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ISSUE 71

CHANGING IRELAND



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WE'VE GOT OUR SENSE OF COMMUNITY BACK

STEO WALL
telling
truths
about the
times we
live in!



LIBERTIES LAD MADE HISTORY:

19 years on, how's
Graham Mooney?



ALSO INSIDE:

- Bye bye to the M50
- Instagram activism
- Rebel County Wild
- Biodiversity courses
- Equality & Sustainability
- Community medics in the air
- Musical inclusion in Louth
- City exclusion: "Build Our Road"
- Positives from 2020 - really!

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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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We lost our sense of community - the pandemic brought it back

BY BEN PANTER

A tear slid gently down my face. Maybe, it was the long weeks of solitude?

A friend had offered a spare ticket to a 'socially distanced' gig in August and of course, I jumped at the chance.

In the intimate surrounding of the Royal Spa in Lisdoonvarna, Steo Wall treated the socially-starved audience to a moving set from his debut album of 2019.

I suspected I wasn't the only one as deeply affected although I made sure no-one saw me wipe my sleeve across my cheek.

"The first album was very autobiographical," Steo told 'Changing Ireland' recently. "That's why I called it 'Where I'm From' and it tells where I grew up, this is the shit I done, this is where I'm at."

Capturing the consequences of addiction, social media, uplifting tributes to family, and the pride he has in his Traveller heritage, his lyrics can be tragic or joyous and comic or serious, weaving through grief and romance with sublime effect.

Steo tells stories and people know they are not alone - stories like 'Sarah Doran', a powerful ballad immortalising his 'nan'.

"When I was growing up I lived with her (in Shankill, Dublin). She would always be listening to bleedin' Patsy Cline and American-folk, and Irish-folk, and there was always 'trad' and Radio One and Hank Williams, Johnny Cash and Christie Moore."

"My songs are written for all the socio-economically deprived people of the world, not just the Irish. I get messages from people all over the world telling me they can relate to my songs- it blows my mind," he said.

Even so, 'Sarah Doran' nearly missed the cut, only for Luka Bloom.

"He said, 'This is your introduction to the world - you have to include it'."



• A still image from Steo Wall's 'My People' video (on Youtube). The front cover B&W of Steo is by Tara Keane.

If Sarah Doran initiated his musical journey, it was the lyrical freedom found in Tupac Shakur which inspired him to first write in the style that inspired 'Pikey Rap' and the hilarious 'Original Bad Boy Material'. [A must-see on Youtube - Ed].

"I remember in '96 a mate put on a 'Tupac' tape and I heard 'Brenda's got a baby'. It blew my mind! The way he spoke and the expression in his words got me into writing songs.

"I wondered which way I was going to go, folk or rap. Then I realised - do all of the above.

"As an artist, all that matters to me is to tell the truth of the times that we live in, so that's what I try to do - make people look."

"Right now, we know the times are

strange. I'm trying to process them. It's when things go back to normal and it settles, then it will come out."

"You know, it's not so much the loss of connection or touch - it's the lack of routine, the kids not going to school and not meeting for coffee... Not earning a living is the hardest part for me."

"And the media - Me Ma, she rang me the other night crying because she doesn't want to die. She's in the house and the telly's on constantly, bombarding her with death and statistics, not a good head-space."

"But then, there's a sense of community - look after your neighbour, check on older people, that sort of thing.

"In the eighties everyone was piss-poor and we borrowed everything

and then the boom happened and we lost that sense of community and the pandemic brought that back."

Community plays a huge part of Steo's life and he lists activists like Sarah Clancy, Josie O'Brien, Ruairi McKiernan, Dr Sindy Joyce, Eileen Flynn, Lynne Ruane and Bernadette McAliskey amongst his heroes.

"There's loads of them - too many to mention," he says.

"I got to know a few of the guys in the direct provision centre here in Miltown Malbay last year. We would do coffee mornings, sing songs and eat traditional dishes. It was amazing.

"Some locals weren't happy with their presence and the efforts of local people who worked with them to point out the inhumane conditions they were subjected to.

"Eventually we got the kip closed down and moved the guys into better conditions, at least in terms of the tyranny that is direct provision. It

"Not earning a living is the hardest part for me."

Rise Up! (Excerpt)

How did it come to this?
 How did the lost generation we miss?
 How do you live in your ignorant bliss?
 While they're dying trying to cross the abyss
 And are hoping for better ways, search for a better day.
 All that we say is, "No go away.
 You don't belong here, you weren't born here.
 This is our country, we're making it stronger"
 Pulling down bridges and building up walls.

Closing the borders, enforcing the law.
 Innocent children are locked in these cages.
 More of these kids are dying on beaches
 What will it take to stand up to hate?
 Look it in the eye and force the debate.
 'Cause this could be you and this could be me
 In the grand scheme of things, we're all refugees.

To listen, see: <https://steowall.ie>

inspired me to write the song, 'More Blacks, More Dogs More Irish,' to highlight it wasn't so long ago we Irish were the immigrants.

"And before Covid, I was teaching guitar to Traveller men in Ennis. We would have these amazing chats which would leave my spirit full."

All changed last March.

"Ha! When the first lock-down happened, I couldn't do anything. I just couldn't access that place that I go to when I'm creating. There was this cap on it."

"I'm recording a new album now," he says. "I'll even tell you the name," he grins. "It's 'Street Wisdom for Lost Souls'. It's a lot more outward gazing than before, universal, exploring what is happening in the world around."

The streets might be where he's from, but it's West Clare where he and his partner Jacinta have chosen to raise their young family. Would he recommend the move from the big city lights?

"No definitely not! Ennistymon is getting too popular, there are too many of us blow-ins now. I said if anyone asks me this question, I'm gonna lie and tell them it's terrible down here!

"It's the best move I ever made. It's a different way of life. It's what gave me the time and space to get back to writing.

"My kids go to an amazing little country school five minutes from our door. I live out in the country, minutes from the wild Atlantic ocean and ten minutes from the still majesty of the Burren. Depending on what energy I need on any given day I head either way."

"Whatever 2020 has taught us, it's that plans are null and void, there are no plans. You build up a version of yourself, a career or job or whatever and then the rug is pulled out from under you and all your left with is yourself. I find it liberating."

"I'm just trying to enjoy the kids and the quiet life and enjoy the process of finishing the album and that's it."

Amen.



• Rescue off Spain. Photo courtesy of UNHCR.

My People - Guardians of Culture

Oh my people, my people, they roamed those ancient fairs,
 Bringing stories and the music of those old and ancient airs.
 But they tried to ban our culture, and they tried to stop our ways.
 The spirit of a people they are trying to erase.

CHORUS

Oh my people, my people, don't let them bring you down.
 Because your rich history is written on every stone in every town.
 Oh my people, my people, don't let them keep you down.
 Because your rich history is laid on every road in every town.



• The late Pecker Dunne.



• The late Maggie Barry.

Ah the winds of change, I can hear the lullaby,
 Of the bould Pecker Dunne, with the teardrop in his eyes,
 Johnny Keenan and Teddy Furey, and old John Reilly too,
 Were the guardians of our culture, we will always remember you.

CHORUS

Oh Maggie Barry with her banjo
 And those ancient Gaelic airs,
 Of the piper Pat Cash, he passed the flame down through the years.
 Johnny Doran and Felix, those gypsy piper kings,
 You inspired generations and your names we'll forever sing.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES MAY EMERGE



Steo Wall graces our cover and provides encouragement to everyone struggling to keep the head up in these strange times. He believes the pandemic has strengthened our sense of community. I like his attitude. His song 'Sarah Doran' - about his Traveller nan - is so warm-hearted for the cold months we're in that I can only urge you to buy his album.

Looking further west, to Inishbofin, we have a report by Laoise Neylon that would also warm up a stone. It is the first in a number of features we hope to publish about island communities in the pandemic.

She also reports from inner-city Dublin where she interviewed Graham Mooney who was a boy the last time he featured in this magazine. Read what he hoped for in 2002 and how it's worked out for him. His smile remains a constant.

So it's 2021, or as one buddy calls it - 2020 Part II. It's a slog so far. Most communities, I imagine, have had funerals that are Covid-related.

Thankfully, this pandemic didn't happen in the 1980s when there was no internet and State support for community groups was weaker. It's also fortunate the community sector has been partly rebuilt since the cuts of a decade ago. And recent investment in our libraries is paying off, with much of the funding going on technology. We're lucky - we often followed Britain's lead and they've been closing libraries.

COMMUNITY CALL

Investment in communities has increased and there's a coherence to the structures in place nationally that wasn't there before. It made possible the launching by the Department of Rural and Community Development of the 'Community Call' which continues in 2021. Everywhere, community groups and local authorities are doing everything they can to connect with people.

Of course, some are suffering more than others. How can people in overcrowded accommodation - eg 14 people living in three-bed council houses - cope with being asked to self-isolate? A meeting organised recently by Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance highlights groups more vulnerable than others - Beth Ardill reports.

MOYROSS VOICE

Thanks to an amazing campaign to #BuildOurRoad, an integral part of the regeneration of Moyross will now go ahead, linking up the community that 'Changing Ireland' is part of with the city and drawing in investment and opportunity. The road was committed to in the Programme for Government, but a review had been suggested.

Community leaders and political parties were dumbfounded.

The Coonagh to Knockalisheen Distributor Road is an integral part of regenerating the city's northside and, previously, everyone had agreed on it going ahead.

Eventually, the wall that corrals

Moyross, making it the country's largest cul-de-sac, will go. Local people have petitioned for its removal and even the OECD and EU are aware of its existence. Building the road and knocking the wall go hand-in-hand.

This new campaign brought the community and politicians together in a way not seen before. New youthful leaders emerged and the focus now is on maintaining pressure. While it takes from essential day-to-day work, Moyross has proven once again that it has a voice to be reckoned with.

POSITIVE NEWS

Thanks to our many contributors. We're emphasising positive news in this edition - from airborne medics who could be by your side in 20 minutes to on-the-ground biodiversity projects that will change the future, and much more. If you've a story our readers would enjoy, contact us!

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:

Photo of Steo Wall by Tara Keane.

**MADE IN
MOYROSS
LIMERICK**

DISCLAIMER

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

One thing we can be pretty sure about: Whoever invented hand sanitiser is rubbing their hands together for the past year.

84% of abused young women said it had a severe impact on them

BY BETH ARDILL

Three out of five young people have either personally experienced or know someone aged 25 or younger who has experienced abuse by a current or former partner, according to research conducted by Women's Aid.

Their research, published recently, revealed that 1 in 5 of the young women who took part in the survey were directly abused, with 51% being under 18 when the abuse started. The report also shows how gendered this form of abuse is among younger people including minors, in line with international figures on all ages. The survey found that 1 in 11 young men experienced abuse.

Sarah Benson, CEO of Women's Aid, said it shows "that we have particularly alarming levels of intimate relationship abuse experienced by young women in this country. One fifth of young women said they experienced abuse which included emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual assault, stalking and harassment. Based on our 2016 CSO data this is as many as 44,540 young women (18-25) which is shocking."

She said, "Even more troubling is the fact that 51% of young women who had suffered abuse said that it began before their 18th birthday, with just 18 years old being the average age at which the abuse began."

New research has shown that 1 in 2 young women abused by a partner experiences abuse online, "including constant bombarding with messages, hacking of email and social media accounts and the taking, sharing and threatening to share intimate images without consent".

Ms. Benson also stated that they "know that the abuse that takes place online can be particularly devastating given the 'always on' nature of life online. It is draining, can often feel inescapable and can be difficult to block a persistent abuser from making contact. It is not a reasonable solution to ask a young person being abused to 'opt out' or 'switch off'. This only isolates people ever more and they should never suffer or be further excluded because of the actions of the perpetrator."



• The new 'Too Into You' mural in Temple Bar, Dublin.

There are long lasting effects from an intimate abusive relationship. "Our research showed that 84% of young women said that the abuse had a 'severe' impact on them. Young women reported that they had suffered anxiety, depression, low self-esteem as well as being isolated from family, friends, and workmates because of the abuse. Some also reported suicide ideation and hospitalisation due to physical injuries," she said.

Ms. Benson said their report only scratched the surface of this huge problem in Irish society: "We need regulation. We need legislation. We need more in-depth research and extensive education and awareness campaigns – including in schools. Most of all, as a community we need to ensure

responsibility lies with the perpetrator and to say loudly and clearly to anyone affected by intimate relationship abuse that 'Yes, it's abuse. It is never okay. It is not your fault and you will be believed and supported.'"

The report was based on "a robust nationally representative sample of 500 young people (aged 18-25)" and was conducted by Red C.

Women's Aid also launched a public awareness campaign called 'Too Into You' which "highlights the signs of unhealthy relationships and encourages young people to reach out for support."

The campaign website includes a relationship health check quiz and a guide to protecting yourself online.

Development network's plan launched

The Minister of State for Community Development and Charities, Joe O'Brien (pictured) in November launched the Irish Local Development Network's (ILDN) strategic plan.

The plan sets out the ILDN's role, said the Minister, "in facilitating Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies in the delivery of many important services such as social inclusion, education and training, employment services, urban and rural development, climate change and work to ensure just transition."

He said it positions the network as a critical partner in the delivery of these objectives.



The Minister noted the plan builds on the Department of Rural and Community Development's five-year strategy for 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities' (2019-2024).

He also acknowledged the support from Local Development Companies in response to Covid-19.

"Given their presence in every community rural and urban, the response has been rapid and widespread assisting the statutory services in reaching people it may not otherwise reach," he said.

The ILDN's plan is entitled 'Supporting Local Development Companies to Build Vibrant Inclusive Communities' and it outlines four key objectives between now and 2025.

Primarily, the network aims to establish itself as "a leading voice in policy development in the

context of local development".

It will also seek to build strategic relationships with stakeholders, to be a platform for members to network and share, and to best serve members' needs regarding communications and resources.

Network chairperson Jim Finn said the plan is focused on giving a voice to the local development sector "and those who depend on it, such as individuals, families and communities most at risk of poverty and social exclusion."

In a press statement, ILDN manager, Joe Saunders said, "(Our) members deliver over €300 million worth of programmes funded by the Government and philanthropic sources, supporting and empowering communities and enabling the State to reach people it would not otherwise reach."

For more, see: <https://ildn.ie>

- A. M.

Islanders film life on one of Ireland's few Covid-free spots



• 'Inishbofin in Lockdown' is a series of seven shorts produced by Kieran Concannon of C-Board Films for Inishbofin Community Services Programme and funded by the Galway County Arts Office. The island measures 5.5km by 3km.

BY LAOISE NEYLON

A series of short films released in January capture the beautiful stillness of Inishbofin during the sun-soaked lockdown of 2020.

Mercifully, despite reopening for tourism in July of last year, Inishbofin has only recorded two isolated cases of Covid-19 in the past 12 months and is currently Covid-free.

Few communities have been this fortunate. Figures from nearby Clare Island show that the virus can spread quickly when it does get into an island community.

Our report here is based on the film testimony and an interview conducted with islander and community worker Tara McMahon. The films show an island thrown into suspended animation by the pandemic:

It is June 2020, a small ferry leaves the mainland at Cleggan Pier carrying cartons of milk, a sack of post and just two passengers.

The boat lands on Inishbofin, where the pier is empty. The two passengers disembark and say good

luck to the crew.

The lockdown of spring and summer 2020 was the quietest time on the island that James Coyne can ever recall. That makes it the quietest time in living memory because James is 91.

Back when he was young the population living on the island was much bigger.

When he was at school "there were 80 on the roll book," he recalls, sitting outside in the sun, taking a break from building a stone wall.

James enjoys the quiet on the island, with minor misgivings: "I miss my couple of pints in the evenings."

He misses matches too. The All Ireland semi-finals hang in the balance - will they go ahead, he wonders? "It was something to look forward to," says James.

It is a bright day with blue skies and James is in the bog digging turf.

Life on Inishbofin is changing, he says there won't be any turf left for the next generation, and the quality of it is declining too.

"The bogs are getting worn out,

they are not as good as they used to be," he says. The turf is too brittle.

Though he doesn't say it, perhaps wind or solar power will power the next generation.

A CHANGING WAY OF LIFE

"It is the first time in centuries that you had such a small number of people on the island," says Tommy Burke who gives walking tours of Inishbofin.

The population of the island has been in decline for decades. When James was in school in the 1930s there were 80 schoolkids on Inishbofin. Nowadays there are 14, says Tara McMahon, the Community, Tourism and Marketing Officer for Inishbofin.

Tourism took off on the island in the 1970s, says Tara, and is now the main occupation of the islanders and, of course, summer is always their busiest time.

"It was really unusual for everybody to be able to enjoy this glorious weather without running

around working," she says.

Normally April and May are very busy but this year there are "zero tourists, so zero walking tours," says Tommy.

Locals catch up with each other while out walking though, he says. "People have more time to stop and chat but maybe we are running out of things to chat about," he says.

This time around the lockdown is harder on everyone, says Tara. Back in the spring and early summer of 2020, it was still a bit of a novelty. "Part of it was lovely," she says.

Financially the short season was hard on small businesses and she says they will struggle if they cannot open as normal this year.

LIVING IN LOCKDOWN

The short films capture more than the beauty of turquoise seas, green fields surrounded by stone walls and old-style, white cottages. The films involve the viewer in the intimate

- Bofin takes a long view on famine, fever and pandemics .
- All islanders remarked on the peace they have enjoyed during lockdown.

way of life on the island.

The islanders come together to work on community-based projects, like sprucing up historic sites. People are filmed cutting the grass in the graveyard.

Down by the pier, the young couple running the shop, Dave Anderson and Annieka Ward got engaged during the lockdown.

Dave couldn't travel back to the mainland to celebrate with his family, so he proposed while they were live on a skype call.

"He even managed to get a ring," says Annieka, showing off a diamond ring, "very impressed."

"I picked it out all on my own," says Dave. He doesn't tell us how he got the diamond ring out to the island.

"I'm finding the lockdown enjoyable," says Callum Day, a young man in a Galway jersey playing football alone on the GAA pitch.

He is taking advantage of extra free time to go kayaking with his brother and sister. "We have the island to ourselves," he says, but he misses his friends and PE.

Kevin Abyeta plays a few tunes on the fiddle. He says there haven't been any sessions during lockdown and he misses them.

The lack of music has really been noticed, says Tommy, "because it is something we were spoiled for."

Kevin compares the lockdown to snow in wintertime - it might look nice but it prevents you from doing things: "It's just in the way you know. But apart from that, we have the island to ourselves."

STAYING COVID FREE

Back in 1919 the Spanish Flu got onto Inishbofin and "wreaked havoc," says Tommy. "For a small community, it is hard to believe that there were three coffins in front of the altar at the one time - all young people."

"There was a terrible cholera outbreak in 1834 that wiped out a lot of people. The famine didn't have a huge effect, but there was a terrible fever in the 1850s, in the years after the famine. So, we're no strangers to these things, and you get over them, but it takes time."

There is a high population of elderly people on the island, so everyone was really worried about

Covid-19 making it onto the island, says Tara.

"We were so conscious of the dangers of bringing it in. There was a heightened sense of awareness," she says.

One of the films shows the island's children chatting to each other on the road while maintaining the 2-metre distance.

Meanwhile Dave and Anneika are delivering shopping to older people, who are cocooning. All the locals have respected the rules with social distancing and hand sanitising. But the couple worried about keeping the locals safe once they reopen to tourism, says Anneika.

Initially, the government planned that the islands would remain closed for a few weeks longer than the mainland. Tara says people wanted that extra time because they were fearful of reopening. Then the government suddenly decided that the whole country would reopen together on June 29th.

That threw the islanders, she says. "There was no little buffer that we thought we would have."

But they managed to keep the virus out throughout the entire summer. "It was incredible it didn't come in, considering the island was really busy in July and August," says Tara.

She thinks it is a mix of good luck as well as both the locals and the visitors being very careful.

A lot of the visitors are people who come back every summer and are very respectful of the island and they were also extremely cautious, she says.

There is a sense of safety and security living on the island, both in general and with Covid-19, says Tara. "Everyone is really connected, it's a real community."

On Youtube:

<http://bit.ly/BofinLocked>

On Twitter & Facebook:

<https://m.facebook.com/Inishbofin/> & @VisitInishbofin

Filming by: @cboardfilms

Community funding: Inishbofin receives support through the Department of Rural and Community Development, including from the Community Services Programme, a programme that funds over 400 community and social enterprise projects across the State. More info: <http://bit.ly/Gov-CSP>



• Kevin Abyeta misses live music sessions, while enjoying the novelty of having "the island to ourselves".



• Tommy Burke, historian and walking tour guide, has never seen it quieter. He has almost run out of things to talk about when he bumps into neighbours.



• Shopkeepers Dave Anderson and Annieka Ward. How Dave got an engagement ring to the island during lockdown remains a mystery. Thankfully, it was accepted!



• James Coyne (91) is the oldest islander. He is pictured here taking a break from turf-cutting and building stone walls to chat to film-maker Kieran Concannon. He misses not having "a few pints".



NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY LAUNCHED BY MINISTER O'BRIEN

The Minister of State for Community Development and Charities, Joe O'Brien, launched the Government's first National Volunteering Strategy (2021-2025) in December. It takes a whole-of-government approach to supporting volunteering.

The strategy contains 56 actions to be implemented over five years, with Government working in partnership with volunteers, volunteering bodies, the community and voluntary sector and the business and corporate world to deliver its objectives.

"The contribution of volunteering to our society has never been so much to the fore than during the response to Covid-19 over the last number of months," said Minister O'Brien.

He said one of the positive and striking responses to the pandemic has been "the willingness of people to give generously of their time".

As a first step in implementing the strategy, the Minister announced that he had approved funding for a new volunteer reserve to be established to respond quickly to local community needs.

The strategy's overall purpose is to "recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution volunteers make to Irish society".

As it points out, volunteering benefits large sectors of society and research has long shown that volunteering has a positive impact on the health and well-being of the volunteer.

In a press statement, the Department of Rural and Community Development said the strategy will provide a vision and road map for both volunteers and the organisations who benefit from the work of volunteers.

More info:

<http://bit.ly/DRCD-Volstrat21-25>



• 20 years ago, now Minister of State Joe O'Brien volunteered in the Special Olympics in Sydney. He is pictured here with athlete Maggie Grant.

SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/joefingalgreen>

Communities & Gov't policy: 4 to read!

1



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4



For readers keen to get to grips with government policy regarding communities and Community and Voluntary Sector, here are four documents published - the most recent in December - by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Government. The departmental strategies are designed to compliment each other.

- AM

1. National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025.

See above.

2. The National Social Enterprise Policy:

The 30-page policy outlines the advantages of having a nationally-defined view of social enterprise. It makes 26 commitments to enable social enterprise to reach its full potential.

Speaking at the launch, Paul O'Sullivan, CEO of Clann Credo, said the policy delivers a road map that will lead to "jobs and services at local level in every region of Ireland."

<https://www.changingireland.ie/national-social-enterprise-policy-for-ireland-welcomed/>

3. 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024'.

The new strategy's vision is: "To create vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities that support the social, cultural and economic well-being of all members."

The importance of autonomy in community development is emphasised in the 48-page document.

Case studies in the document help to show the important role of community development, for example, in empowering minorities, easing integration and supporting Travellers.

Download via: <http://bit.ly/DRCD-5yrsCV>

4. A new Libraries Strategy was launched in 2018 to cover up to and including 2022.

'Our Public Libraries 2022 - Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities' re-imagines the country's 330 libraries as "community hubs". Its outlook was most timely - for example - in proposing investment in self-service technology for more than 200 libraries.

The strategy envisages libraries open from early to late, 365 days a year, with the aim of increasing active library membership from 16% of the population to 30% by the end of 2022.

By contrast, library services across England have been reduced.

<https://www.changingireland.ie/new-library-strategy-2020/>

Gov't funds keeping Lucan disability group and many others operational

BY ÁINE RYNNE

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

The level of funding marked an increase on four years previously when the spend was €28.5m.

Lucan Disability Action Group is typical of the organisations receiving government support during the pandemic. As their spokesperson said, "Without it, it would not be possible to run the service."

Highlighting the overall impact, Minister O'Brien said, "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.

2021 FUND BENEFICIARIES

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.
- €1m for a youth initiative to provide young people with the soft skills needed to improve employability.

Separately, in 2020, as the Department pointed out in a statement, Dormant Accounts Funding provided for €50 million in one-off supports for charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises in response to the pandemic.

"This funding is currently being disbursed to successful applicants under the Covid-19 Stability Fund (€45 million) and the Covid-19 Innovate Together Fund (€5 million)," it said.

LUCAN GROUP'S EXPERIENCE

Lucan Disability Action Group (LDAG) was one of the groups to recently receive support from the Dormant Accounts Fund through the Covid-19 Stability Fund.

LDAG manager Caroline Brady said, "We deliver wheelchair accessible transport throughout Dublin and surrounding counties (and) because of Covid we experienced a



• A passenger boarding the Lucan group's new bus.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUCAN DISABILITY ACTION GROUP.

significant reduction in income this year."

"First, because of Covid-19 restrictions, disability services were closed between March and September, which resulted in no income during this time. Second, because of Covid-19 social distancing, the capacity of the buses was reduced from seven passengers to one passenger."

"In the meantime, we incurred significant extra costs to get the service up and running safely, for example making the buses safe for both members and drivers, investing in PPE and cleaning materials, as well as continuing to meet our existing obligations like payroll, diesel, CVRT, vehicle maintenance, utilities, rent, technology, etc."

She said the extra funding enabled the charity to continue to deliver transport when the disability services resumed.

"We modified three buses in September and two in October and are operating with five modified vehicles from our 10-vehicle fleet."

"This investment enabled our members to access day centres, education, and hospital appointments - much needed after many months of isolation because of Covid."

"All of this is made possible by the assistance of the Stability Fund, without it, it would not be possible to run the service," said Ms. Brady.

To download the Dormant Account Action Plan 2021, use this link:

<http://bit.ly/DAF-Nov20>



• Lucan group's new bus.



• The difference that accessible transport makes is huge.

Equality in a time of Covid

We're all in this together! NOT.

- Look at life of Travellers, migrants, care home patients, others
- Lynch: Capitalism is dictating our morality
- Speakers wiser from pandemic

BY BETH ARDILL

The Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance (CESCA) held an 'Equality Day' webinar in December to tie in with World Human Rights Day. This annual event is one of CESCA's contributions to Cork City's Local Economic and Community Plan.



Breda Donoghue is the advocacy director with **Cork Traveller Visibility Group (CTVG)** and she was the first speaker at CESCA's webinar.

The core of CTVG's work is outreach which typically involves heading out to sites and visiting families in their homes. While the staff are seen as essential workers during the pandemic, they had to turn to giving online support, helping families over Zoom and by phone.

She said anti-traveller racism continues during the pandemic.

However, as Breda said, "The single biggest difficulty is around accommodation". Covid-19 has highlighted the housing crisis amongst Travellers where the fear of

being evicted is of huge concern. She said, "Covid-19 really highlighted the deepest, most desperate situations that Travellers are in."

Some sites have very limited facilities and services such as running water, one toilet, and one shower: "How can you ask them to social distance?"

She said that trying to keep children away from their grandparents proved difficult for the Travelling community. Also, trying to get children to understand that they cannot mix with other households was a big challenge. Not being able to attend religious ceremonies was also hard.

It has also been stressful for CTVG as a team "going out and asking families to socially distance and stay apart and stay safe when they didn't have the facilities like (proper) water or sanitation."

Breda would love to see the systemic racism to come to an end.



Fiona Finn, CEO of **NASC** (the Irish for "link"), an organisation set up to empower migrants and refugees, said that Covid-19 exposed the cracks in direct provision. There was no way for asylum seekers to socially distance - three families could be living in one room and sharing facilities such as bathrooms.

Also, there were people who lost their jobs and could not access the Covid-19 pandemic payment for months.

She told of a breakout in one centre that led to a full lockdown for four weeks and was extremely difficult for the families involved as

they had young kids.

She pointed to a report compiled by the Irish Refugee Council about people living in direct provision during the pandemic: 55% of residents felt unsafe, 50% were unable to socially distance and 42% shared a bathroom with a non-family member. In Cork, Fiona acknowledged that only for the work of the local HSE social inclusion unit the outcomes would have been an awful lot worse. She wants to see an end to direct provision.



Mary Crilly, CEO of **Cork Sexual Violence Centre** described domestic violence as "a hidden epidemic within this pandemic". However, the issue is being highlighted. She commended the Gardaí and others for raising awareness and believes this may hopefully have saved lives.

For the first three months of the pandemic Ms. Crilly and her team stayed in the office and went through people on waiting lists and worked with their clients that came in weekly.

Ms. Crilly has encountered a genuine belief people have which goes along the lines of - "You can't be that busy now because pubs aren't open, and girls aren't out getting drunk and this means that there must be no rapes."

Rapes and sexual assaults are still happening. Most assaults that were reported in the early months of the pandemic were in student accommodation, with people living together, where the woman who was

raped was trapped and had nowhere to go.

Ms. Crilly said she had "contact from over 50 people between March and June who had been raped, who had been sexually assaulted". Ms. Crilly does not want to go back to the old normal. She wants a new normal. Her goal - to end victim blaming and the normalising of sexual assault.

She asked, "What would it look like to have a healthy, a safe city, a city for everyone, a city of sanctuary and a city where no one is left out?"



Sociologist Fr. Sean Healy, CEO of **Social Justice Ireland**, was appointed some years ago by then community and local government minister Phil Hogan to lead a group to develop a model for participative democracy. The result is today's network of Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

He said, "You need to involve people, all people, in decisions that affect them or impact on them in any way. They might have very different views about what is required in the economy, or services, or taxation - and they need to have those views circulated as well."

He emphasised that we are not going to be able to build a social dialogue in the next few years - it takes at least 10-20 years; we have to do it one piece at a time.

Fr. Healy spoke about how, during the pandemic, he could see a "widening gap between the poor and the better off". He believes that

Covid-19 has shown to an awful lot of people that we need to think more deeply about the type of society we want to build and that “if we are to have a thriving economy, we need decent services and infrastructure”.



Senator Lynn Ruane spoke of the Seanad’s Civil Engagement Group. Set up in 2016, it is an alliance for senators with a background in non-governmental or civic engagement organisations. All members were once activists.

She said she brought her principles of community development into politics and believes that participation is needed everywhere in life. Equally, it is important to give people space and time - someone you thought would be in and out of prison is now doing policy development and in college.

She wants to make sure people have a say in decision-making, especially at local level. People are not outputs, she added.

She had concerns that the push for good governance in the community and voluntary sector had removed the human element and was impeding community work at a local level.



Kathleen Lynch, professor of Equality Studies at UCD, spoke about how capitalism dictates morality.

She explained to everyone on the webinar that we all have some insecurity in our lives, but for many people in our society they do not have any security and that is a huge injustice.

She said there was a serious issue with participative democracy in this country - minority groups are affected because it takes resources to participate in politics. For

instance, because we do not see the work of carers, they are invisible.

Prof. Lynch sees our nursing homes as “the new Magdalenes”, because the people in them cannot speak, relatives cannot visit, they have no voice, and they are being sidelined, especially those with dementia because they have no way to publicly communicate.

She pointed to statistics showing how 56% of those who died during the pandemic (up to December) were in nursing homes. She said it was “outrageous” that we can’t organise for people in nursing homes to have visitors.

“It is cruel and is absolutely abusive to their basic rights of association, to intimacy and to have the reassurance that comes from those who look after them,” she said.



Paul Ginnell, director of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, said there was already material deprivation in 2019, that people were already struggling prior to Covid-19. People were depending on food banks and groups in society were being left behind.

He said people on social welfare supports have incomes below the poverty line and that €203 per week is not adequate for people to live a decent life. The €350 pandemic payment made more people realise this, he said.

He agreed with Mary Crilly that we cannot go back to the old normal. He said we cannot just focus on the economy and then deal with other issues. We must look at what society we want and that it must be a rights-based society, one that puts communities and equality first, he said. We have under-invested in our public services and the private provision of public services needs to be tackled.

Doireann Ansbro, research and policy officer with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, highlighted how the emergency legislation enacted to manage the public health concerns of the

pandemic ran the risk of suspending other core human rights.



She deplored the poor decision-making on some issues, e.g. nursing homes. She was convinced that the Government was focusing too much on life for middle class families with big gardens,

“What about people who do not have that?” she asked.



Ivan Cooper, policy director with The Wheel, said the community and voluntary sector has a huge role to play. Organisations who depend on fundraising have been hit hard during the pandemic. Mr. Cooper said there was a need to do more research on Covid-19’s impact on the sector.



Beth Ardill is a third year degree student in Community Development at the Limerick Institute of Technology. She was on placement with ‘Changing Ireland’ from September to December 2020.

Top 3 points

CESCA identified three top points that emerged from the webinar.

1. COVID-19 HAS NOT BEEN THE GREAT LEVELLER:

Covid-19 has not been the great leveller and has in many instances exacerbated the inequalities many communities face. It has also raised concerns about the disproportionate effect lockdown restrictions have on the most marginalised communities.

2. A ‘NEW NORMAL’ IS NEEDED:

There is no desire to return to ‘normal’ after we emerge from this pandemic but instead, we want a new normal. One that properly addresses the inequalities in our society as highlighted by the pandemic. This new normal should focus on equality, social justice and all communities having a say in decisions that affect their day to day lives.

We as community organisations need to be much more critical and collective in our approach if we are to achieve the change we want to see for Irish society and if we are to hear from communities who are not currently part of decision making processes.

3. A WAY FORWARD – through interagency work, participatory democracy and a sustainable community and voluntary sector:

Despite the many concerns shared on the day, it was also clear that there is much that can be done to challenge the inequalities in our societies and to ensure that there is not a slide away from the collaborative working we saw during the initial stages of the pandemic.

It was clear that there is already much in place both in terms of structures and policy commitments to enable these changes to happen, but we need to work collectively to realise this change and to hold Government and others to account on the commitments made.

**For more, visit: www.cesca.ie
Watch the full webinar on CESCA’s Facebook page, via this link:
<http://bit.ly/CescaEqualityInCovid>**

Instagram activism on the rise

- Wake up to the opportunities!

BY CHLOE CAREY

Instagram has been known for its endless pictures of food, vacations, and selfies. However, the platform has undergone a recent shift. Many, including myself, have noticed a rise in Instagram activism since the tragic death of George Floyd and the reigniting of the Black Lives Matter movement or BLM.

While statistics about police brutality were previously available, it was the gut-wrenching video of George Floyd's death that caused mass outrage. The penny dropped as people came to realise how effective the spread of that video was in gaining support for the BLM movement.

Campaigners followed up by sharing infographics and short videos on social media explaining the importance of the movement and how to help. Much of this appeared on Instagram's story feature.

INSPIRED

Inspired, many Instagrammers began sharing posts about other human rights issues. For example, after recent events in Poland, I saw many posts on my feed about LGBTQ+ issues. Many have also been posting about the Uyghur Muslim concentration camps in China.

The pandemic can also be credited for this recent uptake in activism on Instagram. Due to restrictions, the majority of people can't go partying or on vacation, so they are unable to create their usual living-the-good-life content. Now, people are exploring topics outside of what they would usually post.

The Instagram algorithm favours aesthetically pleasing photos. Many users have caught on to this and been pairing information on social issues with aesthetically pleasing visuals. (Source: <http://bit.ly/Insta-activismRise>). One of my favourite accounts that displays such



characteristics is Matt Bernstein (@mattxiv) a make-up artist with 450,000 followers. He creates make-up looks which succinctly support and inform people of topics such as racism, homophobia, etc. People often share his posts to their stories. The picture below is an example of one of his many brilliant makeup looks.

However, many argue that activism on Instagram leads people to believe that their activism stops there. This brings me to the phenomenon of "performative activism" and if it outweighs the benefit of digital activism.

PERFORMATIVE ACTIVISM

Performative activism refers to "activism done to increase one's social capital rather than because of one's devotion to a cause." (Source: <http://bit.ly/PA-GeorgeFloyd>)

Performative activism can be seen with the hashtag #blackouttuesday. Used on Tuesday, June 2nd, the idea was a collective action on Instagram to protest racism and police brutality. It was intended to express solidarity with the BLM movement and to focus attention on the unjust killing of Black people by the U.S. police force. However, many people did it because it was trendy or to avoid criticism for not showing outward support. Many thought they could post a black square, an act that takes a couple seconds, and then end their support there. They posted once to avoid criticism or to increase their likability and not because of a genuine interest or passion for the cause. Yet still, they were engaging in performative activism.

Performative activism can also be seen amongst companies and corporations through a term known as 'wokewashing'. This term refers to the use of progressive-oriented marketing to prey on people's social awareness, while failing on ethics.

It could be said that, with the ability for things

to trend on Instagram, it provides a stage for performative activism, which is undoubtedly a negative aspect of the recent surge of digital activism.

CONCLUSION

Whilst performative activism gives a bad name to activism as a whole on Instagram, I think it is a rather small sacrifice to make to expose young people and users of Instagram to social issues. There are many benefits to using the platform for activism.

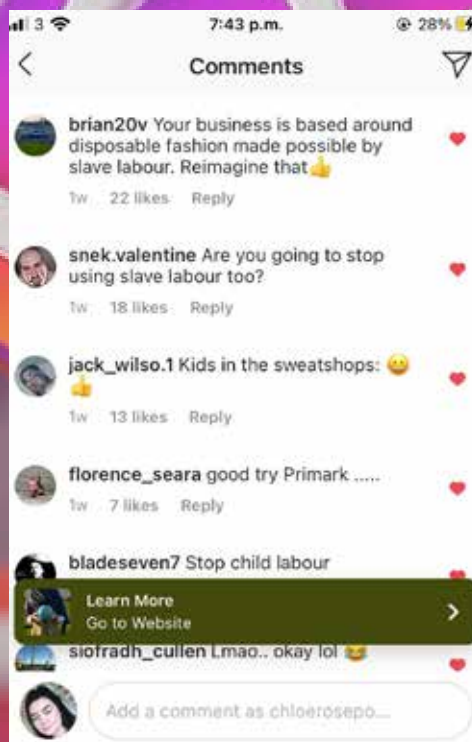
One such benefit is that less known about topics, such as the fast fashion industry, are finally coming to fruition. Whilst many were aware of the negative environmental impact of fast fashion, now people are exposing brands including Fashion Nova, Primark, Levi's and Mothercare for not paying their workers. The hashtag #payyourbangladeshworkers began trending, after it was made known that companies are withholding 3 billion dollars from factories in Bangladesh for orders which had already been shipped.

I understand how many people might see the repost of an infographic on your story for 24 hours unhelpful. But the very engagement with digital activism helps the Instagram algorithm become more social justice friendly.

All in all, I think Instagram is a vehicle for real change. The platform has 800 million monthly active users, with 73% of them between the ages of 18-23 years old. If any social media platform is good for engaging in activism, it is Instagram. Young people will rise to be change-makers and politicians in the future, ones can reform and campaign for the greater good.

This shift from boasting and posting narcissistic content to campaigning on social issues is a huge shift, though I think people appreciate the reality check. It is not the end point of campaigning, but I do think it provides a good stepping stone for those to take activism further than the online world.



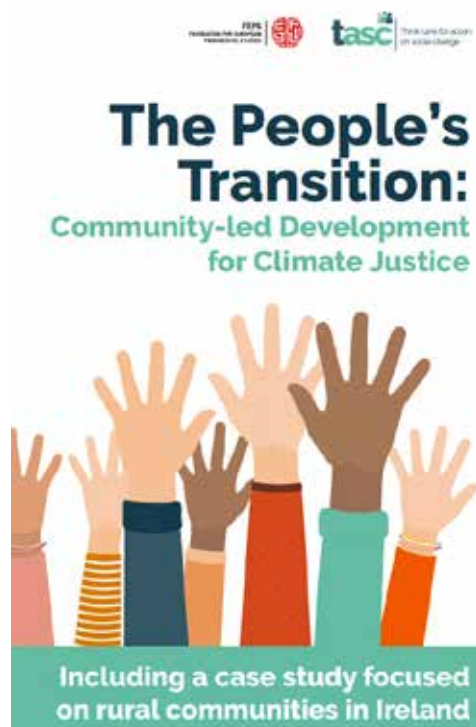


Does Primark care?

- Increasingly, people are exposing brands including Fashion Nova, Primark, Levi's and Mothercare for not properly paying their workers in Bangladesh.
- Here, Primark is accused of talking up their environmental efforts whilst neglecting to take accountability for participating in what campaigners see as slave labour.

Tasc's report is good news for community development workers

BY BETH ARDILL



Beth Ardill is a Community Development undergraduate in Limerick Institute of Technology. Here, she gives her views on a new report from Tasc that focuses on “Community-led development for Climate Justice”.

As a community development student, it is great to see the bottom-up approach being used as it is one of the best ways to go about community work. It is important for communities to have a say in any decisions, especially decisions that affect their community on issues such as climate justice. Involving everyone in the community brings people together, it makes people feel involved and for them to know that they were involved in the decision-making brings them a sense of inclusion.

“The People's Transition’ proposes an approach to climate action that puts communities and local development at the heart of Europe’s Just Transition.” - This quote got my attention as it is important to have communities and local development at the heart of the transition and climate change is affecting every community and local area.

The report talks of “...the bottom-up component of the European Green Deal which seeks to give everyone a voice and a space in which to design new climate actions, share information, launch grassroots activities and showcase solutions that

others can follow”.

This also caught my attention as giving every individual in communities a voice is important; it can make people who have been marginalised from their community feel involved again.

In my opinion, the community-led approach points to a fairer future as everyone is involved in the decision-making, everyone’s opinions are considered. Nobody is left out or is made feel that their opinion does not matter in this approach.

This will require more community workers. Groups could be set up to discuss with the community what is happening and inform them on everything they need to know, and to hear their opinions and ideas. This approach requires more time, but it is more rewarding knowing the community as a whole is involved.

I would love to be involved in bottom-up development in the future, especially with issues such as climate change - it is a serious issue and everyone needs to be involved for change to happen.

Watch Beth's interview with Allen Meagher here: <http://bit.ly/Bethbiodiversity>

For a review of Tasc's report by Davie Philip, a community development worker based in Cloughjordan, see next page.

'The Peoples Transition' sings of bottom-up development

BY DAVIE PHILIP*



A new report signals that we are on the threshold of a possibly great era for community development, local development and social justice. It explains how we can best tackle inequality from the bottom-up. The report by social justice think-tank Tasc and colleagues in Europe puts people and local communities at the heart of the transition. 'The Peoples Transition' points out that if the transition is not fair it will not be made at all. Davie Philip reports:

If you are a community or climate activist I think you will appreciate what has been brought together and proposed in the excellent new report by Sean McCabe, 'The People's Transition: Community-led development for Climate Justice'.

The report was published by Tasc and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS).

The study builds on the pioneering work that is already being carried out by community organisations, cooperatives and rural communities across Ireland and Europe. The report proposes a participative model of dialogue and climate action as an enabler of local development.

It says: **"This report can only scratch the surface of the remarkable work being done at a community level – there is so much to be learned from listening to and working with each other. 'Is ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine' is an Irish saying that translates as: 'It is in each other's shadow that we flourish.'"**

The collaborative approach to addressing the climate emergency that the report advocates for puts communities and local development at the heart of Europe's Just Transition. The study recognises that the



• Resilience training session at Cloughjordan Ecovillage.

transition can't be top-down and it proposes that tackling inequality can also be done through the delivery of climate solutions and by raising standards of living for all.

Mr. McCabe hopes, **"that this study can serve as a framework for designing and implementing policies that realise an enabling environment for a just transition by expanding the capabilities of individuals and communities facing transition."**

There is a focus on climate justice throughout the report, highlighting that the burdens of the crisis must be shared. It recommends ensuring that the most marginalised and impacted are included in participatory community dialogues and in the development of local action plans.

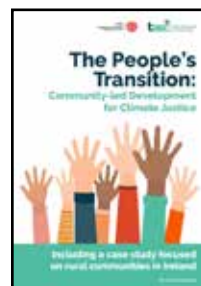
"If climate action is to be fast, it must be fair. If it is to be enduring, it must be inclusive. If it is to benefit from widespread public support, it must share benefits and burdens equitably and fairly," the report states.

By valuing local knowledge and including people and communities in the design, planning and implementation of the transition to a zero carbon society, the study suggests we could catalyse and get buy-in to actions that are urgently needed.

In its executive summary, it

states:

"Fast and effective action will be delivered when people see tangible improvements in their standards of living and, as a result, demand, rather than resist, the radical transformation that is required to avoid catastrophic climate change."



The report, which runs to over a hundred pages, introduces the emerging concept of community wealth-building to ensure local wellbeing. Through changing the procurement practices of big institutions, local authorities and government, this can redirect their spend to the local economy and in doing so strengthen resilience and bring economic security to our regions.

Community wealth building is a practical response to austerity, financialisation and automation. As the 'The Peoples Transition' puts it: **"Community wealth building is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people."**

According to the paper, tackling inequality, expanding the capabilities of all people, and building trust between stakeholders, will ensure a virtuous cycle of action.

"The transformative potential of the transition can be realised through the redistribution of power and wealth through genuine, community-owned approaches. This serves to build public support for climate measures and uplift standards of living and well-being for communities, particularly those in situations of disadvantage."

New approaches like participatory budgeting and community ownership along with models of community supported agriculture, food and energy coops, organic and regenerative farming practices are all discussed as enablers to addressing converging challenges. In summary, this report offers a bottom-up framework that puts people and local communities at the heart of the transition, which if not fair will not be made at all. The full report can be downloaded here: <https://www.tasc.ie/publications/>

* Davie Philip is a community catalyst at Cultivate, the sustainability cooperative based in Cloughjordan Ecovillage, and a network weaver with ECOLISE the European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability.

The future is now!

Biodiversity Leadership Training - with West Limerick Resources

BY ÁINE RYNNE



In August 2019, West Limerick Resources (WLR) issued a request for tender to deliver biodiversity training to community groups in the West Limerick area. The main reason for this was to equip community volunteers and individuals with the skills to become leaders for biodiversity in their communities. Dr Frances Giaquinto was awarded the tender and the project started in June, 2020.

However, as Covid-19 restrictions came into effect nationwide, the delivery of the training took on a whole new approach when it was agreed that it should be delivered entirely online via Zoom. Dr Frances Giaquinto explained that it was anticipated there would be enough interest to facilitate and recruit up to 30 participants - surprisingly, 37 people applied and 35 were accepted onto the course with priority given to residents of West Limerick.

ABOUT THE TRAINERS:

Frances Giaquinto is a botanist and environmentalist who has delivered biodiversity training to community groups and statutory bodies over the last 3 years.

Sarah Thompson is a creative artist and herbalist with a qualification in 'forest bathing', a new initiative from Japan which teaches the physical and mental health benefits of making a meaningful connection with nature.

Linda Gilsenan is a vegetable and flower gardener who works in the community helping individuals and groups to garden for biodiversity. She is a postgraduate in Creativity, Innovation, and Leadership from UCD.

BIODIVERSITY LEADERSHIP TRAINING

The biodiversity course:

- Teaches the different aspects of biodiversity relevant to individuals and communities.
- Gives a solid foundation of



knowledge with comprehensive guidance on how to access further information.

- Inspires participants to take their learning into their communities and develop meaningful and effective biodiversity projects.

In normal times, this training would be delivered in interactive workshops, but the training has had to take place via Zoom. This meant adapting the more practical aspects of the training - such as the mental health benefits of gardening for biodiversity - by using a combination of Powerpoint slides and short videos. This method is effective and the participant feedback has been enthusiastic and they engage freely with the content.

BIODIVERSITY IN IRELAND

'Ireland's 6th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity', by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, was published in May, 2019. (The full report is on this site: www.npws.ie).

The report showed that out of 91% of listed habitats that were assessed, 31% were in a declining condition and just 16% in an improving condition.

The most notable declines are in peatlands and grasslands, and some of the marine habitats. Around 65% of important bird areas (as identified by Birdlife International) are regarded as having a very high level of threat.

Also mentioned in the report is the third National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021, which was developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to protect and enhance Ireland's biodiversity.

This plan envisaged:

- Ensuring conservation in the wider countryside and marine environment.
- Expanding and improving the management of protected areas and species.
- Strengthening the knowledge base, raising public awareness, and mainstreaming biodiversity actions with the cooperation of other government departments and agencies.

The NPWS said in 2019 "a transformational change is required"; we are now in the final year of the plan.

WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY?

Dr Frances Giaquinto says that 'biodiversity' means biological diversity and refers to all the species on the planet and the environments in which they live and the interactions they have with their environment.

For example, to protect bees, we need to think about their food sources, where they can shelter, how they can move safely from one place to the next, and where they can safely rear their young.

"More work is urgently needed and the



• One of the trainers hard at work.

survival of the human species depends on actions being taken quickly, not just in Ireland but globally," says Dr. Giaquinto.

Biodiversity includes all of nature. The economists have coined the term 'ecosystem services' which means all the many benefits we freely gain from nature (biodiversity) - all our food, pollination of our crops, all our fuel, the carbon cycle, the oxygen cycle, air quality and water quality.

Humans cannot survive for five minutes without healthy ecosystem services and to have this we need flourishing biodiversity. This is why biodiversity loss is so alarming, and also why every small thing we do to help biodiversity may be one of the most important actions we take to ensure that our children and grandchildren have a healthy world to live in.

HOW CAN PEOPLE START THEIR OWN BIODIVERSITY EFFORTS?

- 1 Discover what you have and remember that nature always knows best.
- 2 Look after the small and the big will look after itself: For example, caring for a window box in the right way can be as valuable for biodiversity as caring for a whole forest.
- 3 Buy local and Irish (imported trees in particular carry a very high risk of disease).
- 4 Make connections and ecological corridors.
- 5 Check out pollinators.ie for all kinds of useful guidance and ways to get involved.

Rebel County goes wild

- Biodiversity's truly for everyone - Ryan Howard

BY BETH ARDILL

Wild work, a project now in its third year, is a not-for-profit initiative of South East Cork Area Development (SECAD) and it was among 200 projects from across Europe recently showcased online.

Helping nature is only part of Wild Work's goal. "We see helping people as just as important," says **William O'Halloran, co-ordinator**.

The project is a success in large part because it gets across-the-board support from all members of a community. This includes local civil society groups, businesses, local government, the farming sector, academia, members of the public and more.

Wild Work's parent organisation, SECAD, is a local development company that provides rural development and social inclusion supports for a more vibrant, sustainable and inclusive society. Established in 1995, SECAD has worked with and developed strong relationships with over 500 local community groups. In recent years, it has seen a surge in enthusiasm among these groups to help nature, whether it be tackling invasive species, helping struggling native species like bees and butterflies, or planting trees.

"When it comes to nature and what happens in nature, it does not matter what your socio-economic background is, what size your house is or what type of car you drive. It just brings people together. The environment is a great place for people to have a common conversation," says **Ryan Howard, CEO of SECAD**.

Examples of Wild Work's activities over 30 months include:

- 204 education and awareness sessions,
- 12 five-year biodiversity action places,
- 6 habitat mapping projects,
- 29 recommendations reports,
- 57 nature-friendly landscaping projects for pollinators and other wildlife,
- 5,562 consultation hours provided,
- 1,550 wildflower seed packs distributed,
- and 18,450 metres of wildflower seed sown.

Mr. O'Halloran explains: "With our practical expertise, we create and care for meadows, woodlands, beaches, rivers, and other natural habitats, both in urban and rural

settings. We strive to work in line with best practice, with nature and not against and value research as a key component of our work. We always aim to understand the bigger picture so that we can do the right thing."

There has never been a better time for getting involved in biodiversity projects, say Wild Work. Its social ethos is all about supporting people: "We provide quality work experience opportunities for people and aim to contribute to the creation of fulfilling jobs, particularly in the bio-diversity sector," says Mr. O'Halloran.

FEEL-GOOD FACTOR

It is also about educating and raising awareness.

As Mr. O'Halloran says, "We work with nature and the environment in a positive way to have a real and practical impact on environment issues. Increasing people's awareness, respect and understanding, helps them care more effectively for the natural world," he says. Another ethos of Wild Work is benefiting society and nature.

"We want to foster people's good will to ensure that our local flora, fauna and habitat are protected, valued and enhanced. We want people who connect with the Wild Work movement to have a feel-good factor, to enjoy the social aspect and to benefit from better health and well-being."

He points out that SECAD has over 20 years' experience of

successful collaboration with local community and voluntary groups, disadvantaged groups, job seekers, businesses (including private and social enterprise), farmers and schools. The organisation leans on this experience to ensure Wild Work taps into local communities in ways that have a real impact on environmental issues.

SECAD in conjunction with Cork County Council and the communities of Passage West and Carrigtwohill, organised a planning process which led to the development of a strategic five-year Town and Village Renewal Plan for these towns. Wild Work spoke with the communities to contribute to the development of a biodiversity action plan for Passage West and Carrigtwohill.

Wild Work also have a programme called Stepping Stones which uses the natural environment as a "hook" to engage with people experiencing marginalisation. In turn, that encourages them to consider other services and look at their own personal development with more confidence and motivation.

This programme aims to stimulate people's own personal development and "inspire them to actively help themselves, help nature and help their local community".

Overall, Wild Work believes that by helping people to help nature it helps people by bringing wildness back into their lives.

If your surroundings feel a little tame, visit: <http://www.wildwork.ie/>



The EU aims to become carbon-neutral by 2050, a target that European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, describes as the "greatest challenge and opportunity of our times". The European Green Deal is the EU roadmap to reaching that target. It sets out objectives, principles, and tools in policy areas ranging from emissions reduction and industrial policy to agriculture and biodiversity.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) wants to see that local and regional perspectives are always reflected in the European Green Deal.

ADVOCATE

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Governor of Central Macedonia, said in his inaugural speech as President of the CoR, in 2020, that one of his priorities would be to "translate the Green Deal into local climate action while supporting the communities who will be the most affected". President Tzitzikostas said, "The fight against climate change will be won or lost in our regions and cities". The CoR says it is a long-standing advocate of a greater role for regions and cities in global governance of climate action.

JUST GROWTH

The EU Green Deal map is an evolving effort by the CoR to show the steps being taken across the EU by regions and cities to decarbonise the European economy. It shows how individual communities are transforming their way of living and working, of producing and consuming, and how they are trying to achieve environmentally sustainable and socially and economically just growth.

BEST PRACTICE

To share your local Green Deal best practice, answer the EU's Open Call by emailing: enve@cor.europa.eu.

For details about the EU's legislative and political work on climate action, visit the CoR's Green Deal Going Local working group (online).



• William O'Halloran speaking with the group about creating a pollinator corridor.

Meet Ireland's first airborne community medics on scene

- Service proves its worth in saving lives



Watch our video:
<http://bit.ly/ICRRonscene>

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Meet the Republic of Ireland's first airborne community medics who are saving lives by saving time. The month we met them they were called out 54 times.

The service has been running for over a year now and can fly patients from isolated, rural areas to hospital in 20 to 30 minutes. Our editor, Allen Meagher, didn't expect to meet them on scene, but that's the point - you could meet them anywhere.

As well as getting patients swiftly to hospital, founder John Kearney's vision's is focused on bringing A&E to the patient - the opposite to traditional thinking. Each year, the community-based, not-for-profit air ambulance expects to fly over 500 missions.

"Our job is to stabilise the patient and then transfer them to the (most) appropriate accident and emergency department," said Peter Delea, advanced paramedic. "We can land nearly anywhere we want to land. For rural Ireland, in places such as Castletownbere where CUH is two hours away by road, we can bring patients to hospital

within half an hour."

The Irish Community Rapid Response (ICRR) is the charity behind the air ambulance and related medical emergency services. It was founded in 2006 by Mr Kearney from Baltimore after a young life was unnecessarily lost due to the ambulance service being unable to reach the victim in time.

It has won awards and accolades as it grew and has been recognised as a vital social enterprise through

the Social Innovation Fund and the not-for-profit's worth has been measured by partners in UCD.

"Out of the 100 emergencies that (our) teams currently respond to per month, six lives are saved," says the ICRR.

As Peter told 'Changing Ireland', as well as saving lives, their speedy interventions often result in shorter recovery times for patients and a better quality of life after an incident thanks to being

transported to hospital at 300km per hour.

The Millstreet, Co. Cork, based service costs around €2million to run per annum and has completed one full year of airborne operation. It is supported by and collaborates with the National Ambulance Service, the HSE and the Department of Health.

As the ICRR and others point out, access to medical care within "the golden hour" after an incident can often mean the difference between life and death. In Wales and England, charity-run air ambulances have been around for many years, while Northern Ireland Air Ambulance took to the air in 2017.

The ICRR says that their main call outs are for cardiac arrest, road accidents, stroke, falls from a height, and farming and equestrian related injuries.

The not-for-profit says it has four "asks" of people: to donate, volunteer, fundraise and to tell their story.

W: www.icrr.ie



• Air ambulance crew in Co. Limerick: Peter Delea, medic, Tony Meagher, pilot, and Edward Walsh, medic. VIDEO/PIC: A. MEAGHER

RURAL DEVELOPMENT: The integrate

"If we can make it can happen here, it can happen anywhere" - Joe Kelly



BY ALLEN MEAGHER

• Kiltimagh's main street by night. PHOTOS: A. MEAGHER

"The M50 is something I hear about on the radio," says Kristian Sheridan. He works for a global business you might never imagine setting up its Irish HQ in a small town in the West. Yet, it did just that.

His company - Photonomi - is one of a dozen sharing facilities in a sparkling, purpose-built centre in Kiltimagh, the Co. Mayo town the Oxford dictionary credits with possibly having given birth to the term "culchie".

The enterprise centre was built by one of Integrated Resource Development (IRD) Kiltimagh's subsidiaries*. Its voluntary director, Brian Mooney, advises allcomers to "get surrounded by good go-ahead people. Don't listen to the odd begrudger." His motto: "Let the begrudgers at it, but keep going."

IRD Kiltimagh was set up in 1989 as a not-for-profit to develop the town and its hinterland. Outwards migration is a big challenge for many towns and - over 30 years - the organisation has established three enterprise centres which, they say, add "substantial value to the small local economy".

Just over 600 people today work in companies or projects that are, or once were, in workspace provided by IRD Kiltimagh. Joe Kelly, the organisation's CEO, put it in perspective for 'Changing Ireland':

"The town's population is around a thousand, or up to four thousand people including town

and hinterland. The lesson to take from that is this: If we can make it can happen here, it can happen anywhere."

THE CAIRN CENTRE

Kiltimagh's newest enterprise centre is called the Cairn International Trade Centre. It is a high quality building comprising 34,000 square feet of office workspace laid out in 15 open plan suites. It has fibre broadband and "rent is about 10% of the cost of equivalent workspace in the main urban centres".

"It's an ideal location for companies looking for additional space to enable social distancing because of Covid," says IRD Kiltimagh. The centre is also ideal for "companies seeking a low-cost second site outside the main urban centres".

The centre features in a promo video by Community Finance Ireland (CFI) - see below. It inspires viewers to think outside the box, look beyond Dublin and and consider the potential of rural Ireland's small towns. It shows how finance for community organisations is available away from the traditional banks and naturally tells a positive story of engagement with CFI. They provided a "sympathetic ear" and the process to get loan finance was, the IRD Kiltimagh say, "short".

SCULPTURE PARK

Of course, Kiltimagh has been turning heads since 1993 when it opened a sculpture park. You can't miss them, as anyone driving through Kiltimagh will know. It sets the town apart.

When I was passing through one night not so long ago, I was so stunned to see a statue of a man reading a broadsheet newspaper that I stopped to photograph it, or I should say "him"; he was so lifelike. I strolled some more. Across the street, suits were on sale in the local St. Vincent De Paul from €5, surely the best price in Ireland. Unfortunately for me, it was well past closing time.

Then I came across the local kebab shop and, being peckish with a long journey ahead, I stopped in to get a takeaway before continuing on my way.

And that's the idea. IRDK works to develop projects and initiatives that develop the community while simultaneously encouraging visitors to support local business.

"We always try to be different with every single thing we've done," says Kelly.

A unique project on the disused railway passing through the town is to be launched shortly. (We will follow up with coverage once that happens).

* The subsidiary is called Cairn Enterprise Hub DAC.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

There are a number of community-based organisations with “integrated rural/resource development”, shortened to IRD, in their title.

IRD Kiltimagh is one of the originals. Their approach was based initially on lessons learned from Spain. Other community-based organisations around the country also take an “integrated” approaches to local and community development. Their work shows the impact of getting the local community, local authority, employers and state agencies to work together.

MORE INFO:

For more information on IRD Kiltimagh’s work: tel. 094 93 81494; email - hello@ird-kiltimagh.ie

• Community Finance Ireland:

<http://www.communityfinanceireland.com>

• IRD Kiltimagh:

<https://www.ird-kiltimagh.ie/about/background---history/>

• Cairn Trade Centre:

<http://www.ird-kiltimagh.ie/enterprise/cairn-intl-trade-ctr/>

• Kiltimagh Museum:

<http://www.museumsofmayo.com/railway-museum/the-railway-station.html>

• Kiltimagh Sculpture Park is best seen online at: www.pinterest.ca

The West's Embrace! Bye-bye to the M50 and ignore begrudgers:



“Get surrounded by good go-ahead people” - Brian Mooney



• Joe Kelly and Kristian Sheridan in a still from CFI's short video about the Cairne International Trade Centre.



• ABOVE: Kiltimagh's sculpture park. It has outdoor gym equipment and is popular with locals.
• ABOVE, RIGHT: Cairne International Trade Centre from the air, courtesy of CFI.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that Kiltimagh had a direct link to the first landing on the moon? It was also home to Antoine Ó Raifteiri, one of the country's last travelling bards and to world heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney. All that and more is celebrated in the local museum.

PLUS 2 FROM OUR ARCHIVE:

An inspiring craft circle set up by locals in Kiltimagh to nurture interculturalism featured in our summer 2008 edition.

‘Banking On Communities’ was the lead story in our 2016 winter edition. It covered the big picture on financing community initiatives - from minor to major - including Community Finance Ireland’s role.

These and more reports are publicly available in our magazine archive of community development in Ireland over two decades.

W: <https://www.changingireland.ie/digital-magazine-archive/>



Why launch a new association in the middle of a pandemic?



BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Heavy hitters in the world of social enterprise have set up a new membership association to represent the sector in the Republic.

Undeterred by the breaking pandemic, the organisation was officially launched some months ago, headed up by interim CEO, Tammy Darcy (pictured).

"My uppermost ambition is



that the sector is recognised as a distinct sector and has a united voice in Ireland," said Ms. Darcy.

Asked why they launched a new association in the midst of a pandemic, Tammy - founder of the Shona Project in Waterford - said: "During the pandemic, we've seen the need for representation for social enterprises at national level. In a crisis, social enterprises are

more resilient. Social enterprises are able to create impact and solve societal problems... Our jobs are more resilient."

She said that social enterprises have "never been more needed than now".

In a press statement, Darcy also predicted, "The sector will play a leading and powerful role as we move through the current crisis and into recovery."

Seri's founders include community leaders from around the country - from Padraig Casey in Ballyhoura Development to Larry O'Neill and John Murphy in Dublin, and author Senan Cooke in Dunhill.

Former Barnardos chief, Fergus Finlay, is voluntary chairperson of the new body.

He said: "We will forge a new beginning for social enterprise and will grow this sector to benefit all our people and communities throughout the Republic of Ireland."

Founding members include:

- **Brendan Whelan**, CEO of the Social Finance Foundation.
- **Lorraine Corcoran**, CEO of Afanite.
- **Michele Fogarty**, co-founder

Peptalk.

- **John Kearns**, CEO Partas.
- **Karen Leigh**, CEO and founder, Sensational Kids.

Welcoming SERI, MyMind CEO Krystian Fikert said, "We are living in challenging economic times during Covid-19. Social enterprises will flourish in response to society's needs by making services accessible and affordable. This will help the Irish economy to grow faster in a sustainable way. Now is the time for Government to recognise the social enterprise sector as a solution to building a better future in Ireland."

Most recently, Seri highlighted how the EU recognises the role social enterprises will play in the recovery from the pandemic.

"Plans need to be finalised and submitted by April and funds will be disbursed this year," it says.

Community-based social enterprises are encouraged to sign up with Seri and supporters can also join as individuals.

You can contact or call on Seri for support anytime. For more general queries, ask Siri!

W: www.socialenterprise.ie

AIMS OF THE STATE'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE POLICY

The National Social Enterprise Policy has three main objectives:

1. Building Awareness of Social Enterprise.
2. Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise.
3. Achieving Better Policy Alignment.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The National Social Enterprise Policy defines social enterprise as:

"An enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders.

"It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector.

"If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission."

CO-OPS: POSITIVES FROM 2020

TREES, TRANSITION & HOUSING

- Centre for Co-op Studies highlights best practice

BY BETH ARDILL

The following are real-life examples of good co-operative work in practice, as highlighted by UCC's Centre for Co-op Studies.

They are a selection of my favourite stories highlighted by @UCCCoopStudies. It's also worth following @ICOSDublinShows - among others - to learn of the impact of co-ops.

Farming for Nature's John McHugh

John McHugh speaks in this video (pictured right) about his holistic farming approach and the real value of trees - they are worth more than merely timber to cut down. There is a sense of community seen on John's farm as people are welcome to come and plant trees and flowers together. John's work is environmentally friendly and he is focused on bettering the environment.

W: <http://bit.ly/JohnMcHughCCS>

Internationally trading farming co-ops

Speaking on International Co-operatives Day last year, FG MEP Mairead McGuinness highlighted examples of climate action undertaken by cooperatives.

"Co-operatives are local, they're empowering and they're really important in our battle against climate change," she said.

As she pointed out, Glanbia Ireland, one of the biggest farm-focused co-ops, is financing solar panels and helping farmers in transitioning. Recently, it announced it will help to plant 100,000 trees and hedging plants to encourage biodiversity.

W: <http://bit.ly/Co-opDayMMcG>

W: <http://bit.ly/Glanbia100kplants>



Indigenous Seed Growers (USA)

In the USA, the Indigenous Seed Growers Network sprouted from the pandemic and is quickly evolving to help communities secure their own food systems for generations to come.

This sounds like a great co-operative as the work they are doing benefits not only themselves but the generation after them:

W: <http://bit.ly/CCS-native-seeds>

Cobh Credit Union & East Cork Bio

Cobh Credit Union and East Cork Bio are planting 7,000 native Irish trees on school grounds and in public spaces across Co. Cork to create 15 micro-woodlands and 10 micro-orchards.

W: <http://bit.ly/7kCorkTrees>



"THERE IS LIFE BEYOND THE PANDEMIC"

There is at least one co-operative trying to battle the housing crisis in Ireland.

As an example of their work, Co-operative Housing Ireland last year helped people move into a new housing estate in Wicklow. One of the new residents is Winifred (pictured right) who shared her story as part of the 'No Place like Home' campaign.

"There has been so much uncertainty for me personally, well before the Covid crisis. The security of my new home has helped me greatly," she said.

"I work with the Simon Community and sometimes work at home due to Covid-19. In Simon, we have our fingers on the pulse of a

lot of social issues presented by the pandemic. Having a good space to work in at home has made such an impact on my routine and outlook in life."

She is now excited about returning to activities she was previously involved in.

"Before Covid-19, I volunteered with a charity that supports Native Americans in the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota, USA. I took part in an online arts event they held recently and was surprised at how much of a lift that gave me. There is life beyond the pandemic and so many things to look forward to," she said.

W: <https://cooperativehousing.ie/winifred/>



OF COURSE THE EARTH IS FLAT! Now, is there anything we should question about our own beliefs?



• A flat earth as it might be imagined from space, by believers. Image courtesy of the BBC.

BY ROBERT CAREY

What are you being a flat earther about?

There is a scene from the Netflix documentary “Behind the Curve” which is about the growing phenomenon of the Flat Earth Movement. A leading light in the movement informs us that they have recently purchased a “Ring Laser Gyroscope” for a cost of 20,000 dollars with which they will be able to prove that the earth does not move. After setting it up however the device, not unsurprisingly, showed movement (15 degrees per hour for you science geeks) - to which his response was: “We were taken aback, it’s a problem and one which we will set out to disprove.” In other words there is nothing you can do or no evidence you can provide with that will make me reconsider my position.

The fact that the earth is curved [My daughter (10) glanced in passing at this page’s headline and severely rebuked me - ed] as opposed to flat is in most people’s reality a solid, proven fact and has been for hundreds if not thousands of years. Yet when presented with irrefutable evidence to the contrary, “Flat Earthers” refuse to engage with it and instead seek out any information to try to justify their position.

This denial of rationality and facts is part of what psychologists call cognitive dissonance. This is the process whereby, when a person is presented with ideas or information which are contrary to their beliefs, this causes a dissonance or discomfort and, in order to restore balance, we sometimes dismiss the new information out of hand and instead seek to justify our existing ideas. This can lead to confirmation bias and an irrational way of thinking.

This is dangerous when it concerns big and

important issues and it seems to be a rising phenomenon in the world today, which is further facilitated by the internet - because it has never been so easy to propagate a false or just plain stupid idea.

We have seen this across issues ranging from climate change denial, people who deny that racism exists, those who support Trump no matter what he does and recently in the anti-mask protests.

WE NEED TO QUESTION ESTABLISHED NORMS

So what is the role of community development in this: Are we not meant to support community activism and collective action? Do we only support what we agree with? We may be asked for example to support communities to challenge lockdown procedures.

It is true that those working in community development are required to be sceptical, to question the established norms and practices and to empower communities to have a voice. However, there is a difference between scepticism and denial.

Scepticism involves rational analyses and argument and a willingness for your current thinking to be disproved. It is in essence a scientific rational approach.

Denial involves the under-utilisation of your rational faculties, denial of facts and truth. It is in fact a regression to pre-enlightenment days when we looked to superstition and religion for explanations.

OPEN TO NEW PERSPECTIVES

Externally therefore, we need to be willing to continue activism, but only if it is consistent with the values of equality and social inclusion and is well informed, and in this regard we need to be willing to contest misinformation when required.

In Local Development Companies (LDCs) we need to continue to support the interrogation of policy and attitudes which are harmful to social justice and continue to promote rational, fact-based debate to counter the current predilection for conspiracy theories and anti-rational argument.

Internally, there is a challenge for LDCs also, as it is also important for those working in the sector to recognise that we all have biases and some of these are regressive. However, once we are aware of this and open to new perspectives and information, we can make well informed and fair decisions.

While LDCs are not all the same, many are now considered (through the State’s funding structure) to be more corporate and in some ways more conservative. We may not always be as accessible and understanding of the many equality issues as we would like to think. Internally, we need to challenge ourselves, to be aware of our own biases and to strive to be unambiguously egalitarian.

* Robert Carey works in a Local Development Company in Kerry - NEWKD. He is a member of the Changing Ireland Editorial Team.

For more about LDCs, visit: <http://ildn.ie>

MUSIC IS NOT AN ELITE ACTIVITY

- LEADER is music to everyone's ears, funding 60 violins



• A rehearsal at Coláiste Chu Chulainn, Dundalk. The violin, or fiddle, is a harder instrument to learn to play than the guitar or piano. Photo by CBOI.

MUSICAL INCLUSION

Despite the pandemic, every evening schoolkids from three schools in Co. Louth meet online to practice the violin. It's not the easiest instrument to master, but these children are now musicians who can boast of having performed in front of thousands of people.

The violins they play were funded through LEADER - a sign of how varied the support to communities can be nowadays through this fund.

This 'Dynamics' project engages 6 and 7-year-old children in Louth who may not have access to musical instruments or training. It is supported by the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland (CBOI) which was established in 1995 to build relationships north and south of the border through music. The CBOI has become a flagship programme and is probably best known for its Peace Proms.

CONTEXT

The Dynamics project has moved away from the traditional way of learning music in Ireland which is often a one-to-one, once a week lesson. Research found that around half of children who learn via one-to-one lessons quit.

The new approach focuses on group-based and peer-to-peer learning. The project drivers see it as "a programme for social change that builds a belief in each child that he or she can take on really difficult challenges and succeed."

"This method of teaching is a complete game changer," said

Sharon Treacy-Dunne, founding director of CBOI.

The three schools involved are: Mullaghbuoy N.S., Monksland N.S., both on the Cooley Peninsula, and St. Joseph's N.S., Dundalk.

OBJECTIVES

The project aims to challenge the idea of music being elite and to make music more accessible to disadvantaged groups.

It also seeks to show that this 'Dynamic' system of education can help address social issues and be transformative for children.

ACTIVITIES

Initially, Louth County Council supported a small pilot with Monksland N.S. which provided the impetus for the CBOI to approach Louth LEADER Partnership about a wider programme across the county.

"Those six months running the pilot really helped us in building a very strong application," said Ms. Treacy-Dunne.

The CBOI sought funding to support the purchase of violins and to help pay for tuition. They worked closely with project officers in Louth LEADER Partnership (LLP) to get the project application to approval stage.

"I found it really good in comparison to some other funders where applications are unnecessarily complex," said Ms. Treacy-Dunne.

She said LLP staff "were great, very clear, very straight forward."

Since it began, 80 students from three schools have joined and they take part in daily 40-minute lessons (currently via Zoom).

RESULTS

This project targets primary school children who live in isolated rural areas and/or experience socio-economic deprivation.

Children with anxiety and other issues have benefitted. Some of the children learned to completely overcome their anxieties and fears.

Children with learning difficulties benefited greatly. It helped them to excel in other areas of their schooling and to have more confidence.

Teachers noted how the project transformed the class groups - the children grew to love school and attendance improved as the children don't want to miss violin lessons.

Within a year, the Dynamics children had performed in the RDS, Dublin, in front of 4,000 people.

Music to everyone's ears!

LESSONS

The CBOI advises anyone developing their own LEADER project: "Build a good relationship with your funder and project officer, as they will help guide you through the process and help solve any issues you may be experiencing with your application."

- BY ALLEN MEAGHER

COLLABORATION

This is part of 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.



• Liam Smalle of St. Joseph's N.S.
Source: CBOI.

BUDGET:

Total LEADER funding awarded to date amounts to €17,475 broken down as follows €10,974. EAFRD (EU) with €6,501 being the national contribution. Private matched funding of €4,961 came from the organisation's own funds.

Louth LEADER Partnership gave guidance in pulling the application and supporting materials together to get the project over the line.

"We had a lot of supplementary materials, justifications and information to pull together to get through the process. But we had help at the other end of the phone or an email when we needed it and that was key," said Ms. Treacy-Dunne, Director, CBOI.

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

LIBERTIES REVISITED - 2002 to 2021

PUBLICAN WHO MADE HISTORY AS A BOY STILL HOPES TO STUDY

- Graham Mooney meanwhile warns of looming inner-city unemployment

BY LAOISE NEYLON

BACK in 2001, Graham Mooney made local history when he was the first person from the Thomas Court Bawn flats in the Liberties to complete the leaving certificate.

At that time he told 'Changing Ireland' he wanted to go to college and pursue a career in community development.

Fast forward almost 20 years and Graham is a publican, sitting by a blazing fire in one of his pubs, Kavanagh's in New Street.

He casts his mind back to the year he finished school. He really wanted to pursue his education. "College was always at the forefront of my mind," he recalls.

But Graham didn't have the luxury of choosing to go to college, he says, because he needed to work to help out at home.

Tragically Graham's father died aged just 41 the same year that he finished school.

His younger sister who was still in school and his dad had been the main earners in the house, he says. After he passed away, "we had zilch, we had nothing."

Graham had started working in bars aged just 14, so by the time he finished school he had plenty of experience and was able to secure



• *Graham Mooney in 2020 (left) and in 2002 (below).*

PHOTO BY: L. NEYLON

full-time work in the bar trade and help support his family.

If he went to college that would mean that he couldn't help out at home, so he stayed working. "I put my education on the sideline to earn a full-time wage."

In the lead-up to the pandemic, he was busy running two pubs, while still thinking about going back to education - he recently discussed it with his wife. He would like to study

law or sociology, he says.

He has three children, aged 13, 11 and nine, and he coaches a local under-13 soccer team, the Transport Ivy Trust.

He is closely watching the development of the Liberties area and he thinks that many of the changes have not benefited the local community.

CHANGING LIBERTIES

Apart from summers spent working in Spain in his early 20s, Graham has lived and worked in the Liberties area most of his life. He has seen a lot of changes take place in the area over the last 20 years.

One positive change is that most young people finish school now and

A Dublin community worker in the making

Original interview - (Changing Ireland, Issue 3, Spring 2002)

WHEN Graham Mooney decided to sit the Leaving Certificate, he didn't realise he was going to make history. Graham achieved a personal triumph in passing the exam, but the local community also celebrated because he was the first person from his area to get the Leaving.

Encouraged by parents Breda and Paul (since deceased) and homework club workers alike, Graham put his mind to the task and emerged with an 86% grade in the Leaving Cert Applied, making him the first ever person from Thomas Court Bawn flats complex in the Liberties of Dublin to go so far academically. He attended James Street CBS.

"I didn't think anything big of it at the time," said Graham, "but then I found out that I was the only one in the area to do the Leaving Cert and I felt good about it. It's something you'll always regret if you don't have."

While students from middle-class backgrounds merely regard the Leaving Cert as a stepping stone to further education, in Graham's world the norm is to drop out of school early. He felt the pressure from his peers, but persevered: "At first I wanted to be out on the town with everybody, but decided there was no point in doing that when you could get a good job if you have the Leaving Cert. My parents were always pushing me to stick at school."

Just 17, Graham was recently promoted to assistant manager of Byrne's Bar in Meath Street, proving his point that getting the Leaving and a good job go together. Graham hopes to eventually work in community development, having been involved in various voluntary projects since his early teens.

Meanwhile, the uniqueness of his success highlights the Irish education system's disastrous performance level in working class areas. It seems the system needs looking at and inner-city youths need more support.

"Some lads get caught up with the wrong things and get into trouble," said

Graham, who appreciates the support he received at home and from staff of School Street Family Resource Centre.

"I kept wanting to drop out of school, so I joined a homework club and Leo (School Street FRC's project co-ordinator) told me to just get on with it. And my Da was always the one to chastise me. For me, I always wanted to have the Leaving Cert going looking for a job. Now I've done it."

Graham's favourite subjects were Office Skills and Retail Distribution, and Mathematics, which means he is well suited to bar management.

"I started here three and a half years ago as a lounge-boy and I've been behind the bar now for the last two years," he said.

But, Graham wants to go to college now to study community development and childcare and get work in the area.

"I am still very active in the flats complex," he noted. "I'm always involved in swimming, canoeing and rock-climbing. Three years ago, I was selected as the Dublin representative for a youth conference held in Cork. The year before that, I got an award for doing voluntary work after I worked as a junior youth leader for local clubs."

Graham has also worked as a volunteer at Sunshine House, a holiday destination for disadvantaged children. His mother, Breda, is proud of Graham's achievement and staff at the local Family Resource Centre (where Breda works part-time) hope that other teenagers might now be encouraged to continue on and not drop out of school early.

Graham has two brothers who dropped out of school early (and are just as loved by their mother) and one sister who is sitting her Junior Cert this year and intends to continue on.

(cont'd)

many of them progress to college, he says. But other changes are worrying: "The whole heritage of the area is being dwindled out," he says.

There is still something special about the area, says Graham. "There is still a fantastic community spirit in the Liberties and nicer people you won't meet."

But nowadays, he says, gone are the fresh food markets, the traders and those little businesses that were really at the heart of the place.

He says it is frustrating to see that most of what is being built is student accommodation and hotels, instead of housing for local families.

"It might become too commercialised. This area is just saturated with student accommodation and all this other stuff that we don't need," he says.

He's spotted other flaws in the planning of the city too - the concentration of homeless services in the compact space of the inner city is also causing problems.

Once Covid-19 closed the pubs, Graham bought a van and started working as a courier.

When he was out doing deliveries all over Dublin, he noticed major differences in the type of developments allowed in other parts of the city.

"Going into affluent areas, you don't see any wet hostels," he says.

ALWAYS INNOVATING

Graham started out running pubs in the last recession - he leased his first bar, Kavanaghs, in 2009, although he struggled to make a living with high overheads.

Then six years ago, with a business



• Flats, Meath Place, The Liberties.

partner, he leased another pub, the Malthouse in James's Street. They invested heavily in renovating it and installing a commercial kitchen, as they also did in Kavanagh's.

"Then this came around (Covid-19). I don't think we will get our money back out of it."

He fears that another recession is looming.

Behind every pub or restaurant there is a chain of people whose livelihoods depend on each small business, he says. The local butcher, who buys from the local farmer; the local woman who makes the deserts.

"It has an incredible knock-on effect - if the pubs close it affects so many other businesses," he says.

He pointed out how many locals in the Liberties area are at the moment surviving on the PUP payment of €350 per week.

But when things reopen, he fears that businesses will be so badly affected that unemployment will soar. "There will be people out of work. There is going to be major implications after this."

Still, he keeps a positive outlook. Since Covid-19 struck, he has innovated within his business and is doing a good trade in takeaway dinners. "You have to just keep on top of it, reinvent yourself and keep going," says Graham.



• Graham Mooney in Byrne's Bar, Meath St., Dublin, in 2002.

PHOTO BY: A. MEAGHER.

CITY INCLUSION

Moyross #BuildOurRoad win marks start, not end

- Ministerial sign-off on road; wall to fall

In 2006, the level of abandonment by the local authority and the State of communities in Limerick became clear when children were burned in an arson attack in Moyross.

Soon after, Moyross was inundated by every kind of police imaginable. Gardai in the sky, on horseback, undercover, in the community, armed Gardai. Even a spotter plane was seconded to Moyross. It added to the stigmatisation, but helped quell crime. The arson attack was to become the catalyst for setting up Limerick Regeneration.

Had the children succumbed to their injuries, as a four-year old child in Ballinacurra had in 2004, media and political attention would likely have come and gone without the underlying problems being recognised.

When it came, regeneration was not quite what was promised, but people held out hope.

From 2008 to 2020, €397m was spent: across the city 1,091 houses (many loved by their occupants) were demolished and 269 homes (mostly apartments) were built. Money also went on plans, retrofitting and community and social projects. However, work remains to be completed, including on the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Distributor Road, begun in 2017.

In January, Moyross was called to unite and campaign, or all hope people had for the city's northside would be lost. This vital road was slated for review.

People rowed in behind #BuildOurRoad, pushing the Government to live up to its commitments. The campaign gained support from all but one political party.

It also drew extraordinary testimonies from residents and people formerly from Moyross who simply love their community. Noelle, a former resident, wrote:

"Moyross has been the only best memories I have of my childhood. I made lifelong friends, the bestest neighbours. Everyone helped and supported each other, no-one was left out and we were all a big family."

"I always loved Moyross. It was my home. I'd move back in a heartbeat. My two children attend Corpus Christi school. It's an amazing school. The principal and the teachers' work is phenomenal - every single child is treated the same. If they got this road and built more social houses they could build back up the community. I'd love to move back to Moyross."

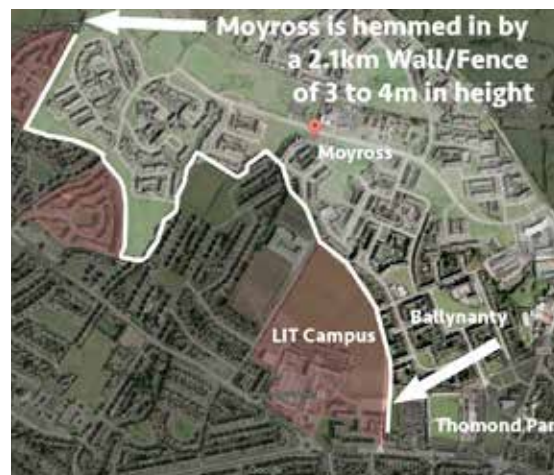
Highlighting how the road could help ease homelessness and job scarcity on the northside, she wrote, "This road... gives families like mine a sense of relief, knowing that there is hope for this amazing community and the plans they have can be fulfilled."

The community and its diaspora and many supporters found their voice on social media and across political lines. New youthful leaders emerged.

Still now, after a ministerial U-turn, and a major investment announcement (the following day) campaigners are not letting their guard down: "This is not the end, but the beginning," said Moyross Partners.

Even at the worst of times, when journalists came from Milan, Munich and New York, the graffiti on walls proclaiming "I love Moyross" was simply true.

- Allen Meagher



• The wall will be knocked and the road completed. RIGHT: LIT is on the other side.

CLOUGHJORDAN ECOVILLAGE IS 20 YEARS A GROWING

BY ÁINE RYNNE

Cloughjordan Ecovillage walks the talk. In 2005, land at Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary, was purchased and received outline planning permission for a sustainable community of 130 homes and work units. Infrastructure work began in 2007 and the first residents moved in two years later.

Today, it shows how to achieve ecological, economic and social sustainability through its 55 low-carbon homes, a carbon-neutral district heating system, a community farm, green enterprise centre, a planned reed-bed treatment plant and Ireland's lowest ecological footprint.

Recently, over 70 people took part in a celebratory online event to mark the Ecovillage's "20 years a growing". Speakers included current residents and founders of the project who talked about the highlights and the challenges of life in an experimental community.

Its founders sought from the start to build "a resilient economy sustained by local enterprises, ecotourism, social entrepreneurs and strategic partners to demonstrate a new way of living in rural areas."

Aaron Bailey, who moved there when he was 12, spoke about how being part of the community was hugely influential and very shaping to him as an individual. He described how life there gave him a sense of belonging at a young age and how powerful that was to him.

"To grow up around people who provide our food is built on the strength of connection and mutual support. The most rewarding parts to life here include a spirit of collaboration and community consensus, which society needs more of," he said.

One of the Ecovillage's founders, **Iva Pocock**, said life in Cloughjordan is intense, but has both positives and

negatives. She described the never ending to-do list and how they naively expected the completion of the project within five years.

There are many wonderful aspects to life in the eco-village, she said, including their commitment to their ecological charter, biodiversity and bird life. She is most proud of the fact that they are still here despite the challenges along the way.

Another long term resident, **Oliver Moore**, a journalist, describes life in Cloughjordan as amplified and that it has been a great place to rear a family. The access to public transport is a huge factor for residents like Ollie - he uses the train for lecturing work in UCC and having this connection was a massive incentive for him to move there with his family. He uses Cork city's bike scheme and returns using Irish Rail.

Morag Friel, who moved to Cloughjordan with her husband and child in 2010, also talked about access to public transport as a key decision in moving there. The main teaching for her personally is learning humility and learning to work and live together while making concerted efforts to show kindness.

Mary Murphy, from Maynooth University, complimented the success of the Ecovillage's staying power as directly to do with the determination by its founders not to lose sight of their core values. As a consensus driven model, this way of making decisions inspires hope and is very important to its success. She talked about the term 'like-minded' and suggested that this was possibly inaccurate as the bringing together of diverse mindsets is its strength, adding to their "amplified life".

She said national housing policy is too limited and local authorities in Ireland - among the weakest in Europe - should adapt their models based on Cloughjordan. She also picked up on an earlier point about gender equality as a challenge that needed more attention as well as an opportunity for increased income support.

She said lessons for the future include increased involvement from public services, as well as informal collaboration with young people - linking into education projects.

Tim Crowley from Martello Low Carbon described the Ecovillage as an exemplar project in putting climate resilience through

sustainable living into practice. He said the social housing model should be introduced to make the Ecovillage more inclusive and accessible, saying that finance is available for this and that it could be a great next phase of development.

"The model to date has been to buy a site and to build your own house. That development model needs to change - by making it more accessible to young people but also to minorities and to introduce social housing, which are part of all communities around Ireland but not in Cloughjordan at present," he said.

He criticised the process around decision-making which can be slow and indecisive - saying that this needs to change. He went on to celebrate the achievements in Cloughjordan saying that the future belongs to eco-models like it.

Karyn Ciesielski from the Irish Environmental Network describes Cloughjordan Ecovillage as "being on the cutting edge of sustainable practices, innovating as a centre of excellence and contributing vital knowledge to the environmental movement in Ireland".

It was very apparent during this discussion how monumental a task it was to establish Ireland's first ecovillage. As challenges were tackled and resolved over the years, it proofed that this model works and can be used by local authorities.

There is no reason why existing towns and villages around Ireland can't use the eco-model to protect biodiversity, implement low carbon measures and adapt other aspects of sustainability for our communities.

Minister Eamon Ryan introduced the seminar with a pre-recorded video message:

"I'm very glad to join this 20 year celebration of the ecovillage at Cloughjordan, to celebrate what's been done and to look forward to what's next. I remember when a whole range of people I knew talked about the ecovillage and setting it up. They were full of real ambition and understanding that the climate is going to change everything. Understanding the need for food security and biodiversity go with that climate challenge."

He congratulated all involved, noting that building began just as the financial crisis hit and many lessons were learnt along the way.

