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"Conas atá tú?"

If people can be supported during a pandemic to integrate imagine all we can achieve together when it's behind us!



The essence of community development

NICOLA BROWNE:

INSIDE: 'Our Rural Future' makes 150 commitments including setting up pub hubs - we talk to Pat Kennedy

ALSO: Gentrification and homelessness in Dublin; Vaccine Equity; Community education; Employment supports; Forging ahead in Kerry; Horace returns



An elephant in the room

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

ISSN 1649-5985



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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'.

SUPPORT

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



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

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INTEGRATION & EQUITY: CONAS ATÁ TÚ?



The work in communities is nicely showcased nowadays online.

The Wheel members, LEADER programme beneficiaries and workers funded under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

(SICAP) now all produce videos from time to time to reveal how their work changes society.

For so many years, our work has been hidden. It is time to shine a spotlight on it.

Take Meath for example where Cultúr is working to integrate asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants - most recently by offering Irish language and dance classes during lockdown. They went down a treat.

In Wexford - as also featured here - community workers under SICAP have made people welcome during a pandemic. No mean feat, but the same good community work is happening across the country, from Inchicore to West Mayo.

The Minister responsible for much in this area - Minister of State Joe O'Brien - knows all about integration from his own work in the area and he is high in praise of the SICAP programme for the difference it makes across Ireland. He recently launched a report compiled by Pobal examining the programme's effectiveness with

new communities.

And, as he has himself highlighted, the Government of Ireland now reaches out through community workers to support asylum-seekers from the moment they arrive.

Meanwhile, work behind the scenes to replace Direct Provision is gathering pace.

In other good news for those working in community development, 15 applications were received for each of the eight pilot Community Development Projects (CDPs) to be funded by Government this year. In all, more than 120 applications were submitted three weeks after the call was made by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Good luck to the eight that are chosen and, if successful, a fuller programme should follow.

It only seems like last week when we had 180 CDPs.

Also, it is good to see that the State is now committed to reducing consistent poverty to 2%, an outcome of the recently held Social Inclusion Forum (attendees wanted a target of 0%).

During the latest and hopefully the last lockdown as a result of the pandemic, community groups and volunteers continued to be to the fore in reaching out to and supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

They continued to advocate for people - from Dublin's inner city to the islands - and their voices were heard, we hope, at that recent Social Inclusion Forum. Hundreds of people attended each day for a four-day event and policy makers assured all present (online) that they were listening. If so, the post-pandemic recovery may yet be a community-led one. More to follow - as they say - in the next edition.

Internationally, Irish activists, NGOs and communities have been asked by Dr Mike Ryan to get behind the WHO's global campaign for vaccine equity. History will judge our actions, he says. He was awarded the Romero Award by Trocaire in February.

Finally, my thoughts are with the family of the late Eileen Lucey who graced our front cover at Christmas-time alongside a friendly carer from Offaly. May she and all others we have lost in recent months rest in peace and long may they be remembered for all the good they did and joy they brought to this world.

Allen Meagher

FILE A REPORT FOR US!

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



Published By:

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

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L: linkedin.com/company/changing-ireland

I: changingireland

Also: Issuu.com

Production:

Editor: Allen Meagher.

Editorial Team: Robert Carey, Joe Saunders, Viv Sadd, Grace Barrett, Paul Geraghty/Bernie Reape and Allen Meagher.

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

Printed by: Davis Printers, Limerick.

Voluntary Board of Directors: Cathy Jones (chair), George Clancy (vice), Seamus McGiff (sec), Andrew O'Byrne and Shane O'Sullivan.

Thanks To . . .

'Changing Ireland' thanks everyone involved in the production of Issue 72.

Front Cover:

Main picture: Tinu Achioya, programme manager with Cultúr based in Co. Meath.

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DISCLAIMER

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

MINISTER MOVES ON INTEGRATION

Minister of State Joe O'Brien launched a report titled 'The Role of SICAP in Supporting New Communities' on March 23rd.

It looks at the role of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in contributing to integration and supporting people in new communities to overcome barriers.

Although it was not possible to interview members of new communities as part of the research, the findings were positive and encouraging.

The report focuses on the experiences of disadvantaged people who are migrants, asylum seekers and refugees supported by the SICAP.

It found that the programme is strongly aligned with national and international integration frameworks. It includes examples of good practice that contribute to integration; employment, education, access to services, social connection and political participation.

Commenting on the findings, Minister O'Brien said this community infrastructure will play a significant role as plans to end Direct

Provision move forward:

"This report provides important evidence that the State's main social inclusion programme – SICAP – is working effectively to help new communities to integrate successfully in their local communities and into life in Ireland. The report is a testament to the work of the 46 local development companies across the country that are implementing the programme.

"I know a lot of the work is tailored (to the person) and is particularly effective as it is at a one-to-one level. It's literally a direct person to person connection and bond that is helping many migrants navigate the multiple challenges that they are facing.

"In my view SICAP is one of the most effective programmes we have that facilitates migrant integration in Ireland. It reaches into almost every community in Ireland and is based on personal contact between migrants and SICAP workers. They are skilled and knowledgeable in terms of getting through the barriers to employment, education, access to services, social connections and

an area that I think is particularly important, political participation.

"Last month Minister O'Gorman and I launched a new approach and indeed a new relationship between the Irish State and people seeking international protection, where the State's efforts and supports to promote integration formally start from the first day a protection applicant arrives in Ireland. Many Local Development Companies have been doing this work, as the report shows. Now they have an even stronger mandate to do so following the publication of the White Paper on Direct Provision but also the evidence of good work from this report," he said.

Pobal CEO, Anna Shakespeare, said the report "highlights the positive contribution that SICAP is making towards the integration of newcomers in communities" and also presents us with useful findings which can inform practice."

She said Pobal was committed to working closely with the Department of Rural and Community Development, Local Development Companies, Local Community



• Minister of State, Joe O'Brien.

Development Committees and other stakeholders to implement the report's recommendations over the coming months.

The Irish Local Development Network welcomed the report's recognition of the multiple barriers to social inclusion experienced by new communities and the finding that SICAP and Local Development Companies contribute strongly to five areas of integration – employment, education, access to services, social connection and political participation.

Download 'The Role of SICAP in Supporting New Communities' from: www.pobal.ie.

CELESTE SAID WE MUST TEACH NEWCOMERS

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

SICAP* has scored highly in terms of helping integrate new arrivals in Ireland.

That the country's national anti-poverty programme has done well in this regard is not just as cause for celebration but a relief.

Speaking to 200 people at a diversity seminar in Mayo, in 2019, Celesta Khosa from South Africa warned that if newcomers did not get the opportunities to integrate then society as a whole would suffer.

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

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

"In Zulu, we say 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu' - meaning a person is a person because of other people. If you are Irish, you have to teach me 'This is the way we do it'," she said.

"We need to open doors. Let's make everyone feel welcome. If we misunderstand diversity, we will have big issues."

She commended the GAA for reaching out and was eager for her son to play Gaelic football.

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

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

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

She grew up learning the opposite: "In my culture, you kick that door, walk in and the next person can get the door themselves."

Language is an obvious barrier. She asked how can Irish ways of doing things and the country's basic history and culture be taught when many new people – unlike her – arrive without English.

She railed against the way in which she and other asylum-seekers are accommodated, saying the Direct Provision system – which she has now moved on from – ruled out easy integration. How can people integrate and learn if they live apart – referring to Direct Provision, she asked.

Thankfully, the Direct Provision system is being replaced and, in the meantime, SICAP has proven that it is possible to support and help people to integrate while living in accommodation centres.

The report findings by Pobal are backed up by

If people aren't shown how to be Irish, we'll all lose out
- Celesta Khosa



case-studies, often with video featuring the voices of the people the programme supports.

Work by – among others – Wexford Local Development (pages 8-11) proved that even in a pandemic, community workers were able to reach out to, connect with, form a web of relationships with, and effect change in the lives of asylum-seekers and migrants and provide them with encouragement at a difficult time for the country.

*SICAP = the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

VOICES
OF SOCIAL CHANGE



People new to Ireland integrate better with 'an cúpla focal'

BY SORCHA GRISEWOOD



Free Irish language and sean-nós dance classes were offered to new Irish communities in Meath, Louth and Cavan during lockdown, through a collaboration by Cultúr Migrants Centre and Conradh na Gaeilge. The classes were held because people new to Ireland have a better chance to integrate if they understand Irish culture and the language.

The online classes were among the many events that took place - mostly online - during Seachtain na Gaeilge 2021*.

"Initiatives such as these, while they may seem tokenistic, actually play a very important role in helping migrants and refugees to assimilate and integrate into Irish society and culture," says SORCHA GRISEWOOD who interviewed those involved in the collaboration.



• Tinu Achioya.

"Irish is an integral part of the puzzle for new Irish communities trying to understand the cultural landscape of Ireland," says **Sean Ó Murachadha**, an integration officer with **Conradh na Gaeilge**.

"The more they understand about the language, the easier it will be for them to integrate into and participate in a society so moulded by its own unique language. It's important especially for our new communities to show them that the Irish language and culture is for them as much as anyone else."

Reuben Hambakchere, an integration officer with **Cultúr** (<http://cultur.ie>) based in Navan, welcomed the collaboration with Conradh na Gaeilge, saying "any kind of contact" is useful and valued by people new to Ireland.

While they may have access to information, "they may not be able to interact with their neighbour or have any Irish contacts," he said.

Reuben works with international protection applicants from 29 countries in Direct Provision and temporary accommodation centres in Slane, Laytown and Mosney. He takes a community development approach to the work and facilitates orientation courses, information sessions and leadership courses.

He says his job is mainly about "building resilience and supporting integration".

Since many migrants and refugees have children who in school, and because the Irish language is a compulsory subject, it helps the children if in turn their parents have 'cúpla focal' themselves.

While you don't need to be able

to speak Irish or dance 'sean-nós' yourself to integrate into Irish society, it helps to know a little. As Seán points out, something as simple as knowing the Irish word for 'Navan' is 'An Uaimh' can help migrants to read maps and road signs and obtain a sense of place.

Knowing basic phraseology, understanding the meaning of surnames and place names and knowing a little bit about the history of a country can help migrants to understand the people and place they're living in a little better.

For instance, **Priscilla Amankwatia** from Ghana found it "very interesting" attending an Irish language workshop. What struck her most were similarities between Ireland and her native country and old shared history of colonisation. She maintains that English "was

imposed" on the Ghanaian people as well and that if she were Irish she would feel "robbed" of her heritage and "would push for the language to be brought back".

Whether or not you agree with Priscilla's views, it's clear that workshops and collaborations with Irish organisations can help to bridge the divide between 'us' and 'them' by highlighting our similarities as well as our differences.

Tinu Achioya from Cultúr said that when they host events like this they work directly with the community in a collaborative manner.

She said, "It's about sharing our knowledge and resources to ensure that we have the most intercultural County Meath possible and that smaller groups are given the foundations needed to flourish. As a migrant organisation we always want

to ensure that our reach is as diverse as possible."

This particular collaboration with Conradh na Gaeilge was funded by the Department of Justice's Integration Fund.

As well as informing and educating, initiatives such as this can also help migrants to feel more invested in the place where they are living and to have a greater sense of belonging.

Cultúr also works with organisations such as Spirasi to support individuals who experienced trauma or torture.

* Sorcha Grisewood is a teacher and freelance writer passionate about human rights and social justice issues, travel, adventure, food, languages, books and the Great Outdoors. W: <https://standingonmyown2feet.com>



Luciano Ferreira, from Angola, lives in Monaghan town and is married with four children. His 14-year-old and 10 year old live at home with him; another is grown up and lives on her own and his other child is back in Angola.

He came here as a refugee and lived in Direct Provision for six years, though now he has residency here. He works as a family support worker at 'Teach na Daoine', a migrant organisation, and is chairperson of an immigrant support group. He hasn't been back to Angola in the 12 years he's been here and if he returns it will only be for a holiday.

He liked the sean nós (brush) dancing.

"We had fun, we had a good craic, people they like it. The brush would pass under your leg like that. It was funny - first she (Sibéal) demonstrated and then we tried."

One can imagine first-timers trying and the howls of laughter. (Try it yourself!)

At the end, the instructor



asked for contributions from the participant's home countries and Luciano and his daughter showed the group how Angolans traditionally dance.

Luciana speaks four languages (Portuguese, Spanish, English and Lingala from Congo) and is very active within the migrant community.

"When there is an event on, I promote getting people together. I can reach Portuguese, Brazilians, people from Mozambique and South Americans."

In the online sean nós class he met people from Brazil, Nigeria

Irish-Americans gave him a new perspective and he learned that the English language was imposed on Ireland.

and Senegal.

"You know in this time of pandemic, people they are so isolated and they're depressed. Everybody was happy because we were able to see each other on the screen," he said.

He can now count in Irish
“because when you are learning
to dance in Irish they use the
numbers”.

As well as the sean nós, he attended an Irish language and heritage workshop.

"It was good. We learned about the word Taoiseach - that it means 'chief'. In my country, we also have a chief - we call the chief 'soba'".

On the course he met Irish-Americans who gave him a new

perspective and he learned that the English language was imposed on Ireland. The course also taught participants a little history - about The Great Famine, Irish emigration, placenames and the anglicisation of those names, amongst other things.

Luciano realised that Ireland under colonisation was treated like Angola and vice-versa.

“When the colonisers came, you were not able to speak your language, you must speak their language and also you are not able to work in a public place...like a council or a hospital. You are obliged to learn their language ...they will do everything for you to forget your language.” he said.



Dr. Hafi Saad is a Sudanese doctor working in Roscommon on immunisation. He previously worked in Cavan General Hospital and the Mater in Dublin (A&E) and is here 12 years, having come, not as a refugee, but as a skilled worker. Hafi is married to an Irish woman.

The sean nós dancing was “really good”, he said, making the point that many migrants “don’t have any idea about Irish culture”.

"It's good to understand Irish culture while you are living here, especially during this Covid time."

He said it was also good for people to be able to have some fun.

"It's good for cultural interaction. (In the online class) you were able to see others and understand other cultures. It took away the feeling of isolation."

He said that many newcomers to Ireland are lost and courses like this “help them to understand

"It's good to understand Irish culture."

what's going on". He has met many migrants who at first thought nothing of the fact that Irish people speak English.

"They didn't know about the Irish language or Irish songs or music or dance," he said.

He thought the sean nós workshop and the Irish language overview workshop was “very good and well-organised and I appreciate what Sean’s organisation did...It’s very inclusive and especially to organise that for ethnic minorities is very clever.”

Asked about Ireland, he said, "Like everywhere, there's good and bad people. In general, I think it's good. Here you have strong family relations. Friendships are stronger here. It's more like home."



ABOUT CULTÚR MIGRANT CENTRE

- **Cultúr Migrant Centre** in Navan is a community organisation working to support migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Meath and neighbouring counties by fostering integration and tackling social exclusion.

- It works with people in direct provision and also runs a number of different programmes and intercultural events from English language courses to job preparation and upskilling courses and parenting groups, women's networking groups and wellbeing courses.

- It receives funding from the Department of Justice and Equality, the EU Asylum and Migration Fund, the Dormant Accounts fund and Meath County Council, among others.

INCLUSION: #SicapStories

Wexford film on integration tells of the joys of community development work *TV-friendly showcases deserve airing*

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A video shot in Wexford with Asylum seekers shows broadly how community development organisations typically engage with people. It captures the nitty-gritty of what community workers do in a way we haven't seen before.

"It focuses on relationships, being flexible, believing in potential and building on the strengths we know that each person and each community possesses, whether or not they are labelled as 'disadvantaged' or 'deprived', to work towards a better future," says Siobhán O'Brien, policy co-ordinator with Wexford Local Development (WLD).

The video is also topical because a report published in March showed how community organisations funded through SICAP were successful in promoting integration across the country. WLD's work in Rosslare and Courtown shows in detail how they go about this critical work.

The video digs deep. Rarely, for instance, to you hear community workers speak of the joy they experience in the course of their work.

They generally tend not to be a self-congratulatory lot and to leave the talking to managers and to people they support.

However, more insights than ever are now being provided into community work in Ireland through videos such as this one.

The Wheel has for some years run a popular video competition. LEADER began doing the same last year. And for the past four years, the 49 organisations across the country engaged in anti-poverty work under the SICAP programme produce videos to showcase their work.

WLD's video* captures the essence of community development work.

It works because while many stories tend to focus on outcomes for the beneficiaries/clients/people experiencing disadvantage, this story is told from a variety of viewpoints - the people who arrived here seeking sanctuary, the accommodation centre



manager and all-importantly - the community development workers.

In 16 minutes, you get a strong sense of how community work works - the subjects talk about developments over two years involving over a hundred people and multiple communities.

It helps that the video is not laden down with the lingo community worker are often obliged to speak off-camera (target groups, disadvantaged individuals, IRIS, programme implements - few like these terms!)

Video-making is one of the newer challenges for community organisations. It's not an easy task to capture what they do, and why, and how on film.

For example, the lighting in WLD's video was at times a little dark. Other videos featured television-standard filming. Getting subjects to speak comfortably on camera is obviously an accomplishment. All new territory for community groups, but worthwhile given the need to

showcase what groups do.

One is reminded of the challenge in producing rose oil; it takes 5,000 kilograms of rose petals to produce a single litre.

However, here's one formula for distilling the work of community development to the point where it is easily explained: include the voices of community workers as well as those they strive to empower.

Another tip is to google #SICAPstorymap and take ideas from the 18 videos featured there (most if not all link to longer, more in-depth films).

We look forward to featuring other SICAP success stories in future editions.

And one day yet, a television production company may see the potential here for a series and focus their professional lens on community development work in Ireland today.

* Watch WLD's 'I Feel Home': <http://bit.ly/SICAPStoriesWx1>

BACKGROUND

Wexford Local Development's SICAP team first engaged with people seeking international protection in May 2019 when asylum-seekers were accommodated in emergency Direct Provision Centres in Courtown (2) and in Rosslare Harbour.

On March 16th, 2020, right at the beginning of the pandemic, a non-emergency accommodation centre opened in Rosslare Harbour replacing the emergency centre in the port. It caters for 114 with men, women and children from 29 countries. Courtown continues to have one emergency centre accommodating almost 50 people.

Wexford Local Development's video (case study) tells the story of how its SICAP team engaged with these people.

"It gives a sense of the quality and depth of the relationships which were developed and which now underpin a web of connections," said policy worker Siobhán O'Brien. "In turn, this created the conditions for personal development, mutual support and learning, awareness, integration and even, despite what might be expected, some joy."

The numbers indicate just how intense the work was. In 2020 alone, an average of 12 interventions were delivered under SICAP to each of the 84 people who engaged with the programme.

As Siobhán says, "If every intervention, contact, call, WhatsApp message was to be counted however, then this figure would be much higher."

"While we fully understand the need to account for our work in numbers, at some point we have to prioritise building relationships and trust over counting transactions.

"The beauty of this web of connections is that we will never know for sure which of the interventions was the one which made the real difference to a person, but in creating this web we know that change is possible," she said.

Real community work is about building trust, relations and community



- On the rationale behind focusing not on outcomes but on process

BY SIOBHÁN O'BRIEN

Siobhán O'Brien explains how their team went about producing a video to showcase some of Wexford Local Development's work (under SICAP) with people seeking international protection.

In preparing this video, one of the SICAP team involved in working with people seeking international protection in Wexford pointed to a young man who has made 'no progression whatsoever' in terms of what we are used to recording on IRIS or even in a typical case study.

This man has had a difficult time since arriving in Ireland, struggling to learn English, to avail of training or to find employment, all the while under pressure from his family in his country of origin who are constantly in touch, waiting for news that he has found a

job. He carries the weight of all that expectation and hope and it is a heavy burden.

Our team member has slowly gained this man's trust and has built a relationship with him, in the process discovering that he is struggling with his mental health and confidence. She has encouraged him to take part in some group work and he is beginning to smile and engage with his peers. So we asked the question – is this work any less valuable than that which 'results in something'? A job, a certificate, a 'happy ending'? This got us thinking about what story we really wanted to tell in our video.

So, this case study takes a different approach than usual by focusing on the process rather than the outcomes of work undertaken by SICAP. This came after many discussions within our team which concluded



that in highlighting how many people take part in an initiative or what progressions have been achieved, a key and important aspect of the work often goes completely unseen.

That unseen aspect of our work is the extent to which the way we work under SICAP is driven and inspired - not by the number of transactions or interventions that occur in a 'service', but rather by creating and sustaining a web of human relationships

and connections. They in turn create the conditions for individuals and communities to reach their potential and to avail of opportunities, to feel like they belong. This is what we mean by engagement.

This web starts by developing a non-judgemental relationship based on trust with the individual, whether that person is looking for help in their own life or for their community, and builds out into a network of supportive relationships. We have been

emboldened in this approach by ground-breaking work in the UK around what are termed "deep value relationships".

(You can download the report via: <http://bit.ly/deepvaluereport>).

The words that best sum up the outcome that we were aiming for are those spoken (in the video) by Robert and echoed by Mariam, Kais and Joy who said: "I feel home".

11 ACTIONS SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS TO WEXFORD

The following are among the initiatives taken by community workers in Wexford through SICAP support for new communities, including refugees and asylum seekers.

1. Support for five local community groups whose specific target group is people seeking international protection in Co Wexford.

2. Collaboration with Food Cloud, Tesco and WLD's wider programme teams to bring weekly fresh food drops to Rosslare Accommodation Centre.

3. Provision of multiple opportunities for people to volunteer with local community groups such as Tidy Towns, Men's Sheds, arts groups and women's groups.

4. Development of collaborative projects to increase community integration. Linked, for example, with Wexford Bicycle Users Group to provide bike maintenance, cycle safety programmes and sourced bicycles from private sources.

5. Supporting young people to participate in local educational services and opportunities including pre-school, mainstream education and youth services.

6. Promoting participation in sporting activities. This includes the formation of the Wexford Sanctuary Runners. (Follow them on Twitter: @RunnersWexford)

7. Creation of links with organisations such as Barnardos, the Education and Training Board, Places of Sanctuary Ireland, Wexford County Council, Irish Refugee Council, Tusla and Wexford Lions Club to meet needs that are beyond the remit of SICAP.

8. Leverage of supports from Wexford County Council Arts Officer for delivery of arts and cultural activities that involve the wider community.

9. Supported the setting up of Wexford Sanctuary Ambassadors, including a training programme to enable asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants in Wexford to influence policy

and decision making. The group learned from Pat Montague how to tell the stories of the real experiences of living in Direct Provision.



10. Linked with community groups to provide equipment for mask-making and other community health projects.

11. Provision of back to school packs to all children living in the centres.

Under SICAP Goal 1, support is provided to "communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of local community groups and creating more sustainable communities".

How Wexford gained the trust to work with people here seeking sanctuary

Wexford Local Development's case-study and video highlights the different elements of "the relational approach we take in SICAP and how it has evolved in our work with people seeking international protection". This edited description of Siobhán O'Brien's report tells how the team planned their video production:

BY SIOBHÁN O'BRIEN

INTRODUCTIONS

Viewers see what happens during the initial engagement, those first encounters, and how we start to build the relationship.

ONE-TO-ONE

The SICAP team begins with the person, gaining and developing trust, sharing a human experience, having conversations, entering a partnership with a view to journeying the road together.

Here, our team spoke about the challenges they encountered in this work.

PARTNERSHIP

We explained how SICAP acts as a catalyst for connection and collaboration by developing relationships with key stakeholders and partners. One of those who speaks is the manager of the centre in Rosslare.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Achieving a sense of belonging and mutual discovery plays a big part in the links we forge between people living in accommodation centres and people in the local community.

People are people and languages are not all spoken. However, the languages of kindness, compassion, creativity, fun and community spirit are universal and spoken fluently in Courtown and Rosslare. This was not inevitable as we know from how events unfolded around Ireland. It took a lot of investment and careful planning and communication, facilitated and directly supported by SICAP staff to achieve that sense of belonging and acceptance.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

The bigger picture, the wider web of connection and influence is always in our mind. This is what community development is all about – the web of connections that unite the individual person with those sharing the experience of seeking international protection and others volunteering in the local community and moves onwards to politicians and decision makers.

The success of Wexford's Sanctuary Ambassadors is testament to the community development focus in SICAP. It



supported the mobilisation and networking of local volunteers with elected representatives, enabling them to tell their stories and advocate for a more humane approach to policy development in the area of direct provision and the needs of individuals seeking international protection.

RELATIONSHIPS – THE ESSENCE OF SICAP WORK

David Robinson says that "relationships are a contact sport". You need to get close and build trust, do what you say you will do and be consistent. Relationships are what transform lives.

Relational poverty – disconnection from the networks of family, friends and contacts

that more advantaged people take for granted – can be even more destructive than material poverty.

The antidote: To show up, be authentic, be flexible, believe in potential, hold a space for people, and create hope. This is a statement not only about how we want things to be for the people living in direct provision, but about the kind of society and world that we hope to contribute to, one based on equality, partnership, shared humanity and caring. A world where we are not 'service providers' and 'service users', but people, united in the shared goal of building stronger communities to which we belong together.

As Kais and Robert said, "I feel accepted, I have not been rejected. I feel home".

SUPPORTS TO INDIVIDUALS

The following are a sample of the actions to support individuals taken by community workers in Wexford through SICAP support for new communities, including refugees and asylum seekers.

1. On-going trauma-informed emotional support for those struggling with anxiety related to the Covid-19 crisis.
2. Advocacy support and information regarding the cancellation of all International Protection Appeals Tribunal hearings.
3. Advocacy work for children who moved into the centres resulting in the donation of clothes, toys and educational resources.
4. Provision of harm reduction information to minimise risks of transmitting Covid-19, in so far as is possible while living in Direct Provision.
5. Provided information from the Irish Refugee Council in relation to securing access to a GP during the pandemic.
6. Referral to free online training resources and support in accessing them.
7. Provision of laptops to facilitate online study. Rosslare clients are regularly making use of them for Driver Theory Practice and online communication.
8. Referral to SICAP funded online accredited training to support work readiness.

Community Development principles:

- PARTICIPATION
- COLLECTIVE ACTION
- COMMUNITY VOICE
- INCLUSION
- IDENTIFYING LOCAL NEEDS
- MANDATED ACTION
- EMPOWERMENT
- ACCOUNTABILITY
- CHANGE

"I feel part of the community now" -

Robert from Malawi

- Team felt "honour" of being community workers

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Reflecting on his time here to date, Robert Lapken from Malawi (now Rosslare) told film-makers:

"I feel part of the community right now. I see a lot of positive impact on my life. At first, I felt like I was lost. Now, I feel home."

Joy Osas Igbino from Nigeria said, "The way people here embrace me, I never thought of it happening. I can say categorically that Irish people are really good and friendly. Seeing people who are ready to sacrifice for you has made me more confident about my future."

This is the culmination of many months of work by the SICAP team from Wexford Local Development (WLD) with people new to Wexford seeking sanctuary and safety.

"What I'm always looking for is that they feel part of the community. You're trying to create the kind of world where they feel welcome," said Jenny Kirwan of WLD.

"They'll always remember the way you made them feel," she added, looking back. "And to feel as though we're part of their lives at this really vulnerable stage, when life is tough, and that we can be part of a welcome, that we can make them feel better about themselves - that to me is where the value of this work really is."

WORKING 1-TO-1

Rosslare-based SICAP worker Jenny Kirwan said, "It was quite challenging. They had lost hope. It was very much 'Let's see where you are at'. They needed to trust me, to believe I could help them in some way."

"I introduced myself as Jenny. I didn't mention SICAP or Wexford Local Development at that point. It would confuse things. I explained what my role was, but didn't go into detail. It was about engaging with the person and most importantly listening, rather than me doing all the talking."

She organised a HACCP food safety training course just before the pandemic hit.

"It was like the day trip of the century for these lads. They were grinning from ear to ear. It had me thinking - something small to me was huge for them."

"I kept the momentum going. The beauty of the relationship we develop is that the client takes the lead - we're there in support. We ensure the person's needs are being met in whatever way we can."

FEELING AT HOME

The WLD team found collaboration with other groups to be "hugely successful" - for example they organised a trip to a GAA club.

Residents recalled such trips.

"We met the local people, we all played football and it was a good feeling," said Kais Khachi. "It changed our feeling because when saw people smiling, we - all of us - felt welcome to be in the community."

Jim Higgins, chairperson of Tara Rocks GAA Club, said, "We were the better for it."

EMPATHY AT WORK

Through various collaborations, the community development work progressed - the residents developed a manifesto about asylum-seekers problems and presented it to national politicians.

"We want to show people our skills, what we can do," said Robert.

The team noted the progress.

As Gorey community development worker John Kelly, said:

"To be honest, it's a privilege to do this work. It's an honour to do this work and not every body gets the opportunity to do it."

"When I go to work everyday and look at the people living in the centres, you can't help but think - that could be me or that could be my family. How would I like us to be treated if we were in the same situation? That's one of the basic things it comes back to."

"The work is complex. 99% of the time you can't fix their problems. What we try to do is look at what we can control - we can control how we are with somebody, the things we say and the things we do. If we do that, we've done something good."

He said, "If somebody feels they can contact me afterwards and they know I'll give them the time and respect they deserve and be honest and try and get some kind of positive outcome for them, I think that's a measure of success."

"I see people smiling every day and I smile, because I know this is their home, that they feel comfortable here," he said.

WHAT IS S.I.C.A.P.?

SICAP stands for Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

It is the Government's primary social inclusion intervention. It seeks to reduce poverty and to promote social inclusion and equality through supporting communities and individuals using a community development approach.

The programme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, co-funded by the European Social Fund.

SICAP has a budget from 2018-2022 of €190m.



• Mariam Dudashvili - "We have many problems when we arrive here. We worked for a long time on a manifest and we presented it to many TDs and to the Minister for Justice."



• Gorey-based community worker John Kelly.



• Joy Osas Igbino.

DUBLIN: Land values breed fear

LOCALS DISPLACED BY INNER CITY'S ONGOING GENTRIFICATION

BY LAOISE NEYLON



Community activist Rita Fagan recalls attending a meeting back in 2008 together with her mother, the well-known tenants' rights activist, Madge Fagan, who was 88 at the time.

The meeting was organised by Dublin City Council. "They had all the plans up for the regeneration of the Liberties," says Rita Fagan.

One of the council officials asked Madge Fagan where she lived.

She responded that she lived in the flats on South Summer Street, in the Liberties. "That's going to be a park," the council official said.

"We said 'what? - that's going to be a park?'" says Rita Fagan. "Well, that's what you think it might be."

The council planned to demolish their homes but no one had spoken to the residents about it, she says.

In Dublin regeneration often means displacement, she says and gentrification is starting to threaten the character of some areas.

Gentrification causes lots of problems in the inner city and the high housing costs can cause problems for the delivery of public services, says Noel Wardick, CEO of the Dublin City Community Cooperative.



• Rita Fagan behind her desk - from our archives.

DISPLACEMENT

Locals in the Liberties feared that the regeneration plans would result in fewer social homes and some of them being forced out of the Liberties, as has happened elsewhere in Dublin, says Ms Fagan.

So they organised protests and disrupted the meetings, says Ms Fagan. "The local people



stood up and fought."

Displacement "is a common experience for people who are low paid," says Fagan.

When a regeneration project is introduced it often means many people are provided with homes outside their area. They end up living somewhere where they have no family or community links, she says.

Without that support network, many people struggle. "You get lost," she says.

The council dropped the plans for the regeneration of the Liberties because of cutbacks in the last recession but locals fear it could still be on the cards, she says.

"We have a great fear as this land is such rich land," she says.

Fagan has campaigned against the privatisation of public land for many years, she says. "They land-grabbed loads of the inner city."

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is a problem across Europe, says Noel Wardick, CEO of the Dublin City Community Cooperative. If an area becomes very trendy and a lot of wealthy people move in, then everything becomes expensive so less wealthy people have to move out, he says.

Gentrification causes major problems in the inner city, says Wardick. "We see a hollowing out of traditional communities," he says.

Local people who can afford to buy their own home often have to move out to the commuter belts, he says, to places like Meath, Louth, Kildare.

That is bad for the inner city communities as they lose out on the contribution those people would have made to their local community, he says.

There are few homes for locals to buy in the city centre because most new developments are bought up by investment funds, for buy to let accommodation.

Together with student accommodation



• Noel Wardick, manager of Dublin City Community Co-op.

and co-living that all leads to a "transitory community," he says.

There is a high turnover of teachers in inner-city schools because they cannot afford to buy a home in or near the city centre.

That is not good for schools, many of which are Deis schools, where the children would benefit from more consistency. "It is harder and harder for schools to recruit," he says.

The problem is similar for the Gardaí and other public services, he says.

We need to move away from looking at housing as a commodity and look at it as a "foundation for communities and housing as a right," says Mr Wardick.

In some areas of the inner city, Dublin City Council will not purchase the legally required 10 per cent of social housing in private developments because it says it is too expensive.

"It is disappointing and it's frustrating, but it's not at all surprising in an Irish context," he says. "Deference is always shown to big developers and deference is always shown to money and to profit."

There needs to be an equivalent amount of social and affordable housing built as high-end private housing, says Ms Fagan.

"There are impacts of gentrification," she says. "The character of these areas are the rooted families and communities of Dublin"

"We make this city," she says.

GENTRIFICATION

Profits from luxury apartments outweigh other concerns

BY LAOISE NEYLON

With cranes surrounding us the inner-city has become a construction site, as one community activist sees it.

At the same time the housing crisis continues to deepen because most of the buildings under construction are office blocks, luxury apartments, hotels and high-end student accommodation.

The cost of housing is transforming working-class inner-city communities as locals are priced out.

“If housing supply and housing demand are closely aligned, there is some equilibrium in the market,” says Noel Wardick of Dublin City Community Co-op. “But we have the exact opposite.”

There are thousands of families living in homeless accommodation in the inner city and many of them are people who are working, he says.

Lots of other families are living in situations of severe overcrowding, doubling up with elderly grandparents.

“Successive government’s housing policy has been an abject failure,” says Noel.

Locals desperately need homes but yet luxury housing lies empty and student housing built is allowed to be converted to holiday lets.

There is a vacant land tax now but there is still no tax on vacant homes.

EMPTY LUXURY HOMES

Some vacant homes are old run-down buildings that need a lot of investment. Others are houses where the owner has died and there is a dispute in the family.

But in the last year, a different type of vacancy has become particularly evident, in Dublin city centre.

Thousands of high end, newly built homes, including student homes and luxury apartments, lie empty.

Killian Woods, writing in the Sunday

Business Post, recently examined vacancy in the high-end apartments, by one developer in the inner city, Kennedy Wilson.

More than two years since its launch, around half of the 190 apartments in Capital Dock, Ireland’s tallest building, are still empty. Those 2 bedroom apartments in the Docklands are priced at around €3,300 per month.

Meanwhile, nearly four-fifths of the 246 apartments in phase three of Clancy Quay in Dublin 8 are empty. Rents there start from €2,200 for a two-bed, and €2,700 for a three-bed.

There is an oversupply of luxury apartments in the city, says architect and housing commentator Mel Reynolds.

The Real Estate Investment Trusts that own the buildings may be reluctant to drop the rents because the share value of their company is based on a certain ‘yield’, he says.

If they do lower the rent they will not be able to hike it later because of the rent caps.



View facing north-east of the proposed hotel scheme.

DUBLIN: €1,200 a month for a room

Can you really be at home in a hotel?

BY LAOISE NEYLON

Short term transient forms of accommodation blur the lines between housing and hotels.

Student Accommodation is used for holiday letting in the summer and last year, Dublin City Council granted planning permission for some student developments to switch to short term letting year-round, during Covid 19.

"Naturally change is a good thing," says Rita Fagan of St. Michael's, Inchicore, "but if it is all about hotels it might not be."

Companies that develop co-living complexes say they will charge around €1300 a month to rent an en suite bedroom, with access to communal facilities, like kitchens and lounge areas.

That means renting one room in Dublin city centre is set to cost the same as renting out an entire home in many other parts of Ireland.

In November, the Minister for Housing Fianna Fáil TD Darragh O'Brien moved to ban co-living. But despite the ban, there are planning applications already submitted for thousands of those rooms, most in the inner city.

Developers have already applied to build at least 2,770 co-living rooms, says Orla Hegarty,

Professor of Architecture at UCD.

On top of that thousands of rooms in high end, student accommodation across the city centre are planned or already built.

Those charge from €900 to €1200 per month for students to rent a room and then the owners rent the apartments as holiday lets in summer. High-profit, transient accommodation developments drive up rents and the price of land, says architect and housing commentator, Mel Reynolds.

The problem is that building co-living and student accommodation is so profitable that it discourages developers from building normal homes.

"Co-living is exciting all right – for developers," he says.

UNANIMOUS OPPOSITION

Locals in the Liberties area of Dublin almost unanimously oppose the development of any more high-end transient accommodation in the area.

That sentiment is reflected by their local political representatives, who came together on a cross-party basis to oppose plans for a



• The Bonnington Hotel (formerly The Regency) has an agreement with the authorities to accommodate people who are homeless.

144-bed hotel and 69 room co-living development in Fumbally Lane.

That proposal followed many similar developments in the area.

PLANNING PERMISSION

In December 2019, councillors from Sinn Féin, the Green Party, the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil and People Before Profit took to the doorsteps to campaign in favour of "real housing" for the area.

People Before Profit councillor Tina MacVeigh said that almost

everyone she met was opposed to co-living.

"Everyone thinks that co-living is rubbish – a kitchen on every second floor, a hob in the room and a tiny toilet," said Green Party Councillor, Michael Pidgeon. "It is taking the low standards from student accommodation and applying it to housing."

It is wrong, he said, for proponents to portray it as contributing to what they call "an innovative, boutique lifestyle".

The development at Fumbally Lane was granted planning permission.

Dr Mike Ryan - communities central to vaccine equity - At earlier **trócaire** awards, he rang alarm bell over nature's limits

Mike Ryan, the strongest Irish advocate for community development in modern times, joined other guests for a #FirstWeds webinar hosted in March by Comhlámh.

The solidarity organisation campaigns for an equitable and sustainable world.

Its webinar "on solidarity and activism for a more equitable world" also heard from Nadine Ferris France, Dr David Weakliam and Robbie Lawlor. Dr. Ryan was particularly interested in what Mr. Lawlor, as co-founder of Access to Meds Ireland, had to say.

Calling for vaccine equity at a global level, Dr. Ryan warned that it was unethical and medically unsound for rich countries to take the vast majority of vaccines and that history would remember if it was to play out that way.

He said the WHO's secretariat was "absolutely committed" to driving equity in vaccine distribution to the most vulnerable globally, saying academia and nation states must get smarter in negotiating pricing and patents with big pharma.

"We let our state vaccine systems wither," he said, forecasting vaccine production led by nation states or in partnership with private companies.

"Even industry themselves don't like the position they're in."

He said G7 and G20 nations "know in the face of global existential threats there must be a better way of doing this."

"We'll get the smart heads together and keep civil society and NGOs and communities at the centre of that debate. And we need every activist on board for this. Activists are central to the discussion."

"The WHO is now, for the first time, absolutely committed to vaccine equity - serving communities better and being braver," he said.

In February, when presented with Trócaire's Romero Award for fighting to protect vulnerable communities from Covid-19, Dr. Ryan warned: "We are pushing nature to its limit. We are pushing population to its limit. We're pushing communities to their limits. We're stressing the environment. We are creating the conditions in which epidemics flourish. We're forcing and pushing people to migrate away from their homes because of climate stress."

He also participated in a recent event held by Changemakers - it was set up by Inishowen Development Partnership and included Donegal ETB, Trócaire and Self Help Africa.



VACCINE ROLL-OUT

Strict instructions from Tusla

HSE chief: Queue skipping an “abuse of trust”

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

The HSE chief Paul Reid has described as an “abuse of trust” the reported misuse of the vaccine registration portal by, among others, a community group. His comments followed reports that cleaners, kitchen staff and administration workers at a centre in Limerick were vaccinated against the virus.

The Irish Mail on Sunday reported that almost 70 employees at the Northside Family Resource Centre were asked to misrepresent themselves as frontline healthcare workers on the HSE’s vaccination portal. Some staff, displeased at being asked to skip the vaccine queue, contacted the newspaper.

The paper said they were instructed to do so by the CEO of the centre and were warned not to speak of their vaccination.

Mr Reid, speaking on Newstalk, said that immunisation programmes must be underpinned by trust in order to operate effectively.

“The whole programme of vaccinations in this country, and indeed in any country, is based on a high level of trust,” he said.

“It’s certainly geared towards, in the first instance, protecting those that are most vulnerable or most liable of risk of hospitalisation, severe disease, ICU and mortality.

“I have to say for the vast, vast majority of the close to one million doses that we will have completed by the end of this week, that trust remains very strong and the vast majority of the public are awaiting their turn for the vaccine.”

“It is very frustrating, it’s annoying and it breaches the basic tenet of what the programme is all about when incidents like that happen or other incidents that are high profile which we know have happened,” he said.

Earlier, the Beacon Hospital and VHI chief were reported to have engaged in queue skipping.

Tusla, which funds many groups working with families and children, issued ‘Changing Ireland’ with a lengthy statement saying it had communicated effectively at all times. It said it



• HSE CEO, Paul Reid.

“clearly outlined the categories of staff that were to register in line with HSE Categorisation 2a-2g” to all relevant groups nationwide.

The HSE had issued guidance to Tusla on February 8th “on the sequencing and registration process for Health Care Workers COVID Vaccination, which encompassed essential frontline staff, in both statutory and funded agencies”. This included numerous community groups.

“Tusla subsequently issued communication (including the HSE Guidance) to all Section 56 funded agencies, to inform them of the HSE guidelines for the prioritisation and registration of ‘frontline public facing essential workers’ on the HSE Vaccination Portal,” stated Tusla.

Five of seven community workers asked about the reports echoed Mr Reid’s condemnations with four pointing to elderly and vulnerable members of the community still awaiting vaccination.

One said it was “grossly unfair” and “a disregard for procedures” while another said, “The quality of community development has to be set by us on the ground.”

All five community workers who expressed shock were concerned it could happen again. While

Tusla was unable to provide figures that would remove any doubt, the HSE has since tightened up its vaccine registration process.

Two of seven community workers contacted were supportive of the approach taken by the centre. The FRC itself did not return our calls.

QUESTIONS

Questions were also put to three representative bodies from the Community Sector, as follows:

- How best should community groups lead from the bottom up in regards to the vaccination programme?

- Do you have any statement to make on vaccine queue skipping where it occurs?

In response, The Wheel issued a statement pointing to the information it provides in weekly updates for groups in the community, voluntary and charity sectors (see below).

Community Work Ireland responded, but said it was “not in a position to comment”.

The National Family Resource Centre Forum did not respond before we went to press.



Weekly updates on vaccine rollout

In the context of the vaccine rollout, The Wheel has pointed community organisations to its website where information is kept up-to-date on a weekly basis.

The Wheel said it has partnered with the HSE “to provide accurate and up-to-date information about the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines directly to the community and voluntary sector.”

“We are publishing weekly updates on our website, in our newsletters and on social media. For more information visit www.wheel.ie.

www.wheel.ie/covid-19-info-hub,” said Deirdre Garvey, CEO.

The Wheel complimented the work by people on the frontline in communities:

“Throughout the pandemic, the staff and volunteers of community and voluntary organisations have been on the frontline in communities to support people of all ages and abilities. They have been outstanding in their dedication to the public good.”

Its statement added: “The roll-out of the national Covid-19 vaccination programme and associated

registration process is managed by the HSE in accordance with the HSE Sequencing and Registration Guidelines.”

“Many community and voluntary organisations are important frontline organisations in this regard and their volunteers and staff have been part of the phased roll-out of the vaccination programme.”

“These organisations carry their responsibilities to make sure all their staff and volunteers are informed and adhere to the latest official health guidelines,” it said.



• Deirdre Garvey, The Wheel.

OPINION: Elephant in the Room

Putting the 'human' back into human rights and social justice organisations



PUTTING RIGHTS INTO PRACTICE

Nicola Browne is a Belfast-based, social justice activist who has worked in NGOs on issues including refugee and asylum rights, penal law and the death penalty, and economic and social rights.

She has written in detail on the topics touched on in this article. **Download her guide - launched in April - from:** <https://www.changefromthegroundup.org/disruptive-rights>

On Twitter: @nicolajbrowne

CHANGE *from the* **GROUND UP**

Disrupting Rights: Putting people at the centre of change



• *Not an actual image! We certainly hope not, because (a) the office workers portray stereotypes, (b) because the elephant looks very uncomfortable, and (c) the stereotypical office workers, if real, are in a real pickle. The point is that sometimes we can't ignore the elephant in the room. Source: Pinterest.*

BY NICOLA BROWNE

The pandemic has shown us more than ever the importance of self-care, writes Nicola Browne. She asks - why are social justice organisations so slow to practice what they preach when it comes to wellbeing?

Where I live in Whiteabbey, on the outskirts of Belfast, many of my neighbours are older women who live alone. Every other day at 4pm during the first lockdown, one lady across the street opened her front door and set up a chair just inside. A few minutes later, doors opened and other women in the street carried out their kitchen chairs and sat metres from her front door, chatting and laughing, before disbanding after an hour or so and going in for dinner.

Like others, I've drawn comfort during the pandemic from the natural

"Many organisations do not respond well to the challenges of maintaining the wellbeing of their staff"

environment, watching the wild garlic emerging and new buds on the trees at nearby Hazelbank Park. But the rhythm of my neighbours' outdoor meetings has been a daily reminder of the importance of connection and care, not as a one off purchased treat, but as a practice built into the everyday.

Discussion around self-care has boomed during the pandemic. As activists we have felt both the urgency of opportunities for change that crises bring, alongside feelings

of exhaustion, powerlessness and inadequacy at the scale of the task ahead.

But as the months have passed, the evidence of burn-out and fatigue is becoming clear.

Many of us are drawn to activism as an expression of our values around equality, justice and dignity. At its best, working for change can be a source of joy and community and yet it can also feel dispiriting and

disillusioning when we are bereft of successes. And yet, as author Bonnie Honig* points out, “Exhaustion is a feeling that autocrats like us to have.” Neglecting care of ourselves and our community plays to the interests of those who wish to uphold the status quo.

We all need to grapple with the fact that many human rights and social justice organisations do not respond well to the challenges of maintaining the wellbeing of their staff, and can be steeped in the standards based in the very white dominant and capitalist values that we oppose in our campaigning work.

Human rights organisations in particular are increasingly recognising these systems as the source of many of the injustices we fight. And yet it can be difficult to avoid absorbing these values into our own core. We may judge ourselves based on our productivity, put urgency around our external deliverables and not our internal reflection practices.

We may see our own work as much more important than that of others around us. In her article ‘Is your social change organisation a pressure cooker?’ US racial justice activist Deepa Iyer** identifies productivity, purity and personality (among others) as characteristics of social justice spaces which can result in:

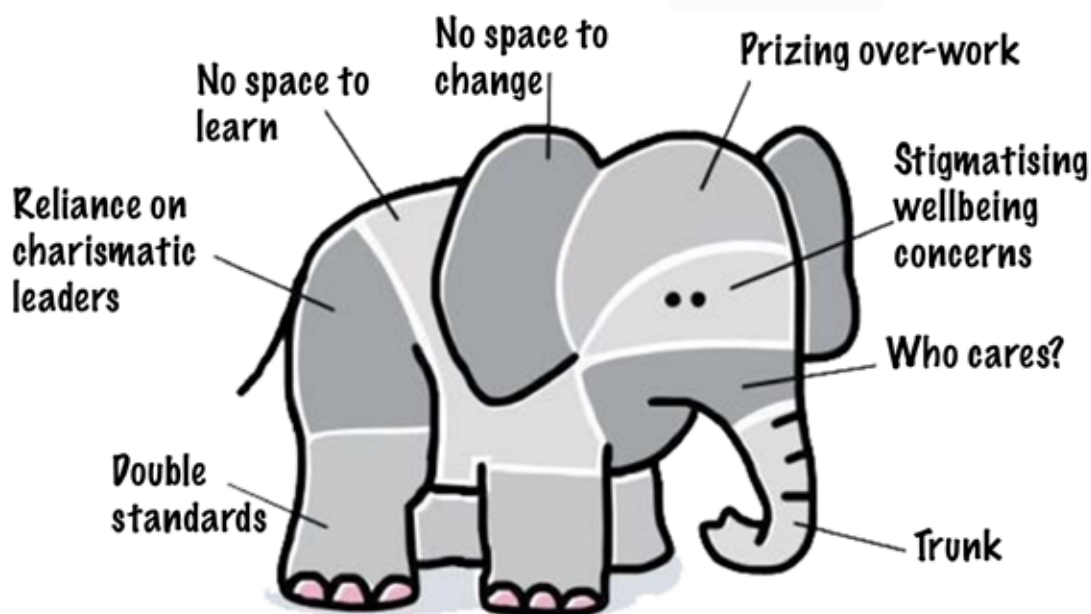
- prizing over-work,
- having no space to learn or change, and,
- reliance on charismatic leaders.

As sociologist Emma Craddock points out, direct action is often thought of as ‘true activism’ and privileged over the many other roles which make up a campaign - admin work, logistics and care.

Inspiration can always be drawn from the networks of care we see around us if we recognise their value. We should not see them as inconsequential because they are feminine, local and unpaid. Putting the ‘human’ in human rights requires us to consider how our activist practices must change.

To act with integrity in our work means it is not acceptable for our workplaces to preach one standard of dignity and care to government and public bodies, and deliver another to our colleagues. Instead we must bring the human rights values of dignity and equality to life in our work and activist spaces and look at how we care for each other through the same human rights lens we use for the rest of our work.

A healthy social justice space?



• Image by Changing Ireland.

1. NAME THE ISSUES

This requires naming and clearly acknowledging the common habits that arise among activists that get in our way. Margaret Satterthwaite and others carried out extensive research into human rights culture which “too often valorize(s) martyr and saviour mentalities, and stigmatise wellbeing concerns”. As a close friend and activist pointed out to me recently, “To say that care is unnecessary for social justice work is to speak from a position of privilege.”

2. LOOK AT OUR ORGANISATIONS

Adequate rates of pay, good terms and conditions, anti-racist, ableist, sexist hiring practices and collective bargaining are the fundamentals.

But we must go beyond one-off trainings and move towards structural changes in the way our work is done.

- We can examine our cultures and the values our leadership is demonstrating.

- We can change the messages we send about what we value in appraisal systems and in decision-making processes.

- We can be explicit about embracing the rhythms in our work - building in time for practices like action learning and reflection.

3. IMAGINE SOMETHING BETTER

One inspiring example is the ‘Happiness Manifestx’ (52 colourful pages of commitments) released in 2019 by a Canadian not-for-profit called the Frida Fund, a foundation for young feminists. The word ‘Manifestx’ points to the political nature of their commitment to self-care. Identified through a series of reflective conversations, it includes commitments on the part of workers to communicate when they are overtired, renounce guilt, and delete their work email from their phone.

As an organisation, the Frida Fund committed to clear decision-making and communication processes, to provide training and coaching, and to a four-day week, with Fridays spent reading and writing about feminist organising.

The pandemic has shaped us all, and has impacted both the issues we work on and the way in which we do that work. If we are to truly put the human back into human rights, we must place our values at the heart of our everyday work, and protect our new and established activists, in order to preserve their vital knowledge of struggle for the future.



FURTHER READING

* Self-care tips from Bonnie Honig: <https://bit.ly/3strlMa>

** Read Deepa Iyer’s article ‘Is your social change organisation a pressure cooker?’ - here:

<http://bit.ly/Isitacooker>

Download Frida’s Happiness Manifestx as a PDF via Google.

ON TWITTER

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DÉJÀ VU: Pilot instills hope

Huge appetite for 8 pilot Community Development Projects in 2021

Over 120 applications were submitted from around the country by community groups wishing to be one of eight Community Development Projects (CDPs) to be backed as part of a pilot programme by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The pilot has €1m for 2021.

On March 4th, the Department issued the call, saying - "The aim of the 2021 Community Development Pilot Programme is to trial community development initiatives that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promote human rights."

The overwhelming interest in the programme was remarked on at the Social Inclusion Forum 2021 by Minister of State Joe O'Brien who said it was "heartening to see there is an appetite to reinvigorate the community development approach on the ground".

When first announcing the call, he said, "True community development is trusting communities to develop their own solutions and pathways out of poverty and inequality. It's important that these pilots are impactful and make a real difference as that can inform a potential growth of this community-led approach to the significant social challenges we are facing."

The call invited expressions of interest from community development organisations working to address issues in areas such as racism (including Travellers and Roma), domestic or sexual violence, migration, gender, people living in direct provision or seeking international protection, climate action and a just transition.

The Department anticipates an allocation of €120 – €140k per organisation per annum and applicants were asked to outline three-year plans in their submissions.

The previous Community Development Programme lasted for 18 years and supported 180 CDPs before it was shut down during the austerity era.

Pointing out that many challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic, Anastasia Crickley, speaking for Community Work Ireland, said it was "critical" the programme receives long-term resourcing and can expand.

So, what do community development workers have to say about the eight new pilot projects?



• Siobhán O'Dowd - Cork. Follow her on Twitter: @Siobhan_ODowd



• Dr. Tommy Coombes - Bluebell.

Here we speak to two veterans.

AGHAŠT & AGOG

Tommy Coombes, formerly the co-ordinator of Bluebell CDP, was "gobsmacked" to hear CDPs were back.

"I'm aghast and agog. I hadn't heard about the call for submissions - we would have applied," he said.

He feels shortchanged since December 31st, 2010, he said, when €136,000 that Bluebell CDP had in its accounts was transferred to the local partnership.

"We were all subsumed into the local partnerships," he recalled. He was transferred as an employee, as were hundreds of others, to their local partnership (aka Local Development Companies). While he has always enjoyed good relations with the larger partnership organisation, he would love to see

Bluebell CDP restored to its former glory with independent funding, staffing and autonomy.

"When CDPs went we actually lost the voice of people on the bottom. If they're going about bringing CDPs back, it's an amazing u-turn," he said, hugely welcoming the move.

Bluebell CDP has survived.

"We kept going with a community lotto to pay for the various interventions we do," said Tommy, who began his career as a CE worker.

His proper title today is Dr. Thomas Coombes, though he prefers plain Tommy.

"I've just finished my PhD in Maynooth and there's lessons to be learned. My PhD was about older men and the local CDP - it saved their lives, it's as simple as that," he said.

COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Siobhán O'Dowd is co-ordinator of Ballyphehane/Togher CDP and, as such, is one of the few people working in a CDP set up in the 1990s that survived.

"I'm long enough around to remember when community development was hip and trendy."

"People still remember the excitement of CDPs coming to an area - the ability to hone in on and include those who were most excluded in an area."

"The major buzzword now is 'intersectionality' and CDPs do that very well - working with and through the local community," she said.

She recalled the many protests

when CDPs were being lined up for closure in 2009/2010.

As the Community Development Programme was wound down, the project she works with - and other CDPs in Cork - made a successful case to the HSE for support. They have flourished since, remaining small to medium-sized, locally-based and engaged with issues the community identify.

She tells of the value of having a CDP in a locality.

For example, Ballyphehane/Togher CDP can pivot swiftly to align with and respond to community needs.

She said CDPs can focus on a community of interest or an issue that arises - for example, suicides among young people which often has a domino effect.

Their CDP supported young people to have their voices heard and encouraged local home school liaison teachers to do training. It engaged directly with young people, which led them to creating a memorial space for those who had died in the community.

"You need a programme that is flexible - so CDPs become part of the local community," said Siobhán.

Long-term funding is also required if the new projects are to become true community anchor projects.

"I wish the new projects well. The pilots are really welcome," she said.

We spoke to other veterans too in researching this report - they all believe we can learn lessons from the past. In our next edition, we will look at tips from community development workers, all of whom hope the new programme is a success.

- BY ALLEN MEAGHER

OBJECTIVES

The Pilot Programme's objectives are to:

- Develop community development responses to a range of social, economic and environmental concerns;

- Facilitate an empowering collaborative approach to building relationships and undertake cooperative initiatives between marginalised groups, mainstream services and decision-making bodies; and

- Showcase and profile the benefits of an autonomous approach to community development in relation to existing, new and emerging issues.

RURAL & COMMUNITY NEWS UPDATE

The following include some of the main announcements not covered elsewhere in this edition that were made by Minister Heather Humphreys and/or Minister of State Joe O'Brien since January. *List by Allen Meagher:*

- Jan 17 - The Government's Remote Work Strategy was published.
- Jan 18 - €3.2m in funding was announced for outdoor recreational amenities.
- Jan 22 - Over 3,000 projects were supported through the 2020 Community Enhancement Programme, it was revealed.
- Feb 22 - Minister Humphreys announced a new €800,000 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme to help Social Enterprises recover from the impact of COVID-19.
- Feb 23 - Minister O'Brien is asking all government departments to provide details of their engagement with the Community and Voluntary Sector.



- Feb 25 - €10m in Covid stability funding was announced by Ministers Humphreys, McGrath and O'Brien.
- Feb 26 - Minister O'Brien welcomed the publication of the White Paper on the Government's new international Protection Support System.
- March 1 - The National Economic and Social Committee published a report on the Community Call. It was welcomed by Minister Joe O'Brien.
- March 10 - Minister Humphreys announced a new Social Enterprise module for young people.
- March 15 - A 10% increase in budget saw the Clar Programme receive €5.5m for 2021.
- March 23 - Minister O'Brien welcomed the role of Public Participation Networks in the development of the Climate Action Plan.

Social Inclusion Forum 2021

The Social Inclusion Forum was held from April 12-16 and it heard, as before, from people working in communities and from policy-makers at senior level.

Minister of State Joe O'Brien recalled attending previously as a community worker. In his closing remarks, he said, "I and my officials will continue to engage with the Community and Voluntary Sector to ensure that principles of social inclusion are imbued into the work of Government, so we do everything in our collective power to reduce social exclusion and try to ensure nobody is

left behind as we emerge into a post-pandemic Ireland."

Paul Ginnell from the European Anti-Poverty Network (Ireland) spoke about the voices of people on the margins being heard: "It needs to be meaningful and not box-ticking and tokenistic which unfortunately was a lot of people's experience."

Other points he made included:

- The role of community development in challenging policy needs to be respected.
- Local people need to see the results of

their engagement - it helps people overcome disillusionment.

- Often strategies are not implemented as they should be which results in frustration in communities.
- There was a welcome for the recent announcement of new autonomous community development projects.

Full report in our next edition. Meanwhile, see our Youtube channel for video footage and Twitter for commentary.

Post offices urge gov't to back 'offline' services - including provision of community information

The Irish Postmasters' Union (IPU) has welcomed Government plans to strengthen the delivery of essential services 'offline'.

A new inter-departmental group is looking at directing more Government business to the post office network and is due to report back by the end of July.

Covid-19 highlighted how many people are not online and depend on the country's 900-plus post offices for services and the IPU sees this as an opportunity to secure the network.

On March 9th, Minister of State Hildegard Naughton announced that the Government "remains committed to delivering services using channels geared to the needs of the public" and

is also "committed to a sustainable Post Office Network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure in both rural and urban areas".

She said the pandemic again demonstrated the strong customer service ethos of the network

"Government is committed to working with An Post and postmasters to ensure that the network continues to play a strong role in delivering State services," said the Minister.

The IPU general secretary Ned O'Hara says that post offices are "ideally placed to provide people with person-to-person 'offline' access to vital services.

At the same time, the IPU warned that action is urgently required or up to 200 post offices may close from June when a change in bank payments to post offices is due.

"The IPU supports expanding Government services delivered through the Network and to provide this postmasters should receive an annual Government retainer payment. This will ensure an infrastructure for communities to access services - and keep hundreds of struggling Post Offices open," he said.

Services identified by the union that can be provided offline by post offices include motor tax, licences, renewals, registrations, identity verification, and community



- There are currently 891 post-master and 45 An Post-operated post offices in the country.

information.

At the Social Inclusion Forum 2021 - held in April - many people called for more information about people's rights, services and supports to be made readily available to the public. This would help to reduce poverty and exclusion, they said.

VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Our Rural Future sets out a Vision and Objectives which sees rural Ireland as central to our post-COVID recovery and integral to our longer-term national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development.

The Vision emphasises the interdependence of rural and urban areas and recognises:

- the centrality of the people who live in rural Ireland;
- the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places; and
- the possibilities for rural areas to support quality jobs and contribute to sustaining our shared environment.

The policy will encourage and support rural communities to develop cohesive and integrated plans to meet the long-term needs of their own particular area, recognising that each rural place is different and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to meet the developmental needs of every area.

HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES

The high-level outcomes of delivering this policy will see:

- More people living in rural Ireland, including in our towns and villages and on the islands;
- More people working in rural Ireland, with good career prospects, regardless of where their employer is headquartered;
- Rural Ireland contributing to, and benefiting from, the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate-neutral society;
- Rural towns being vibrant hubs for commercial and social activity; and
- Rural communities, and especially young people, having an active role in shaping the future for rural Ireland.

Our Rural Future: The Government's blueprint to transform the country



• The ambition laid out in Chapter 6 is to empower people, develop community leaders and create the conditions for all people to participate in and share in the recovery.

Our Rural Future' was launched with as much fanfare as Covid-19 would allow for in April.

It is the Government's five-year strategy to transform rural Ireland and Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, and Minister for Transport and the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan attended in Croke Park for a real-life launch.

The government believes we have an "unprecedented opportunity for Rural Development post Covid-19".

The plan is focused on attracting remote workers to rural communities (one element of which we look at in the following pages).

It covers revitalising town centres, rural jobs, adventure tourism, a green economy and island development.

Broadband roll-out is obviously critical to rural development and critics pointed out the strategy did not include costings nor target dates. Nonetheless, it was widely welcomed.

Rural networks funded by government gave it a warm welcome, while mainstream media commentators varied from slightly skeptical on a plan without deadlines to wildly enthusiastic (It "hits all the right notes,"

wrote Clodagh Finn in the 'Irish Examiner').

An idea for pub hubs in communities was picked up by the BBC and others abroad, to the delight of Minister Humphreys.

She and her colleagues in government described 'Our Rural Future' as "the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in decades".

The policy reflects the unprecedented change in living and working patterns during Covid-19 and the significant opportunities this presents for rural communities – from remote working and revitalising our town centres to job creation, developing a green economy and enhancing our outdoor amenities.

It is supported by 150 commitments across Government, which will address the challenges facing communities and deliver new opportunities for people living in rural areas.

The policy will help rural Ireland to recover from the impacts of Covid-19, enable long-term development of rural areas, and create more resilient rural economies and communities for the future.

Speaking at the launch, An Taoiseach Micheál Martin said:

"Ireland is heading into an era of unprecedented change, and with that comes unprecedented opportunity.

"Over the course of the pandemic, we have discovered new ways of working and we have rediscovered our communities.

"The policy we launch today, Our Rural Future, provides a framework for the development of rural areas over the next five years.

"The policy is forward-looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can capitalise on.

"The Government's vision is for a rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development.

"That vision is built on the talent, skills and creativity of people in rural communities; on the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places; and on the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment.

"Rural Ireland will play a central role in our recovery from the impact of Covid-19.

"The commitments outlined today will benefit individuals, families, communities and businesses. It will enhance the wellbeing and quality of life of people living in rural areas.

"It will build resilient and sustainable rural communities and economies through investment, supports and services. And it will ensure that rural communities are at the heart of designing and delivering responses that meet local needs."

New policy commits to 150 actions

(continued)

Minister Humphreys said:

“Our Rural Future represents a new milestone in the approach to rural development for Ireland.

“As we recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to reimagine rural Ireland and harness the talent, skills and creativity running through our rural communities.

“For decades we have seen global trends where young people leave their local communities to live and work in larger cities. As we emerge from Covid-19 we will never have a better opportunity to reverse that long-standing trend.

“The move to remote working, underpinned by the rollout of the National Broadband Plan, has the potential to transform Rural Ireland like never before.

“It will allow people to work from their own local communities, revitalise our town centres, reduce commuting times, lower transport emissions and most importantly - improve the quality of life of our people.”

An Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar said:

“We want to have more people working in all parts of Ireland, with good quality jobs on offer and good career prospects. The Covid-19 pandemic has already shown us what’s possible in terms of remote working and flexible working. Our Rural Future is one of the ways that the Government is making that a permanent option.

“Our Rural Future will help the tourism and hospitality sectors to recover after the pandemic, create jobs in the Green Economy and the Agri-food sector, and make it easier to set up and grow a business in Rural Ireland.

“It means more people will be able to live in their communities, or move to new ones, with the option of good quality employment. It will mean less commuting, and more vibrant communities as people have more time to spend with their families, their neighbours, and local clubs and organisations.

“Broadband and new technologies are key to making this happen. That work has already started. I am proud to have been part of the Government that kicked off the National Broadband Plan – the biggest investment in rural Ireland since electrification. And I’m equally proud to be part of the Government that is now making it happen.”



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Our Rural Future Rural Development Policy 2021-2025



• ‘Our Rural Future’ - the 97 page plan was launched on March 29.

Minister Ryan stated:

“Now is the time to be ambitious for rural Ireland. The governments investment in climate action will bring new job opportunities to rural communities, in areas such as renewable energy, retrofitting and sustainable farming and tourism. The National Broadband Plan will act as a key enabler for the development of new businesses in regional and rural Ireland, together with an increased opportunity for people to work from home. Through the Just Transition Fund, Government is supporting the retraining and reskilling of rural workers and assisting local communities and businesses to adjust to the low carbon transition.

“We want to put the development and regeneration of our rural towns and villages at the heart of decision making, so that they are vibrant centres where people can live,

work and socialise, with walking, cycling and public transport options connecting people and places. The Government will continue to support this active mobility through the National Transport Authority, with €72m in funding being allocated in 2021 for high quality cycling and walking infrastructure for our more rural towns and villages across the country. Through the implementation of Our Rural Future, Government will seize this unprecedented opportunity for rural Ireland.”

Download ‘Our Rural Future - Ireland’s Rural Development Policy 2021-2025’ via this link:

<https://bit.ly/OurRuralFuture2021>

BRIEFS

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

Examples of key actions in terms of community supports to be delivered through ‘Our Rural Future’:

- Establish a Rural Youth Assembly.
- Establish a permanent Volunteer Reserve in local areas.
- Develop a single online portal to provide a funding roadmap on the range of programmes and schemes available across Government for rural and community development.
- Develop and implement Local Digital Strategies in each Local Authority area.
- Develop an integrated, place-based approach to rural development to support rural communities to develop long-term Master Plans for their areas.

KEY ACTIONS ON REMOTE WORKING

Examples of some of the key actions in terms of remote working which will be delivered through ‘Our Rural Future’ include:

Establish a network of over 400 remote working hubs nationwide to enable more people to live and work in rural communities.

• Pilot co-working and hot-desking hubs for civil servants in regional towns.

• Move to 20% remote working in the public sector in 2021, with further annual increase over the next 5 years.

• IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta to promote and enable the uptake of remote working across their client base.

• Fund the repurposing of vacant buildings in town centres into remote working hubs.

• Review the tax arrangements for remote working for both employers and employees as part of Budget 2022.

• Introduce legislation in 2021 to provide employees with the right to request remote work.

• Provide funding to Local Authorities to run targeted campaigns to attract remote workers to their area.

• Examine the introduction of specific incentives to attract remote workers and mobile talent to live in rural towns.

RURAL LIVING

Examples of some of the key actions in terms of rural living which will be delivered through 'Our Rural Future':

- Update the Rural Housing Guidelines for planning authorities.

- Identify the scope to channel additional Government services through the post office network.

- Implement a €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme (see page 23).

- Improve rural public transport, including enhancements to Local Link, a subsidised Local Area Hackney Scheme for remote locations and a pilot to examine the potential for ride hailing services.

- Increase the number of places on the Rural Social Scheme, TÚS and Community Employment Schemes to support rural areas.

- Establish 96 new Community Healthcare Networks across the country to support people to live more independently locally.

- Support research and development in areas such as agri-food, biobased systems, smart agriculture and precision agriculture.

- Expand the number of farmers' markets, farm shops and community-owned markets in all towns.

- Enact legislation implementing revised provisions for the Fair Deal Scheme in respect of farm and business assets which are family-owned and operated.

- Support generation renewal, including young farmers and women in agriculture, through the CAP, taxation measures and access to finance initiatives.

- Publish and implement a new 10-year policy for the development of our offshore islands.

- Establish enterprise hubs on our islands to support employment.

- Utilise the islands as test-beds for innovative technologies in areas such as eHealth and micro-generation of renewable energy.

Kennedy: Let's open community pub hubs without delay

- Pub hubs could become a selling point for Ireland

- No need for expensive and protracted planning

INTERVIEW BY GRACE BARRETT

Pat Kennedy urges the Government not to allow its plans for the use of pubs as community spaces to get stalled by bureaucracy.

Launched on March 31, 'Our Rural Future' published by the Department of Rural and Community Development is an ambitious five-year strategy featuring 150 commitments to develop rural areas. It includes a proposal to turn vacant properties into remote working hubs and use pubs as community spaces.

For Pat Kennedy, the plans held a sense of familiarity. In 2019, he had written an Op-Ed for 'Changing Ireland', outlining precisely how communities across Ireland could be in a position to develop a network of 800-plus innovation hubs by using pubs as the bricks and mortar. These 'pub hubs' could operate as pubs by night and community hubs by day, he proposed.

Grace Barrett interviewed Mr Kennedy - the owner of digital community platform eTownz - following the publication of 'Our Rural Future':

Q - So as this idea developed, and you published your thoughts about it, do you think the Government then stole your idea?

PK: (Laughs) "No-one has really

said it's my idea, they might say it's from somewhere else, it's hard to say with these things. But it makes complete sense, so I'm more than delighted to see it happen."

"I got the idea at an ERDN event in Brussels (European Network for Rural Development) and they were talking about community spaces and I was sitting down with an Austrian guy, and I said "What they should do is convert the pubs in Ireland into community spaces", and he burst out laughing. And I was like "What, you shouldn't be laughing, that's a perfectly good idea!"



• Pat Kennedy.

"The pub has been the centre of the community for so long. And it's really important that there's that inter-generational mix within a community. Pubs are the mixing pot where ideas get shared."

Q - What do you hope to see in how this plan is put into action?

"What I hope happens is that they (the Government) realise their current asset and make benefit of that and then gradually add to it. The Government has an awful tendency sometimes to think the solution is always throwing money at something. And, absolutely, money is required to do lots of things. But sometimes, money is not even required."

"Of course, investment will be needed to improve broadband and Wi-Fi in these areas, but there's no need to wait to get much of this happening ASAP. When Covid lifts, this can be something the country is ready for. Let's not wait until they have a big consultation, write another report, then assign a 10 million budget, and then have a grants programme... All of a sudden there's two or three years until this gets legs. This can get legs in weeks. It doesn't need years to get legs."

Mr Kennedy referred to his work:

"We build tools for community planning and community management. We're always looking at community assets, community challenges, community projects and community goals and so forth."

He sees pub hubs as a perfect fit because most pubs only really function from 6 or 7 in the evening



• Pat Kennedy was the first we know of to push the idea of pub hubs, now part of the Government's 150 point plan for rural Ireland. This is his article as published in August, 2019.



• A typical rural pub with ample space to operate as a pub hub - Kirby's Hunting Lodge, Co. Limerick.

PHOTO BY: A. MEAGHER.

until 12 at night, and the community hub spaces can do their work during traditional office hours from 9 to 5.

"Obviously, the insurance is covered, because the building is insured for the entire day. And you have seats, tables, etc. We've got a place where you can receive mail and sign for parcels. Many pubs already have Wi-Fi," says Mr Kennedy.

"The more I played with the idea, the more I thought this is pretty obvious. This was pre-Covid - now the pubs are all in trouble."

Q - How do you think we could see this plan for pub hubs take root quickly in communities?

"I'd like to see a simple audit undertaken of pubs. It could be a self-audit, done online, and there we go, we've got a profile of every (interested) pub in the country, and then we profile what they've got."

As pubs are licensed to sell alcohol, do you see any conflict between them acting as community spaces and pubs in the more traditional sense?

"I think they could absolutely exist side by side," he said, suggesting the Irish may become more like continental Europeans in our approach to drink. He recalled being astonished to see how people quietly had a drink and went on their way.

He said Ireland should change its attitude to drink.

With regard to the viability of the proposal in each community, he said, "We need to measure capacity on a case-by-case basis."

"Consider the pub as a mini community in itself and do an audit of this community, this pub. It might have a bar, a lounge and a dining area. Give each one of them a timetable, and look at their adaptability. What simple movements of furniture and so forth could change this space into a training room?"

"You can have a pub where a couple of lads drink at the bar, but back in the lounge there could be someone having a training course with ten different people, and in the next space over, you have someone having a technical meeting with people in the States, and so on. They can absolutely all exist side by side."

"With a simple audit, that can be organised for people. Pubs can be trained to re-imagine their space as community assets, and how they're going to be leveraged."

"And piece by piece you can audit the community to see what they want. Ask the GAA, ask the local drama club, ask the local parent's association: 'If you had this space, if it was entirely yours, how might you use it?' They mightn't necessarily get exactly what they want, but it gets them thinking - 'Oh, maybe we could do this and this on the weekend, or maybe once a month'."

"Once you get that profile of opportunities, then you can play with your calendar and see how that might all mix in together."

Q - How do you think remote working hubs and pub hubs can answer the problem of depopulation in rural communities?

"I'll give you an example. We were down in Carrigaholt many years ago running a community planning workshop. And the people there were saying the big problem there was depopulation. And they were asking, 'How are we going to get our kids to stay here?'"

"Someone from the back of the room stood up and said, 'Sorry, you mightn't know me, I'm here from overseas with five others here and we've actually been living in Carrigaholt for five years. We find it to be one of the best communities in the world to be living in.'"

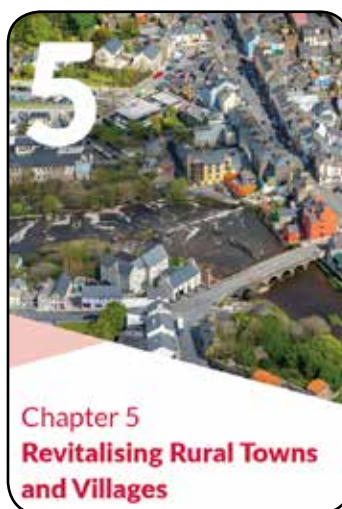
"To address the depopulation issue is not just about stopping your kids from leaving, because sometimes they want to leave. Sometimes they

want the big smoke. Sometimes they don't want to come back ever, or maybe not for next 20 or 30 years."

"Ireland is a phenomenally beautiful place and people come here for its people. Visitors love meeting the people. So you could very easily get a situation where there's no end of people who are travelling around here while working."

"You could go stay in B&Bs and live in Carrigaholt or Kinsale or wherever for three weeks, and then go up the road and live in Galway for another three weeks. Those digital nomads are real, they exist. With the advent of Covid, that's going to become way more real. So we might as well set ourselves up."

"Pub hubs could become a lovely selling point. Here's a map of a network of 500 places. It's a fantastic offering. I think it will provide a really good dimension to our tourism offering. I think it will potentially bring a lot of opportunities."



Download 'Our Rural Future - Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025' via this link:
<https://bit.ly/OurRuralFuture2021>

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHY

The 'Changing Ireland' team was saddened to learn and extends its deepest sympathies to the family of 'Changing Ireland' reporter Ray Lucey whose mother Eileen sadly passed away on Easter Sunday.

Eileen and Ray featured on our front cover recently, a mother and son team highlighting the important work of carers in the community.

Rest in Peace Eileen.



CORPORATIONS SUING GOVERNMENTS

In a letter signed by Mark Cumming, head of Comhlámh, and dozens of other civil society leaders, in February, concerns were raised over the proposed EU Canada Trade Deal known as CETA.

CETA stands for the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the EU and Canada which aims to remove barriers to trade.

CETA's critics say it is anti-democratic in allowing private corporations to sue European states if laws impact on profitability.

The letter calls on the government not to rush signing the agreement.

"There is no pressure on Ireland to vote for CETA. Nearly half the countries in the EU have yet to vote on CETA where its legality and overall benefit is still under consideration, including countries such as Germany, France and Italy," they wrote.

The letter was signed by representatives from the National Women's Council, ICTU, Oxfam Ireland, Trócaire, the Irish Wildlife Trust, Afri, Extinction Rebellion, Feasta, Friends of the Earth, and Gluaisceacht, among others.

An all-party Oireachtas committee is currently looking into the issue.

CALL TO PROTECT LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



• Local Employment Service staff in Tralee in 2015.

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN), representing Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs) has called on Oireachtas members "to ensure that the future of Community based Local Employment Services are protected and developed".

The network urged the Government to consider the rollout of a Local Development Company-led employment services model as part of its response to the unemployment crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

It rejected the idea of for-profit companies replacing the Local Employment Services.

"Cost-per-unit models do not serve jobseekers well," said ILDN CEO, Joe Saunders. "There is no upside in cost, governance or service levels with such a model."



• Joe Saunders.

Mr Saunders said, "Our members are concerned regarding proposed changes to the inclusive, community-based, not-for-profit model of public employment services in Ireland currently operated by Local Employment Services. Thus, we have provided government with an offer to provide additional community-based services nationally that will be open to all jobseekers."

Local Development Companies have 25 years operational experience in preparing jobseekers for work and are familiar with the barriers facing long-term unemployed people. "Employment Services must be part of the integrated provision of social and personal service as part of a non-profit based public employment service," he said.

Mr Saunders said: "Employment services are best located in community settings, operated by providers who can tailor to local circumstances, building relations with local employers. LDCs have a key strength in providing holistic wraparound services for individuals, families and communities."

Aontas calls for gov't focus on community education & long-term impact of Covid

Speaking at this year's AONTAS STAR Awards, CEO Niamh O'Reilly said her organisation called on the Government "to develop a national strategy to address the long-term impact of Covid-19 on engagement, retention and progression across tertiary education, with a specific focus on marginalised learners and the community education and FET sector."

"Part of this strategy should include an additional Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund for community education and actions to address digital poverty, access to devices, internet and resource courses aimed at building skills to learn online," she said.

"Covid-19 has exposed systemic inequalities which must be tackled. Digital poverty must be addressed especially as the majority of courses are now online. We can use this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to inclusion and properly valuing adult learning," she added.

The national AONTAS STAR Awards were announced online. The winners for 2021 are:

Power in Participation is a collaborative project involving Galway Traveller Movement, the Community Action Network, and NUIG's community education section. The project examines the impact of an outreach Diploma in Community Development Practice on the personal and professional lives of programme graduates, all of whom are from the Traveller community. A key focus of the project is promoting access to educational opportunities and widening participation in higher education for under-represented groups. Power in Participation won in the Third Level Access and Engagement category.

Roscommon Women's Network's Cycle Up project is a community environmental protection initiative where participants design and up-cycle textiles, while raising awareness about protecting the environment. The group also explores environmentally-friendly income generation models and opportunities. Cycle Up was a winner in the Sustainable Development through Education category.

Age Friendly Roscrea, based in



• Niamh O'Reilly speaking at a pre-Covid AONTAS STAR awards event.

Tipperary, won for their 'Care and Connection through Covid' initiative which provided an essential service to people - including care packages, support and friendship services, and health and safety information about Covid-19. It won in the Health and Wellbeing - Small/Medium Organisation category.

East Limerick Traveller Project is a collaborative project between Ballyhoura Development and the HSE's Traveller Health Unit (Mid West).

The project works with the Traveller Community to improve health outcomes and the quality of life for Travellers in East Limerick. It won in the Health and Wellbeing - Large Organisation category.

The Aiseiri Progression Programme, based in Waterford, won the Social Inclusion award for small and medium-sized organisations. Their specialised education and training programme supports men and women in addiction treatment and in the early years of addiction recovery to access meaningful education and training. The programme also looks at setting goals for work and equipping participants with the skills and confidence to achieve these goals.

The Irish Wheelchair Association won the Social Inclusion award for large organisations. Its Ability Programme provides job seeking and employability skills coaching to young people aged 18

- 29 with any physical disabilities. Ability focuses on developing decision-making skills, critical thinking, self-directed learning and self-advocacy.

Belfast Recovery College was a winner in the Learner Voice category. Its unique learning and leadership initiative is called 'Making Silent Voices Heard' and it places the learner's voice at the core of the college. The programme enables learners to pursue their dreams to participate as equal citizens in economic, educational, community, social inclusion and family life.

Blossom Ireland is based in Dublin and won an award for their 'My Blossom Channel Assertiveness Course' which provides skills-based training and support for young people with an intellectual disability between the ages of 15 and 20.

The assertiveness course was delivered through an accessible blended learning model and they were the winners in the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage through Innovation (during COVID-19).

WALK, based in Dublin, won the European Social Fund Special Recognition Award for their 'REAL Ability Project'. It kept service users connected and motivated during the pandemic by providing an accessible online space for them and staff to share information and resources.

€70m in LEADER funding welcomed

- Humphreys and McConalogue: allocation up €50m following EU support
- Funding will support communities and enterprise in Covid-19 recovery



"My priority is to ensure that the LEADER model of locally-led community development is maintained without interruption."

- Minister Heather Humphreys TD

• Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, and Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys.

€50m is expected to come from the EU to boost funds to a total of €70m for the LEADER programme for the period 2021-2022.

The update, welcomed by both the Irish Local Development Network and Irish Rural Link, was announced on March 12th, by Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue.

Ministers Humphreys and McConalogue said the funding will support rural communities and private enterprises in the recovery from the pandemic. The funding is significant and there are thousands of examples of how LEADER makes a difference. For instance, we recently showcased how LEADER funding of €17,475 helped a project in Co. Louth to transform children's lives.

In a press statement, the Government said on March 12th it began the process of submitting an amendment to the European Commission to extend the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, under which LEADER is funded, to the end of 2022.

As part of the process, the LEADER Programme will be allocated a total of €70m for 2021-2022, adding an extra €50m to the initial funding of €20m announced by Minister Humphreys in December.

Minister Humphreys said, "This will give local communities and enterprises an opportunity to respond to the emerging challenges for their areas and will support measures that provide employment and job creation throughout rural Ireland."

"The funding... will ensure that more vital locally-led projects in areas like climate change, digital transformation, remote working

and enterprise development can be progressed in rural communities throughout the country."

LEADER is an important element of Ireland's EU co-funded Rural Development Programme, which forms part of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

Minister McConalogue said, "Through the LEADER programme, over the next two years a total of €70 million, of which more than €50 million is expected to come from the EU, will be directly invested into rural areas to help address specific needs and help to realise opportunities for rural Ireland as we recover from the impact of COVID-19."

ANNOUNCEMENT WELCOMED

Both the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) and Irish Rural Link (IRL) independently welcomed the funding announcement. Jim Finn, chairperson of the ILDN said, "As the deliverers of LEADER across the country, we are greatly encouraged by (this) announcement."



He said his organisation had recently been calling for the Government to use funding available from the EU for rural development, for the purposes of LEADER.

ILDN rural development

spokesperson Éamonn O'Reilly said, "The LEADER Programme offers the ideal vehicle for the delivery of development funding to rural areas in the most effective manner. The allocation of this increased funding will deliver critical stimulus to rural areas to help drive the post Covid recovery."

He said the €70m will ensure that vital projects in the areas of climate change, digital transformation, remote working and enterprise development can be progressed in rural communities throughout the country "to meet the expectations of the EU in terms of the requirements of its recovery funding criteria."

Seamus Boland, CEO of IRL, pointed out that LEADER aims to aid the development of sustainable rural communities. He said, "This funding will ensure projects that contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities will be able to continue and there will be no gaps in funding until the new CAP is announced which may not be in place



until 2023".

The statement added that IRL was involved in a lead role in supporting the 2014-2020 LEADER programme, highlighting projects funded through LEADER and working with the Local Development Companies and Local Action Groups to ensure effective delivery and it will continue to be involved in the extension of the programme.

LEADER BACKGROUND

LEADER is a rural development programme co-funded by the EU which operates a locally-led, bottom-up, approach to meeting the needs of local communities and businesses. The programme supports private enterprises and community groups in rural areas. LEADER forms part of Ireland's multi-annual Rural Development Programme which is co-financed by the EU and is part of the Common Agriculture Policy.

The LEADER programme is delivered by 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) in 28 sub-regional areas. These groups are partnerships of public and private entities from a defined geographical area. LAGs are responsible for identifying and helping to develop local projects which support the themes of Economic Development (including enterprise development and job creation), Social Inclusion and Rural Environment.

The breakdown of the allocations to each LAG that delivers LEADER is available to view on the Department's website.

See following pages for a case-study example of a project LEADER supported.

To find out about applying for LEADER funding, see: <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie>

Also see: <https://ildn.ie>

LGBTI+ AWARENESS: RAISING THE FLAG IN CORK

IDAHOBIT stands for



International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia and it took place on May 17th, in the midst of LGBTI+ Awareness Week (May 16-22).

As it has done every year for the past decade, Cork city's LGBT Inter-Agency Group brought the City Council, public services, community groups and LGBTI+ NGOs together to mark the occasion.

Every year, the group has raised the Rainbow Flag over the city - on public buildings, in parks and community spaces. This year, they raised what is called the Intersectional Rainbow Flag (above).

As Audre Lorde once said, "There is no such thing as a single issue struggle, because we do not live single issue lives."

On Twitter: @CorkLGBTWeek
Also on Facebook.

€800K FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

An €800,000 announcement in March of a Covid-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme by Minister Humphreys has been widely welcomed. The programme aims to "help Social Enterprises to recover from the impact of COVID-19".

The programme will work in delivering training and mentoring for staff and directors in social enterprises across the country. The announcement builds on the launch in 2019 of the State's National Social Enterprise Policy.

Kerry village forges ahead with unique attraction



• Above - Dermot Crowley at work in Churchill Forge.



The LEADER Programme provides funding to support community-led rural development. Here we feature one of the thousands of successful projects, to give a flavour of the kind of ideas that win over the funding adjudicators.

Back when horse drawn vehicles ruled the road, every town and village had a forge because once your horse had good shoes, you could travel anywhere. They also repaired ploughs and the metal rims on carthwheels, made gates and so on.

The work of the blacksmith has almost died out now, yet it is a fascinating trade and youngsters in the Spa-Fenit area of north Kerry are among the most educated in the country on the subject.

They have rare first-hand experience and insight to the craft thanks to a LEADER grant, a local benefactor, and local fundraising that saw the reopening of the old forge in Churchill.

"It would be terrible if it was left to go into disrepair, because it would have been knocked and a lot of the history attached to the area would have been lost," says Dermot Crowley, of Spa Fenit Community Council (SFCC).

Fred Kreidbiel acquired the Forge and gave it, in trust, to the Community Council in 2002 so that it could be restored to its former glory. The Council went further, added more visitor space and over 20 display panels to tell the history of forging in area. They now have a

new community asset, a better sense of the area's heritage and an unique visitor attraction.

OBJECTIVES

- To restore the Forge and protect and preserve the history of forging in the community of Spa/Fenit.
- To develop the Forge as a community asset and local tourist attraction to benefit the community.

BACKGROUND

The SFCC was set up in 1985 and first became involved in projects such as developing local viewing points and initiating a local 12km greenway connecting Tralee to Fenit.

Once acquired in 2002, the Community Council set about rebuilding and repairing the forge. This initial stage was supported by funding under the previous LEADER Programme.

However, a forge without tools is an empty shell. The SFCC collected tools such as anvil, hammer, bellows, tongs, punches and a furnace to publicly display. Over 2,000 visitors had seen the forge before we were struck by the pandemic

In Ireland, forging is a tradition that goes back thousands of years, and in recent times there has been a re-focus on forging and on preserving it along with a other traditional skills.

I had the good fortune of knowing and interviewing the last blacksmith in Westport, Co. Mayo, and he could

knock a horseshoe into shape in less than a minute. There is nothing like it when a blacksmith throws coal in the fire, pumps the bellows, and beats hot metal into shape with sparks flying all round you.

ACTIVITIES

In 2016, the SFCC set on developing it into a bigger attraction and LEADER funding was sought to support:

- building an extension to provide enough space to host events.
- kitting out the space with display panels telling the history of forging in the area and supplementing the display of equipment and tools.

"Sean Linnane was the co-ordinator and he was outstanding. He gave us great advice in applying for the funding and was very supportive," recalled Dermot, paying tribute to staff from North East West Kerry Development.

"There is no way we could have progressed the project without LEADER support," he said.

LESSONS

To be successful in gaining a LEADER grant the promoters suggest that applicants need to have a good project idea with everything well laid out and to have match funding.

The match funding requirement is something that applicants need to bear in mind before approaching LEADER.



A local community group in Spa-Fenit made it happen

- Above - Spa/Fenit Community Council members.
- Centre - Restored forge.
- Right - the forge had fallen into disrepair.

BRIDGING LOAN

The SFCC availed of a bridging loan from Clann Credo to start works while waiting for the approved LEADER grant to come through, as often this can take a few months.

This bridging service can be particularly useful for capital projects where the granting of planning permission can take time.

SUSTAINABLE

In advice to others considering applying for LEADER support, SFCC advise being clear about how the project will benefit your community now and into the future. Also, for projects to be sustainable, you need an active community group and continuity with development organisations.

"You need to get a project that will last the test of time," says Dermot.

RESULTS

This project has resulted in the preservation of local history and the development of a community amenity.

The multi-use visitor space and the installation of 20 wall panels enabled the Forge to open as a tourist attraction.

With room for 60 more visitors than before, the space has been used to host group visits, trad nights, cultural events, local community events and talks from guest speakers on forging and other traditional crafts.

During National Heritage Week the Forge held open days to demonstrate traditional skills and crafts including weaving, bottle making and beekeeping and over 2,000 people have visited the forge (currently closed due to Covid-19 restrictions).

"We are thrilled to have a fabulous public amenity and it will be great for the people who visit the area post COVID," says Dermot.

€164,422 BUDGET

Total LEADER funding awarded to date amounts to €52,422 broken down as follows: €32,921 EAFRD (EU) with €19,501 being the national contribution. Match funding included €85,000 from private/corporate donors and €27,000 from the organisation's own funds.

The grant was approved under Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. The contribution to rural tourism was also a factor in it getting the green light.



• Kay Foley at an antiques evaluation day in the Forge.

AWARD WINNER

The Forge project was one of 33 LEADER-funded projects which took part in the National Rural Network's LEADER Impact Campaign 2020 (aimed at celebrating the success of the programme in Ireland). It won first prize under Theme 1.

- 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.

CLANN CREDO

Clann Credo is a Social Investment Fund that has provided almost €130 million in Community Loan Finance to more than 1,500 projects since 1996, creating and sustaining thousands of jobs and strengthening communities.

It was founded by Sr Magdalen Fogarty and the Presentation Sisters in 1996.

W: <https://www.clanncredio.ie>



VISIT FORGE IN CHURCHILL

Maybe in the years to come, LEADER funding will be available to restore old petrol stations, to remind people of the long-gone petrochemical era and noisy, human-controlled, ground-bound mechanical vehicles.

You can see the tourists now zooming in from above on electric- or hydro-powered vehicles to have a gander, maybe stopping and spending some money (or whatever will replace it) in the area.

Old Topaz and Shell signs will be on display and people will be invited to step down into the huge underground tank that stored fuel shipped all the way from Saudi Arabia.

They will marvel at displays of pumps and read about how the world moved on from oil and gas. Then zap off to another country.

Whatever the future holds, however, a forge will always beat a petrol station a hundred times over as a place of interest. Why not drop into Churchill Forge while on staycation and see for yourself!

LEARN ABOUT LEADER

The LEADER Programme provides funding to support community-led rural development. To find out how the funding process works in practice, and get an overview of the main stages and requirements when making an application, visit:

<https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie>

Horace's Diary - no masking the truth!

The New Normal!

When they said to socially distance, I stopped talking to everyone except my local takeaway and the Amazon delivery guy.

But I'm back keeping a diary after a strange thing happened to me yesterday.

I went to the shop to buy a mask and then realised I couldn't enter the shop without a mask. While I was wondering how I would enter a shop without a mask to buy a mask, a fellow gave me his mask as he left the shop.

Grand! I wiped it on my sleeve for safety's sake and put it over my face, delighted that I could now enter the shop - then I realised that now I had a mask I no longer needed to go into the shop to buy a mask.

In the end, I did go into the shop. You can never have too many masks. I got a breakfast roll, and a newspaper, because as Einstein famously said

- "It is very easy to make stuff up online."

My local Tidy Towns meetings are great. Without them, the house would be a total mess. They insist on me having the camera on - they say it's for GDPR. Who's he? Or is it she? Everyone says they don't know much about GDPR. Nor I. Hope he never calls.

TOWN NEVER TIDIER

Anyway, it means I clean the place once a week. I'm sticking with Tidy Towns this year. TBH, the town's never looked better. Clean as a whistle since nothing's happening - ever. The chairperson Hilda picks up all the abandoned masks and washes them for reuse and recycle. We should win easy this year.

PUB HUBS

On all other Zooms, I stick a plaster over the camera and say it's broke. Saves getting dressed or tidying.

We should meet in the pub. In the new rural plan, there's talk of pubs becoming community hubs - what's new about that? That's where I do all my best work.

On the subject of pubs, what they mean by wet pubs are what I call dry pubs. The reason indoor drinking took off in Ireland in the first place was so we could drink without getting wet.

GUIDED BY SCIENCE

Still waiting for my jab, when I get lonely, I turn on the radio. "We are guided by the science," they say and they keep talking about anti-buddies.

I've no buddies left at this stage, but when I see the dishwasher's half full, I find myself



saying things like: "I'm looking forward to ramping up capacity."

I never had so many dishes to wash because I'm forever eating. The past year has been all about fattening the curve and I've done my best - with pastries, apple tarts, steaks, pies, the odd chocolate cake.

I've had Covid by the way - I know because I tested negative. Luckily, I didn't experience any symptoms.

I still wear a mask, but that's because I'm growing a handlebar moustache for

November and I want it to be a surprise.

Beards are so last year, or should that be 2019.

ABOUT HORACE:

A former civil servant, community worker and agony uncle, Horace is utterly solutions-focused and has been writing for 'Changing Ireland' since he was a nipper.

He has addressed everything from world poverty to one-stop shops and can speak fluent Poblaise.

A few of his better columns are available on our website.

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