

CHANGING IRELAND



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Would you be happy working remotely 14.5 kilometres from the mainland?



Fresh hopes for isolated rural communities since you can now work remotely, even from Inishturk



**TAOISEACH
PLEDGES GOV'T
SUPPORT FOR
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

Of course communities can own hotels!

**We visit Sliabh
Beagh Hotel in
Co. Monaghan**



DEJA VU: Return of Community Development Projects. **GARRYOWEN:** 50 years a waiting. **FOSTERING:** Appeal to New Communities. **YOUTHWORK:** Humour an essential ingredient.

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.





I am'
**Raising
Amazing**






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



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HOLIDAY IN MONAGHAN / LIVE ON AN ISLAND



People still leave our offshore islands for work on the mainland, but if ever there was a silver lining to the pandemic it was seeing young people move back to the islands to work from home. Families are even moving out to islands. The issues and opportunities are explored in this edition.

As one community leader acknowledged, islands have generally had the ear of decision-makers and are looked on favourably, more so than other more disadvantaged areas.

GARRYOWEN

Garryowen is probably the biggest, established urban community in the State without a community centre. People have campaigned on and off for over 50 years for one. Limerick is behind the rest of our cities when it comes to poverty and disadvantage and Garryowen has suffered from a lack of public investment. It is past time for action here.

SLIABH BEAGH HOTEL

I didn't know there was a community-owned hotel in Ireland until Sorcha Grisewood suggested we cover it. Like 'Changing Ireland' it's been on the go for 20 years. Now I know how surprised people are when they come across

'Changing Ireland' for the first time and are astonished they didn't find us before now.

Can Sliabh Beagh's community hotel be replicated elsewhere? Have they got the template? Well, it says something that there's still only one such enterprise in the country. However, it is a success and surely something that might inspire another community.

Funding helps. Sliabh Beagh was helped by various peace funds and by LEADER and is partly supported on an ongoing basis through the Community Services Programme.

PILOT PROJECTS

The Community Development Programme once supported 180 projects before cuts, mergers and takeovers a decade and more ago. It is encouraging to see a new fledgling programme begin to emerge with seven new pilot projects approved in June.

TAOISEACH'S ENDORSEMENT FOR THE COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH

It is remarkable that An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, has given his backing not alone for community development work, but the community-led approach. This doesn't always appear to be the way favoured by all policy-makers and it is significant, surely, to have the head of the government endorsing this community-minded approach.

#VISIT PULLOUGH!

Previously, we covered community shops. There are still under ten in the country and it was good to hear recently from Martin Buckley, a co-founder of Pullough Community Shop & Cafe in West Offaly. He wrote to invite us all to call by over the summer. Now, there's lots to do in the area - from walking and cycling on a new greenway passing by the shop's front door to kayaking. Drop by!

And Pullough's success is partly a #SicapStory - it received support through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

FOSTERING'S NOT EXCLUSIVE

Tusla Fostering is appealing to people in community development to spread the word that fostering is for many more people than most of us realise.

They are especially seeking, albeit late in the day, to reach out to people in new communities. You don't need to be a citizen to foster, or to be a couple, or own your own house.

Tusla Fostering are also interested specifically in the type of people who read 'Changing Ireland' - community-loving people with an altruistic mind and big heart. We hope our coverage will awaken you to new possibilities.

Allen Meagher

FILE A REPORT FOR US!

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



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'Changing Ireland' thanks everyone involved in the production of Issue 73.

Front Cover:

Main: Bruno and Irena Meilick and family on Inishturk. **Btm**

Left: Anna Shakespeare, Pobal CEO, elbow-greeting An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin. **Btm Right:** Sliabh Beagh.

**MADE IN
MOYROSS
LIMERICK**

DISCLAIMER

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

THE START

Projects in Community Development (Pilot) Programme named (for more - see page 11)

• Seven organisations from 124 applicants chosen to take part in a pilot Community Development Programme were named at an event in Longford on June 24th. Minister of State Joe O'Brien said he deliberately chose to launch the new programme with a Roma community development project, "because as a group they are likely the most marginalised and excluded group in Ireland". (For more, see p11). **ABOVE:** Minister Joe O'Brien pictured in Longford with Mark Noble, Viktoia Sigova, Patrick Nistor, Marek Ziga Senior and Junior, Kristian Ziga, Stanka Pompova and Ivan Hangurbadzo.

Minister Joe O'Brien believes June 24th marked the start of something potentially very important. He could be right - just over a decade ago, there were 180 State-funded Community Development Projects in the country.

Here's what he had to say on the day in Longford:

"This could be the start of something very important. This is a national programme. We've come to Longford to launch this Community Development (Pilot) Programme.

"We've got €1m to start for seven community development projects across the country.

"The focus of those projects is about putting trust back in to the people on the ground, in marginalised communities, to form their own way out of the situation they're in.

"The programme will support them to do that and will give them the space to do that. It will also link them in with other organisations.

"This is an approach that, as many of you will know, was much more prevalent in the past. It was a very effective approach. It's about

grassroots. It's about people with the knowledge of the situation they're in charting the pathway out of that situation. They're the people that know best and it's about government trusting people to do that. It's an approach we want to grow.

"This is a pilot, but I'm really very committed to growing it, so it's really important we support those seven projects to break new ground and do so successfully and effectively.

"Once they've proved their worth, and I'm sure that they will, I'll certainly be pushing for the programme to grow.

"We will have a complementary approach to the other government initiatives that are tackling exclusion and marginalisation - we need that grassroots swell to come back up again in a more structured and supported way. And this is a very important day to mark the start of that process."

- Minister O'Brien in an interview with Allen Meagher. The text here is from one of two video interviews with the Minister available on our Twitter feed.



• Joe Flaherty, TD, Eliska Schneider of Longford Community Resources, Minister Joe O'Brien, Adrian Greene, CEO of Longford Community Resources & Ivan Hangurbadzo.



• Pat O'Rourke, chairperson of Longford Community Resources, Anastasia Crickley of Community Work Ireland, Minister Joe O'Brien, Joe Saunders, CEO of the Irish Local Development Network, Cllr. Paul Ross, Cathaoirleach of Longford Co. Co., and Cllr. Uruemu Adejinmi.



Islands embrace remote working - but need more hubs & houses

BY LAOISE NEYLON



Back in 2019 Irena Meilick and her husband Bruno decided to move from Germany to the Irish countryside because they are nature lovers.

The couple had three young children at the time and were looking for somewhere to settle by the sea, “with fresh air and nature around us,” she says.

Her husband is a web programmer so he can work from anywhere. Ms. Meilick started looking on Daft.ie and one day she spotted a small house to rent on Inishturk, she says.

Within weeks they viewed it and

“instantly fell in love with the little house,” she says. “It has very nice views.”

They moved in with just the belongings they had brought in their backpacks and didn’t go back to Germany to get the rest of their stuff for a year, she says.

Island life is everything they dreamed it would be and more. “We love it, it’s even better than we thought it would be,” she says.

They never imagined that the small community would be so welcoming to them. “It is such a community,” she says. “They were so welcoming from the beginning.”

REMOTE WORKING

Since the pandemic struck, the increase in remote working has presented a glimmer of hope to young islanders from Inishturk and people who dreamed of moving home to enjoy island life have found a way.

Unemployment and emigration have always been high on the list

of challenges faced by Ireland’s offshore islands, says **Mary O’Toole, co-ordinator of Inishturk Development Company.**

But, increasingly companies are open to employing people to work remotely. Advances in technology could open up a wide variety of jobs and slow the flow of young people to the mainland and beyond, to look for work.

“We are looking at developing a digital hub on the island,” says Ms O’Toole. “Which will not only ensure connectivity with the excellent broadband we have - but will see the return of islanders hopefully.”

While islanders face challenges of employment and construction costs, they are benefiting from improved amenities too, she says.

Máire Uí Mhaoláin, CEO of Comhar na nOileán, says that there are plans for digital hubs in many islands and remote working is improving the range of employment available to islanders across the offshore islands.

Ms. Meilick says her husband is remote working as a self-employed web programmer and has no issues with the internet.

She has started working in the community garden and helps out in the shop and the restaurant too, she says.

CHANGES ON INISHTURK

Around 18 years ago Changing Ireland reported that people living on Inishturk had to travel to the mainland for a haircut.

That is still the case, says Ms O’Toole, but there are more regular sailings nowadays.

An extension to the pier in 2006 means that the boat now runs in all weather, she says. There is a daily service from Roonagh and a service from Cleggan twice a week.

“We have advanced a lot in the last 18 years,” she says.

In 2003, Inishturk got a new health centre and they have a nurse available there full time and a GP



MAYO DAY WITH OUR ISLANDERS
• From a video by Mayo County Council.



REMOTE WORKING IN THE EXTREME

From Germany to Inishturk, Co. Mayo:
"We love it! It's even better than we
thought it would be"

- Irena Meilick

• Bruno and Irena Meilick and family found life on Inishturk "even better than we thought it would be".



visits once every three weeks, says Ms O'Toole.

If the doctor's visit is urgent people travel to the mainland, she says.

The coast guard and the RNLI provide back up to the nurse and have been assisting with the vaccination programme,

"The service of the coast guard and the RNLI has been just absolutely amazing," she says.

RESTAURANT

An extension to the community club, which now includes a restaurant and function room, has opened up the possibility of going out for a meal.

"The restaurant is a massive addition," she says. It is open seasonally and is well used by locals.

The sports pitch was upgraded in 2010, and dressing rooms built in 2012. That has allowed Inishturk to host matches and clubs have travelled from the mainland to play.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The population of the Inishturk is 62 and there are just five children in the primary school.

"We have a wonderful, vibrant school with two teachers, says Ms. O'Toole. "The children get plenty of special attention."

The primary school got a boost when Ms Meilick's family and another family also from Germany, moved to the island.

Ms. Meilick's eldest child, aged 9, is in the local school. "The school is such a nice place, the teacher is great," she says. "He has the smallest class ever."

She is homeschooling her 7-year-old for now. One of the things that attracted the couple to Ireland was being able to let their children choose between going to school.

Homeschooling is very complicated in Germany, she says.

Secondary students travel to the mainland and board during the week,

says Ms O'Toole. "That is all part and parcel of island life. We are still dealing with population decline which is ongoing for any rural community."

There is some employment on the island including farming and fishing, she says. And publicly funded jobs too - like herself and her colleagues, the teachers and the nurse.

There is work too in tourism, which is seasonal, yet many young people still have to go to the mainland for work.

With plans for a digital hub on the island though that could be set to change, offering hope to islanders that wasn't there before.

Since Covid-19 restrictions kicked in four islanders have come home. They are working remotely for companies based in Denmark, the UK and two on the mainland, she says.

"This is a massive shift in the right direction. It is our goal to increase this number and capitalise on this opportunity," says Ms O'Toole.

Companies are finding that "remote working is working," she

says.

Those islanders who have come home are benefitting from the change in approach. "They are content doing it and they are happy to be home while still working away."

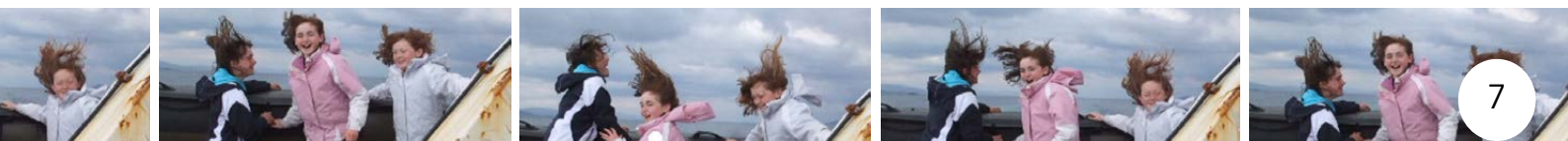
Getting the digital hub up and running as soon as possible is a key priority for the sustainability of Inishturk, she says.

Another major issue is construction costs, it can be around 30 percent more expensive to build a house on the island. Materials have to be shipped out and tradesmen have to be accommodated in B&Bs too.

She says that if both of those issues could be tackled, it would make it easier for people to move to Inishturk and for young people to stay living on the island too.

"Sustaining the population and ensuring that Inishturk has a bright and vibrant future for many years to come," says Ms. O'Toole.

"Of course we would love to see more families here," says Ms Meilick, "it is so important for the community."



Islands face obstacles, but also never-before seen opportunities



• One of Inishturk's main roads on a good day. Source: Inishturk on Facebook.

The surge in remote working could boost the population on Ireland's offshore islands and restore their viability. As indeed it could for much if not all of rural Ireland.

Plans for digital hubs on many islands and better broadband are already improving the range of available employment options.

You can now sit for a job interview with a company in Paris from your home on Cape Clear and start work without leaving the house.

Minister Heather Humphreys, who has responsibility for the islands, said in the Dáil

A few islands have already got digital hubs up and running. There is one on Arranmore, another being developed on Inis Mór and smaller hubs already operating on Clare Island and on Inis Oírr.

The country's Irish-speaking islands are getting new digital hubs as part of a Údarás na Gaeltachta initiative* to roll out 30 innovation and digital hubs. Other islands are applying for LEADER funding to open digital hubs. Some are purpose built. Others use existing office space with the facilities (eg printer) kitted out for shared usage.

Broadband is improving. At present, for instance, the connection on Inis Oírr is being upgraded as part of the National Broadband Plan.

Between hubs and better broadband, it means young islanders in the future will have options and possibilities that didn't exist before.

Newcomers may also recognise the opportunity that the Meilicks from Germany grasped when they

recently moved to Inishturk (see previous pages).

"There are a lot more options for people working for banks, or Google and those companies. They can work from here as easily as they can work from anywhere," says Máire.

The same can be said for every rural location being boosted by better broadband and digital hubs.

Nonetheless, for the islands, for the time being, depopulation remains a challenge. The cost of living is higher and employment prospects lower on an island. Remote working obviously has appeal and potential, but it's also not for everyone and people from the islands are still as we speak migrating to the mainland seeking work.

However, the pandemic had a silver lining.

PANDEMIC BENEFITS

"Covid-19 brought unexpected

recently, "If people are willing to move back to the island that they were originally from, we should be looking at it."

If housing is available and you can work remotely, you can even move out to an island. Outward migration was rare up to now. That may be changing and going by **Laoise Neylon's** report on previous pages the process has already begun.

Here **Allen Meagher** speaks to **Máire Uí Mhaoláin, CEO of Comhar na nOileán**, the islands development company. Máire is optimistic. She says "I think remote working will have a huge impact."

benefits to the islands and we are seeing a reversal of the outward migration trend," says Máire.

"Now many people and especially those in the age group of 25 years – 35 years are back working from home and interested in staying on the islands."

HOUSING

"The islands are a microcosm of the whole of Ireland and like the rest of Ireland, housing is a major issue. It is homes that make communities and depopulation is an ever-present menace lurking like the grim reaper in the background," she says.

"A recent housing seminar for the islands (held online) was attended by 82 people. A report is due to be issued following the seminar.

"The housing issue has to do with planning for sure in some places, but it's also to do with houses being sold off on some islands as holiday homes - with local people being priced out

of the market. It's about dark houses in winter, as we call them, with no lights on in holiday-home owners' houses. It's also to do with derelict houses. There are a number of issues.

"Tourism is wonderful, but you can't get houses to rent for people who want to live and work here," she says.

HIGH PROFILE

On the positive side, Ireland's offshore islands tend to get more official attention than places on the mainland with possibly greater needs.

"The islands have a much higher profile than many other disadvantaged areas in the country - amazingly so really," acknowledged Máire. The islands body has little difficulty arranging meetings with government departments.

"Comhar na nOileán has a very good relationship with the Department of Rural and Community Development," says Máire.

HUMPHREYS: DRAFT ISLANDS POLICY BY YEAR'S END

Minister Heather Humphreys, speaking in the Dáil on May 25th, gave an update on the development of a new islands policy. While work on the policy was delayed by the pandemic, it is one of the key elements in 'Our Rural Future', the Government's new rural development policy.

"The central objective of the islands policy will be to ensure sustainable, vibrant communities continue to live on the offshore islands," said Minister Humphreys.

"I hope to have a draft policy document by the end of this year," she said. "Once agreed, the policy will be supported by a series of action plans across the Government to support, promote and empower our island communities."

She said a consultation process conducted by her Department of Rural and Community Development last year identified the main challenges.



"Issues which were highlighted by the island communities included education, health, housing, energy, employment, broadband and access to services," she said.

An interdepartmental committee that convened in January was due to again meet in June to review progress on devising the new policy.



• The 'Happy Hooker' seen on calm seas in 2018 as it made its way from Inis Oírr to the mainland.

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*Social Inclusion and Community Activation
Programme (SICAP)*

Vacancy

SICAP Community Development Officer



A vacancy has arisen for a part-time (21 hours per week) Community Development Officer supporting PAUL Partnership's activities in providing community development support for local groups and communities.

The overall purpose of the role will be to support the delivery of a range of well-organised, imaginative, quality projects and capacity building supports for community groups. A key part of this role will be to support community engagement and group development with the Limerick City Traveller Community.

This is a temporary contract to cover staff leave of absence. A contract will be offered to the end of September 2022.

Job Description and Application Form can be downloaded from the PAUL Partnership website: paulpartnership.ie

Only electronic applications will be accepted. Completed application forms by e-mail to: recruitment@paulpartnership.ie

Closing date for applications is: 5.00pm Tuesday 3rd August 2021.



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The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.



MÁIRE UÍ MHAOLÁIN INIS OÍRR



• **FAMILY SNAP!** Ruth and her mum Máire with family pets Rex and Puisín. Máire Uí Mhaoláin is CEO of the islands development company - Comhar na nOileán - and lives on Inis Oírr with husband Tom and son Dara. The couple have two grown up children - Adam who works in Spiddal and Ruth (pictured) who is currently in Australia.

How long are you involved with this project?

I'm working in development for 30-plus years. I began like many others, in my teens, doing voluntary work as a youth club leader, chairperson, secretary and so on.

What made you want to become a community worker?

Community activism was huge in Connemara in my childhood and lots of us from that era went into this kind of work. There was a huge Gaeltacht civil rights movement going on that led to the formation of the co-ops and much more.

What difference has being involved made to you?

I really believe in participatory democracy and you are involved in helping to make communities viable and sustainable - nurturing the language, culture and community and you're working towards that. You're directing resources to places based on community values.

Name 3 people you most admire!

Fr Peter McVerry - I really admire him, he's so humble. Also New Zealand's prime minister Jacinda Ardern - she shows great leadership, is decisive and

shows concern for all.

Closer to home, I really admire Marty Walsh whose ancestors came from a very deprived area of Connemara and who emigrated to the USA. He rose to become mayor of Boston and is now working in the US Senate on enterprise and employment.

Your top 2 issues in Ireland today?

Housing has to be number one. Covid-19's impact is number two.

Finish the sentence - "Nationally, we need more..."

Consultation. Communities should be consulted more by government departments. It must be real consultation. Sending an email isn't consultation. Also, we could do with more support for the Irish language.

"We need less..."

Bureaucracy. We're strangled by it. We have these circulars every other day from government departments, sometimes asking for silly things. Currently, I'm trying to move a staff member from one office to another. The old office cost €50 per week and the office they are moving to is €40 per week. We have to justify the change in expenditure even though it's a reduction.

Bureaucracy is strangling

community development and development generally. Often, when we meet people about a project we can't tell them everything at the beginning. If we did, they'd run away.

I believe in good governance but you don't have to take it to the limit.

Is Irish recognised as an important part of your work?

We work bilingually. We work through Irish in the office. We get very little credit for that. For instance, we accept applications in Irish but translate them for Pobal, the Department and LCDCs. That can take hours, but we don't make an issue of it. It's not said, but we know it will be put on the back-burner if an application is submitted in Irish.

What are you reading at the moment?

I've just finished reading an Icelandic crime series. Like ourselves, Iceland is a small community and I love the descriptions of mountain and landscape.

Do you have a pet?

I've dogs and cats. I love my dog Rex - he's a Jack Russell, nearly 14, coming up to his end of life and a bit crotchety but he's part of the family.

Dept's islands pledge

The Department of Rural and Community Development has responsibility for islands.

It states: "Our coastal islands are an integral part of the state's heritage. Around 30 of these islands are inhabited and hold a wealth of cultural heritage. A central objective of this Department is to ensure that sustainable vibrant communities continue to live on the islands."

"Satisfactory services and a developed infrastructure are important prerequisites for maintaining island populations. The department's aim is to seek to meet these requirements through current and capital investment via the Department itself and through other relevant Departments and organisations."

"In recent years, priority has been given to the development of island infrastructure as well as subsidising comprehensive access services. The quality of life of the island populations has improved significantly as a result of this."

"The islands on the west coast of Ireland represent a bastion of Irish heritage, culture and language and today their protection and development is guaranteed by government policy."

These islands are scattered along the west coast of counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Cork. They include islands within and outside the Gaeltacht.

Today, there are over 30 inhabited islands surrounding the whole island.

In the past, State support proved inadequate and some islands died, including the Great Blasket Island off Kerry and Inishark off Galway.

New Community Development Programme

7 new pilot CDPs named after 124 applied



• Dublin's Inner City Organisations Network (ICON) welcomes Minister Joe O'Brien. **BACK:** Sian Muldowney, ICON co-ordinator, and Neasa Hourigan, TD. **FRONT:** Minister O'Brien, Nicola Kelly, ICON community development worker, Seanie Lambe, ICON board member, and Noel Wardick, CEO, Dublin City Community Co-op. ICON, active for over 20 years, was one of the organisations chosen to take part in the pilot Community Development Programme. The project will work with marginalised women using a community development approach to help address the issue of housing in the private rented sector in the area.

The seven organisations chosen from 124 applicants to take part in a pilot Community Development Programme were named at an event in Longford on June 24th.

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien, made the announcement at Longford Community Resources which hosts one of the successful projects – a Roma-led project to enhance integration for members of the Roma community locally and in wider society generally.

The pilot projects chosen are in Donegal, Clare, Dublin, Kilkenny, Longford, Wexford and Meath/Louth and will provide supports to Travellers, Roma, women living in poverty, migrants and people with disabilities.

The aim of the pilot programme is “to trial community-led interventions that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promote human rights” and it will cost €1m this year to begin with.

Minister O'Brien said, “We must do better as a whole in society for groups that suffer particularly high levels of disadvantage and marginalisation.

“This programme is about building

The seven successful pilot Community Development Programme organisations and the themes of the proposed project are as follows:

- Donegal Intercultural Platform (Migrants);
- Clare Local Development Company (Travellers);
- Dublin's Inner City Organisations Network (Women, poverty, housing);
- Kilkenny Community Traveller Movement (Travellers);
- Longford Community Resources Longford (Roma);
- Cultur Migrant Centre - based in Meath and Louth (Migrants);
- Independent Living Movement Ireland (Disability Activism).

the capacity of some of those grassroots groups most excluded to support them to chart their path from disadvantage.”

In a speech to around 40 people attending the first such live event in many months, he talked up the programme's importance.

He acknowledged that 124 applications was a high number to receive in a six-week window.

OTHER WAYS

It was clear, he said, from the number and quality of applications “that there is a strong need among marginalised communities across the country for the supports to build a better life for themselves.”

“My officials will be engaging with

the projects that were unsuccessful this time to explore other ways of supporting their proposals.

“This is an initial step in recasting a grassroots community-led approach to tackling disadvantage that will complement other local and national government measures to address social exclusion.

“It's important that all of the successful projects are impactful and make a real difference as that can inform a potential growth of a community-led approach to the significant social challenges we are facing,” he added.

Summarising the programme's focus, he said: “Communities themselves are best placed to identify needs and to work collaboratively

to develop pathways to fully access their rights. It is hugely important that the voices that are most marginalised in society are given opportunities to engage and help develop activities that they know will help enhance their lived experiences and bring their voice to the table when decisions are being made.”

GOV'T SIGNAL

The launch was also “a signal from government that we are building a recovery from Covid-19 with the most social excluded to the fore”.

Setting up the programme was committed to in the Programme for Government.

STRUCTURE

Local Community Development Committees will provide support and introduce pilot CDPs to other potential funders, help to integrate the organisation with other bodies delivering similar services and facilitating networking. The LCDCs will also have oversight of the administration of funding in respect of any projects in their area.

The pilot projects will report to their LCDC for information purposes in the first 12 months of funding and as agreed locally thereafter.

- AM

Inclusion programme has proven its worth - says An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, was on home turf for the launch of the annual report detailing the impact of the Government's primary social inclusion programme in 2020.

The rain held off, the marquee held up and Covid-19 restrictions were adhered to by the 50 or so people present for the launch, held in a public park in Gurrabraher.

While the press were out in force, they were focused on issues of the day rather than the importance of the event to those working and volunteering in community development.

The event marked the highest level recognition - next to that of the President - for those working in communities, particularly under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

An Taoiseach hailed "tremendous insights" in the annual report that show "how communities came together with SICAP supports to help people who were very affected by the pandemic".

"Working together for the common good, protecting the vulnerable is what community is all about," he said. "By its nature, community development involves a combined effort - government, national and local, as well as community and voluntary organisations."

He highlighted the programme's structure whereby Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority area, along with the local development companies "provide a clear architecture countrywide for delivering effective and sustainable responses" - such as during the pandemic.

HEART OF WORK

"SICAP is right at the heart of this work in tackling disadvantage. As our primary social inclusion programme, its services reach into every community, urban and rural.

"It has proven to be a vital resource for people, who even in the best of times need extra help and support. In particular, SICAP's reach into communities nationwide has been a core strength during the pandemic.

"Supports provided by SICAP and the local development companies that deliver it are key to ensuring



• Not an everyday occurrence: Two Leesiders launched the annual SICAP report for 2020. Cork humour abounded!

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, joined Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O'Brien, at Gerry O'Sullivan Park in Cork city, on July 3rd, to launch the 2020 Annual Report for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

The programme, funded through the

Department of Rural and Community Development, is the government's primary social inclusion support and it seeks to strengthen communities, reduce poverty and address social exclusion among the most marginalised groups and individuals who are furthest from mainstream supports and society.

that those who need more intensive support are not left behind.

"The manner in which SICAP is delivered demonstrates the effective operation of the LCDCs and the local development companies. They have a proven track record of collaboration and delivery in the communities in which they work," he said. He commended the ability of staff in local development companies in achieving results by bringing together people, groups, organisations and agencies.

NEW COMMUNITIES

"The SICAP annual report shows the vital support this programme provides to many communities. I know, for instance, how hugely important it has been to new communities, as we welcome them to our shores," he said.

26,000 ONE-2-ONES

"The report's findings show the vital support this programme provides to many communities, including support provided last year

to over 30,000 children and young people and over 9,000 parents and guardians.

"During this time, SICAP workers continued to offer support to some of the most vulnerable in our communities, working with over 26,000 people on a one-to-one basis. The dedication has led to life changing impacts for many people."

GIVES US A SNAPSHOT

An Taoiseach was "impressed" by the case-studies in the report. He said they alongside some "exchanges" he had that morning with people supported through the programme gave him "a snapshot of the variety of the work and the adaptability and versatility of a locally-led and locally-delivered programme".

COMMUNITY CALL

"SICAP is a great example of how existing local structures can be used in a flexible and adaptable way to meet the ongoing needs of communities," he said, pointing to

the Community Call initiative in responding to the pandemic. During this, local authorities and LCDCs worked closely with SICAP staff and other agencies to ensure a collaborative approach to responding to local needs.

CHAMPION

He commended all involved in the programme: Minister O'Brien, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the LDCs, LCDCs and Pobal and staff and volunteers.

"Again, I want to acknowledge that Mr. O'Brien is a great champion at government level for community development in general and for SICAP in particular," he concluded.

DOWNLOAD THE REPORT

The 2020 Annual SICAP Report was commissioned and completed by Pobal which manages the programme on behalf of the Department. It can be downloaded from:

<https://bit.ly/SICAP2020>

TOP LEVEL ENDORSEMENT FOR “COMMUNITY LED APPROACH”

- Taoiseach talks of “building on range of programmes to support communities”

There has been a near constant campaign over the years to have community-led approaches to development recognised as being of prime importance by policy-makers and, on July 3rd, An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, lent his support.

“It’s now clear that community-led and community-based approaches are the best way to tackle disadvantage at a local and community level and deliver community needs in a proven and sustainable way,” said An Taoiseach, speaking in Cork.

“We are committed to refining and building on a range of programmes to support communities, including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP),” he added.

“The Government I lead is deeply committed to supporting community development approaches in order to improve the lives of people living in difficult circumstances,” he said.

He pointed to discussions about new supports coming for communities.

“Through our cabinet sub-committee, I’ve been in discussions with Joe (Minister of State) as to how we can develop new approaches and new supports for partnerships and for community development, particularly in areas that need it the most. And also that we develop new capital programmes to (build) facilities,” he said.

“HEARTENING” SAYS O’BRIEN

Welcoming An Taoiseach’s comments and his launch of the report on social inclusion, Minister of State Joe O’Brien, said:



• Joe O’Brien, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, and Taoiseach Micheál Martin in Gerry O’Sullivan Park, Cork.

“It is heartening to have a Taoiseach who understands the value of grassroots community work.

“His endorsement of SICAP is very much valued and appreciated. I echo his welcome for this report. And my own commitment is to ensure that we continue to serve those people who need us most, and that we ensure that SICAP remains a key intervention and protects and nurtures individuals and communities that we engage

with.”

“My Department supports the Government’s vision for a fair Ireland. We have to realise this vision by promoting community development and supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.

“A core part is ensuring that all communities and all individuals have the chance to contribute to and benefit from (recovery),” he said.

“The SICAP programme is at the heart of that mission seeking to reach the most marginalised in Irish society, ensuring the most vulnerable are not left behind and have the same opportunities as everyone else.”

He said it was his “absolute pleasure” to be in Cork as Minister of State in the Department of Rural and Community Development to launch the annual SICAP report.

- AM

SOLIDARITY AMIDST COVID

“We all witnessed, during the pandemic, great examples of community at work,” said An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, speaking in Cork.

“It is vital now that we place a particular focus in our efforts to ensure that our recovery is inclusive, sustainable for everybody and that it is fair. That is a key part of our economic recovery programme,” he said.

“Throughout the pandemic, we were able to draw on a deep and innate sense of community and

solidarity to get us through this,” he said.

He was “immensely proud of how us as a people pulled together, particularly looking after those who are less fortunate and in difficult and vulnerable situations and who needed our help most”.

He added that he was “very conscious that many very vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities have had a very difficult time over the last 16 months.”

“Notwithstanding the Delta

variant and it will be challenging - as we know there are many twists and turns on the Covid journey - we are making progress and the sense of community has been central to that progress.”

He highlighted the central mission in the Programme for Government which is to build stronger and safer communities.

“Tackling social and economic disadvantage is a key priority for this government,” he said.



THIS PROGRAMME REALLY TACKLES POVERTY & EXCLUSION - O'BRIEN

In his speech in Cork on July 3rd, Minister of State Joe O'Brien said:

"I am delighted to be able to return to Cork alongside the Taoiseach and I thank him for accepting my invitation to launch this report and help highlight the vitally important work of SICAP.

"I am very proud of SICAP – its importance as the State's key tool for addressing social inclusion, particularly at a time of national crisis, cannot be overstated.

"This is confirmed by the annual report which highlights the importance and flexibility of the programme during the pandemic as well as the capacity and expertise of staff in Local Development Companies (LDCs), who responded so effectively - to ensure the needs of the communities they serve continued to be met at the height of the public health crisis.

"SICAP will be facing new challenges as we progress the social recovery from COVID and I am committed to supporting the programme to do just that".

TRUSTED

He said that LDCs, such as Cork City Partnership, were at the heart of communities, were trusted, and the dedication of their staff - and staff of local authorities - had been an inspiration.

"So we see now more than ever the value of a locally-led programme and what can be achieved," he said. He complimented the "collaborative approach that has always been a foundation of SICAP and a key strength".



• Minister of State Joe O'Brien in Cork. All photos by A. Meagher for 'Changing Ireland'.

"We know that those on the ground are best placed to know the emerging and most pressing needs locally and giving them the flexibility in responding to those needs is vital."

VITAL FLEXIBILITY

He said that flexibility was "another key to SICAP's success".

Giving the example of Cork city's 'Friendly Call' service - one of the case-studies referred to by An Taoiseach - he said 360 people receive a call every week and the service is being expanded.

On a recent tour of projects in the city he met beneficiaries of the service.

"For me the Friendly Call service encapsulates what SICAP is about

"There are lots of gaps and still too many geographical areas and pockets which suffer from inter-generational poverty"
- Minister Joe O'Brien

and indeed how it should strive to grow – reaching people who would not otherwise have been reached, and perhaps have not yet been reached. Perhaps people who fall between stools, so to speak.

"We have our education system, our health system, our social protection system. But there are lots of gaps in between, and there are still too many geographical areas and pockets which suffer from inter-generational poverty which need increased and sustained support to break that cycle of poverty," he said.

"I really believe that SICAP, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, is one of the key tools available to Government to ensure that the national recovery from Covid reaches into the most disadvantaged households and communities.

"But it's also a key tool to tackle that intergenerational poverty and social exclusion," he said.

PROVED THEMSELVES

"The local development companies that span the country, that have been implementing SICAP, have proven themselves to be responsive and adaptable, connected to their localities and trusted by their communities. These are invaluable assets we in Government must support and develop," he said.

POBAL SUPPORT

He added that Pobal provides "tremendous support to my Department, particularly in relation to SICAP".

"We have a strong partnership and we share a vision of an inclusive and equal Ireland."

Both the Minister of State and An Taoiseach thanked in particular Prof. Deiric Ó Broin, who is stepping down after three years, as Pobal's chairperson.

- AM

Cork Youthreach taught me about poverty and "randomness of birth"

Born and reared 10 miles outside Cork city, before he moved to Dublin, Minister of State Joe O'Brien recalled his early years when speaking at the SICAP report launch on July 3rd.

He told how experiences he had working in Youthreach in Cork City partly shaped his life and how he learned two "abiding" lessons in that time.

"After I left UCC, I had the experience that in many ways has led me to be here today. I worked in

what is now known as Cork Learning Support Services, essentially a Youthreach service - a second chance education for young people.

"I did various jobs there - including taking classes, mentoring work, but also home liaison.

"Some of the older young people there were not much younger than me at the time, so in many ways I identified with them very directly. But in many other ways, our life paths were miles apart."

"Many of the young people there

came from tough backgrounds, what we might call 'disadvantaged' under SICAP.

"And my abiding learning (from my time in the training centre) centred around two things:

"Firstly, that I was lucky. And that those young people in the training centre were very often unlucky in terms of the different sets of circumstances that they were born into."

"My second learning was: I believe

that we all have a responsibility to address the randomness of birth that perpetuates generational poverty and disadvantage and continues to limit opportunities."

"That's what has guided my path, to a large extent, over the past 20 years," he said.

YOUTHREACH

SHOW US THE MONEY!

- Taoiseach & Minister sound supportive
- Community funding half of 2008 levels

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Funding was possibly the only unaddressed element of the otherwise remarkable launch by An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, of the annual SICAP report.

The report was renamed a “progress report” on the day - and that is a fair description because workers have continually surpassed almost all targets since the programme was launched in 2018. Last year, they succeeded despite the pandemic (and from talking to staff the targets are by no means low).

At the launch, the mainstream media put questions to An Taoiseach on everyday issues such as Brexit, Covid-19 and the Mother and Baby Homes. I took the opportunity to ask about funding for SICAP and community development generally.

It was the only question asked about SICAP following the launch. Clearly, the programme is good news.

The SICAP programme had of course surpassed its targets and both An Taoiseach and the Minister gave great credit to all involved.

However, as we put it to both An Taoiseach and the Minister: “You didn’t mention funding. Community workers keeping an eye on today would be really encouraged by you launching this SICAP report, but can you say something about the funding aspect? Maybe you’ve talked about that?”

An Taoiseach replied:

“Well, we’re going to continue with that. Significant funding has already been provided, and of course we want to maintain and sustain supports to communities that have been in play during the pandemic and certainly in the years ahead, and we’ll be looking afresh at how we can do that - through the various subheads if you like of the various budget lines - how we can continue to support community development more generally, but particularly SICAP.”

Minister O’Brien added:

“I would draw attention to the fact that we launched a new Community Development Programme just last week, a one million euro line, and that’s something we want to grow as well. (It’s) very much focused on grassroots community development as well. And it’s a slightly new way of doing things, and we’ll be watching that very closely. And I’m able to build that over time as well. And that might inform how we build SICAP into the future as well.”



• Paul Geraghty, Principal Officer, Dept. of Rural and Community Development, Anna Shakespeare, CEO of Pobal, Joe O’Brien, Minister of State, Nicola Dunne, Pobal, An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, and Catherine Sheahan, Pobal, in Gerry O’Sullivan Park, Cork.

30,000 MARCHED

The investment - which looks set to rise - in the new Community Development Programme augurs well. However, workers and volunteers see there is much catching up to do across the Community Sector.

As recently as February of last year, 30,000 childcare workers and supporters marched in Dublin - the last big march before lockdowns came into force. They were campaigning for more investment as childcare workers were leaving the sector due to low wages. It was the biggest community sector march for some time. A decade earlier, numerous marches took place over the impact of austerity cuts on community funding. SIPTU, community activists and UCC academics - to name but some - have previously highlighted the impact of those earlier cuts (as documented in our archive). Nothing has radically changed since then.

HALF 2008 LEVEL

In Cork, on July 3rd, the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) welcomed the Taoiseach’s launch of the SICAP report, but noted the funding level for this work is less than half what it was 13 years ago.

CEO Joe Saunders began by saying it was “encouraging” to see An Taoiseach pay tribute to local development companies for their contribution, particularly over the past year.

For instance, the report sets out “several instances of LDCs, through SICAP, providing much needed supports to vulnerable communities across the country,” he said.

“Notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic, the SICAP programme met all targets, providing assistance to 26,178 individuals and 2,687 local community groups.”

Nonetheless, as he pointed out, “The 2020 SICAP budget of approximately €39 million stands well under half of what it was in 2008.”



• ILDN CEO Joe Saunders in conversation with Taoiseach Micheál Martin.

“I hope that through Minister O’Brien’s continued commitment to the Programme and the Taoiseach’s personal interest that this can be addressed in Budget 2022,” he said.

EDDIE HOBBS

The launch was memorable for being the first live national event focused on community development in many months.

There was even an historic tinge to the occasion as it was great to see community development endorsed at such as high level. It was unprecedented and all involved hope it bears fruit.

There was also a cheery Cork atmosphere evident, with jokes about the need for Cork people to spread their wings and their talent around the country and worldwide. An Taoiseach is from Cork now living in Dublin. Likewise, the Minister.

Perhaps we should have called in Cork finance legend Eddie Hobbs who has also demonstrated his talent nationally.

As he used to quip in his Celtic Tiger era television programme: ‘Show me the money!’

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

COMMUNITY NON-PROFITS MAY LOSE JOBS CLUBS AS GOVERNMENT PUTS SERVICE OUT TO PUBLIC TENDER

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Government moves to trial a new job-seekers support service by putting the work out to public tender - inviting in private sector bids - have been criticised by SIPTU and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

In late May, the Department of Social Protection issued a public tender notice for "the provision of employment assistance and advice supports to clients referred by the Department, primarily those who are long term unemployed and in receipt of a social welfare payment but also including some other client groups."

Initially the new service will cover only Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Offaly, Laois, Longford and Westmeath.

The Department of Social Protection says it plans to expand services, and that existing operations could apply under the proposed tender.

"It is hoped and expected that local community and voluntary organisations will respond to the RFT and offer to provide services in their areas of operation," the Department stated.



Nonetheless, SIPTU warns that about 300 people who provide support and advice to unemployed people could see their own jobs lost. On July 9th, SIPTU members, working in local employment services, held a socially distanced protest outside the Department of Social Protection in Dublin "to highlight their opposition to plans to privatise these essential community services".

At the protest, the trade union launched a campaign called 'Our Community is Not for Sale'.

It seeks "an immediate halt to tenders for private companies to bid for state contracts to run programmes to assist people getting back into the workforce".

"It is time to call the Government out. If these tendering processes proceed as planned it will lead to the wholesale privatisation of local employment services. This will see the forcing out of the effective

community-based non-profit providers of local employment services," said SIPTU community division organiser, Adrian Kane.

BEGGARS BELIEF

Martina Earley, speaking on behalf of the ILDN's 49 local development companies, said the move "will instantly close Jobs Club" in the trial counties and "later in 2021 will inevitably lead to the closure of vital Local Employment Services (LES) and Jobs Clubs across the remainder of the country."



• Martina Earley.

The ILDN continues to favour retaining and expanding the community-rooted, not-for-profit LES that has supported jobseekers especially in disadvantaged areas for 25 years.

When the service was vetted by Indecon in 2018 it became clear that LES costs and achievement rates were ahead of those achieved by private companies under the Department's Jobpath initiative.

Independent TD Thomas Pringle said the LES cost of finding someone employment cost about €1,200 less money. The service is also tailored and inclusive and the projects are community-based.

Arguing earlier this year for the LES's retention, the ILDN's Joe Saunders said, "Cost-per-unit models do not serve jobseekers well. There is no upside in cost, governance or service levels with such a model."

The network had proposed expanding the LES so that it would "be open to all jobseekers."

Ms Earley said, "It beggars belief that the Department would move to dismantle such important services for those without work at such a critical time."

"The timing could not be worse as communities face into a post pandemic unemployment crisis."

"This move will deprive [people] of walk-in, person centred, community-based employment services and all the supports that such services provides. Instead,



• Local Employment Service staff in Tralee in 2015. Pic courtesy RTE.

jobseekers will be faced with a centralised profit-driven, results-based process which will not be accessible to all jobseekers."

"The ILDN [proposal] would give an efficient, accessible service to jobseekers as well as transparency and value for money for the taxpayer," she said.

"The Minister and the Department must revisit this decision," she added.

Others were also vocal. For instance, Dublin South City Partnership tweeted, "We prioritise the needs of our clients, meeting them where they are at in life. New proposals for employment services monetize individuals and disregard those who are most distanced from the labour force."

UNMATCHABLE

In 2019, then ILDN chairperson Marie Price-Bolger put it directly to the government of the day that privatisation of these



• Marie Price-Bolger.

services was anti-community.

"Our sector consistently provides services on behalf of government departments in an efficient, effective and value for money model that cannot be matched by any private sector programme," she said. "LDCs are all not-for-profit, registered charities that operate to a very high standard. For example (her own) South Dublin County Partnership adheres to EU audit standards."

"We operate for the benefit of clients. We reinvest every penny in our communities, and not in directors' fees, as we (volunteer directors) well know," she said.

WHAT DO JOBS CLUBS DO?



• Linda Bolger, a jobs club leader in Monaghan.

Taking one Jobs Club as an example, here's how the local development company explains the work:

"The Jobs Club is a job-seeking skills programme funded by the Department of Social Protection and delivered by Monaghan Integrated Development to support local communities. The Jobs Club is a mobile service and delivers the training outreach in communities, therefore job seekers around Co. Monaghan and Co. Cavan can access the training.

"The aim of the Jobs Club is to support job ready people into employment by delivering a part time formal training programme which consists of CV Preparation, Cover Letter Writing, Job Searching, Interview Preparation/ Techniques and Mock Interview.

"The Jobs Club also provides a one-to-one service to assist people on an individual basis, whatever their particular needs are," it says.

New communities urged to consider fostering

Tusla, the child and family agency, wants to be able to match more children with families from a similar cultural, national and/or religious background and it is calling on families from new communities to strongly consider fostering.

“The potential for people from new communities to offer a child a foster home that is reflective of their family culture and heritage is immense,” says Jacqui Smyth, principal social worker. “The transition to foster care is a difficult enough one for any child. It is scary and challenging. The challenge is greater when the child also has to adapt to a different cultural or ethnic home life. On the contrary, there is comfort in living with a person who understands your needs from a cultural perspective - where the food is familiar to the child and there is an understanding of their religious and cultural norms.”

Asked why people from new communities should come forward, she said the benefits from fostering can be huge.

“Children in foster care have experienced so much change and trauma that being able to give them a safe and stable home is an immensely fulfilling and rewarding endeavour. Every family is unique and will have something different to offer a child in foster care. Being a positive part of a child’s journey and helping them to achieve their full potential will bring huge rewards to you and your family,” she said.

Also, more people qualify to foster children - and teenagers - than most people realise. (See the myth-buster on page 13).

A small number of families from new communities already foster



• Happy heads. Photo from UK fostering services.

“Tusla is eager to undertake this in partnership with the communities to whom we are reaching out”
- Jacqui Smyth

children and, in their quest for higher participation levels, Tusla is appealing to community groups to help spread the word that migrant and new communities families should apply to foster children.

“We would welcome the opportunity to engage with community groups around this endeavour,” said Jacqui. “We are open to meeting and talking to any and all organisations. Some consultations have already taken place on a local level and more would be extremely welcome. This is a learning journey and Tusla is eager to undertake this in partnership

with the communities to whom we are reaching out.”

For interested applicants, the main criteria are having residency or citizenship, a steady means of income and the time to invest in fostering a child. Fostering is open to both individuals and couples and, while a stable home environment is

required, fosterers don’t need to own their own house.

In regards to status, applications are invited from people who are non-Irish nationals once they can provide proof of residency.

“Families can apply anytime and if they meet the basic criteria that applies to all applicants, more children will find a home that matches their needs,” said Jacqui.

“As an organisation we are acutely aware of the importance of the ethnic and cultural identity of foster children who have experienced so much change and upheaval.

“We in TUSLA want to be in a position to be able to offer children foster homes that are reflective of their own ethnicity and culture. It is a hugely important component of the matching process,” she said.

As of March of this year, Tusla had 5,884 children being raised by foster families and most hosts are traditional Irish families.

More info: <https://www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/foster-care/>

- By Allen Meagher

How to apply if you’re new to Ireland

Tusla welcomes applications for non-relative fostering from those who:

- have residency permits,
- or have refugee status or leave to remain,
- or can provide proof of EU citizenship,
- or can establish that they have permanent residency in this country.

The logic behind this is that children in foster care need to be assured of the stability of their care in a very particular way.

Families and individuals thinking about becoming foster carers need to be able to devote their time, energy and attention to the process and being sure of their residency is an important part of that.

What are the main criteria that apply?

Individuals or families must be in a stable place themselves to focus on their foster care journey.

Some basic criteria are as follows:

- Minimum age of applicant - 25.
- You must be of good physical and mental health.
- You need to have a stable place to live (rented or owned) with space for a child.
- You need to have residency in Ireland.
- You must be financially stable in your own right (able to pay your bills).
- You will have to undertake a Garda clearance as certain convictions (e.g. violence/child-related) are unacceptable to fostering.

Tusla Fostering’s role is to recruit, train and assess potential fosterers.

Full information on the process can be found at: www.fostering.ie

BLESSINGS SAYS JUST DO IT!

INTERVIEW BY GRACE BARRETT

"My name is Blessings, and originally I come from Nigeria. About 19 years ago, I moved here to Newbridge. I have four kids, all Irish children. I foster a child who is nearly 19 years old now.

"I've fostered my daughter for 18 years. I had her since she was nine months old, so she grew up with my own kids. My first daughter was almost the same age. So, I felt like I had twins and they've grown up to be like twins."

"There have been ups and downs, but I've had more of the good times, because from the start I made up my mind that I was going to do this to the best of my ability. I decided in my mind and in my heart. That's a decision that a lot of people really have to take. It's very difficult, when you have your own children, to bring someone totally new into your own family home. You want to be a parent to them.

"Sometimes, I have to sit down and say to myself, 'Look, Blessings. Give the child a reason to be alive. The child deserves it. The child is a human being like every other person. Except for some unfortunate thing that happened to her.'

"I said I'd give her the opportunity to live life to the fullest, just like anyone else.

"There were sometimes challenges, like with access. We weathered that as a family and stood strong during all those years, hoping for the best, believing that things were all going to be okay.

"She is a sweet, sweet child, she has her own personality and that made it easier for us. She's so lovely. She's kind and caring.

"It's just the same as with your own children. I would say to anyone to do it, if they have the heart to give a child the chance to be the best that they could be. You're giving them a home, a peaceful place where they will have calmness, food, clothes on their back and all the things humans need to thrive. If you want to do that for another human being, you will never regret it in your life.

"It is one of the best gifts you can give another person. It helps them to stabilise. Research has found that supervision and attachment are among the greatest things for a child to thrive. If a child has no one to bond with, to attach to, to be supervised by, that child cannot thrive.

"So if anyone thinks they could be that person, there'll be ups and downs - just like there will be with any other thing in life. Let them

• ***Blessings has raised a child from nine months old to 19.***



• *Blessings relaxing at home in Kildare.*

make up their mind from the start, like I did, that no matter what, I will go through this.

"The overall satisfaction and the joy that you can give of stability and life to another human being is the reward.

TO OTHER IRISH PARENTS

"I'm Irish, I'm Irish now. I'm going to be here for a long time. So I speak for the rest of Irish parents. So that they can see fostering as parenting.

"There's nothing greater than seeing another human being - who otherwise may have perished or something would have happened to them - to see them thrive. Look at my baby, my daughter, she's so blessed, so happy. She's well brought up, she's well mannered. She's no different than my other, my birth kids. They are the same and I treat them the same. I see them the same.

"She's going to college now, doing nursing. She was a prefect in her school. She got A1s and A2s and every year she won the award for the child with the best attendance. She's

into sport and very active in church and with her youth group. She just passed her piano exam with honours and now she can teach piano. She is thriving.

"Sometimes, she drives me to tears. She looked at me (one day) and said, 'What you did for me I will never forget. I will tell my children. I will tell my children's children.'

"She compares herself with (another foster child) who was moved from one home to another. She asks why is she special. Why did God love her so much and give her to me? Why did her own life turn out good? Why? What happened?"

"I'm not saying this to praise myself or to look good or something. I'm just saying how it is.

"At a point, I almost wanted to give up, but then I had a chat with my husband and he said, 'You cannot give up now. You can't. You said you made up your mind.' I came back to my senses and I kept my baby, all these years. I will never regret it. It's one of the greatest things that I've done in life.

"I am very happy, blessed and proud of myself. I'm working towards a PhD, but no achievement

Blessings' child is now 19 and she is happy to say how it went and why others should consider it. She wants to see more diversity among foster parents as that is the Ireland we now live in.

We are grateful to the Tusla staff members who helped behind the scenes to connect Blessings with us and make this collaboration happen. Due to the need for confidentiality, not all foster parents can speak of their experience.

Blessings' interview speaks volumes. A must read!

- Editor

will equal this. So, I would say to my fellow Irish people: 'Go and do it. If you have made up your mind, come onboard, it is very rewarding. There will be ups and downs - brace yourself - and do it!'

INCLUSION

"It's important for people to know that the demand for foster carers is huge. Hopefully, it doesn't become a crisis situation.

"Inclusion is so important because the Ireland of today is so different to what it was in the past and going forward, it's going to be like this, even more so.

"So with Tusla starting inclusion now, a little late - it's fine because we have started, but we must continue, because the face of the nation is going to look like this from now on and we have to get everyone on board.

"Everyone should know, not just feel, that they belong, and that this is their home. That they can thrive here and can give it their best shot here.

"And that they can work hard and do good for the nation's sake, and move the nation forward. I see that for Ireland."

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MYTHS?

Powerful beliefs, mythical in status, often put people off fostering. How many have influenced your views?

For one, you don't need to be living a perfect life to foster. To foster a child today, you don't need to be married, or have a partner, or own your own house, or be an Irish citizen.

Attracting new fosterers is a challenge, especially in the capital. Yet, there are many fostering opportunities.

"In Dublin, the pool of people who feel they have the capacity to foster is decreasing," said one social worker.

In essence, Tusla is looking for people who are in a position to open their homes and hearts and look after a child who cannot live with their family.



ALTRUISTIC

Foster parents are often altruistic, community minded people who like to live a little outside the box. Sound like anyone you know?

Studies in the UK found that people who become foster parents are often altruistic, community minded people who like to live a little outside the box. Does that sound like anyone you know?

Also, people who have struggled in their own lives should not think of themselves as unable to foster. As Tusla says: "You can apply to foster if you have faced challenges or adversity in your own childhood or adulthood, once you have effectively dealt with them and have the ability to provide care for a child/children."

Editor Allen Meagher was surprised - chatting with Jacqui Smyth from Tusla Fostering - to have many of his beliefs shattered and put together this list of six myth-busters.

6 facts about fostering

1. FOSTER CARERS CAN WORK FULL TIME.

You can be single and work full-time and still foster - for example, by fostering semi-independent older teenagers. Full-time workers can also consider providing respite fostering care - for example, where you foster a child for one weekend a month.

2. OLDER CHILDREN ARE OFTEN EASIER TO CARE FOR.

People gravitate towards younger children because of a false belief that older children are harder to care for. However, older children are often able to communicate better and look after themselves. All children however need the same loving care.

3. YOU CAN BE SINGLE AND FOSTER.

People think they have to have a partner and have kids themselves. Not so. Your religious beliefs or sexual orientation also do not matter.

3

4. PEOPLE WITH (MINOR) CONVICTIONS CAN APPLY.

Having a conviction, for example for a minor traffic offence, does not automatically rule out an applicant.*

* Applicants, however, with a record of violence and/or domestic abuse are always rejected.

2

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6. AGE IS NOT A BARRIER.

You can foster at any age once you are relatively fit and healthy to care for a child.

5. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AN IRISH CITIZEN.

Being resident here may be sufficient. Applications are accepted from people who have residency permits, who have refugee status or leave to remain, from EU citizens and those who can establish that they have permanent residence in this country.



Ireland's only community-owned hotel

Hotelier Mary Mullen: "We never set out to build a hotel!"

**BY SORCHA
GRISEWOOD**



The Sliabh Beagh hotel in County Monaghan is Ireland's only community run hotel. It was set up by a group of visionary, committed locals who formed Knockatallon Development Group which spearheaded the entire project. Remarkably, Mary Mullen, chairperson of the board of directors, says, "We never set out to build a hotel."

"We had a parish hall here that would have been built in the 1950s that had fallen into disrepair and there would have been very little use being made of it. We had a parish priest at the time, Canon Gilsenan, who called a meeting and he stood up and he said sure we could always rent it out as an industrial unit. That got the reaction he was looking for in that people didn't want that to happen and we set up a committee."

"Our original intention had been maybe a bar and restaurant and self-catering accommodation, but when we talked to the like of Fáilte Ireland, they advised us that a hotel would be a better option," she says.

SPECIAL PLACE

The hotel is named after a 380metre mountain straddling counties Monaghan, Fermanagh and Tyrone. It's a remote and isolated part of the country, but what it lacks in development it makes up for with natural beauty. The area has been designated a special area of conservation and is listed under the European habitats directive. There are also numerous trails and walks in the vicinity and Monaghan County Council recently launched a plan that includes Sliabh Beagh.

The hotel opened in 2000 with funding from the International Fund for Ireland, the INTERREG programme, and the Peace and Reconciliation Fund, amongst others. It has been operating successfully since although Covid-19 restrictions have proven challenging.



• *Staycationtastic! Sliabh Beagh Hotel in Co. Monaghan provides a perfect base for exploring the local countryside.*

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL REGENERATION

The area was in dire need of economic and social regeneration and had been severely impacted by the Troubles. There were significant road closures which made access difficult. There were image problems to address as well as a dearth of public transport, employment, amenities, broadband coverage, housing and tourism. Young people were leaving the area.

John Moyna is the hotel manager and he says that, when they opened the hotel in 2000, they didn't have "village status". However, "The council came on board with us and put in street lighting, footpaths and a sewerage system and then a whole lot of new houses were built. It was the catalyst that brought it all together. Then back about seven years ago, we looked at adding some amenities. We built three astro-turf pitches on a piece of land beside the hotel - funded through monies raised in the hotel and through the LEADER programme."

There were over 100 derelict houses in the area. However, thanks to community efforts, they

have now been replaced and 27 new houses have been constructed.

Other amenities and services followed with the set up of a preschool and playground. The area twinned with Geel in Belgium and Prince Edward Island in Canada and that link brought visitors and tourists. Seamus Sherry, also a member of the hotel's board of directors, states that the hotel has boosted the profile of the area and that as well as groups from Northern Ireland, England and the US, they also get a lot of visitors from Canada who "come to see their roots and where their people come from".

PROFITS INVESTED IN COMMUNITY

What makes the hotel unique, aside from the fact that it is entirely run by members of the community and has a voluntary board of directors, is the range of initiatives that it is involved in. Fiona Connolly is another voluntary member of the board of directors and she also runs an adventure centre. She emphasises that though the hotel is a social enterprise and a company limited by guarantee, they are still a "trading company".

However, any profits made are

reinvested into the delivery of the Community Services Programme and there's "more flexibility to provide the facilities for meetings at a minimal rate", because they are a social enterprise.

For instance, as well as providing local employment, the hotel also facilitates and runs a bowling club, dancing for senior citizens, a womens' group and a Foróige group. The most impactful project however is the subsidised meals programme for vulnerable members of the community.

According to Mary, the hotel does approximately 200 to 250 Sunday lunches for locals of which about 100 would be subsidised meals for the elderly. Funding for this initiative comes through POBAL, who provide €136,000 per annum for wages.

Incidentally, Mary is dedicated to widescale community development - she is currently chairperson of Monaghan Integrated Development.

AN OVERLY AMBITIOUS PLAN?

John tells me that when starting out, the group were told that some of their ideas were





Shop, cafe & bike hire

Letter from Pullough

Dear Editor,

How're things? I just wanted to give you and your readers an update regarding our shop, village and greenway and to invite you all to come visit. That was a great article in 'Changing Ireland' (Summer 2019) and people still reference it when chatting about Pullough.

Our shop has continued to trade and our volunteers have been fantastic and very dedicated, especially over these strange times.

Our village had one bad spell with Covid after Christmas, but no deaths thankfully and people are looking to the future again after a tough period.

The new Greenway has come to fruition and opened, without fuss, in April. With restrictions lifting, more people are coming to visit Pullough - walking and cycling.

Your readers are invited to call and visit our community shop and café. We recently installed a wheelchair accessible toilet and we repainted the shop.

We can treat you to tea/coffee, scones and buns and we also now rent bicycles.

As ever, we are still reliant on volunteers, but there's good news. Offaly Volunteer Centre was launched on May 17th, during National Volunteer Week.

So, exciting times for Pullough and for Offaly with a government-funded centre to support those wishing to volunteer and volunteer-involving organisations. It was much needed for our county.

Call for a walk or cycle on the new Greenway and pop into our shop anytime. Offaly readers interested in volunteering are invited to check out volunteeroffaly.ie

Kind Regards,
Martin Buckley,
Chairperson, Pullough Community Shop,
Pullough, Co. Offaly

** The Grand Canal Greenway is an historic trail which traverses Leinster from Ringsend in Dublin City to the River Shannon at Shannon Harbour in County Offaly, a little past Pullough.*



CONGRATS! Martin was recently elected chairperson of the board to oversee Offaly Volunteer Centre. We wish him and his colleagues every success.

BACKGROUND: In 2019, 'Changing Ireland' featured Pullough Community Shop on its front cover. The volunteer-led project remains one of only a handful of community shops in the country, yet it has gone from strength to strength.

By taking over the shop, villagers pulled their village back from the brink of decline.

Martin was among the co-founders. He is pictured below with fellow volunteer Paddy O'Reilly.

Pullough has made a remarkable turnaround. This year, it was one of seven Offaly villages awarded funding (€100,000 in Pullough's case) through the Town & Village Renewal Scheme. The village that almost ceased to be is most assuredly back on the map.



"overly ambitious". However, their plan was "the only one to ever fully come to fruition". Briege McGinnity and Patricia McCrudden work in the hotel in accounts and administration respectively and tell me that a lot of people would have said they were "crazy" to consider building a hotel in the area given its remote location and lack of services.

He said that, nevertheless, the beauty of working in a community run hotel is that you do feel part of a community and that most of the business comes from "returning visitors, family events, weddings, funerals, that type of thing."

"You know the people and even if you don't know them well you know who they are. It's nice for them too because, when they come through the door, they immediately feel welcome."

IS THIS A MODEL THAT COULD BE REPLICATED?

Mary says that there's no 'template' that could exist for the idea and she's "not sure that it's something you can really advise people on". She adds that, "You can tell us your story, but depending on where you are or what kind of area you're in, it's probably going to be a different story."

Seamus points out that you need to have a lot of "buy-in" from people in the area. However, Mary adds that they would certainly be happy to assist anyone interested in replicating the idea!

BOOK NOW!

A room with a view and a positive social impact! That's what you get for your money - and much more - when you book a getaway holiday to Sliabh Beagh: <https://sliabhbeaghhotel.ie>



BALLYBOUGHAL, FINGAL, CO. DUBLIN

YOU CAN NOW GET A LEADER GRANT FOR . . .

You can get a LEADER grant for hedge funds now.

We've all heard of hedge funds, though most of us don't know what they are. However, they're ahead of us in Ballyboughal, Fingal, Co. Dublin, certainly in terms of treasuring nature and wildlife.

With a small LEADER grant - and some of their own hard-raised funds - a voluntary group brought hedgerow and biodiversity experts from near and far to meet and address locals about nature's true value.

This is true hedge fund investment. The series of nine workshops in Ballyboughal were held prior to the pandemic which many, including the W.H.O.'s Mike Ryan, blame on mankind's dismissal of and encroachment on nature.

It shows this group of volunteers were genuinely ahead of most of us. Recognising the need for more education, they applied for a small grant and were successful.

LEADER APPLICATION

Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society began the application process for LEADER funding in March 2016 and were successful in August 2017 - just short of 18 months.

The funds sought were to help run environmental workshops. While LEADER takes time, it can be transformative.

Until then, such events were organised on a voluntary basis. The new approach brought biodiversity consultants and lecturers into the area



• On a nature walk. Ballyboughal people do not take nature for granted - they enjoy and nurture local biodiversity.

for the first time.

"There is a biodiversity wave happening. We were there at the beginning and now it is gathering momentum," says Ann Lynch, founder member and secretary of Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society.

WORKSHOP RESULTS

The workshops enhanced the active

learning experience for participants. These were workshops on the move, involving learning by doing.

How many of us for example have ever been on a mycology walk, or know how to forage for herbs?

Ann believes the workshops, held over a 14-month period, also enhanced the area's reputation. More people have now heard of Ballyboughal and hold it in high regard when it comes to biodiversity.

ALARM BELLS RANG IN 1999

It's over 20 years since residents including Ann first grew alarmed. When hedgerows in the area began to disappear as farming intensified, it was seen as a call to action and led, in 1999, to the setting up of Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society. Its aim: "to promote hedgerows and their biodiversity and cultural value".



• LEFT: On a nature walk with an old hedgerow in the background.



• RIGHT: New hedgerow - an example of hedge-laying in Ballyboughal.

All photos courtesy of Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society.

HEDGE FUNDS



• We have this! Painting bee boxes in Ballyboughal, Fingal, Co. Dublin. Workshops don't need to be held indoors. This photo come from one in a series of nine workshops held in Ballyboughal supported by LEADER.

Since then, they have been busy bees - and yes they have also helped bees. Each year, through nature walks, training and workshops, the group has educated many hundreds of people on the history and botanical make-up of hedgerows.

"If we don't value the local environment ourselves, how can we expect planners to value it?" says Ann.

They conduct intergenerational nature walks for children aged 8 to 14, families and older active retired people.

The group also teaches 'hedgelaying' to farmers and anyone interested in learning this skill.

PREPARATION

To prepare for applying for LEADER funding, the Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society checked in with local networks and contacts, including a biodiversity expert, the GAA club, Foróige, mothers' groups, men's sheds, community councils, lecturers, and contacts within organisations such as the Heritage Council and Wildlife Trust.

This helped the Society to generate ideas for workshops. It helped them to identify people best suited to facilitating workshops and to get an idea of costs.

SUPPORT

This was the Society's first time

applying for LEADER funding and they gladly availed of support from Fingal LEADER Partnership, whose staff helped in particular with the necessary paperwork to support the application.

The workshops led to locals painting bee boxes, sampling local fruit and vegetables, and learning about various types of animals, falconry, birds and trees. The workshops attracted higher levels of interest and excitement than before and stronger attendances at events.

BEE-BUSY IN 2021

They have continued into 2021 with a second round of LEADER funding provided, again with support from Fingal LEADER Partnership.

As well as locally held workshops, this summer beginner beekeepers of all ages from around Ballyboughal travelled to Galtee Honey Farm in Tipperary.

"We dressed up in our suits and held frames with hundreds of worker bees and some developing Queens in our hands, a bit nerve wracking but amazing. We used a smoker to calm the bees which was fun. We saw bees coming back from collecting nectar and secreting honey. Later we cut honey off the frames and tasted ivy honey, clover honey, lime tree honey and sycamore honey," the group reported.

Overall, the many events have raised the village's profile and, being a local group, Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society makes a conscious effort to support local pubs or cafés after each workshop, giving participants an opportunity to discuss the events of the day. It has all helped to create a greater sense of camaraderie in the community, says Ann.

Follow the group on: <https://www.facebook.com/BiodiversityCorridor>

- By Allen Meagher



TOTAL BUDGET OF €3,898

The LEADER funding granted to Ballyboughal totalled €2,923, broken down as follows:

€1,836 EAFRD (EU)

contribution;

Plus €1,087 (the national contribution).

Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society contributed a further €975 to the project, bringing the total project budget to €3,898.

The LEADER grant was approved under: Theme 3 - Rural Environment; Sub-Theme - Local Biodiversity.

LESSONS & TIPS FOR OTHERS

From their experience, Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society recommends involving as many stakeholders in the community as possible in the decision-making process, discussing what the project should entail, what the funding is most needed for, and what should be included in the LEADER application.

STAY POSITIVE!

The LEADER application process can be arduous. It required a lot of time and effort by volunteers in Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society.

The important thing, they say, is to work through it and try to stay positive. This is a motto that the society applies to the protection and improvement of biodiversity in general. The focus is always on what has been achieved and what more can be done in the future.

No point beating around the bush!

There's no point in beating around the bush here. Many people still don't know how diverse LEADER is and how wide a range of groups can apply for funding. The funding is available and the support is easily found. It just takes patience and a willingness to learn.

To find out how the funding process works in practice and to get an overview of the main stages and requirements when making an application, contact the National Rural Network: <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie>

Rural-based local development companies (LDCs) also provide support and advice - in the instance shown here, from Fingal LEADER Partnership. Every LDC in the country is listed here: <https://ildn.ie/directory/>

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, to Daniel Bennett and staff in the National Rural Network and to Dr. Maura Farrell, NUIG, for their co-operation.

DON'T LAUGH NOW, THIS IS SERIOUS!

Humour should be recognised by academia as a tool in non-formal education settings and for engaging youth. It should be part of the curriculum on courses purporting to teach youthwork and related subjects, say the organisers of a comedy festival with a difference, held in June.

The 'Humour Festival' was aimed at youth workers and non-formal educators and it set out to "celebrate the value, importance, relevance, benefits, and power of humour" in working with individuals and groups.

It was the first event of its kind and involved facilitators and attendees from across Ireland and the EU. It was all conducted online.

BOTTOMS UP!

The 20 or so workshops included titles such as 'Bottoms Up! Comedy Steps towards Change', 'Humour as Healing', 'Humour & Theatre of the Oppressed' and 'Humour as Resilience'.

According to Derry-based youth worker Fergal Barr, one of the organisers, humour creates openings and outcomes, especially when you're trying to support young people.

"If you giggle together, you're making time with them, you're being sincere and you're being yourself. You can then transform the relationship," he says.

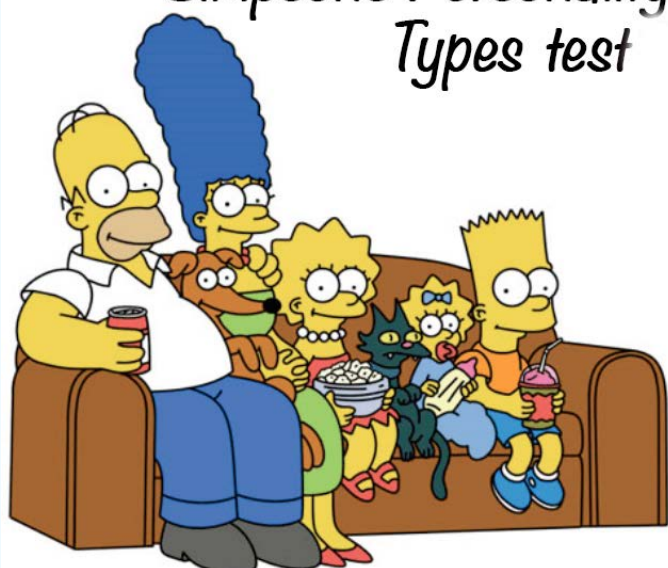
TRUST BUILDING

"A lot of young people are coming with a lot of baggage and anger about stuff. Having fun with them and giggling together might create an opening. They might see that you're sincere and trust you more than other adults," he says.

The festival pointed attendees to resources to incorporate humour and fun into their work. For instance the Myers Briggs test can be channelled through The Simpsons characters.

Watch this space for more from the Humour Alliance on the value of humour in community settings.

*Which one are you? Try the
Simpsons Personality
Types test*



IRD Duhallow

Showcase day for New

Volunteers and staff at the James O'Keeffe Institute in Newmarket, Co. Cork, were celebrating on June 29th, as IRD Duhallow rolled out the red carpet for a visit by Minister of State for Community Development (and Charities) Joe O'Brien.



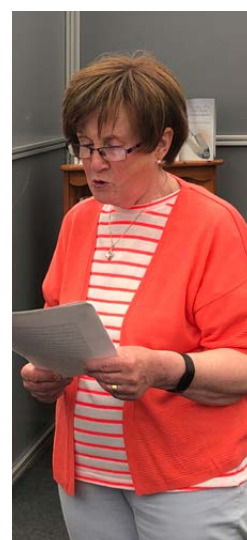
• Susanne Brennan, Dept. of Social Protection, Trina Dennehy, employment, training and social inclusion co-ordinator, IRD Duhallow,



• Michael Twohig and Ann Marie O'Bourke, board members, IRD Duhallow.



• Stylish SICAP workers Stephanie Moynihan and Trina Dennehy of IRD Duhallow.



• Kathleen Moylan makes herself heard.

wmarket non-profit

He was introduced to projects covering everything from warmer homes to biodiversity, LEADER-supported small businesses, outdoor recreation (pitch & putt), social enterprises and work supported through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.



• Award-winning Jenny-Rose Clarke of Toons Bridge Dairy greets Minister Joe O'Brien in Newmarket.



• Liam Buick looks on as colleagues explain the Warmer Homes Scheme.



• Ian McGregor makes a point, watched by Brigid-Íde Walsh (centre), to Minister Joe O'Brien. All photos by A. Meagher for 'Changing Ireland'.

WEST CORK

Taoiseach recalls Sherkin adventure in car without brakes



At the SICAP report launch, an Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, told of an adventure in the late 1980s on an island in West Cork in a car without brakes. He was with a fellow city councillor, the late Gerry O'Sullivan, after whom the park in which he was speaking was named.

He said he was "very privileged to be here as Taoiseach in Gerry O'Sullivan Park honouring his memory and his sense of community in the context of launching the SICAP annual report."

"I became friendly with the late Gerry O'Sullivan - a proud Labour Party member. He personified community engagement and had a great sense of humour and he was particularly interested in looking after disadvantaged young people," he recalled.

"Once, we went to a conference on fish on Sherkin Island. We weren't experts on fish, but we went. Gerry was Lord Mayor I think at the time.

"One of the local lads offered us a lift from the conference centre down to the pier. And he jollily went at great speed down the hill, only to let us know on the way down there were no brakes in the car."

"He said 'Don't worry!' - that there was a very opportune sandpit (at the bottom of the hill). And the car ended up in the sandpit."

"We calmly got out of the car and thanked him very much," he recalled.



Incidentally, Gerry went on to serve as Minister of State at the Department of the Marine with special responsibility for Port Safety. No doubt he too often told the story of using a sandpit by the pier as brakes.

He was born in 1936 and passed away in 1994. The city park named in his honour is not to be confused with Professor Gerry O'Sullivan Memorial Park - named after a namesake - in Caheragh, Co. Cork.

LIMERICK: What's another year?

Garryowen (pop. 4,000) still has no community centre

BY BETH ARDILL

Five years ago, 'Changing Ireland' highlighted good community work in Garryowen, Limerick city, and reported on why a community centre was vital for the area which has a population of just over 4,000 residents.



"We're the perfect candidate for a community centre and we have to be on top of the list by this point," said the then project coordinator of Garryowen Community Development Project (CDP) Maghnus Collins.

At the time, Garryowen had next to no youth facilities and parents who called to Garryowen CDP often got nowhere due to limited youth club capacity. CDP staff were all working unpaid overtime.

Staff were passionate about their work and the potential was clear if the community got the support it needed to set up a sufficiently staffed community centre.

Collins said at the time that Garryowen people "don't want handouts, they don't want to be spoonfed, but they need some of the supports and services provided already in other parts of the country."

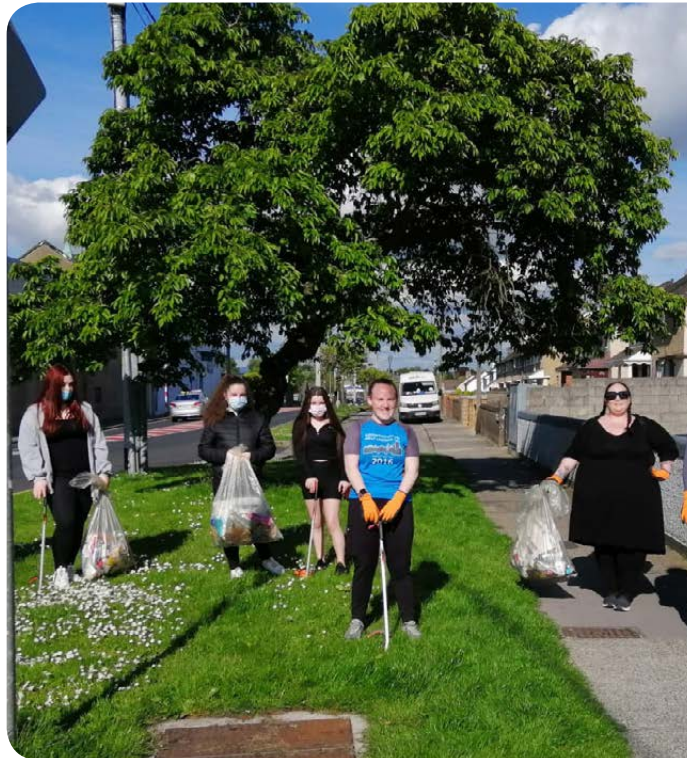
The estate was built back in the 1950s and he described the absence of a community centre as "an affront to the residents".

Beth Ardill, LIT student and a former volunteer working with young people in Garryowen, returned to see what has transpired since. She interviewed the CDP's current manager, John Buttery, to ask:

- Has Garryowen got its community centre?
- Is the CDP still highly reliant on volunteers?
- Is the CDP's premises now accessible to all, in particular wheelchair users?

WORKING HARD ON A CENTRE

Garryowen still does not have



• ABOVE: Garryowen volunteers taking part in a recent community clean up organised by Garryowen Residents Association with support from St John's Youth Club, Garryowen CDP and Limerick Youth Service.



• TOP RIGHT: A mural of St. Mary's Prize Band in Garryowen.

a community centre, but they are working hard on it, said John. They are at "the concept design stage" and hope to attract funding once the design is finalised. In the meantime, the CDP would welcome "a clear commitment of support" from Limerick City and County Council.

"It would be nice," said John.

The CDP has moved locations twice since 2016. Their current premises has some advantages: It is wheelchair accessible, but they are still based outside the actual community of Garryowen.

"It is far too small for our needs and, while we pay more than €20,000 annually in rent, we do not get a cent allocated in public funding to cover this cost."

IS THE CDP BETTER STAFFED?

In 2016, Garryowen struggled to provide for the youth living there - there were only 45 youth places available in an area home to over 800 young people.



• John Buttery, community development worker.

The number of one-parent families (50%) is exactly double the national average.

Today, the project has more staff, while volunteers remain central to its work - they help out especially with older people.

The CDP and Limerick Youth Service deliver a model of detached youth work with two additional staff.

Also, the CDP has recruited a sports hub co-ordinator to deliver

physical activity programmes in Garryowen in collaboration with Limerick Sports Partnership. This work receives funding from Sport Ireland.

Additionally, the CDP now has a group who can do home visits - delivering the ParentChild+ Programme to families throughout Limerick City.

However, as Mr Buttery says, "In community work, no position is permanent and there is, for example, an uncertain future for the positions of manager and youth worker when Regeneration funding is withdrawn in 2021."

WORKING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Mr Buttery said the pandemic "severely limited our capacity to support groups. Not only were numbers allowed in the hall cut by more than half, but staff lost valuable space and time having to work from home."



Local residents campaigning on and off for over 50 years

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

I asked him are more than 45 youths catered for with weekly activities by the CDP now?

He said the situation was improving but deteriorated when Covid-19 struck. Prior to the lockdowns around 50 young people were being supported. Restrictions meant only seven young people could be in the space at any one time.

VIOLENCE IS "A BLEAK TESTAMENT"

Buttery said, "The violence and anti-social behaviour that was endemic in Garryowen last summer stands as a bleak testament to the need for substantial investment in community space and community services".

From hearing this it is clear that Garryowen is in need of a community centre, a space where people can gather and where youths can get involved in activities instead of participating in anti-social behaviour.

MY GARRYOWEN EXPERIENCE

Although I only volunteered in Garryowen's youth club for a short few months, I got a good understanding of the youth. I volunteered every Monday night for an hour and a half with young people from sixth class. They were a vibrant group and I met some very strong characters as well as some very quiet youths.

Some were very talented - when they were preparing for a talent show I heard some great voices. When all the young people in the youth club arrived in the hall, the noise volume was deafening. There was never a dull evening during my time there.



In 2010, Garryowen Young Men's Group produced a video titled 'Does Garryowen need a Community Centre?'

Now, the odds are narrowing for the young film-makers to see pension age before Garryowen gets a community centre. One of the local residents they interviewed at the time was actually of pension age and had campaigned in her younger years for a centre.

Mrs. Reale, a resident of Garryowen for over 50 years said that when she moved in "the corporation" earmarked a site for a community centre.

"We went about it. Next thing was there were 17 objectors. We got fed up then. That was the end of it. ... And all the young fellas standing around on corners with nowhere to go."

Instead, Mrs. Reale and her fellow volunteers put their energy into organising Garryowen teams to enter the community games

"And none of the children involved ever went wrong. There was one year we won everything," she said. Praising the Christian Brothers, she said Garryowen had a proud history of producing "great hurlers and soccer players".

"Garryowen is not a bad place, but the youth have nowhere to go. That's what Garryowen is lacking," she said.

The film-makers ruled out the few obvious-looking potential locations. The Markets Fields stadium was for sports only. St John's Scout Hall couldn't be used because it's a heritage-protected building where 14 rooms are closed off because there's no fire escape.

Among those they interviewed was Kieran O'Donnell (FG) who was a councillor at the time. He has since been elected a TD, appointed as a Minister of State and, in fairness, he remains supportive a decade on.

But children grow up in a decade. How many more decades does the community have to wait? This particular Garryowen Young Men's Group, if they were to reform, would have to become the Garryowen Soon-To-Become-Middle-Aged Men's Group.

Some communities have it harder than others - which is a good reason why they should be prioritised.



• Mrs. Reale was one of the first campaigners for a community centre in Garryowen. Below: Maurice Quinlivan, TD, in a newspaper report on Garryowen's challenges.

National figures show Limerick city scoring highest in terms of long-term unemployment and poverty, while educational attainment is low. Many communities suffered extreme neglect by the local authority, leading to the setting up of the independent regeneration agency (now back under council control).

When Garryowen was not deemed needy enough to meet the criteria to be included in the initial regeneration program, it lost out on community funding. Had it been a little more "disadvantaged" it may by now have a multi-million euro community centre.

It has cost the community and the State more not having one.

In 2018, Jennifer O'Brien, then the manager of Southill Area Centre a few kilometres from Garryowen, pointed out that the annual cost of running a community centre in the city was almost the same as keeping one young person in a juvenile facility for a year - around €340,000

(incidentally by far the highest cost in Europe).

In any case it is odd that a long-standing community like Garryowen has been left without a community centre. It is almost certainly the only community of its size in all of Ireland without such a facility.

Good social infrastructure is included as a matter of course in planning for new build communities in the Greater Dublin area and elsewhere.

Limerick city officials cannot point the finger at developers. While Garryowen is located near Limerick city centre, gentrification (see our previous issue) is not an problem and there are acres of grassland in the heart of the community owned by the council.

The good people of Garryowen have spent too long watching this space.

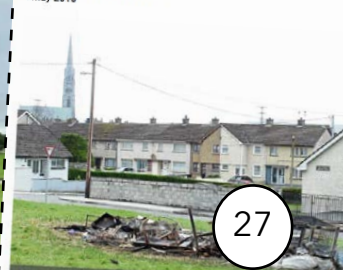
Garda operation to tackle crime in Limerick estate

by Nick Rabbitts 21 Aug 2020
Email: nick@limerickleader.ie



Calls to 'name and shame' thugs who attacked Limerick fire officers

by Nick Rabbitts and Fintan Walsh
3 May 2016



Campaigner, now a youth worker, says people are crying out for a community centre



• ABOVE LEFT: Jonathan in 2010. RIGHT: Jonathan Collins in 2019 (extreme left) with a group in Garryowen, including youth workers from Garryowen Youth Together project Hazel Martin and Gillian Boland, and John Nugent from Garryowen Residents Association.

BY BETH ARDILL

Jonathan Collins, who is now 30 years of age, featured in a 2010 video calling for a community centre in Garryowen. Limerick Youth Service supported the making of the video and today Jonathan is employed as a youth worker with the organisation.

If there was a community centre in Garryowen when Jonathan was growing up, he believes a lot of young people would have used the service.

"They would have gone there for advice, support, follow on educational programmes or simply just a hand around the shoulder to help with everyday struggles young people face these days," he said.

• **Growing up, Jonathan did not sense stigmatisation towards people from Garryowen:**

"It was not rough, but not quiet. The only cause for stigmatisation I remember growing up was that there was a lot of stolen cars in the area at the time. Which there was. However, this is not the case nowadays," he said.

• **Would having a community centre save Garryowen?**

"I do think that having a

"I am from the area and I work with over 60 young people from the area. These young people are crying out for a community centre."

- Youth worker, Jonathan Collins

community centre in the area would go a long way in helping to once again have that sense of community in the area, along with guiding young people in the right direction."

• **How did you become a youth worker?**

"I was in and out of trouble as a teenager and essentially came through the ranks in Limerick Youth Service as my key worker was an employee and helped guide me in the right direction through very helpful advice and support. Although there was no immediate impact (from that support) it was down the line, as I matured, that I could see myself reaping the rewards of the support I was given. I went back to college as a mature student and completed a four-year social care course, applied for my job and here I am today. I've come full circle."

• **What motivates you in your work?**

"I am strongly motivated by my own story to be honest. The work that was done with me had huge benefits down the line, and if I can duplicate that work with even one person from the area, then I know I have done my job."

"I am from the area and I work with over 60 young people from the area. These young people are crying out for a community centre," he said.

In the video from 2010, there were four other boys who featured.

"All the lads in the video went on to bigger and better things. We have two youth workers, a carpenter, a quantity surveyor and one in hospitality. However, one thing I will say about this particular group is that we had strong support systems at home and in the community."

For more see inside (p26-27).

LIMERICK COUNCIL RECOGNISES NEED FOR CENTRE



Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) says it recognises the need for a community centre in Garryowen.

"The need for a community centre in Garryowen is indisputable and we would be very supportive of the idea, generally speaking," said Seamus O'Connor, chief officer, Local Community Development Committee.

"We certainly see Garryowen as an area that needs investment. We see the value to be gained from it," he said.

The council is presently finalising an audit of community facilities in Limerick city and county to identify key areas where there are needs. Garryowen is very likely to feature prominently and the Council will continue to work with the Garryowen Community Development Project on this issue.

SOCIAL INCLUSION SUPPORT

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) has two goals - to support both communities and individuals.

In Limerick city, the PAUL Partnership implements SICAP in co-operation with community-based organisations such as Garryowen Community Development Project (CDP). For instance, SICAP supports the provision by community worker John Buttery of one-to-one advice and support to individuals and community groups. Last year, SICAP also supported summer and Easter camps locally.

"During the lockdown, our SICAP partners worked creatively to engage children and young people. A combination of open-access online content, online classes, tutorials and educational/art and crafts/fun packs were delivered to children by our SICAP partners," said PAUL.

As highlighted here and on pages 26-27. Limerick Youth Service is also involved in youth activities in the area in co-ordination with Garryowen CDP.

