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YOUTHWORK WITH DERRY'S FERGAL BARR:

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VOLUNTEER IN MEATH!

Wildlife needs you



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unique!*



A smashing time for arts & activism

*- Mary Moynihan
on hope, courage
and resilience*



**Dublin Arts &
Human Rights
FESTIVAL**

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TRAVELLERS: Fostering campaign. **COOTEHILL:** Online funding. **REFUGEES:** Settling down. **DISABILITY:** End incarceration. **FAMILY LAW:** Children at risk. **YOUTHWORK:** 10 Tips.

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

ABOUT US

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUPPORT

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**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
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HUMAN RIGHTS & ARTS ACTIVISM



• 'Changing Ireland' encourages young voices and student voices to collaborate with us. See Cai Desmond-Sadd's article for example.

We are interested in hearing from those of you studying community development, youthwork, equality studies, social enterprise, etc.

Disempowerment we see and hear plenty of - such as when big decisions are made about your community without any meaningful consultation. This is a regular feature of life in Moyross.

From the courts, one very frequently hears of female disempowerment when violent assailants, often partners, are let go free.

The disinvestment in health care and accommodation for Travellers is a betrayal of the State's responsibilities when you consider living conditions and the super-high suicide rates among Travellers.

On a positive note, these topics and more will be addressed on stage, in film and artwork - mostly online - at this year's Dublin Arts & Human Rights Festival - taking place in October. We're all invited. Learn more from our interview with Mary Moynihan, the founder of Smashing Times which is holding the festival with Frontline Defenders and others. She also talks of her slow recovery from Covid-19.

The good news for wildlife in this country is that there is now a Wildlife Hospital, run by volunteers in Co. Meath. I never imagined such a thing; now it seems obvious, essential even.

Humour in youthwork is not formally recognised in academic courses for youth workers - as reported in our summer edition. Here, you can read an interview with Fergal Barr on the subject. Again, I never knew and now I think it's a grave oversight by the academic authorities.

To put a positive slant on a very serious issue - at long last the relevant government department is looking into concerns that some separated parents are taking advantage of court-mandated meetings with their children to abuse those same children. This sounds scandalous, but is largely out of sight because of the nature of court reporting. A conference held over the summer helped to highlight the issue.

The threat of tendering and privatisation meanwhile has brought Jobs Club and other workers onto the streets in protest. There's nothing more empowering than marching for your community's rights. The protesters have strong backing and time will tell.

These are but examples of issues that like carbon monoxide, the silent killer gas, we need to hear more about. We especially need to hear from whose voices are but a whisper.

However, measures that result in radical empowerment may be a step too far to secure State support, suggests Mary Moynihan. She believes long-term funding for arts engagement in communities could be transformative. Hey, who doesn't want to see communities empowered and transformed from the bottom up?!

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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Tel Editor: 061-326057. **E:** editor@changingireland.ie

Office: 'Changing Ireland', Community Enterprise Centre, Moyross, Limerick.

W: www.changingireland.ie

T: @changingireland

F: www.facebook.com/changingirelandmedia/

Y: youtube.com/changingireland

L: linkedin.com/company/changing-ireland

I: changingireland

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Front Cover:

Main picture: Mary Moynihan of Smashing Times.

**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.

RURAL & COMMUNITY NEWS UPDATE

The following are but a sample three of the funding and other announcements* made by Minister Heather Humphreys and/or Minister of State Joe O'Brien over the summer.

LIBRARIES

July 20 - €650,000 funding package for 120 library projects provided from the 2021 Dormant Accounts Action Plan.

The funding is to support public libraries in reaching out to



• Minister Heather Humphreys outside the Highspeed Broadband Hub on Bere Island, Co. Cork.

marginalised, socially excluded and disadvantaged communities.

CLÁR €4.2M

Aug 30 - Details were published of 104 projects to benefit from the latest funding under the CLÁR Programme. The funds are going to schools, playgrounds, infrastructure projects and community organisations in rural areas. This was one of a number of funding announcements under the CLÁR Programme by Minister Humphreys.

Since CLÁR was re-introduced in 2016, it has provided over €38m to over 1,600 projects.

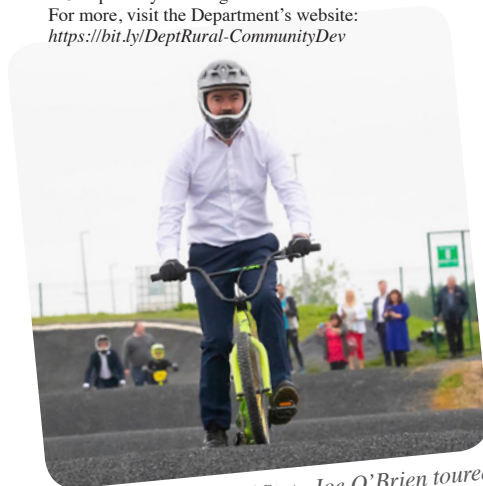
BICYCLES

July 22 - The successful applicants under the €3 million Pilot Bike and E-Bike Upcycling Initiative were named (see: <https://bit.ly/InclusionBikes5>)

"The successful projects were chosen because they are very innovative and outline a model that has the potential for replication on a nationwide basis," said Minister O'Brien. The scheme aims to provide up-cycled bicycles and e-bikes for those on low incomes, increasing access to sustainable transport, and providing training and employment opportunities.

The €3 million in funding over a three-year period is being provided by the Department of Transport and will be made available through the Department of Rural and Community Development's Community Services Programme.

* Compiled by A. Meagher.
For more, visit the Department's website:
<https://bit.ly/DeptRural-CommunityDev>



• Minister of State Joe O'Brien toured community projects in Co. Wexford in early September, including a visit to the BMX track at Riverchapel Community Complex.

Dept. oversaw spending of more than €359 million in 2020

Some key points from the annual report for 2020 from the Department of Rural and Community Development include:

- o The Department oversaw spending of more than €359m in 2020.
- o €152m was invested in the Rural Development Investment Programme, including the LEADER Programme, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Local Improvement

Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Scheme and the CLÁR Programme.

- o €202m was provided to communities through programmes including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Community Services Programme, the Seniors Alert Scheme, libraries development and other supports for the Community and Voluntary sector.

- o The €45m COVID-19 Stability Fund supported by Dormant Accounts Funds enabled critical services to be delivered to vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

- o The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund continued in 2020 with funding of €168 million approved for 139 projects.

- o The country's first National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025 was published.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

Reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and equality in Ireland

See #SICAPStories on social media.

Also, check out the SICAP storymap which features text, maps, graphs and multiple videos, via this link:

<http://bit.ly/SICAPstorymap>



"Our communities are not for sale"



• Local Employment Service (LES) and Jobs Club staff came from Kerry to Mayo and beyond to protest outside outside the Department of the Taoiseach on September 6th. Since the 1990s, the LES and Jobs Clubs have provided assistance to unemployed people, with supports ranging from literacy to interview skills and job placements.

Jobs Club / L.E.S. protests in Dublin

The first protest march since the pandemic struck by people in the Community Sector took place in early September - over the looming privatisation of an essential service used by thousands of people annually.

In May, the Department of Social Protection had issued a tender in relation to the provision of employment support services in counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Offaly, Laois, Longford and Westmeath.

The march by over 100 community-based employment advice workers, led by SIPTU and Fórsa trade unions and with the backing of most political parties, heard calls for An Taoiseach Micheál Martin to intervene.

"A Government-imposed tendering process favours for-profit providers over the current community-focussed, not-for-profit service. This means that privatisation, job losses and a diminished employment service is likely unless the Government changes course," said Fórsa.

Its members were considering taking strike action. The staff concerned, who work in Local

employment services (LES) and jobs clubs, say the Government proposals would "commodify" job-seekers and make it harder for them to get help.

"We are demanding that the Taoiseach listens to our concerns over jobs and service quality, and works with us to establish a stakeholder forum involving service providers, job-seekers, workers' representatives, government and academic experts," said Fórsa official Lynn Coffey. She warned of services being "damaged" at a time when over 300,000 people are unemployed or on PUP payments.

SIPTU official Adrian Kane, said calls from trade unions for a meeting with Minister Heather Humphreys had been "met with silence".

The Minister has previously stated that the services must be put out to public tender as this is "required to comply with EU procurement rules".

On the day of the protest, the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) called for "meaningful Government engagement with stakeholders". The ILDN's Martina Earley, speaking for Local Development Companies that

oversee the services at local level, condemned the move to privatise the community service: "Jobseekers will be faced with a centralised profit-driven, results-based process which will not be accessible to all jobseekers."

"PRIVATISING SERVICES WOULD BE A TRAVESTY"

Orlagh Denny, co-ordinator Mayo Local Employment Service, said: "Privatising these essential services would be a travesty. Privatisation does not work in community services."

"It will result in chronic long-term unemployment and subsequent social problems for individuals who have many barriers to employment."

"Pulling the service now from safe hands, at a time when Covid-19 presents an employment crisis like never before, just beggars belief," she said.

Elected public representatives from Fianna Fail, Sinn Féin, Labour and other parties joined the protest or showed their support.

BY ALLEN MEAGHER



DUBLIN ARTS & HUMAN RIGHTS FESTIVAL (Oct. 15-24)

The 2021 Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival runs for ten days from Friday, Oct. 15 to Sunday, Oct. 24.

The theme is 'Hope, Courage and Resilience: The Story Continues' and the festival aims to highlight the work of human rights defenders in Ireland and globally, and the role of the arts and artists in promoting human rights today.

It is organised by Smashing Times and Front Line Defenders in partnership with Amnesty International, Fighting Words, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, National Women's Council of Ireland, Trócaire, and Poetry Ireland.

Local groups involved include Dublin North East Inner City and Dublin Northern Partnership.

For more, see p8-10 & visit:
<https://smashingtimes.ie/dublinahr/>

(Also see pages 8-9).



WHO's Dr Ryan and Minister O'Brien discuss poverty and value of community work



• Two Irish people who are notable advocates of community development and climate, health and social justice.

Dr. Mike Ryan of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Joe O'Brien, Minister of State for Rural and Community Development, took part in Community Work Ireland's (CWI) annual conference, held online, on September 28th.

Minister O'Brien and Dr. Ryan, the executive director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, took questions from CWI chairperson Ronnie Fay.

As Ireland was praised the same day by global finance media company Bloomberg for returning to near normal following our vaccination campaign, Dr Ryan said "normal" is a very relative term and it is more a case of rushing back to the "abnormal".

"For people who have wealth, education and services, everyone wants to get back to that kind of normal. For a lot of people that normal never existed."

He said, "If we could just change the language we use, we'd be on the road to having the discussions we need to have (about poverty)."

He gave examples - such as older people being seen as a drain on the economy and diversity not being valued.

"It's a hard road. You've been fighting this fight for a very long time. This lurch back to normal, that (belief) that we are putting this behind us to move on... it can't be."

He said, "Health justice, social justice and climate justice can no longer be separated. There are so many common elements driving each."

For his part, Minister O'Brien thanked Dr Ryan for his "global leadership" and "for your fight and your grá for those on the margins of

society and for speaking up the way you do."

He said, "Listening to communities is key to ensuring we move forward in a way that captures the solidarity we saw during Covid, with the Community Call being one great example of that."

He said, "Poverty isn't a word we debate very much in Ireland - we often think of it as something that happens in distant countries, but it's very much a problem in Ireland."

Both he and Dr Ryan agreed there were moral, ethical and businesslike benefits to tackling poverty and that solutions that come from listening to communities are the most effective.

The conference, attended by over 100 people, was titled 'Not Just Recovery?' and it aimed "to provide an opportunity for reflection on the experience of the most disadvantaged communities in Ireland and globally during the past 18 months, the lessons learned, and the key priorities for action in building a just and sustainable recovery as we emerge from the Covid-19 crisis".



THEMES

The conference included seven workshops where priority actions were identified:

1. Racism and Addressing the Rise of the Far-Right.
2. Climate and a Just Transition.
3. Health.
4. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.
5. Women's Rights.
6. Social Dialogue and Participation in Decision Making.
7. Building an All-Ireland approach.

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LONG-TERM COMMUNITY ARTS WORK IS RADICAL



BY ALLEN MEAGHER

SMASHING TIMES FOUNDER TALKS ABOUT HER COVID EXPERIENCE AND THE ARTS & HUMAN RIGHTS

I hesitated to ask Mary Moynihan if she felt she was a Covid survivor. She had no doubt about it.

"I was told I was in the mild end of the serious category. I did have to go into hospital and I did have to get oxygen, so it was quite serious. All of my family got Covid and it was in March 2020 so it was right at the beginning. Everybody recovered except for myself. I ended up sick for six weeks straight.

"I had huge difficulties with my breath - I did have asthma prior. Then I was lucky that when I got oxygen I started to recover so I didn't stay in hospital long.

FRIGHT OF LONG COVID EXPERIENCE

"When I was recovering, that's when I wrote the poem. I felt I was coming out of a very traumatic experience and it really brought home the important things like the people we love, living in the moment, things like nature, art - which I do

love... That's where the poem just came from."

Her poem called 'In Time' was recorded as a music video by fellow-artists and can be watched online. While she shares the excitement with others in the arts and theatre world about opening up - in a careful manner - she is first and foremost simply grateful to be alive.

"I have long Covid, so I am one of the many thousands with an ongoing illness. So I fully get the seriousness of Covid. It's still killing, maiming and leaving people with long-term serious illness. We need to be vigilant about that," she said.

"VERY EXCITED"

Mary is the founding director of Smashing Times, now 30 years in operation, and she retains the positivity and spark she has demonstrated throughout those years.

She said she was "very excited" about connecting once more and "not just having the arts online".

"The arts have been very hard hit,

particularly performing artists who depend on gigs and live theatre and performance."

"It's important we get back to work, earning a living and reconnect with one another, but in a way that's safe.

"We've spent months working on guidelines around Covid compliance and health and safety. And a lot of us have adapted. For example, in ST we're doing a lot of outdoor events for our upcoming festival."

VACCINE EQUITY

As someone who habitually reflects on equality issues, I pointed out to her how the WHO has condemned vaccine grabbing by Ireland, the EU and other rich countries.

Mary said, "We live in a very unequal society where access to health is not equal in the first place. Vaccine equity is a human rights issue and governments need to act to ensure that the vaccines are available to every country in the world and that

there is no profit involved."

She agreed with Dr Mike Ryan when he said "Social justice is only a dream if we don't put health justice at the centre of it".

INFLUENCES

Given her work, there are many human rights defenders that Mary greatly admires. Asked to name who who had a big influence on her, she said, "I always say my parents first."

Mary has previously written about the great love in her family growing up and about how her mother's fierce independence influenced her. Now she is a mother of four children. Have any of them followed her path into the arts, activism or drama?

"I've three boys and a girl and they all have a strong social conscience. One is a writer and the others are business orientated," she said.

Her mother died when she was 16, a few days after giving birth and her father without hesitation took over the role of care-giver to the family

IS THAT WHY IT'S NOT FUNDED?

- Mary Moynihan, *Smashing Times*

including the new born baby.

Mary's family believe that failings in maternity care played a role.

"Women at the centre of maternity care are not being listened to," she said. She strongly supported the campaign to make it mandatory to hold inquests when a woman dies in a maternity hospital. The story she tells of her mother's death is one of many that fuelled the campaign and, thanks in particular to campaigning by nursing sociologist Dr Jo Murphy-Lawless, in 2019 it finally became mandatory to hold inquests.

"That was very important. It showed we needed to tell our stories. My mum always said stand up for what you believe in."

PEOPLE SMUGGLER MARY ELMES

In terms of heroes, she also named Mary Elmes from Cork. Mary was a WWII era human rights defender who Smashing Times recently celebrated. She volunteered with a group of Quakers and successfully smuggled hundreds of refugees out of Nazi-occupied countries.

The discovery of and celebration by Smashing Times of Mary Elmes's story - previously unknown - is a good example of their work and impact.

It was the organisation's connections in other European countries that revealed an Irish woman had played a Schindler's List-style role in smuggling refugees across Nazi lines.

The presentation of her story on stage so captivated journalist Clodagh Finn that she spent a year researching and writing a book about this remarkable lady. ('A Time to Risk All' is published by Gill Books).

"She was non-violent, peaceful and very much believed in a shared humanity and reaching out to strangers," said Mary.

"It's a human right to seek sanctuary... and we need to do more on that count. We also need to close down Direct Provision which is going to happen I believe."

The Mary Elmes story is typical of those Mary is drawn to: "We're interested in forgotten or hidden stories. And my particular interest as an artist is in making theatre and film from historical memory of forgotten stories of women in history."

She said that diversity is always about whose voice is not being heard and is more than just getting diverse



people faround the table.

"How do you make sure that all voices are heard?" she asks.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Asked to name two issues we don't hear enough about, she said, "You may think this is not hidden, but sexual harassment is a huge issue. There's a whole generation of people who think we've moved on, but things are getting worse."

She made her point only a day before a judge let a convicted murder off without jail time after he tried to strangle his partner and two days before sexual abuse and harassment in the Defence Forces was revealed.

She said it was important that sexual consent is discussed more with young men and women.

While the #MeToo movement undoubtedly brought good, gender-based violence continues. She believes there's "a continuum between sexual harassment" and the worst forms of violence in society.

"Recently, I heard about a runner - a young woman - who won't go running in the evenings anymore because of the harassment she gets. I think that's shocking."

"It's talked about, but not enough. Everyone thinks it's a woman's issue, but it's a men's and boys' issue too."

She recalled doing a symposium on the subject with secondary school pupils in the Samuel Beckett Theatre: "A young man from the inner city said this is everything to do with me. I don't fit the gender norm for men. Men are seen as strong, as leaders, as go-getters. He said, 'What if you're like me and you're none of those things?' He just didn't fit."

She welcome the fact that young

people are moving away from gender binaries. She knows men can be great care-givers.

"The gender stereotype would say men are a certain way, but after my mother died, I saw my father - who used to have everything done for him - be a wonderful care-giver to a young child (her baby sibling)."

TRAVELLER SUICIDES

"The suicide rates in the Traveller community are also shocking. It's

"The suicide rates in the Traveller community are shocking and more needs to be done."

wiping out a whole generation of young people and I definitely think more needs to be done about that. It's horrific what's going on and more support," she said.

The suicide rate within the Travelling community is six-times higher than the wider population. Suicide is most common in young Traveller men.

Looking to where more support could be provided, she said, "I had the pleasure of working with Kildare Traveller Action where Traveller women work as Primary Healthcare Workers in their own communities. It is a really positive HSE programme. Those kind of really positive programmes need more support," she said.

SMASHING TIMES

Smashing Times is a great name, so where did it come from?

"The Suffragettes.... We don't like smashing windows of public buildings, but we do want to smash taboos. We also shine a light into dark areas. We are about primarily about making art, but we care deeply about the world we live in and we want our art to impact in terms of human rights, equality and diversity.

"And because we're about art, we're about bringing people together. We want respect and dignity for everybody, which is what human rights is about."

"One of the festival events we're doing is called 'State of the Art' - it's about the nation-state as both protector and violator of human rights. Both happen."

Returning to Covid, she said, "I have to say the State did an amazing job dealing with Covid when it first struck compared to other countries and saved many lives by the actions it took."

HUMAN RIGHTS PARTNERS

"We partner with human rights organisations such as Fighting Words, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Frontline Defenders and they run brilliant workshops - such as knowing your rights when arrested.

Frontline have really good workshops this year. For example, one is an online panel discussion called 'The Social Life of Misinformation' about the global misinformation crisis. It will ask: How can you know if something is true or false? If the far right is on the increase, why is that happening and what can we do?"

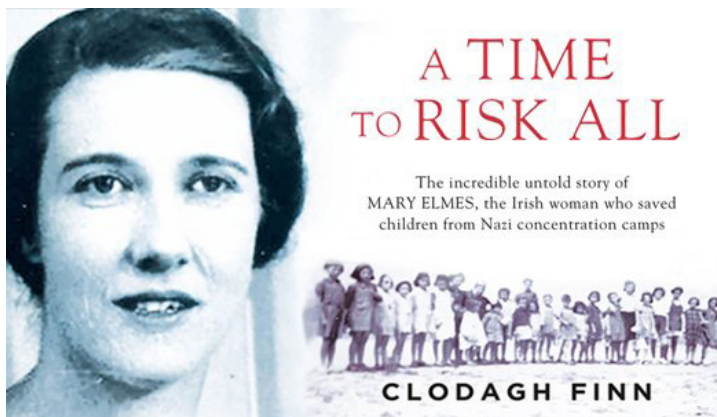
"We have an event led by a radical feminist organisation from the US called 'Guerrilla Girls'.

We will also show a film documenting young people's experience of direct provision."

FIVE STAFF

Smashing Times had a core budget of €261,000 in 2019, it employs five people full-time and has a freelance panel of artists and people interested in human rights who also contribute.

Theatre can be a powerful tool for human rights, development education and community development.



• Since Mary Elmes's heroism was discovered, a book has been written about her and a new bridge in her native Cork city named after the WWII saviour.

"We're very open. Join our arts and human rights network. It's free - you can be a citizen, an artist, a community worker - it's for anyone interested in arts and human rights. Email us," said Mary.

"In Ireland, we ran a programme to train people to do what we do and a lot of organisations sprung out of that. For example, look up the wonderful cross-community space called The Hub in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, run by Carol Doey who trained with us. They've won huge awards."

Since 1991, Smashing Times has grown from working with communities in Coolock, Tallaght and Ballymun to being active countrywide, north-south, and across Europe.

While only going since 2019, how significant is the Dublin Arts & Human Rights Festival and are there others like it?

"It's growing. For example, we partnered with a group in Serbia who, like us, use theatre and film in post conflict environments. Last year, because they had been involved in our festival, they held the first arts and human rights festival in Serbia.

"There's also the 'Imagine Festival' in Belfast and there's a Derry Arts and Human Rights Festival."

MAGIC / POSITIVITY

We would all like to live in a world without violence or poverty - and it's something Mary believes can happen. How can she be so positive in her outlook?

"I've had the pleasure of working with many different groups and communities and it has never ceased to amaze me the connections that can be made between different people, from different communities. I often see that through the arts. There's a kind of magic in it and it always makes me feel really positive.

"The arts have been hugely successful as part of the (peace process) promoting positive community relations, enabling people to come together.

"The arts are full of paradox. The artd environment provides a safe space to take risks - particularly in theatre and creative processes in a workshop space. When you get into film, art, music performances, there's a common language that comes that goes beyond the language that divides us."

Speaking about challenges facing the community in which 'Changing Ireland' is based, Mary suggested Moyross become part of next year's festival.

"The arts can envision new futures. You can use the arts to help create the vision for how we want our world to look like, if we start to tell alternative stories.

"Sometimes the dominant narrative doesn't allow the positive stories to come forward.

"For me the dominant narrative sometimes doesn't even allow people to say we want to connect and we want to find a way to challenge what's wrong in society.

"We need to hear more voices and the arts can do that and envision a positive future," she said.

RADICAL & PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

"On a personal level the arts enable you to grow as a person, to communicate, to stand in someone else's shoes. We've worked with hard-to-reach communities and there's always room to do more. There's huge potential and community organisations need more support to bring the arts in, because it is an empowering tool. The arts are magical, but you need sustained, long-term engagement.

"When they talk about arts, participation is a buzzword. Real arts engagement is about embedding yourself in the community, building your connection with the group and empowering them to make the work themselves.

"Long-term sustained arts engagement is radical. Is that why it's not funded?" she asked.

NEW ONLINE MAG - 'DEVELOP'

The first edition of a new online publication called 'Develop' has just been published.

Launched by Éamonn O'Reilly on behalf of the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) it focuses on LEADER projects and work by the 49 not-for-profit Local Development Companies in the State.

Éamonn is CEO of North East West Kerry Development and also chairperson of the ILDN Rural Development/LEADER Committee and writes in the magazine: "The pandemic has shown the importance of keeping in touch. It has also underlined how passionate colleagues are about the impact that LDCs have on communities and why it's vital to continue supporting and funding the work."

The first edition covers LEADER support for biodiversity, tourism and child welfare in Mayo, Clare, Sligo and Dublin. It also features interviews with Jim Finn, the network's voluntary chair, and Eilish Harrington, CEO of Fingal LEADER Partnership.

Download here: <https://bit.ly/ILDNdevelopmag>



DUBS ZOOMED IN TO FUNDRAISING

A 'Festival of Fundraising' was held in Dublin, in late September, aimed at members of Dublin City Public Participation Network (PPN).

The "festival" ran for four days with all events held on Zoom and all free for PPN members, including workshops, training sessions, networking opportunities and one-to-one mentoring.

Thinking ahead, Dublin PPN was able to offer Zoom familiarisation classes to anybody wishing to attend but unsure of how to use the Zoom app. They recommended people check in with the neighbouring PPN in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown which runs 'Zoom Training for Beginners' classes.

The 'Festival of Fundraising 2021' was delivered in collaboration with Academy Street Workshop.

Find out more about Dublin City PPN: <https://dublincityppn.ie/>



SUICIDE RATE AMONG TRAVELLERS

Support for Travellers is of paramount importance, according to Mary Moynihan of Smashing Times who features on our front cover. Data backs up her claim, as the suicide rate among Travellers was six-times higher than that of wider Irish society, according to figures released in 2019 by the National Traveller Mental Health Network.

The network pointed to key facts pertaining to Traveller mental health:

- 82% of the community had been affected by suicide.
- 56% of Travellers reported that poor physical and mental health restrict their normal daily activities.
- 62.7% of Traveller women and 59.4% of Traveller men disclosed that mental health had not been good for one or more days in the last 30.
- 10% of the residents at the Central Mental Hospital are Travellers, more than ten times the Travelling community's proportion of the population.
- 90% of Travellers agree that mental health issues are common amongst the community.



• Mags Casey, Tipperary Travellers project co-ordinator, at the launch of the survey findings in 2019.

FOSTERING & CULTURAL IDENTITY

Tusla wants more Travellers to consider fostering

Tusla in conjunction with Traveller Families Care launched a new campaign in September seeking foster carers from the Travelling Community.

Jane, a Traveller whose family fostered two children, supports the campaign.

She and her partner had tried for several years without success to have a child, including by IVF.

“We went down the road of fostering,” she said, recalling her foster-child’s appearance when only a baby.

“He had really big eyes and I remember being told he was born very premature and there was a possibility he would never walk.

“When we saw him, all I could see was his eyes. It was just delightful to have him.

“We had the opportunity to foster (his) sibling. It is important where possible to keep siblings together.

“It was hard work, there’s no doubt about that, but without the experience and support of the social workers we overcame a lot of hard and difficult obstacles.

“It’s very important with Traveller children who are fostered to try and instill what I would see as Traveller culture, to be proud of who they are and where they come from.

She says, “Families and children are a huge part of Traveller culture.”

“If someone decides to do fostering, I would say follow your heart,” said Jane.

“THIS POSITIVE PROJECT”

Leona Collins, manager of Offaly Traveller Movement, said, “We support Traveller Families Care and Tusla in this new project recruiting Traveller foster carers.”

She said Travellers can provide “a place to feel at home, a sense of community and belonging while keep up with traditions.” *

Jim O’Brien of Bray Travellers CDP, in existence for over 20 years, welcomed the campaign. Without more fostering, he said Traveller children will experience a “long-term identity crisis”.

He said that cultural identity was “extremely important and vital within the Travelling Community” and pledged his group’s support for Traveller Families Care and Tusla “to engage Travelling families in this positive project.”



• Jim O’Brien, Bray Travellers.

Bernard Joyce, director, Irish Traveller Movement, said, “Our children and young people have the right to live within their own

community in the richness of our culture. It is crucial that we have Travellers fostering and it is vital to protect a child’s sense of identity and belonging with their community.”

The campaign also has the support of **Pavee Point: Mary-Brigid Collins** works in co-ordinating the nationwide Primary Health Care for Travellers Project and she urged “Travellers to take up fostering Traveller children.”

Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, said:

“When a child cannot live with their parents and needs to be placed in care, it is important that every possible effort is made to arrange a foster care placement that respects their unique cultural identity and meets their cultural needs. I am delighted to support the Tusla project to recruit more Traveller foster carers.”

The campaign is the product of collaboration between Tusla and Traveller Families Care and was undertaken as part of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021.

Currently 91% of all children in care in Ireland live with a foster family. Tusla encourages people from all communities and backgrounds to consider if they could become a foster carer.

Fostering social workers are available to answer questions on fostering at: 1800 226 771 (freephone) or email tusla.fostering@tusla.ie.



• *LEFT: Music is very important in Traveller culture. Photo courtesy of the Irish Museum of Country Life in Castlebar.*



We are looking for **Traveller Foster Carers** for **Traveller Children**.

• A previous campaign by Tusla in the West to encourage more Traveller families to foster children saw a big rise in numbers fostered.

• In May, 2020, an impressive 61% of Traveller children in care were being cared for by Traveller foster families, compared with just 3% in 2014.

• The increase in fostering levels was highlighted in a foster care service inspection report by the Health Information and Quality Authority covering counties Galway and Roscommon.

Traveller Families Care, in existence since 1975, has - with the HSE - developed residential, aftercare and foster care programmes to meet the needs of members of the Traveller Community. For more about their work, visit: <https://ballyowenmeadows.ie/traveller-families-care-clg/>

RESOURCE MATERIALS TO DOWNLOAD

Last year, Offaly Traveller Movement and Tusla published a poster and leaflet to encourage more Travellers to becoming foster carers.

You can download the leaflet at this link:
<https://bit.ly/OTM-Tusla-leaflet-PDF>

The poster is downloadable here:
<https://bit.ly/OTM-Tusla-poster-PDF>

More resources are available through:
<https://www.tusla.ie/>

As highlighted in our Summer Edition, foster carers make a huge difference to the lives of the children they care for and Tusla needs more people who can care for children in the short; medium or long-term. There are many myths about who can and cannot foster - visit our website to read more.

Co-op drove online sales after 75% rural tourism grant for laptops

Úna Bhán Tourism Co-op provides a range of services, but its activities would have stalled by now if it wasn't for LEADER funding.

"Genuinely, without LEADER we would not have been able to develop as an organisation. It was crucial," said newly appointed manager Ciara McCormac.

"It was essential to driving marketing initiatives and in developing a direct point of contact with the public online," she said.

Since 1995, the co-op has been based in an office in the grounds of King House, a magnificent Georgian mansion in the centre of the historic town of Boyle, Co. Roscommon. It runs a tourist information centre, Boyle Craft Shop and a year-round farmers market. They also provide office services and meals-on-wheels.

In March 2017, Úna Bhán applied to LEADER and throughout the application process the co-op liaised with Roscommon LEADER Partnership.

"They guided us every step of the way and were so helpful and communicative," said Sabrina Brady (see right). In September 2017, the application was approved.

The funds (including a 25% contribution from the co-op) paid for a desktop computer, a monitor, three laptops, software and a quality photocopier.

The funding support enhanced the co-op's capacity in all areas, including tourism promotion and in three core activities that bring in income - the market, the online shop, and the provision of office services.

While they had to wait six months from when they applied to when funding was approved, it's a tall task for any community group to fundraise to update computers.

The timely funding also gave Úna Bhán the ability to embrace online sales before it was commonplace. The online shop (<https://boylecraftshop.com/>) has proven especially popular. It has a superb local books section that appeals to, among others, Boyle natives living abroad.

In terms of advice, the co-op advises aspiring LEADER applicants to have a vigilant management committee in place and motivated employees who can work together to generate the match funding.



• Sabrina Brady and Ciara McCormac at work.

Sabrina Brady, tourism development officer with Úna Bhán Tourism encourages community groups to consider applying for LEADER funding.

"Applying to LEADER is not as intimidating as people perceive it to be and we always felt very supported by the team in Roscommon LEADER Partnership," she said. "Although it's a long process, it's very open and there's nobody putting barriers in your way."

The co-op has a habit of being ahead on trends. In 2005, it started its Saturday morning Courtyard Market in the grounds of King House.

And since Úna Bhán's 2017 application for computer funding, the co-op submitted a second successful application - this time for a gazebo and all-weather covers for the market stalls.

"We're now entering a really exciting phase," said Sabrina. "We're re-imagining what we do and in the process of rebranding."

As part of those plans, Úna Bhán's new website 'Discover Boyle' will be soon be launched.



TOTAL BUDGET OF €6,677

The LEADER funding granted to Úna Bhán Tourism Co-op (UBTC) totalled €5,008, broken down as follows:

- €3,145 EAFRD (EU) contribution;
- + €1,863 (national contribution).

Úna Bhán Tourism contributed a further €1,669 to the project bringing the project budget total to €6,677.

The LEADER grant was approved under Theme 1: Economic, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. The sub-theme was: Rural Tourism.

LEARN THE LEGEND OF ÚNA BHÁN



• Trinity Island, Lough Key Forest Park, just 8km from Boyle, Co. Roscommon.

Úna Bhán, named after her long blonde hair - was the beautiful daughter of a chieftain called MacDermott.

He planned for an arranged marriage, but Úna fell in love with one Tomás Láidir, who was then banished from the area while Úna was confined on Castle Island, Lough Key by her father. Úna fell into a deep melancholy and began dying from grief.

On hearing this, Tomás was alarmed and returned to demand MacDermott allow them to marry.

However, when the message of approval from the chieftain did not reach Tomás in time...

Well, it's best you head to Boyle and head out to Trinity Island to find out for yourself! When you find two trees entwined in a lovers' knot above a double-grave, you've reached a legendary spot.

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 in providing relevant LEADER case-study details.



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



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



National Rural Network



• Úna Bhán Tourism Co-operative Society has been in existence since 1990.

- The project is supported, in terms of long-term funding, by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal through the Community Services Programme.

Could your group do with a tech revamp?

Many people still don't realise just 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.

- To find out how the funding process works 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 - as in the instance shown here by Roscommon LEADER Partnership. Every LDC is listed at: <https://ildn.ie/directory/>

Roscommon women's project sets the pace to stop waste in EU

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

In two years time, under an EU directive, all textile waste has to be disposed of properly. That puts pressure on all who handle textiles, including charity shops.

Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) now find themselves in a lead position nationally having first looked at this issue three years ago and setting up a social enterprise to tackle clothes waste. The Roscommon women were ahead of the EU. Their CycleUp project reuses clothes that would otherwise end up in landfill.

"The idea came from women themselves," said RWN co-ordinator Nora Fahy. The project does its best to use, rather than dump, unsold textiles generated by their charity shop - by upcycling these textile items into different products for sale.

"This project also meets two of our four main goals - sustainable living and supporting women into flexible paid employment," said Nora.

Specifically, The Waste Framework Directive (WFD) states that Member States shall set up separate collection for textiles by 1 January, 2025. The WFD also requires EU member states to promote repair and re-use of textiles.*

Now, Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency is funding RWN's textile upcycling project and that has allowed them to take on a full-time project manager - Martina Hourigan (see Laoise Neylon's interview with Martina on page 15).

The 'Cycle Up' project presents what opportunities (and challenges) for charity shops and community groups because of this new waste directive and funding for upcycling.

The project won an Aontas award in March. It is hoping to launch as a stand alone project within a couple of years. They are fast off the mark - when masks could not be got at the beginning of the pandemic, the project produced masks for care homes.

"We're needs-driven as an on-the-ground community project and it was the women who saw the need for it. That's why we came to do this work before others did, before there was formal funding for this work," said Nora.

Nora says NWN were "fortunate" to get support from international clothing company Patagonia which part-funded their project in its earliest



• ABOVE: Nora Fahy, co-ordinator of Roscommon Women's Network. BELOW: 'Cycle Up' supporters at work.

stages. Now groups can apply to their local authority for funding.

"Most community development projects don't get to talk about the value of what they do, because we're actually all so busy doing the work," said Nora.

But this time NWN found itself in a lead position on an issue that other groups realised they needed to learn about and they need to show how they've gone about their work. It was in hindsight a pilot project.

"We have women with us who started with no formal education and now becoming trainers of trainers at QQI Level 6," said Nora. Some of the women have faced harsh challenges in life.

Community development often works out of sight, silently changing lives. Its first duty is to the people and communities it empowers.

With this particular project, the educational progress alone is startling - as demonstrated by Philomena (see previous page) who told her story recently when RWN won the Aontas award.

'Cycle Up' is not only for women, but for men too and that is the long-term strategy.

"We've always approached our work with a feminist lens and in an inclusive way in a rural context," said Nora. The project currently has nine



women and one man on its training course.

Suzanne Dempsey, until recently the environment awareness officer with Roscommon County Council, noticed more people than before enquiring about funding for textile upcycling and waste reduction generally. It may be the same across the country as upcycling becomes cool all of a sudden. Suzanne points to RWN's project as an example of best practice because they are doing it for the past three years.

* Several studies have been conducted on the environmental impacts of textiles including by the European Environment Agency. In addition, the EU is conducting a study to better understand the material flows in the textile value chain, to review textile sorting and recycling technologies and to map examples of circular textile business models.

Ref: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-004882-ASW_EN.html

SURVEY: CHILDCARE LOW-PAY WARNING

Warning of a looming “winter of discontent” in the Community Sector, SIPTU has highlighted the plight of community-based childcare services.

A recent survey of more than 3,000 childcare managers and staff “indicated that many facilities face reducing services or potential closure over the coming months due to an inability to recruit the necessary qualified professionals required to run them,” said SIPTU.

SIPTU Head of Organising, Darragh O’Connor



O’Connor (pictured) said: “Many qualified and skilled educators simply cannot afford to stay in their profession. The survey found that

42% of Early Years educators are actively looking for a job outside the sector with 75% identifying low pay as the reason for leaving their profession.

The Early Years Staffing Survey Report 2021 was launched at a special online briefing for Oireachtas members and reveals a sector “drifting further into crisis due to the impact of low pay and staff leaving the sector”.

Campaigners are calling on the Government to invest an additional €150m in childcare, split between pay and affordability measures.

In February 2020, SIPTU’s childcare facilities campaign saw 30,000 people march in Dublin over low pay and lack of state investment.

FINGAL: REPS MEET MINISTERS

Children’s minister Roderic O’Gorman and Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O’Brien, met online with community representatives from Fingal on Sept. 10 “to discuss early years and childcare” issues in the local area.

The Fingal Children and Young People’s Services Committee welcomed the meeting, saying: “Community-based, not-for-profit childcare services provide such essential services to communities.”

Grainne McKenna, who lectures in early childhood education at DCU, also welcomed the engagement.

Minister O’Brien remarked afterwards, “Good first meeting. Having affordable childcare for disadvantaged and marginalised communities is particularly important in facilitating community engagement and ultimately community development.”

Empower Fingal organised the meeting.

FAST FASHION ACTIVISM

TESTIMONY: Philomena left school aged 11, yet now has a degree from Sligo IT



• *Philomena left school at 11 years of age. Now a degree holder, she is involved in Roscommon Women’s Network’s CycleUp project which recently won an Aontas Award. She is pictured with up-cycled Christmas decorations produced for sale in the network’s charity shop and via their new online store.*

Philomena first called into Roscommon Women’s Network while going through “a bad period in my life” over ten years ago.

She is one of many to receive support from the project, one of 17 women’s groups that belong to the National Collective of Community-based Women’s Networks.

“They gave me the help

that I needed and following this I joined the women’s group. I had left school when I was 11 years old to look after my sick mother. Leaving school at such a young age, I felt that it had held me back my whole life, both mentally and physically,” she said.

“I was asked if I was interested in taking part in some training,” she recalled. She completed a

confidence building course and then went onto a Level 2 FETAC studies in art and maths and, over five years, Philomena continued to study, leading her onto an Institute of Technology Sligo degree course in fine art.

“Three years later I got my level 7 degree and I believe that this changed my life and has saved my life,” she said.

She is now involved in the CycleUp project where she has learned “so much about climate change and the environment”.

For more about CycleUp see following pages.

national collective of community based women’s networks



MARTINA HOURIGAN: We hope this can be a model for other community groups around the country

BY LAOISE NEYLON

Roscommon Women's Network runs a charity shop so they receive lots of donations of clothes. In 2019 they received donations of around 931kg of textiles, says Martina.

Many of the garments are snapped up by new owners but like all charity shops they end up with a lot of items that can't be easily re-homed, she says.

So in 2018, a group of volunteers from RWN went on a fact-finding mission to the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, which specialises in upcycling clothing and textiles.

They were inspired by that work and so they established the Women's Environmental Community Activation Network (WECAN) project and started to roll out training programmes for mending clothes and upcycling textiles.

WECAN established the Cycle Up store to sell the upcycled products, including bags, cushions, clothes and toys.

"There was so much interest from women who were accomplished sewers to those who had never threaded a needle," says project manager Martina Hourigan.

WECAN now runs training in upcycling to community groups, schools and other organisations



and currently has a waiting list of participants, she says.

The older generation was great at fixing things, but we have lost some of the skills and with them part of our heritage, says Martina.

Some garments that are donated to the charity shop are of such poor quality they are not worth mending and those are often made from non-recyclable material, she says.

"It is the dirty word, it's the fast

fashion," says Martina.

But it is empowering to be able to tackle a global problem at a local level, she says. "Our mission is to develop a social and environmental training enterprise," she says.

She hopes other community groups around Ireland will replicate their model.

"Our values are rooted in community development, the principles of inclusion, social justice,

empowerment and collective action," says Martina. "We are hoping this initiative can provide a model of best practice for other community groups around the country."

Not every charity shop or community organisation needs to establish its own upcycling store, but perhaps they could set up repair cafes and train people to mend their own clothes, she says.

Roscommon Women's Network runs a successful social enterprise

Social enterprises are organisations whose mission is to have a positive effect on society by generating revenue through the sale of products or provision of services and by reinvesting the profits back into achieving the mission.

Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) following cuts a decade ago, opened a now highly successful charity shop which is completely self financing and fully volunteer run.

The proceeds go towards running RWN Resource Centre and giving support to women and families around the county and beyond.

The shop also tackles loneliness and isolation, providing a space for participation, rehabilitation, learning new skills and

progressing into training, education and employment.

Among the items for sale are Cycle Up products which have proven to be great sellers. Call in and browse at The Old Mill, Castlerea (open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm and Saturdays 11am to 4pm). T: 094 9621 690.

Very soon the project hopes to have its own online shop.

To view samples of upcycled products, visit: <https://rwn.ie/textile-upcycling-pilot-project/>



VOLUNTEERING & BIODIVERSITY

IRELAND'S 1ST VOLUNTEER WILDLIFE HOSPITAL

FOX RUSHED INTO INTENSIVE CARE - IN COUNTRY'S NEWEST HOSPITAL

BY GRACE BARRETT



The door of the intensive care unit bursts open and its newest patient is rushed in, flanked by two hospital staff. Except in this case, the patient is in a cage, not on a gurney, and its carers are not doctors. The patient is an injured fox, and he has just been admitted to Ireland's first wildlife hospital in Meath.

Unlike the hushed environment of a typical ICU, this intensive care unit features the sounds of birds cheeping and the shuffling of hedgehogs moving towards their feeding trays.

Volunteering there for a day, I have a unique insight into the day-to-day operations of a unique facility. The hospital opened during the pandemic in February of this year, using the grounds of a pub in Garlow Cross, just outside Navan, whose owners had shuttered its doors and offered them the space during Covid.

The hospital project, run by Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland (WRI) was an idea formed over several years, as licensed rehabilitators around the country were inundated with an increasing number of calls. With the opening of the hospital, many wildlife casualties can be directed to Meath. Their mission is to save the lives of thousands of sick and wild animals in Ireland every year. The UK has five dedicated wildlife rehabilitation hospitals. In Ireland, we now have one and it is fully reliant on public funding to stay open.

The hospital is entirely staffed with volunteers, and the value of community contributions are widely felt as I join their ranks for a day. The spirit of camaraderie is ever present, and everyone mucks in – literally – and is quick to help others with the



• An injured fox on the road to recovery after receiving treatment at the newly opened wildlife hospital in Co. Meath.

“Peering into the cage of two adorable baby foxes, it takes all my reserves of strength to resist the urge to coo at them.”

assorted tasks at hand. Volunteers come from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, but practical experience is what is prized and what is gained at the hospital.

The need for its existence is obvious. Space for injured animals is at a premium, and visitors arrive with injured animals at the front gates throughout the day.

My time volunteering is mostly spent in the ICU, cleaning hedgehog homes and doling out regular feedings to birds. One becomes all too aware too soon of the dangers of hedgehog spines and the claws of enthusiastic birds. I am kindly shown how to hold a hedgehog in a towel to protect my hands. Moments later, Dan Donohoe, the hospital's/ WRI's Animal Manager and something of an animal whisperer, picks up a hedgehog delicately and easily without any need for gloves. He's similarly gifted with all other animals on the premises, and is

often dispatched to lead on transfers of animals to new housing and for releases back into the wild.

One of the first rules I come to understand is that wildlife are wildlife. Read: this is not a zoo, and volunteers must be careful to not ingratiate themselves by speaking with or petting the animals. They are supposed to remain afraid of humans, and any easy familiarity that could develop towards us could dull their sense of danger when they are returned to the wild. When peering into the cage of two adorable baby foxes, it takes all my reserves of strength to resist the urge to coo at them. The older fox admitted earlier that day to the ICU with a head injury is now resting in his cage, the light in the room blocked out with newspaper to give him some peace to sleep.

Stables out back have been converted into further hospital “rooms” for animals on the mend and in less serious need of attention. A chalkboard in front of each stable

lists the number and types of animal patients present, with medical charts attached to their pens and cages. At this time of year, the hospital is populated with young offspring abandoned by their parents. There are baby chicks, the aforementioned foxes and hedgehog community, badgers, rabbits, and a wide variety of bird species in care. A cuckoo has been housed in one of the stables, medical chart on display. It is the hospital's aim to provide care for every native Irish wildlife species.

Volunteering brings an awareness of one's natural environment and the significance of making a contribution to conservation. Just one day as a volunteer gave me a broader understanding of Ireland's wildlife community then I'd learned in years. Volunteering for any cause brings a sense of calm and unity. The focus is on the practical task at hand, and the team of people around you.

The hospital is in need of support and I'd recommend anyone to take part in this important initiative. Hopefully bringing more and more attention to the needs of our wildlife population will lead to formal and regular funding from our government.

FIRST RESPONDERS NEEDED

- Some volunteer positions urgently need filling, such as: volunteer projects co-ordinator, wildlife education office, social media, transport provider.
- They also have volunteer opportunities in animal care, transport, first responders/rescue, maintenance, fundraising and administration.
- To find out more about volunteering with WRI visit:
<http://wildlifehospital.ie/volunteer/>

“Space for injured animals is at a premium and visitors arrive with injured animals at the front gates throughout the day.”



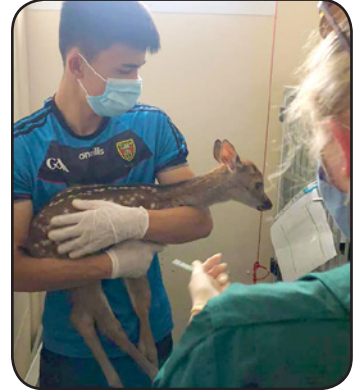
• A pigeon is provided with emergency care at the wildlife hospital.



• A cat attacked this robin fledgling. Cats are lovely but deadly - a collar with a bell on your cat will help alert wildlife to their presence. If you find an injured bird, do not realise it back into the wild. WRI advise carefully lifting the injured animal, placing them in a safe dark container, providing heat and allowing them to calm down. Then call your vet or



• Releasing a swan back into the wild is a challenging job for a volunteer.



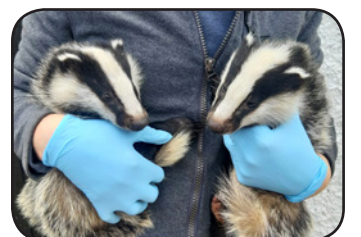
• An injured deer was rescued.



• Little May had an injured foot and required a lot of care.



• Do you know the name of this little critter - now in good hands?



• Two young badgers receive care.

THE ONE ART FORM

MISSING FROM YOUTH

BY CAI DESMOND-SADD



• Cai Desmond-Sadd is a 6th year pupil in Bruce College Cork.

• Here he interviews youth worker Fergal Barr who is campaigning to have humour recognised as a valid tool for engaging young people.

• This is Cai's first time writing for publication.

1. For anyone unaware, what exactly do you do in a nutshell?

"I'm a youth worker by profession, and also by trade - I see them as two different things. I currently work for one of the councils in Northern Ireland as a community development worker.

"Outside of that, I do other things such as freelance with Youth Work Ireland in Tipperary and I also organise humour festivals from time to time," he said.

2. What do you hope to achieve through your work?

"The one art form that is missing from youth work is humour. Every other art form is recognised, whether it's dance, poetry, music or art through brush or pencil. Humour is missing because it's such a natural phenomenon. People laugh and joke, but they don't think about it being a skill that you can actually learn."

"It's not about teaching people to be comedians. I don't want this to be confused with that. It's about using humour as a medium to engage people and transform situations," he said.



• Fergal Barr at work!

3. When did you start this work?

"Humour has always been a part of my life. From the minute I left the womb until now, humour has featured.

"A year later, we organised a feasibility meeting and then, long-story-short, the first humour training programme was held was in October 2012, followed by others in 2014 and 2018."

The next Humour Training Programme is actually scheduled

for this November."

• Find out more about the upcoming **Humour Training Programme** here: <https://thekingisalive.wixsite.com/humour>

4. Can you tell me a bit about the latest Humour Festival (held in June)?

"I decided to organise an event for practitioners who share an interest in the use of humour. One of my frustrations in youth work and trying to bring humour into it is the fact that a lot of people just don't get it.

"We wanted to create something that would help

increase awareness of the importance of humour and to help people learn some techniques about how they can use it in their work setting.

"What started as an idea of one half day event turned into a five-day festival of activity. We had 15 practitioners from 11 countries who used everything from simply a sense of humour in their work to clown therapy and stand-up. Each day had a theme and there were 26 events," he said.

5. I read on the line-up for this festival that one of the main theories involved with humour is **Incongruity Theory**. Could you explain that for me?

WHY THIS IS A REAL ISSUE

WORK IS HUMOUR

"There's actually a joke to explain it: Incongruity theory, it's not what you'd expect. If you ever hear a comedian tell a joke where they build up to something and you have a certain expectation, but what you get is completely different - that's incongruity theory. It's probably the strongest theory that underpins humour and comedians use it all the time."

6. Youth work is generally seen to be quite a serious field. Would you agree?

"Youth work is seen to be less serious than social work, but that doesn't mean it isn't serious. You can support a young person, and change their life because you intervened at a moment which ended up being life changing for them."

"Youth workers are serious about what they do, they want to support young people, they want to care for them and see them progress and develop as a human being," he said.

7. How is your work trying to change this perception of youth work?

"By holding humour festivals and a humour training programme called 'Humour is Serious Business'."

"I'm also doing some work with one of the health trusts here in the North, bringing recognition to humour as a means of promoting wellbeing. It's one of the most natural resources we have as humans. Humour is the shortest distance between people, after all," he said.

8. Could you give an example of how your use of humour has helped a situation relating to your work?

"When you're meeting a young person for the first time and they're a bit nervous about meeting another adult, because maybe they perceive adults as something not to trust, humour can be a great tool."

"By showing that you can be funny and are prepared to laugh at yourself, you break down barriers and nurture a rapport. As a youth worker, you need



• Anyone trying to engage with young people without employing a little humour might need to think again. Above: *The Derry Girls*.

to show the young person that you are not like a lot of the other adults they experience in their daily lives."

9. What is the fine line in the usage of humour?

"The fine line is really when a person is no longer part of the joke, but instead the target of it."

He warned against making fun of a person.

"Essentially, you need to have the consent of the person that

affects your work?

"Particularly in Northern Ireland, we have a dark sense of humour. One of the ways people in the North have often dealt with the trauma of The Troubles is by their humour."

"Not everyone understands this, so if you go to another part of the world, and you start to use this type of humour, people mightn't appreciate it. If you use sarcasm with people from other countries, they might think you're

them feel a little bit different. The child isn't telling a joke, they're not trying to be sarcastic - they're just having fun."

"There's nobody on planet earth that hasn't laughed, hasn't smiled, hasn't tried to tell a funny story or hasn't thought about something funny. Humour is ever present - it's in our DNA."

12. What got you interested in youth work in the first place?

"I fell into youth work by complete accident. I was in the job queue after I left school, outside the job centre in Derry, and somebody told me about a youth project," recalled Fergal.

He went along and it introduced him to group work methods and learning how to interact and relate to people and so on.

About 17 months later he moved to providing youth information and his role evolved. Gradually, he realised he was actually doing youth work, so he went to university to become a professional youth worker.

"I was on a kind of seven-year journey, my apprenticeship as I like to call it."

• Read Fergal's Top 10 Practical Tips on page 22.

"By showing that you can be funny and are prepared to laugh at yourself, you break down barriers and nurture a rapport."

you're sharing humour with. I don't mean that you must get written consent, where you might send them an email and say, 'Before I crack this joke with you, do you mind if I get written consent from you?' No, it's all about the relationship between you and the person you're sharing humour with."

10. There are obviously cultural differences in humour. Can you talk about how this

being serious," he said.

11. What advice would you give for anyone reading this who thinks they are "not funny"?

"Everybody has a sense of humour, and humour is not comedy. Comedy is just one form of humour."

"So you could be sitting in a cafe and you see a child giggling. Nobody can look at a giggling child and say it doesn't make

CONFERENCE: BUILDING A FAMILY LAW SYSTEM

Children are sometimes at risk through contact visits with violent parents

BY LAOISE NEYLON



Reform of the family court system is being considered at the highest levels as the system urgently needs reform, according to speakers at the 'Building a Family Law System for Children' conference held over the summer (see page 21).

Following the conference, reporter Laoise Neylon spoke to Mary Louise Lynch who founded a group for survivors of domestic violence called Survivors Informing Services and Institutions (SISI):

Lynch says she is regularly contacted by mothers who have been instructed by the courts to send their children on contact visits but the children are afraid to go. "The voice of the child absolutely needs to be represented," she says.

Lynch says she is regularly contacted by mothers who have been instructed by the courts to send their children on contact visits but the children are afraid to go. "The voice of the child absolutely needs to be represented," she says.

The family courts here, as in many other jurisdictions, see it as their job to facilitate contact with both parents. "They want joint access, they want joint custody," she says.

Which is fine - unless of course, it is dangerous.

Most of the work done by social workers and professionals working in the family court looks at the child's primary residence and considers whether that is safe, says Lynch. Potential



danger on access visits isn't given much consideration, she says.

COURT FLAWS

And the family court system doesn't recognise the dynamics of domestic violence, which is an ongoing pattern of behaviour, she says.

The courts appear to take the view that "just because he beat and raped the mother, doesn't mean he is not a perfectly good father," she says.

Lynch said that material evidence of serious violence, including Garda reports and medical reports of injuries, are often not taken into account, within the family court system, when deciding on a safe level of contact for children.

"Someone who has a safety order or a barring order will still have to facilitate access," she

says.

She said that, in Ireland, the child's contact with the perpetrator of violence is usually unsupervised.

LINKS BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE

Research indicates that there are links between domestic violence and child abuse, said Lynch. "Often in homes where there is domestic violence there is child sex abuse as well," she said.

Even in cases where children tell their play therapist about abuse, they are not always listened to, she said.

There are some excellent judges, she says, but there are too many family court judges in

Ireland who believe that 'parental alienation syndrome' is common.

Parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a child's experience of being manipulated or coached by one parent to turn against the other parent and resist contact with him or her

However, the syndrome has been dismissed by leading psychiatric associations in the US and is not included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the International Classification of Diseases.

According to parental alienation theory, one parent may persuade a child to turn against the other parent and even to claim that abuse took place when it did not.

Lynch says that if this happens at all it must be very rare, but it is resulting in numerous decisions by the family court that children

What if the children are not lying?

What if they are telling the truth and the court is ordering them to keep going on visits with their abuser?



- Mary Louise Lynch

are lying when they disclose abuse.

But what if they are not lying, she says. What if they are telling the truth and the court is ordering them to keep going on visits with their abuser?

"It is a fundamental human right to live free from fear," she says.

DEPT OF JUSTICE VIEWS

A spokesperson for the Department of Justice says that existing legislation sets out a wide range of factors that the court is required to take into account when determining the best interests of the child.

"These factors include, where applicable, any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering, including harm as a result of household violence, and the protection of the child's safety and psychological well-being," he says.

The Department has arranged for research on parental alienation to be carried out this year, looking at international approaches to the issue, he says.

They will then look at whether any changes to legislation or policy are required. "The best interests of the child will of course be paramount in any considerations," says the spokesperson.

MOVES BEGIN TO REFORM FAMILY LAW COURT

BY LAOISE NEYLON

Change is coming to family law courts and the sooner the better for children at risk, attendees heard at an online conference organised by One Family over the summer.

Dr. Stephanie Holt, an associate professor at TCD, speaking at the 'Building a Family Law System for Children' on June 2 said a risk assessment should be carried out on the dangers of allowing children to have contact with an abusive parent.

"Children have a right to end an abusive relationship," she told attendees.

At present, she said professionals often ignore a past pattern of domestic violence when deciding whether to grant contact. However Holt wants the legal system to take account of past abusive history as being relevant in assessing if there is a risk to children.

"Child safety and interests cannot be realised in a system that doesn't identify the risks," she said, speaking on June 2nd.

She said the family justice system in Ireland is currently characterised by a "dangerous combination of invisible risks and invisible rights," for children.

CHANGE IS COMING

Liam Coen, assistant principal officer at the Department of Justice, said change is coming.

The Department ran a public consultation survey on the future of family justice and it plans to consult with children and young people separately.

They are collaborating with the Department of Children to develop a process for doing that, said Coen.

"We will, as you can imagine, have a huge amount of information through our consultation process to analyse and reflect on," he said, speaking at the online conference.

He said the Department will establish advisory groups to analyse that information and feed into the Family Justice Oversight Group and the reform process.

Towards the end of this year they will begin to draft a new national family justice strategy.

They will look at the reform of family justice systems that have taken place in other jurisdictions while also examining scope for reform in the Irish context.

"It's a really exciting piece of work," said Coen.

The Family Court Bill, the general scheme of which was published in 2020, will establish special family courts at the district court and circuit court and high court level, with specialist training for dedicated judges.

The aim is to "try and improve the experience, overall, for families seeking to access justice," said Coen.

It is not yet known when the bill will be published, he said.

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A CHILD?

Holt said the new family courts need to look at what it is like to be a child and live with domestic violence, saying it has a serious impact on children.

"They see it, they hear it, they experience the aftermath," she said.

She said she found through her research that often the violent parent who rigorously pursues contact with the children, then doesn't actually participate in that contact once it is granted.

That calls into question whether the desire for contact was real in the first place, said Holt.

"The initiation of contact proceedings is often merely a tactic used by the abuser to continue the harassment and control over women and children," she said.

The family law courts should move away from focussing on the adult's right to contact. The objective should be "children's rights to safety, voice and agency," she said.

The aim is to "try and improve the experience, overall, for families seeking to access justice."



- Liam Coen, Department of Justice.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR USING HUMOUR WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

BY FERGAL BARR



- Always be prepared to laugh at and make fun of yourself – young people appreciate an adult that is prepared to do this – they tend to think this person is ok!

- Always greet young people with a smile – it can set the tone for them and you!

- Make sure the humour you use is equal to the relationship you have with the person you are engaging with – they must understand where you are going with it and be ok with it.

- When you use humour, you are making it ok for others to use it, but it might not be the kind of humour you expect or respect, so prepare yourself – not how to react, but how to respond. Your response will be key, particularly for any young person that might not understand your boundaries or expectations.

- Don't make young people the joke because you can and/or it's easy for you.

- When young people try to use humour to belittle or put you down, 'embrace' and use it to your advantage. By taking ownership of their humour you can turn the situation around and create a new situation which leads to a better outcome.

- Don't interpret every act of humour as an attempt to get at you – for some it's a defence mechanism and is all they know.

- Be prepared to challenge certain kinds of humour if it crosses ethical boundaries - explain why you are challenging it and what the issue with it is.

- Help young people to explore humour and understand the implications of it if it is misused.

- Your humour should only be used to care for the person you're trying to work with. It's designed to lighten the moment, put a smile on their face and be enjoyed by them. It can offer perspectives they might not have thought about and is based around the relationship you already have with them.

See our interview with Fergal on pages 18-19. Email him on: thekingisalive@hotmail.com

HORACE is back working in the Community and is concerned about Marcus's behaviour



After years on the fringes, I've returned to the workplace.

I sailed past never-before-seen adverts for jobs in pubs, shops and bike repair to return to – drum-roll please – the fabulous Community Sector.

I'm back in Ballybog Community Development Hub (nobody calls anything a 'Project' anymore) and they've appointed me a deputy supervisor. Of what I'm not sure. Of Marcus I think.

I'm only a few days back and it's getting to me.

Marcus, who cleans and hovers the place and is popular and indispensable, goes around humming "Community-Immunity... Community-Immunity" ALL DAY LONG, while sticking his tongue out and making faces at me, under his mask. I think. I'm pretty sure.

Almost certain. It's driving me insane. And I can't prove it until we get X-Ray CCTV to prove Marcus is sticking his tongue out.

It's a HR nightmare because Dotty my manager – reputedly Marcus's second cousin – says she doesn't want to know.

She said something about being more concerned with

recruiting people willing to work in the creche for a few euro an hour. (And you got to love children).

UNREAL

Left with no option, I signed up for 'HR Training In the Era of Covid' and Yoga classes. I was appalled. They wanted me to turn up in person, in a real place.

Seriously, what happened to just staring at a screen?

"Yes!" said Dotty. "It's like the old days again. Dress up, show up and don't f*** up, I mean pay attention."

If I have to fill out an evaluation form, I expect to be allowed to keep the pen.

It's one thing I miss since the pandemic struck – freebies at seminars, launches and conferences. I look on my collection of acronymed biros now with fondness.

I've also signed

up for Dublin PPN's weeklong: 'Festival of Fun(draising)'. I might even bump into someone there with the same horrific HR issues.

And yes, of course there are other issues.

Yes, the community garden is rather overgrown since Covid struck and the padlock on the gate's gone rusty. (There's a grant for fixing that – not the padlock, the garden).

Yes, the creche attic is overloaded with toilet paper since they panic-purchased a five-year supply in March of 2020 (anyone looking – good price!). Wondering is it a slight insurance risk. Hey, at least the kiddies won't run out.

And yes, I have return-to-work issues. When someone calls me by my name and I can't see a digital name beneath their chin... I flounder.

LATEST UPDATE

I applied to the Community Facilities Fund to get the X-Ray CCTV. They said it would be a bit of a stretch for under a grand, so I went to LEADER – they fund all sorts nowadays. We'd have it within a year, they said. A YEAR!

Instead of tech in the community, I've got thick in the community. I can't help it. I'm starting a Ballybog anti-mask group.

Meanwhile Marcus keeps singing that tune and Dotty and the team now all join in – "Community-Immunity... Community Immunity... Comm..."

AARGH, I'M BACK!

ABOUT HORACE:

Horace has worked as a civil servant (until he was fired), as a community worker (until he was fired) and as an agony uncle (very successful). He is utterly solutions-focused and has addressed everything from climate change to world poverty and he speaks fluent Pobalese. A few of his better columns are available on our website.

2,600 NEW PLACES ON CE AND TÚS SCHEMES

Over 2,600 additional places on Community Employment (CE) and Tús schemes are to be provided. The extra places were announced on August 27th.

An additional 1,475 places will be provided on CE schemes and 1,164 places on Tús schemes.

Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, and Minister of State, Joe O'Brien, said this "reflects a key commitment in Pathways to Work – the Government's ambitious new employment services strategy".

Minister Humphreys said, "At present, there are over 19,000 people participating in CE schemes and over 4,000 on Tús schemes. In 2020, the Department of Social Protection invested €425 million in these schemes – demonstrating their importance to communities right across the country."

A full list of the CE and Tús schemes receiving additional places is available on the Department of Social Protection's website.



ARTS & COMMUNITY DEV'T €10k BURSARY

The Arts Council's second Artist in the Community (AIC) Scheme bursary for 2021 focuses on collaborative arts and community development. The €10,000 award is being offered in partnership with Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

The Arts Council offers grants biannually through the AIC Scheme so artists and communities can work together on projects. The scheme is managed by Create.

This bursary aims to support an individual professional artist working in collaborative, socially engaged arts practice.

"It is aimed at an artist with a track record of working collaboratively with communities of place or interest in the context of community development," said Create.

ILDN CEO Joe Saunders was "pleased" that community development was the chosen theme. He said the arts can make "a valuable contribution to the work of our members in community development (and) the communities they work in".

"This is an exciting new partnership for us as we continue to broaden our range of activities within communities nationally," he added.

An information session facilitated by Siobhan Power of Dublin City Community Co-operative was held in early September to outline the selection process.

Closing date: October 18. Full details at: <https://www.create-ireland.ie/>

HOW RECRUITREFUGEES.IE ORIGINATED

First specialist recruitment company for refugees and asylum-seekers challenges stereotypes and supports refugees to get work

BY SORCHA GRISEWOOD

On 27 July 2021, one thousand of the over four thousand people who recently received Irish citizenship logged on to attend a virtual celebration which was live streamed from Croke Park.

For Roos Demol, CEO of RecruitRefugees.ie, who has been working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers since 2014, these are wonderful events and she hopes "they will also be treated like Irish citizens by employers and be given exactly the same chances as other citizens. It's what is needed to make the country a place of sanctuary and welcome for everyone."

Roos wants to tackle the negative stereotypes that exist around refugees and asylum seekers and highlight the huge wealth of talent and skills that they possess.

She set up RecruitRefugees.ie, a Cork based social enterprise, over a year ago to support refugees and asylum seekers in obtaining employment.

It is, as its website states, "the first specialist recruitment consultancy and agency for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants in Ireland".

Its mission is to "inspire dignity, hope and a bright future for asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland by connecting people to careers."

ROOS'S OWN EXPERIENCE

Roos' own experience as a newcomer to Ireland and former nurse within the prison system in her home country of Belgium has greatly informed her passion for this particular cause.

She moved to Cork with her husband in 1998 while pregnant with her first child.

She initially blogged about her experiences

trying to get to grips with the Irish healthcare system. However, she became "fed up" with blogging about herself and through a chance encounter, ended up becoming the host of a radio programme for asylum seekers and refugees.

Other opportunities came along in the form of a music band which showcased the talents of refugees and asylum seekers and enjoyed moderate success, even playing a concert in the National Concert Hall in Dublin!

She then began volunteering with refugees in a Direct Provision centre, supplying food and clothing and getting to know many personally.

A one minute "elevator pitch" and a chat at a networking event led to the set-up of RecruitRefugees.ie and she hasn't looked back since.

PARTNER ORGS

*RecruitRefugees.ie partners with the following organisations: Doras, the Irish Refugee Council, Open Doors, An Cosán, Cork City of Sanctuary, Mukisa, West Cork Development Partnership, MASI, and Sanctuary Runners.

(For more, see pages 24-25).



• Roos Demol (centre) with Norbert Nkengurutse and Albert Hakizimana.

STORIES OF REFUGEES V

Zimbabwean tech whiz calls for more opportunities

Andile Mondela from Zimbabwe is another success story. He has a background in hardware and systems administration and has lived in Ireland over four years. Though still in DP, he is busy volunteering as IT manager with RecruitRefugees.ie while also working fulltime with a major digital services company.

There have been positives for him such as being able to pursue his “passion for IT” and work in cloud technology.

Living here has also been challenging, particularly having to share a room in the centre where he lives and trying to do his job via mobile phone when the WIFI signal drops.

If he were to change anything about the current asylum system here, it would be to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers have access to

“unlimited labour” opportunities and a driving licence.

Living here has been challenging, having to share a room in the centre where he lives and trying to do his job for Dropbox via mobile phone when the WIFI signal drops.



Egyptian journalist free to practise again

Ahmed (*not his real name) is a sterling example of the incredible talent that newcomers to Ireland possess and that RecruitRefugees.ie is trying to promote.

An experienced journalist from Cairo whose photojournalism and documentary work has won awards, he has worked in 13 countries and for well-known media outlets such as Euronews and Associated Press. He has also covered protests in Egypt against the government. He tells me that

his home country ranks 3rd in the world for the number of imprisoned journalists and 153rd in world rankings for press freedom.

Much of the appeal of Ireland is that he is now living in a country that ranks 8th or 9th in the world in terms of press freedom. As a former asylum seeker who now has leave to remain and work, life in Ireland is “really good. It is the ideal peaceful place that I need to live in for now, after what I have seen and what I have covered.”

The big difference for him being able to work and contribute is that he is “no longer afraid”.

“When I was in my country, you might be arrested, you might be deported because of your work. Here I am not afraid to write about whichever topic I want,” he said.



Life in Ireland is “really good. It is the ideal peaceful place after what I have seen and what I have covered.”



PLEDGES ON DIRECT PROVISION IN THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Asylum-seekers are among the most vulnerable groups in society and the Programme for Government included a pledge to replace the Direct Provision accommodation system and replace it with a new not-for-profit approach with human rights at its core. This work is underway.

The PfG stated: “We are committed to ensuring that Ireland provides protection to those seeking refuge from conflict and persecution, as is required under international law.”

The PfG also pledged to improve conditions in the short term: “This includes vulnerability assessments, the right to work, the ability to apply for driver licences and bank accounts, an independent inspection process, measures to reduce the length of time in processing decisions, mental health services, and the training of managers of Direct Provision Centres.”

The acceptance in the PfG that DP must be replaced by a more humane, non-profit-driven system was seen as a win for activists who campaigned for dignified treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers.

WHO SETTLED

Algerian volunteer wants more work while embracing "diverse society"

Finally, Hanane (who asked us not to reveal her surname) is a former asylum seeker from Algeria who came to Ireland in 2015 with her young son. She volunteers with RecruitRefugees.ie in an outreach capacity.

As she is an Arabic and French speaker, she facilitates workshops in Arabic, helps with translation of documents and supports other refugees and asylum seekers to obtain work suited to their qualifications and level of job readiness. She also volunteers with Waterford Integration Services in conjunction with Waterford Youth Services. She previously worked with Waterford Education Centre and Treo on a youth diversion project and is currently studying towards a degree in Community Development and Education at Waterford IT.

Life in Ireland has also been challenging for her, particularly because of legislation that denied asylum seekers and refugees the right to work and education (a situation that has improved recently). She refers to it as her "journey from oppression to liberation".

She said the Irish state paid lip service to the idea of integration while placing barriers such as employment restrictions and the prohibition on obtaining a driving licence in the way thereby "increasing the level of stereotyping" and stigmatising of people who live in the DP system.

She emphasises that asylum seekers want to work and believes that "a diverse society is something amazing. Our uniqueness is our difference, I have something that you don't have and you have something that I don't have."



The prohibition on obtaining a driving licence increases the level of stereotyping and stigmatisation.

Employer: Hiring a refugee is the clever thing to do

Dr Lucy Michael is Director of Lucy Michael Research Training and Consultancy, and she has recently hired an employee through RecruitRefugees.ie.

She says that "hiring a refugee sounds like the morally right thing to do, but actually it's the right thing to do too in terms of business sense if you're looking for experienced employees."

"There's so much valuable experience and talent amongst people who have sought refuge in Ireland from war and persecution," she said.

"Hiring a refugee sounds like the morally right thing to do, but actually it's the right thing to do too in terms of business."



€1m social enterprise capital grants scheme

A new one million euro funding for social enterprises nationwide was announced on September 6th by Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys.

The Social Enterprise Capital Grants Scheme 2021 provides funding for the purchase of equipment or the carrying out of repairs or refurbishments to enable social enterprises to improve their service delivery.

The Minister said, "This initiative builds on other successful schemes for social enterprises funded by my Department in recent years, such as the Training and Mentoring Scheme, the Small Capital Grants Scheme for Social Enterprises, and the Social Enterprise COVID-19 Regeneration Programme."

"This announcement underscores my commitment under the National Social Enterprise Policy to growing and strengthening Social Enterprise," she said.

The scheme will be delivered by Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs). Final decisions on funding will be made by the Department of Rural and Community Development."

To allow flexibility, the Department did not set a national closing date, but allowed each LCDC to set its own deadline (once it was no later than October 15).



• This new capital grants scheme supports one of the key commitments in the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 – "Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise".

CALLS TO END “INCARCARATION” OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NURSING HOMES

- Minister Rabbitte agrees: €3m to go on independent living solutions

BY LAOISE NEYLON

Growing up in the Dublin suburb of Coolock, Peter Kearns recalls being sent to a special school every day in an ambulance.

He left the other children in his working class community each day to go to a “special clinical school in posh Sandymount,” he says.

Now a project manager with the Independent Living Movement of Ireland (ILMI), Mr Kearns said the experience left him with a clear understanding of the flaws in the medical model of disability.

He said it gave him “a mirror to look at how that experience was shaped by oppressive suggestions and directions and signposts.”

On May 5th, Mr Kearns chaired the ILMI conference ‘Everything You Wanted To Know About Disability But Were Afraid To Ask’.

The conference took place on the same day that the Office of the Ombudsman launched its report* ‘Wasted Lives’ (see opposite) on the experience of around 1,300 people with disabilities, aged under 65, who are stuck in nursing homes.

The conference also looked at the social model of disability, which sees disability as caused by society’s barriers (from attitudes to physical blocks) rather than by any difference or impairment.

INCARCERATED TO GET “PAROLE”

Selina Bonnie, access and equality officer for South Dublin County Council, said the ILMI was well aware of the issues before they were raised in the Ombudsman’s report.

Those younger people with disabilities, “have not been placed in nursing homes, they have been involuntarily incarcerated,” she said.

Fianna Fáil TD, Anne Rabbitte, Minister of State with responsibility for disability, launched the conference.

She said she will introduce legislation to ensure that disabled people and their organisations are central to the development of policy in the future.

She hopes to remove barriers to disabled people fully participating in education and employment too, she said.

Government and senior civil



• Photos from the ILMI’s annual report for 2019.

Maggie Cameron said systems can be hard to change, but disabled people’s organisations can educate policymakers about the social model.

servants must move towards the social model of disability, said the Minister.

“Ultimately I am here to listen and learn,” she said.

Minister Rabbitte said nursing homes were “not an appropriate placement” for under 65s and that those people should be provided with independent living solutions.

The government has allocated €3m towards that. “There is a clear government commitment to reduce this and provide a pathway to eliminate this practice,” she said.

Responding, Ms. Bonnie said, “It is wonderful that from today people will start to be paroled.”

A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The first question to the panel was “What does the word disability mean to you?”

“To me, disability is a social construct,” said Maggie Cameron, a freelance disability equality and diversity trainer with experience in developing Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs).

She quoted the feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, who famously said that “women were made not born.”

What de Beauvoir meant was that at that time society treated women very differently from men and that resulted in them having a different set of expectations and outcomes compared to men, said Ms Cameron.

“In terms of disability it is also true,” she said. “We are told as disabled people that there is

something wrong with us, that we are not quite right. This is all medical model thinking.”

Society makes assumptions and stereotypes about people with disabilities and the medical model sees disability as a negative, which can result in people being put in institutions.

The social model has completely different expectations and views disability as external.

“We have impairments, conditions, whatever term you chose to use about yourself,” she said. “But disability is imposed.

HOW CAN THE SOCIAL MODEL BE APPLIED?

Ms Cameron welcomed the minister’s attendance at the conference.

Systems can be hard to change, she said, but disabled people’s organisations can educate policymakers about the social model.

“If you work through and come from a social model ethos and understanding, it enables you to ask

Wasted Lives

Time for a better future
for younger people in nursing homes

An investigation by the Ombudsman

(Cont'd from previous page)

the right questions so you can then provide the right services,” said Ms Bonnie, who works for South Dublin County Council.

In an example from her own job, she said South Dublin County Council shouldn't ask people if their disability stops them from using the parks. Instead it should ask - “How can we change our parks so that you can use them?”

The social model means moving away from the charity model of service provision, said Amy Hassett of Disabled Women Ireland.

“We change disabled people from being recipients of charity... to people who have expertise,” she said.

Disabled persons' organisations have expertise and that should be valued in terms of their input into policy and decision making, she said. Disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty and half as likely to be employed, yet they are constantly being called on to work for free.

“How can I send a disabled person to go and give their expertise pro bono, when we are already more likely to be impoverished and less likely to be employed? It is not fair,” said Ms Hassett.

THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE

“Freedom of expression and the right to organise,” are essential, said Des Kenny, chairperson of ILMI. There should be a variety of groups of people with disabilities too. “Disabled people could bring a certain new tapestry to a new collective,” he said.

“Where would you be without a strong DPO?” asked Ms Cameron.

There aren't any in the northeast of England where she is working, because the funding has dried up. That means a decline in advocacy, information and peer support.

Local authorities and social services don't always have the expertise and knowledge required. “People are just left not knowing where to turn.”

• This was the first in a series of online ILMI events. For more, follow the ILMI on social media.

Testimony

HANNAH'S NURSING HOME EXPERIENCE

This is one of the many testimonies in the 228-page report 'Wasted Lives - Time for a better future for younger people in nursing homes', taken from the chapter 'The Personal Experiences of Residents Under 65':

Hannah has been living in a nursing home for over a year. She has a council house, which she visits once a week. Aside from this, she rarely leaves the nursing home.

She eats her meals by herself in her room as she finds it difficult to be in the communal dining room with some of the older residents. She described herself as having no social outlets.

She said that there are not many activities in the nursing home as the residents there are too old to even engage in activities like bingo. She said that they had flower arranging the previous week, but it involved watching someone showing them flower arranging, not participating.



She tries to go out to get her hair cut. She is very careful about her appearance and told us that the hairdresser in the nursing home gives everyone the same haircut. Hannah said that the other residents treat her like a member of staff.

She also said that she has a good relationship with staff, which is the only thing that keeps her sane.

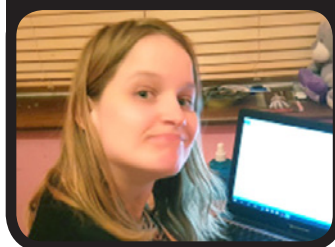
Her days are extremely long. If she talks to another resident, they often do not remember the conversation the next day. Living in the nursing home gets her down. Hannah has no Personal Assistance support and she would like one to get out of the nursing home more. Her advocate said that they are impossible to get in her area.

• The Ombudsman's report 'Wasted Lives' can be downloaded from its website: ombudsman.ie

Personal Assistance

45 mins a day not enough for a decent quality life

BY SARAH FITZGERALD



Since 2008, disability services have been ravaged by cutbacks, and many services, including the Personal Assistant Service, have become over-medicalised.

In the words of one of my former mentors Martin Naughton, a founder of the independent living movement, disabled people are traditionally viewed as people “to be cared for rather than to be cared about.” However, disabled people should have the right to make real choices that affect their lives, including where they live and who they live with.

At the moment, one of the most serious issues affecting disabled people is that many disabled people are living in institutions and in the family home. This is despite the fact that under Article 19 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, disabled people should have the right to access housing and the services they require to live independently.

Another issue is that Personal Assistance (PA) is grossly misunderstood in Ireland. The service is supposedly controlled by disabled people themselves, but according to research in 2017 a mere 2,200 people were accessing PA services in Ireland. Also, it was estimated that 44% of these received the equivalent of a mere 45 minutes a day. This is not nearly enough time to enable a disabled person to access a decent quality of life – employment, education and social activities.

In 2016, I became involved with what is today known as the ILMI. It was shortly after Martin Naughton died and I was invited to join a group of disabled activists from across Ireland to organise a memorial event for Martin and other disability activists who had passed away. This event became a catalyst in reigniting

the disability movement in Ireland. I learned the benefits of comradeship in a human rights movement and I felt at home. I had the privilege of working with seasoned disability activists, including the late John Doyle.

After the event, I was invited to join the ILMI's board and I officially joined in April 2018.

The ILMI is a disabled people's organisation which means that the core decisions are made by disabled people themselves. We are the experts in our own needs and we believe that solidarity among disabled people is central to the building of a movement.

I love the way that being involved with the ILMI feels like home, I am among people who realise that we are not broken, but it is society that needs to be fixed. We welcome membership from like-minded disabled people who want to work towards a fairer society for everybody.

The Irish advisory committee of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be soon reporting its findings to the UN and I hope that its contents are taken seriously and that improvements are made in order to allow disabled people to enjoy their rights as equal citizens.

I would also love to see more younger people becoming involved and to bring a fresh perspective to the movement.

Although there have been some improvements, issues such as Personal Assistance continue to deter disabled people from living their best lives. Going forward, we need to legislate for Personal Assistance to ensure that the service is protected from further cutbacks in the future.

WRITER & ACTIVIST

• Sarah Fitzgerald is a disability activist, writer and blogger. She is a member of the Offaly Disability Equality Network and secretary of the Independent Living Movement Ireland.

She blogs at: wobblymummy.com

Humphreys urges other towns to follow Cootehill & seek support funding

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A new community and business orientated website for a small town, believed to be the first of its kind, was launched recently by Minister Heather Humphreys.

Cootehill.ie includes a community hub showcasing clubs, groups and initiatives in the area and telling the history of Cootehill. It also provides an online marketplace for local business owners to sell their products directly from the site.

The site currently features 50 businesses on its online high street and 32 community groups.

The website's high-quality, interactive content was developed as part of a Smart Communities Initiative championed by Cootehill Chamber of Commerce and funded by Cavan County Council and the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2020.

The website "seeks to be an exemplar project" and an example of a digitally enabled community.

"The goal was to create a website to represent and promote all things good about Cootehill and act as a focal point for local initiatives which we think we have accomplished with the help of eTownz," said those behind the project.

WEBSITE DOES CAVAN PROUD

Chairperson of Cavan County Council, Cllr. Sarah O'Reilly, welcomed the launch of "a digital gateway to this vibrant, bright, dynamic, connected community."

She congratulated Cootehill Chamber of Commerce on "their vision", saying: "Cavan and Cootehill are among the first communities in Ireland to embrace the new EU directives on 'Connecting Rural Businesses through Technology' and all of us are very proud."

Cavan County Council provided over €4,000 towards funding the initiative, alongside the Department's larger grant.



• The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, earlier this year announced €15 million in funding to help revitalise rural towns and villages post Covid-19.

ONLINE PORTALS FOR TOWNS & VILLAGES

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys said it was "a wonderful concept and shows great vision and leadership by Cootehill Chamber of Commerce".

"I am very pleased to be associated with this initiative under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. My Department provided just over €37,000 for the project (and) it strikes me that many more towns and villages should and will follow your lead in developing an online portal for your community."

"It is important to equip local businesses with the tools they need to develop a web presence quickly to increase revenue. For the past year, we've been rolling out the importance of getting that online web presence. This website will increase footfall for Cootehill businesses. These kind of initiatives are now more important than ever as we begin to move beyond the pandemic and repair our economy."

Noting that any business or organisation on Cootehill's site can sell through the site, she said: "I understand this is the first for any town in Ireland. You should be very proud."

TOWN & VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME

"The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is one of the most popular schemes under my Department. It is designed to rejuvenate small rural towns and villages, to make them more attractive places to live, work, raise a family and do business and socialise," she said.

"It very much takes a bottom up approach. You come up with the ideas, you make the submissions and my Department, in conjunction with the local authority, ensures you get the funding to make it happen. That's what's happened in Cootehill."

She detailed the spending and the number of projects supported:

"Since 2018, under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, over €62million has been invested in 890 projects in every single county."

"When I became Minister I decided to enhance the scheme and last year saw total funding of €25m (spent on the scheme) including an additional €10 million provided under the Government's stimulus measures tailored to address the challenges from Covid-19 and to reflect that communities across the country need to be supported to get back on their feet."

RURAL REGENERATION & DEV'T FUND

The Minister also highlighted other schemes under which groups can work with their local authority to apply for - in particular the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which is for targeted large-scale investment. It aims to drive economic and social progress and sustainable development in rural areas.

COLLABORATION

Web designer Pat Kennedy of eTownz said, "Uniquely, each club or business runs their own profile page, with prices and services displayed. Now people in Cootehill can sell 24/7, worldwide."

"We have lots of ideas on what next for the site and we're asking people what they think. The site is built around being collaborative. It will be curated to ensure quality while also inviting people to submit news and content," he added.

While the closing date for receipt of applications to the Town and Village Renewal Scheme has passed for this year, plan now for the next round of funding.

For more info, see the dedicated page on the Department's website, via: <https://bit.ly/TVRSinfo>

