

# CHANGING IRELAND



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## A STABLE BOND - John and Monty



### Youthwork proves its worth

#### **FRESH START**

- John Bawle says Tús scheme is under-appreciated.
- Éamon Ó Cuív on scheme's history & why it needs reform.

#### **BUDGET BOOST**

- €4m extra for Social Inclusion & Community.
- €5m more for youth.
- €69m extra in 2022 for early years & childcare;
- Overseas aid to increase by €140m.



#### **DUBLIN**

Rita Fagan:- O'Devaney Gardens was a landgrab; Residents never sought regeneration.

ISSN 1649-5985



01 >

**CAPE CLEAR:** Ready for refugees. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE:** Humphreys pledges more support. **MAYO:** Edible landscapes. **POLITICS & PREGNANCY:** Tipp support. **ASKEATON:** Lighting up.

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

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A red and white logo with the text "MADE IN MOYROSS LIMERICK" in a bold, sans-serif font, set against a red background with a white border.

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

'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'.

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



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



# Contents

## LEAD STORY

**6-7**

- Winning Moyross jockey Westey Joyce puts youthwork in spotlight.

- John Wyse (11) on why he likes horses.



## NEWS

**5**

EQUALITY: Get elected, not pregnant!

**9**

84 outdoor adventure spots approved for funding, including swimming facilities

**10**

- More workers as SICAP budget up 10%
- Campaigners welcome amnesty

**11**

Community workers seek 3% pay rise

**12**

Social enterprise - more support pledged

**13**

- President on 25 years of community radio;
- New chair: "Pobal is a means to an end"

**21**

- Funding: €5m coming via Community Climate Action Programme; €2.6m from Town Centres First.

- More support for domestic violence victims

**26**

Dementia-inclusive radio on Near FM



**29-30**

Changing Westmeath / Frank Murtagh

**32**

EU embraces 'Smart Village' approach

## FEATURES

**8**

They've seen the light in West Limerick!  
- a SicapStory about community, art & illumination

**14-15**

Community leader John Bawle swears by Tús - "My head was gone"



**18-19**

O'Devaney Gardens  
17 years on

**20**

Wait became inter-generational

**22**

Cape Clear is ready to welcome refugees

**23**

In Profile: Olive McCarthy, Co-op Studies, UCC

**25**

Seeking change? Mayo has got your goat

**26**

What's special about pizza in Portlaoise?

**27**

Food Forest Workshops

**28**

The bees are coming this Spring!

## VIEWS & MORE

**16**

Éamon Ó Cuív, TD, writes about Tús, its origins and the unrealised vision behind it

**17**

- Horace's Diary



**22**

Childcare scheme doesn't match needs



## €5M MORE FOR YOUTHWORK - SOMEONE'S LISTENING



The case for supporting youthwork is clearly made by Wesley Joyce who attended the Moyross Youth Academy before becoming a top jockey. He is an inspiration, as is fellow Moyross native Keith Earls (whose book we gladly plug and encourage you to buy).

Both would have been pleased to see Budget 2022 commit €5m more to youth services.

The childcare and early years education sector was also promised increased investment in the budget.

The 10% increase in funding for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme was widely welcomed. (Funding for other programmes largely remains unchanged).

As highlighted by Rita Fagan and Frank Murtagh in these pages, community development work can never be underestimated. Without it, communities can be swept off the map - witness what's happened to O'Devaney Gardens.

Visiting Westmeath recently, I was struck by the volunteering and the difference that supports for local projects make. One man John Bawle said that without the Tús programme he "would be gone". He and others, including the very minister who set up the scheme in 2011, want to see it reformed.

Dedicated community workers and volunteers can make all the difference. On page 22, we read how an island off our south-west coast is ready to receive refugees, working in tandem with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. Cape Clear is an example to us all.

In this edition, we also highlight climate action and biodiversity from the bottom up. We cover goats in Mulranny, perfect pizza in Portlaoise, and bulbs and bees.

This is a bumper edition (printed as always on recycled paper with veggie inks) and still we have not covered all whose work demands more attention. I'm thinking of you Maria Flanagan and An Cosán's work, of two brilliant social change

organisations in Limerick, of reports from Westmeath held over for our next edition, and many more. We're looking at possibilities beyond this magazine to deliver all the news to you smartly.

Which brings us to Smart Villages. They're going to be all the rage from 2022 onwards - keep an eye out and avail of training if it comes your way.

Finally, to a very smart idea: A decade on from the recession, trade unions are seeking a pay rise for workers in the community and voluntary and care sectors. Good idea that!

The pandemic is of course still very much with us. However, you'll barely read about it here. I hope these news reports and positive stories of community development give you all a spring in your step.

*Allen Meagher*

## FILE A REPORT FOR US!

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



### Published By:

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

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**Editorial Team:** Viv Sadd, Robert Carey, Joe Saunders, Paul Geraghty and Allen Meagher.

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

**Printed by:** Davis Printers, Limerick.

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

### Thanks To . . .

'Changing Ireland' thanks everyone involved in the production of Issue 75.

### Front Cover:

Main picture: courtesy of Moyross Youth Academy.



## 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.

## Get elected, not pregnant!

- Bill seeks to give councillors family leave



• Holly Cairns, TD.



• Tipperary Councillors Máirín McGrath and Mary Hanna Hourigan.

In November, **Holly Cairns, South West Cork Social Democrats TD**, tabled a motion in the Dáil calling for maternity leave for councillors, as well as paternity and adoption leave.

During a recent visit to Co. Tipperary, we raised the issue with **Cllr Mary Hanna Hourigan** (Fine Gael) and **Councillor Máirín McGrath** (Ind).

They represent a quarter of the female councillors on Tipperary County Council (8 of 40). As **Cllr Hourigan** pointed out, eight is the highest number of females ever elected there.

"Not one of them has young children. I don't think you can do it," she says. As a mother of three, she had to wait until her children were older before seeking election.

"I would fully support Holly. It's a huge barrier. We're a modern society," she said.

She talked about a councillor she knows from West Cork who

had a baby recently and was taking calls from constituents the day after giving birth.

There is also the question of what happens when a councillor is sick.

**Councillor Máirín McGrath**, also supports the bill, but felt there were "grey areas" that had to be discussed.

Máirín, elected in 2019, is the daughter of Mattie McGrath, TD, and as one of her colleagues put it - "she works as a 24/7 councillor".

"It has to be done. It is surreal when I compare my role to my friends who are working in the public or private sector jobs," she said.

"It definitely should be done. They must be some options in place for young women who need it. But how would it work practically? Who replaces me for that period of time?"

"There just needs to be a greater conversation about it. The public

voted for me. Who can take up your job for you?"

For now, the message seems to be - don't get sick or don't get pregnant. When put to Máirín like that, she said, "You go into it and you know what's involved."

At present, leave can be granted to councillors for six months, but it has to be approved by a resolution of the local council and the person is deemed to have resigned from the council for that period.

Both councillors believe change is absolutely necessary - the nitty-gritty just needs to be discussed.

"How does the public get a good public service if I was out of work?... That needs to be addressed whether it is for maternity, or sick leave", said Máirín.

The bill was debated in the Seanad in early December and a motion of support passed.

- BY ALLEN MEAGHER

## JUST 25% OF COUNCILLORS ARE FEMALE

As of May 2021, 25% of elected local authority councillors in the State were women, according to 'See Her Elected' a relatively new Irish gender equality initiative.

However, there is an urban/rural divide. The 2019 Local Elections saw women win 48% of the seats in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown. In contrast, the proportion of women on Longford County Council fell to 5%, on Mayo County Council to 6%, and on Donegal County Council to 11%.

SHE's main work is to increase the representation of women in local politics in the rural northwest and midlands. The project is supported by Longford Women's Link and six women have so far decided to stand in the 2024 local authority elections, after attending online SHEschool classes.

SHE recently won the 'Innovation in Politics Award 2021' in the democracy category presented by the Vienna-based, Innovation in Politics Institute.



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

W: <https://innovationinpolitics.eu>

## NEXT EDITION: THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE COMMUNITY

As private sector companies are invited to tender for some work traditionally done by community-based organisations, we explore arguments for and against privatisation.

We look at work done by Jobs Clubs and Local Employment Services, why it is being put out to tender and what happens next.

The provision of homecare is now dominated by for-profit companies? Why so? Is it better? What do not-for-profit community-based services have to offer? Who regulates homecare?

And what's happening internationally? Tenders are now often issued for work once done very well by not-for-profits: Why?

## BRAS FOR THE LADS/SUPPORT US TOO!

Over 100 people have lent their support to a campaign led by an anonymous online activist calling on women to post their bras to the three Government party leaders.

Under the Twitter hashtags #OneSizeDoesNotFitAll, #WeAre50PerCent and #BrasForTheLads, campaigners argued that women are inadequately represented in making decisions in response to the pandemic.

Those posting said, "Bras have given women more support during Covid than the Government have."



## CAMPAIGN OVER COST OF INSURANCE

The Disability Federation of Ireland, representing over 100 voluntary disability groups, has joined a

campaign calling for insurance reform.

"Rising insurance renewal premiums are a concern to organisations of voluntary disability services because they have to take money from delivering services to pay increasing insurance cost," says John Dolan, the network's CEO.

Peter Boland of the Alliance for Insurance Reform (AIR) said: "It is frustrating that an organisation so focused on providing such essential services should feel the need to join our campaign." He called on the Government "to urgently accelerate the pace of insurance reform".

Members of the lobby group for insurance reform now include: Early Childhood Ireland, Volunteer Ireland, The Wheel, the Irish Charity Shops Association, Community Reuse Network Ireland, Galway County Public Participation Network (PPN), Sligo PPN and South Dublin County PPN.



# Winning Limerick jockey puts youthwork in spotlight

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Until recently, Moyross Youth Academy (MYA) was one of Limerick's under-the-radar success stories.

The organisation helps to train, mentor and nurture youngsters with ambitions to work in the horse industry. It does much more besides to engage youths – from carpentry training to motorbike maintenance to name but two.

However, it was its horse welfare and education programme that shot into view this year when one of the project's protégés Wesley Joyce won at Sligo Racecourse. And he keeps on winning.

Wesley joined the project when he was five years old and never forgot his roots.

"They're great people down there, trying to help all the young lads. They don't get paid enough for what they do," he told television viewers.

MYA has a strong partnership with RACE Academy in Kildare and that's where Wesley rose to stardom. He now rides with Johnny Murtagh's yard.

Naturally, local youngsters hope to follow his path. While others have gone from Moyross to Kildare before him and found success, Wesley's winning streak – seven wins and counting – has made him stand out.

"I want to be a jockey like Wesley," young Calum told TG4. A young female jockey testified that, "Wesley is a great inspiration for all of us. You can get anywhere if you put your mind to it."

In August, Wesley had a big win when he romped home in the €100,000 handicap on day six of the Galway Festival. His form is steady.

He encourages every youngster with an interest in horses to pursue their ambitions.

"There's loads of young lads in Limerick, in Moyross, with plenty of ability to go on and make good lives for themselves."

Recently, he took the bus home to Limerick with a group of adoring fans from the city who went to The Curragh to see him ride (he won again).

"He came back with us on the bus, he was sitting beside them. It makes their dream attainable. It's no longer a dream, it's an achievable goal," said



• Wesley Joyce speaking to Sport TG4.

riding instructor Catherine Normoyle of MYA.

TG4 visited Limerick this month to find out more about the group Wesley paid such high tribute to and the crew accompanied MYA staff to Clare Equestrian Centre.

Helping youngsters to saddle a horse, Catherine said, "They're fairly on the ball. They know what they're doing. Some are real naturals."



• MYA says Trisha Kerrigan and Ora (above) have an incredible relationship: "This girl is a very special talent, one of the best riders we have for sure. A future in the equine industry is inevitable."

She noticed youths on the course bring what they learn home to their community.

"We had a young girl here the other day and I asked her how did she know how to do something and she said 'Calum showed me', which is great to hear."

With the cameras rolling, she gently encouraged youngsters making their first appearance on television:

"You'll have to get used to this if you're going to be a jockey. You'll be on camera all the time," she said.

As well as children who grow up around horses, the project also welcomes those who never sat on a horse before in their lives.

Catherine sees the benefits daily.

"I've seen kids come in here in the morning and you'd know there was something slightly off. By the end of the day, you see the change. It's the horses – they're calming and they bring you back to yourself. They give you a break. They're really important," she said.

People have seen their lives turn around by engaging with MYA and the academy has evolved from when it originally focused on young people in Moyross and Ballynanty.

"It's gone citywide and we're



looking at communities across Limerick city where there is a culture of horse-ownership, where it's generational," said Karen Keehan of MYA. "For some of these youngsters it's innate with them. They grew up all their lives around horses and they're very passionate about horses."

Young people sign up for courses with MYA across a range of skills areas. The academy also teaches the Leaving Cert Applied.

Remembering when Wesley was a child, Karen said, "I remember him telling a teacher once – 'There's no plan B, I'm going to become a jockey.'"

She said MYA hopes to instill that level of self-belief in the young people it works with.

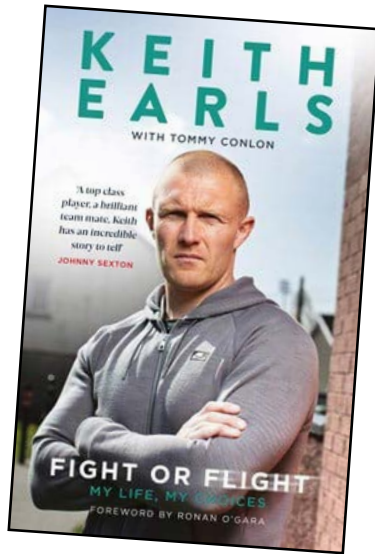
Keith Earls – who publicly congratulated Wesley on his success – is the most famous sports stars to date to emerge from Moyross. With Wesley now making waves, you can bet on more stars emerging from sporting Limerick. It's not just hurling in the Treaty City!

Meanwhile, staff in MYA are enjoying the extra attention Wesley's success is bringing to their crucial, community-based youthwork. In operation since the early 1990s, the





• Keith Earls in 2008 playing his first game for Ireland in Thomond Park, next door to his homeplace Moyross. His award-winning autobiography 'Fight or Flight - My Life, My Choices' was published recently. He is delighted for Wesley.



project rebranded as MYA in 2018.

Elaine Slattery is one of the academy's founders (and as it happens one of the founders of 'Changing Ireland'). As she has previously said:

"Compared to other EU member states, Ireland actually has a very good story to tell in the area of youth justice. We have comparatively low numbers of children in care or in detention. But the challenge is always to identify what more we can do and what new approach we can take to diverting children and young people from crime and anti-social behaviour," she said.

The project's funders include: the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Social Protection, An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, Solas, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, and Limerick City and County Council's Regeneration Programme.

**For more information directly from the project, contact:**

Andrew O'Byrne on 085 853 0463 or at [andrew@mya.irish](mailto:andrew@mya.irish)

Elaine Slattery on 087 283 5390 or at [elaine@mya.irish](mailto:elaine@mya.irish)



• John and Monty have bonded. This is the kind of work Moyross Youth Academy have been doing with young people for years. Photo by Karen Keehan.

## "I WANT TO BE A JOCKEY LIKE WESLEY"

**Where are you from?** My name is John Wyse and I'm 11 years old and I'm from Ballynanty in Limerick.

**Why do you like Monty so much? What is Monty like?** Monty is a hard pony to hold. He's a good pony and I like him cause he's quiet but very fast.

I like all the ponies - we have six now. I really like Comet too... I'll be riding Comet in future. Tianna - she's my age too - and she rides Comet.

**How often do you meet Monty?** We go to the stables every week, more often when we're on our holidays from school.

**What do you do when you go to the stables?** I groom all the horses, then go for a cup of tea, then we go riding.

**How long are you going to the stables?** About two years I think. My brothers used to go and I went with them one day to meet the bus. I was on my bike and was going to cycle back home, but I asked Karen could I go too. Next thing I was on the bus with my bike too.

**Who else goes to the stables with you?** I go with my two brothers Jordan and Michael and other people in my group.

**What do you want to do when you grow up?** I want to be a jockey like Wesley.



• Top right and clockwise: Callum Quinn, Chelsea Quinn, Jordan Wyse and Trish Kerrigan - young riders with ambition from Limerick city who spoke to TG4 about Moyross man Wesley Joyce's winning.



## They've seen the light in West Limerick!

• Lantern festivals are popular the world over - from Hong Kong to Banjul to the Rhineland - and now they've seen the light in West Limerick! Askeaton's 'Féile Laindeir' has brought the River Deel to life in ways never before seen.

• Thanks to local volunteer Deralee Collins for sharing her shots and to development worker

**BY DAMIEN AHERN\***



Askeaton came alive on Friday night, Oct. 22, for 'Féile Laindeir' where brightly-coloured, uniquely-designed, environmentally-

friendly Willow Lanterns were paraded up the River Deel and along it's riverbank.

The spectacle resulted from a lantern making programme run over five weeks in Askeaton Community Centre. The theme for this year's festival was 'Lights on the River Deel' which was individually interpreted by each participant.

The Deel Art Group facilitated the lantern programme, with advice and guidance from illustrator and designer Rachael Grainger, supported by West Limerick Resources through the national SICAP\* programme.

The Deel Art Group have earned a reputation, having led many community arts projects in the town - including a 'Paint a Rock' project, the recent 'Arts of the Quay' project and their famous Christmas Window Display.

Anita Guinane is the group's chairperson. She said, "It was a hugely positive evening for the town, where a large crowd gathered to admire the lanterns, and to follow the parade up the river. As a new addition to this year's festival, music was projected over a speaker, adding to the drama and spectacle of the evening. I am very proud of our members who delivered the programme and of the participants who amazed us with their talents."

The Desmond Rowing Club, Askeaton-Ballysteen Ladies Gaelic Football Club and Askeaton-Ballysteen Community Council volunteered their services for the evening, ensuring a broad representation from the community - all working together for the enjoyment of the town.

Limerick Youth Service and



• Local artists took to the river on baots with lanterns while others carried their lanterns along the riverside.



• What better way to respond to winter darkness than with a lantern festival!



• This is the festival's second year.

*Askeaton's 'Féile Laindeir' brings the River Deel to life, as Deralee Collins's photographs so beautifully show.*

Foróige members also took part in the festival. They provided materials and ran a workshop through West Limerick Resources, with SICAP support.

"The Deel Art Group is just one example of a number of community groups supported by the SICAP programme in West Limerick," said Adrienne O'Connell, SICAP education and training co-ordinator.

"In building the art group's

capacity, it allows them to become a strategic player in delivering positive community development initiatives, while creating a creative space where individuals can come together and share skills and talents and form new friendships. In fact, the Deel Art Group has three new members as a result of this project and the very best of luck to them," she said.

*\*\* SICAP stands for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.*



## 84 adventure spots receive 'Our Rural Future' funding - including for outdoor swimming



• North Clare teenagers show off their skills in the surf near White Strand.

PHOTO BY A. MEAGHER.

- **Major investment in our mountain and forest walks, cliffways, beaches, bogs, lakes, rivers, greenways, blueways and brideways**
- **Focus on developing adventure tourism activities such as hiking, mountaineering, kayaking, swimming and cycling**
- **New funding to support projects at an early stage of delivery**

Outdoor swimming facilities are among 84 projects destined to receive funding through the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS).

As tourism minister Catherine Martin said, "As a nation we've taken to the water like never before."

The funding was announced on November 30 under the Government's 'Our Rural Future' plan. It includes funding to develop 66 established natural amenities and outdoor pursuit locations for hiking, mountaineering, kayaking, swimming and cycling. Funding is also being provided to progress 18 outdoor recreational projects that are at an early stage of development.

The projects chosen for support include walking and cycling trails, cliffways, beaches, lakes, rivers, bogs, greenways, blueways and brideways.

Formally making the announcement, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, said:

"Outdoor pursuits have become an even bigger part of all of our lives over the past two years. Through this Fund, we are developing and enhancing the fantastic natural amenities in our rural communities so more and more people can access and enjoy them."

The spending – a key part of Our Rural Future – will support rural economies and make Rural Ireland a more attractive destination for adventure tourism.

She said, "This investment will be felt in every county. I'm also really pleased to provide over €855,000 in funding to support 18

further projects that are at an earlier stage of development. These projects, when complete, will make Rural Ireland an even better place to live, work, visit and raise a family."

She acknowledged the support of Fáilte Ireland which is once again contributing to the funding of projects under the ORIS Scheme.

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin, said:

"Fáilte Ireland has invested more than €11million in the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme over the past three years, with a further €4million this year.

In partnership with the Department of Community and Rural Development this four-year investment has helped to truly transform the landscape of Ireland.

"The inclusion of outdoor swimming facilities is welcome. As a nation we've taken to the water like never before," she said.

Funding for developing or improving outdoor swimming facilities has been approved for the Bishops Meadows, Kilkenny City, Kinlough, Co. Leitrim, Ballybay, Co. Monaghan, Rathkeale, Co. Limerick, and Anaghdown Pier, Co. Galway. The latter is a good example: €20,000 has been approved for the maintenance of the shallow swimming area, the pier structure and bank wall, and the provision of lifebuoy.

The full list of approved OTIS projects are online at: <https://bit.ly/OTISfunding2021>

The November 30th announcement brings the total investment announced this year under ORIS to almost €35 million.

## OUR RURAL FUTURE

Our Rural Future is the whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland from now to 2025.

According to the Government, "It represents a new milestone in the approach to rural development policy for Ireland and adopts a more strategic, ambitious and holistic approach to investing in and maximising opportunities for rural areas."

## OUTDOOR FUNDING GRANTS FROM UNDER €20K UP TO €200K - YOU PAY 10%

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding as follows:

- Measure 1: Small scale repair/development/promotion and marketing (grants up to €20,000 available).
- Measure 2: Medium scale upgrade and new trail/amenity development (grants up to €200,000 available).
- Measure 3: Large scale repair/upgrade and new strategic trail/amenity development (grants up to €500,000 available).

Project Development Measure: Development costs for strategic large-scale Measure 2 or Measure 3 type projects. e.g. Detailed design, preparation for the planning and/or procurement, appropriate assessment, etc. (Grants of up to €50,000 are available).

Funding of up to 90% of the total approved project costs is awarded, with the additional 10% to be provided from other sources.

All measures under ORIS are supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development in partnership with Fáilte Ireland. Following consultation with local communities project applications are submitted from Local Authorities in respect of Measure 2 and the Project Development Measure and Local Authorities and State Bodies for Measure 3.

The Government's commitment to invest in communities and in tourism through ORIS is a key part of Our Rural Future.



**Todhchaí Cheantair Thuaith na hÉireann**  
**Our Rural Future**



## BUDGET 2022

## €5m more for youthwork, but not enough for poorest children

Budget 2022 received a mixed reception from community and voluntary organisations. Take funding for youth and children for example.

The €5m extra for youth work was welcomed by Foróige and others. It will see the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth spend €73m on youth services in 2022.

The National Women's Council of Ireland said the budget was "a missed opportunity" because the Government did not commit "to the development of a public childcare model".

One Family said it was "a piecemeal budget that fails to deliver for Ireland's poorest families".

Meanwhile, Children's Rights Ireland said there was "some relief for families in Budget 2022, but more could have been done for the poorest children".

**CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS  
ALLIANCE**

# SICAP budget up 10%

**B**udget 2022 will see additional workers hired to work in communities through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Funding for the programme will increase from €40m to €44m, in a widely welcomed move.

Groups including the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) had lobbied for more support, pointing out that spending in this area remains below what it was a decade ago. In 2010, there were 180 Community Development Projects funded by the state - the programme was ended after 18 years and projects either had their funding cut or were merged with larger groups to form local development companies.

The ILDN described the increase as "a step in the right direction".

Minister of State Joe O'Brien, responsible for Community Development and Charities, pointing out that SICAP is the country's principal social inclusion programme, said the increase "will further enhance the vital work of SICAP".

He said it will see "additional community workers on the ground in communities."

"The community spirit underpinning SICAP and that was so evident throughout the pandemic must be harnessed and built upon. Today's budget increase is a significant strengthening

of community supports and I look forward to welcoming the new community workers into communities across Ireland over the coming months."

ILDN CEO Joe Saunders said, "SICAP is the Government's flagship anti-poverty programme and the increase in its budget certainly sends a signal to our colleagues working in communities tackling social exclusion that their efforts are valued and supported."

Adeline O'Brien, also speaking on behalf of the ILDN, said the increase was "an acknowledgement" of SICAP's role in tackling social exclusion, especially during this pandemic.

"Our efforts Pre-Budget focused on poverty, homelessness, social exclusion, isolation, and marginalisation and the negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals and the communities they live in and belong to. Today's increase in the SICAP Budget will further equip ILDN members to meet all of these challenges in their communities," she said.

Despite inflation, funding for the Community Services Programme, Public Participation Networks and other community supports largely remained the same.

Nonetheless, it is clear the range of programmes and funding distributed through the Department of Rural



• Minister Joe O'Brien in Cork in July at the launch of the annual SICAP report.

and Community Development is growing. The Department's budget has increased to €376m for 2022.

Meanwhile, on climate action in Budget 2022 overall, the Environmental Pillar acknowledged there were "some wins here" for the environment "but big strides are still needed to address the climate and biodiversity crises".

The budget for Irish overseas aid was also increased - by €140m, - which GOAL said showed solidarity with vulnerable communities.

# Campaigners welcome amnesty

**G**one is "the fear that the next knock on the door will be someone to take us away", said Tjanasi Potso, responding to the announcement by Justice Minister Helen McEntee of an amnesty for undocumented migrants.

The scheme is open to anyone living here for over four years who needs to regularise their immigration status. For people with children, three years will suffice. The scheme also includes a separate track for International Protection applicants who are in the process for a minimum of two years.

Ms. Potso is chairperson of the Justice for Undocumented Group.

She said, "This scheme will allow us to live securely in our homes, no longer in fear that the next knock at



• L-to-R: Campaigner Tjanasi Potso; Justice Minister Helen McEntee.

the door will be someone to take us away. We can stand up for our rights at work, our children can grow up safely, and we can visit our families for the first time in many years."

Ms. Potso said the scheme "will transform our lives", adding: "Make no mistake this was achieved because a small group of people took a big step to come forward and campaign for rights and recognition."

**Gone is "the fear that the next knock on the door will be someone to take us away" - Tjanasi Potso**

An estimated 17,000 people are likely to benefit. Undocumented people will no longer have "to live in the shadows", said Minister McEntee.

Of note, a scheme to regularise the position of undocumented migrants was promised in the Programme for Government agreed last year.

While the move had been expected by NGOs that support migrants,



they were caught partly by surprise when the justice minister made the actual announcement in early December.

The National Women's Council of Ireland said, "This move will benefit so many undocumented women, many of them at the heart of our communities, and working in key sectors of our economy such as childcare, retail and cleaning."

Community Work Ireland

described it as "a game changer for so many" and "justice after years of hard and very creative work".

The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland which supported Tjanasi's group described it as "huge news" and "a major victory" after years of campaigning.

The Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) said it was "pleased to see (the) scheme reflecting submissions on the way it will be administered". MASI co-ordinator, Bulelani Mfaco and Ms. Potso were among 25 campaign leaders who called in September for any amnesty scheme to be "broad and inclusive".

However, it added: "We are mindful that the schemes don't include everyone and urge parties in government to provide a pathway for frontline workers."



# 3% PAY RISE SOUGHT BY UNIONS FOR COMMUNITY / CARE WORKERS

SIPTU, the INMO, Fórsa and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions are seeking a pay rise for thousands of workers employed in the voluntary and community sector.

Unions are also seeking to establish a collective bargaining forum for the sector where pay, terms and funding can be properly established.

The unions say the pay claim, set at 3%, would bring tens of thousands of workers in the community and voluntary sector in line with pay patterns across all sectors (including the pay provisions contained in the public service agreement, Building Momentum).

The unions launched a joint campaign on November 9th called 'Valuing Care/Recognising Work'. It aims to find "a fair way forward" for workers in the community and voluntary sector.

**Community development worker Roisin Ryder** said: "This is complex and skilled work. We need to attract skilled and talented people, but there's no pension or competitive pay scale. There's been an exodus from the community sector to the HSE, and why wouldn't they? They can get better pay and a pension elsewhere."

**SIPTU public administration and community sector official Adrian Kane**, said: "Most workers in these sectors are precariously employed with little or no pension cover or sick pay. We need to find a

*"There's been an exodus from the community sector to the HSE, and why wouldn't they? They can get better pay and a pension elsewhere."*

fair way forward for the voluntary and community sector."

"These workers are the glue that holds our communities together. We want to ensure their work is recognised and valued. We're putting in a pay claim of 3%, for a group of workers who have endured pay cuts, reduced working time, and zero pay improvements since 2008."

While figures were not provided, unions say that "the vast majority of workers providing these services have not had any pay improvements since the collapse of social partnership in 2009".

Following that breakdown, there was a "decoupling of the sector from pay provisions included in public sector pay agreements".

The unions say the retention of staff in the sector is an issue, with up to a third of leaving their jobs each year to avail of better terms elsewhere.



• Union representatives and workers outside Leinster House on Nov. 9th.

Mr Kane continues: "Central to all of this is the establishment of an appropriate collective bargaining forum for the sector where we can negotiate pay, terms and funding for the sector with its primary funder, which is the State."

Union leaders argue that while the Government is the principal funder of the sector, successive administrations have denied any responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment which exist within it.

"This has led directly to a highly dysfunctional industrial relations environment where recommendations

by the Labour Court and other Employment Law Bodies remain unimplemented because the relevant government department will not fund the employer to comply with same," they say.

**Fórsa assistant general secretary Catherine Keogh** said:

"Employers in the sector are witnessing a flight of workers - which has the knock-on effect of creating additional recruitment costs. The loss of experienced staff has an immeasurable negative impact on the continuity of care they provide," she said.



## 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>



# #SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: Keynote Speech

"If you're a social enterprise, be proud to identify yourself!"

## - Humphrey's pledges more support for social enterprises at 3rd national conference

October 19th saw 370 people log in to attend the 2021 National Social Enterprise Conference. It was hosted by Dunhill Eco-Park.

The first national social enterprise conference with full State support was held in Croke Park, in 2019. This year, as in 2020, it was held online, with much innovation apparent in the delivery.

It was opened by Dunhill's Senan Cooke, known as "the Godfather of social enterprise in Ireland", as Waterford neighbour, Tammy Darcy (CEO of Seri\*) nicely termed it. Probably everyone would agree that the author, community development and social enterprise enthusiast is a born leader. He has campaigned for decades about the empowering potential within communities, if properly harnessed and supported.



• Senan Cooke, Dunhill.

In her keynote address, Heather Humphreys, Minister for Rural and Community Development, addressed what the Government was doing in that regard for the "growing sector".

The conference theme was 'The Future of Social Enterprise in a Changing Ireland' and she praised social enterprises for their role to date in the midst of the "biggest pandemic in a century".

Urging people to raise awareness about the value of social enterprises, she said next year was "a critical one" as a new national strategy for the Republic of Ireland would be developed. (Northern Ireland is some years ahead in terms of developing its social enterprise sector).

"The next 12 months are critically important for the social enterprise sector in Ireland. It is the year in which we must co-create a new social enterprise policy from 2023. We



• Guest speakers sit for a kitchen-table style discussion as part of the conference - beamed live from Dunhill.

won't rush it or dictate the priorities. It's for all stakeholders to work with us. The conversation starts now," she said.

Looking at how Ireland was changing, she welcomed the greater diversity and rising awareness "of the need to address the climate and biodiversity crisis".

"Our young people are seeking a brighter, greener and more sustainable future," she said. "But if the pandemic has taught us one thing, it is that sense of resilience and community spirit that we have right across our society. As Minister for Rural and Community Development, I've seen so many examples of that sense of resilience in towns and villages the length and breadth of the country in recent months. Many of those were social enterprises. Keep doing what you do best - serving our communities and making a positive impact on our society and on our economy."

She referenced various funds that provided or provide support to social enterprises, including the Stability Fund and the Innovate Together Fund.

"We also developed a new scheme for start up social enterprises in conjunction with Rethink Ireland. To raise awareness, the Arise scheme was also recently announced. The

### *"Next year, we'll also be conducting our first census of social enterprise."*

€600,000 scheme is the first of its kind," she said.

She also highlighted, among others, the €1m capital investment scheme for social enterprises, being delivered through Local Community Development Committees.

"Behind the scenes my officials are also working with other relevant departments so that social enterprise can apply for mainstream business supports," she added.

"Raising awareness of social enterprise continues to be an ongoing challenge. We all have a role to play. I want to challenge you - how can we all continue this effort to promote social enterprise? If you are a social enterprise, please be proud to identify as one."

She added: "Next year, we'll also be conducting our first census of social enterprise. This work will give us a better idea of the scale of the sector."

Among the conference speakers were: Ossian Smyth, Minister of State at the Department of Public

Expenditure and Reform, Sarah Miller from Ballymun's Rediscovery Centre, Una Lavelle, chairperson of the Community Reuse Network Ireland, Eoghan Ryan from Rethink Ireland, Clodagh O'Reilly of the Irish Social Enterprise Network, the PAUL Partnership's Elaine McGrath, Fergus Finlay (representing SERI), the Wheel's Ivan Cooper and Pauline Gannon of Social Impact Ireland.

Kevin McCarthy, Secretary General, Dept. Rural & Community Development summed up the conference. There was, he noted, debate about whether social enterprise was a sector or a movement. He spoke about "the collective challenge of partnership and collaboration which will be very important in developing the new strategy".

He too noted that the OECD work is to commence soon "to get an external perspective on where we are at".

He said, regarding co-creating the new strategy, that the next 12 months are critical. "We are keen to take forward the conversation," he said.

\* Seri = Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland.





## PRESIDENT SPEAKS AT 25 YEAR RADIO CELEBS

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the setting up of the first 11 community radio stations in the ROI, with support from then communications minister - President Michael D. Higgins. He officiated at a summer celebration of the quarter century of broadcasting, saying how community radio proves that listeners are "much more than passive consumers in mass communication".

He said: "Community radio uniquely fosters a positive dialogue and practical solidarity, one that contributes to the advancement and betterment of our communities and our society, with its great capacity to bring people together."

"Community radio is a vital part of the shared public space for people to meet and collaborate. It is a public good," said President Higgins.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Craol describes community radio as "a force for community development, identity, and expression". The umbrella organisation supports around 2,000 volunteers operating close to 50 community radio stations, reaching over 170,000 people around the country.

Last year, Craol published a series of reports on the social benefits of community radio and how best to identify them.

As Declan Gibbons, chair of Craol, said, "It is only through demonstrating the social benefit that our sector delivers, that we can capture the true value of community radio and media."

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



# €717m ALLOCATED IN 2020

## "Pobal is a means to an end" - Mannion tells Oireachtas



• Rosarii Mannion, chairperson of Pobal, Anna Shakespeare, Pobal CEO, Heather Humphreys, Minister for Rural and Community Development and Deiric Ó Broin outgoing chairperson of Pobal – pictured on Sept 29th at the launch of Pobal's annual report for 2020.

Pobal is "not an end in itself", but a means to an end that results in stronger communities, the new chairperson of the huge agency told Oireachtas members in late September, a week before taking up her new voluntary role.

Rosarii Mannion addressed the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands on Sept 22nd, a week before she was formally appointed. (She replaced outgoing chair Professor Deiric Ó Broin).

"As chairperson of Pobal, a key role for my board colleagues and I will be to support, to challenge and to lead our excellent and committed staff to deliver on government policy, to deliver on our programmes and to remember one fundamental thing. Pobal is not an end in itself.

"It is not the object of the exercise. It is a means to an end and that end is a stronger society. It is communities across the country where people – especially the most vulnerable – are better supported," she told the committee.

"I believe passionately in rural communities, in community development and in social inclusion. I have seen first-hand the impact of the work of Pobal. My

lived experience is that diversity, equality, justice and inclusion make for a stronger society. I know that these values give chance and opportunity to those who would not otherwise enjoy it."

"If the programmes we support are effective, people's lives are enhanced. That is the context in which my board colleagues and I are working on our Strategic Plan 2022– 2026," she said.

Ms. Mannion has worked professionally as National HR Director in the HSE while volunteering interests include serving with the National Adult Literacy Agency.

She has served on local, national and international boards and key interest areas of her own include the role of women in society, the role of carers and gender equality.

## NOT SMALL CHANGE

Pobal's 16-person board already includes people with experience in various areas – from Ciaran Reid, CEO of Louth LEADER Partnership to Molly Buckley, a public health nurse, and Ann Hanley who worked as Manager of Bailieborough Resource House Childcare Facility for almost 20 years. (To read more about the

board's current members, visit <https://www.pobal.ie>)

## FROM DRUMSHANBO

Ms. Mannion, from Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, joined the board in late 2020. Outlining Pobal's work, Ms. Mannion said on a Zoom interview with us:

"In 2020, we allocated €717m to local and national community organisations."

She described Pobal as "a really busy, progressive, involved and dedicated organisation."

"It works on behalf of government in conjunction with communities and local agencies to support social inclusion and local and community development. We do this by managing funding and providing support – at this stage to around 31 programmes."

Its Senior Alerts Scheme is one of the best known, not least because it's very easily explained.

Looking ahead at Pobal's role, she said, "There is an unique opportunity now in building back better and being more socially inclusive post-pandemic."

Time will tell how successful the organisation and those it supports are in that regard.



## COMMUNITY LEADER JOHN BAWLE SWEARS BY TÚS - "MY HEAD WAS GONE"

Now he and his team are winning awards for Mullingar and changing the town

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

**"T**here's a man down the corridor who's waited an hour to see you. He has a story he wants to tell," said Linda Jo Quinn of Westmeath Community Development.

I was on my first ever visit to Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, and Linda Jo was my guide. I stepped into a neat modern office and met John Bawle who was sitting waiting with Tús supervisor, Rosie McCormack.

He quickly made it clear he wouldn't be here today only for the national community scheme (set up in 2011 by former communities minister Éamon Ó Cuív).

"The Tús scheme," said John, "was the best thing in life that I ever got. Without that, I'd say I would be gone."

A former restaurateur, John is married with three children, and he outlined in some detail the difficulties he went through after the banking crash of 2008/09. He lost his business, had to let go all his staff, was left owing debts he could never pay and became deeply depressed.

He was transformed through the Tús scheme and his transformation helped directly to improve the look of Mullingar. He and a team of Tús and Community Employment Scheme workers accomplished what nobody else could - they tidied up the more neglected parts of the town and earned the midlands town a national Tidy Towns award this year (as well as a regional award - see page 17).



• John Bawle - former business owner who went bust as many did after the banking crash. He is a former Tús participant and current CE worker who leads Mullingar Tidy Towns, after reinvigorating it and restoring its reputation with the local authority and with the town's citizens.

### GLADLY DOING 60 HOUR WEEK

"I could be doing a sixty-hour week, but it doesn't matter because I'm enjoying it," said John.

He formally works 19.5 hours per week, earning a weekly top-up on his social welfare payment of €22.50. Neither the low pay nor the extra hours bother him.

"I mean I've no life pressure that I used to have. I could tell you horror stories about losing money and losing businesses and losing houses, like many others have gone through."

### MY HEAD WAS GONE

Looking back to where he's come from, he said:

"It's very difficult when you're at the point where

you're head is gone. My head was gone. I had panic attacks. As the doctor who prescribed to me said, 'There's a ladder and you're on the very last step. The next one and you're going to go over the edge. That's how bad you were,' he says.

"Medication was brought into it, and a consultant and I talked with people and a counsellor, and I got help. But I also needed something else. And this pathway Rosie has given us with the Tús scheme, as I'm seeing with the lads coming on board now, was the best thing in life that I ever got. Because without that, I'd say I would be gone. There's no question about it, my mind wasn't in a great place."

"When my family see me now, they see I'm happy."

"I do the (extra unpaid) hours. I give back to society. I feel that I may have fallen

back on issues, in businesses. I've lost a lot of money, I may owe people money, and I can never pay that back. But I can give back something to society, and maybe improve someone else's life," he said.

### MOTIVATING FROM ZERO

John knew Rosie, the Tús supervisor with Westmeath Community Development, but he hadn't ever heard of the Tús scheme.

Rosie recognised John's leadership qualities. He was brought on the scheme and, bit by bit it helped him build his confidence.

Last year, after the maximum one year on Tús, John was moved to a Community Employment Scheme and agreed to take on the task of leading a group of ten Tús and three

*"This pathway (via) the Tús scheme, was the best thing in life that I ever got. Without that, I'd say I would be gone."*

CE workers to relaunch Mullingar Tidy Towns.

Rosie and Bill Collentine, the chairperson of Mullingar Tidy Towns, knew areas in town had to be cleaned up, but they didn't have someone to lead the work.

Said Rosie, "We needed someone that had very good organisational skills. We needed somebody that can build relationships with the County Council. With the organisations around the town, to get the businesses and schools involved."

So he was a good fit?

Rosie: "Absolutely, one-hundred percent."

John knew it was a big ask, but he was given the latitude to tackle the work as he and the group best saw fit.

Morale was low and the pandemic didn't help.

John recalls: "Some lads were coming in in the morning and as soon as they were in they were turning their back and going on home, because there was no leadership there and none of the structure."

"I says to myself - 'Okay, how is this going to work?' It's like everything else, you start at the very bottom. Make yourself comfortable with the lads, make sure the lads are in the same frame of



(Cont'd from previous page)

mind as yourself.

"And so we said to ourselves, 'Look, we have to do something. What can we do together? We have to fill in the time. We have the hours to do. Let's do something positive'."

Over time, they found out what each person was good at.

"One was good at strimming, another at painting, another at weeding. We said, 'Sure we'll find something to do with all that'. And so we did."

"Now, we're a team that works together, we have fun, we have a laugh, we talk about our families, our kids, and our experiences in life," he said.

Rosie said, "They take a lot of pride in the work they do."

John said, "We have lads that are going strimming and painting and coming in on their own time to do work that they forgot to do or they want to get it done. And like they're only getting twenty-two euro extra a week.

"We have lads in the group who would probably not fit in in a (traditional) work environment, but they do fit in in our environment, because we're all in the same boat together, and we help each other."

## RECOGNITION

"There's stigma being unemployed. When you're on the live register, you're seen as lazy, that you should be doing more. There's a stigma too signing up for a scheme. That shouldn't be there," said John.

Their work so impressed Westmeath County Council that they were awarded €4,000 for a separate project - fishing equipment and classes for youngsters.

"A year ago we couldn't even work with Westmeath County Council. They wouldn't recognise us as a body. They saw us as lads on the dole doing nothing. Now we have a situation where they're ringing us up and asking us to do jobs. It's completely turned around," he said.

## Tús nationally deserves more support

Rosie McCormack wants changes to how Tús operates. As she put it:

"The Department of Social Protection needs to allow Tús to branch out more. It's at the Government level you're held back. It really needs from the Government level and from the top down for them to see the good work that goes on in communities and to see everything that we do in the communities to help the communities to get better and to improve.

"And it does work, lads on CE and Tús working together. And that's not just in Mullingar or Westmeath, it's all over the country.

"I don't think people on a higher level see enough of what is done within communities. They're just about the figures and the statistics and how many are on the live register. But those people coming off the live register to give



• Rosie McCormack, Tús supervisor with Westmeath Community Development, with John Bawle.

them statistics are doing great work. And it's not recognised enough."

John said he spoke for a group in saying:

"I think Tús has been a fantastic programme for us. The people I'm involved with are shy to stand up and say 'Listen it's been good for me', but I'll stand up for them and say, 'Look, it's been good to a lot of people'."

"We've had lots of great laughter within the group. We've never had a situation where it's been uncomfortable. We've all worked together in all sorts of circumstances. We go into areas that others wouldn't, and we have fun. We chat among each other, and we give out and have our bit of craic, and it's all about our own mental health. That we get to the far side of this, and we see a purpose and that it's worth it."

*"I don't think people on a higher level see enough of what is done within communities... People coming off the live register are doing great work. And it's not recognised enough."*

## Why not extend duration?

### ILDN - Let over-62s on Tús stay until retirement

**Tús participants should be able to stay on the scheme for more than one year and waiting times to join the scheme should be reduced, says the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).**

Furthermore, it believes that anyone over 62 years of age on Tús should be allowed continue until retirement age.

"Job opportunities for the over 60's are limited for a range of reasons," said the Network, in a pre-budget statement in October. "To provide fulfilling opportunities for those over 62 who wish to remain on a Tús scheme for an extended period, consideration should be given to allow this age cohort to remain on Tús until they reach statutory retirement age (or gain full-time employment)."

**The ILDN believes Tús could be expanded by:**

- Reducing the qualifying period for Tús to 6 months.
- Allowing training, work experience and short-term employment count towards Tús eligibility.
- Extending eligibility in certain circumstances to those not in receipt of a social welfare payment.

**It has called on the Government to:**

- Extend employment contracts for participants, as it was "evident" that one year was insufficient for people coming from long-term unemployment".

- Reduce from 3-years to 1-year the waiting period for previous Tús participants to take up new placements.

As the Southside Partnership has previously asked, "Why should an unemployed person have to wait for 3 years to go back on the scheme?"

The ILDN also seeks changes to the Community Employment Scheme and the Rural Social Scheme (RSS).

Galway Rural Development has described the work done by participants on CE, the RSS and Tús as "the backbone of community supports".



• Frank Duffy, a Rural Social Scheme participant, was too busy to stop for a photo as he repaired the wall of Mountbellew GAA in Co. Galway.

## MORE PLACEMENTS & CONTRACT EXTENSIONS

In October, the Government announced it was extending contracts for over 13,500 Community Employment (CE) and Tús scheme workers until February 2022. These contracts were due to run out in November.

Heather Humphreys, Minister for Social Protection, said this was a tribute to the "fantastic work in our local communities" by participants and "to help ease pressure" on the schemes at local level.

Earlier this year, on August 27th, the Department announced that over 2,600 additional places were to be provided under the two schemes - 1,475 more places on CE and 1,164 more places on Tús.

Minister Humphreys noted at the time: "In 2020, the Department of Social Protection invested €425 million in these schemes - demonstrating their importance to communities right across the country."

As of August, 2021, stated the Department, a total of 19,000 people were on CE schemes and over 4,000 on Tús schemes.



# The origins of Tús and the unrealised vision behind it

(and why people should be allowed to stay longer on the scheme).

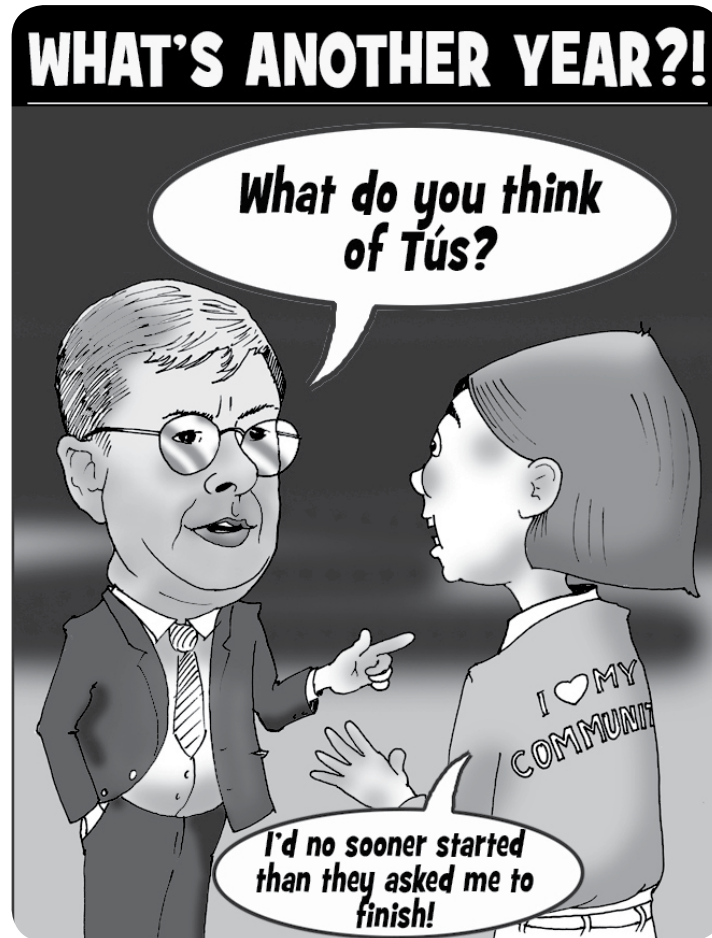
**ÉAMON Ó CUÍV, TD,  
WRITES**



The beginning of this story goes a long way back to the time I was dating my wife to be. She grew up on a very small farm outside of An Spidéal, Co. na Gaillimhe, and her father had seen very bad economic times in his life.

One day I said to him – “What did Fianna Fáil do for the country anyway?”. He was a quiet man who would never in my experience reprimand you but on this occasion, he was quite annoyed, and he gave me a lecture on what he thought they did from his prospective starting in the thirties. It outlined things that stuck with me ever after and on which I based some of my political thoughts since. Basically, he explained how hard it was to survive economically solely living off a very small farm on poor land. In the 1930s when Fianna Fáil came to power they set up work schemes for these farmers doing work on bog roads and other things needed by the community in the winter and giving a wage in return. This was a massive change for the farmers as they had an income in the lean winter months and the benefit of the roads they built to get their turf from the bog. It seemed to me to be a very sensible arrangement. The irony was that the leader of that Government was my own grandfather and of course he knew that.

When I became Minister for Rural and Community Development in 2002, I got an idea of setting up a modern version of such a scheme for small full-time farmers and fishers who could not survive without some supplementary income. I named it the Rural Social Scheme.



The basic rules included a provision that as long as your basic eligibility to be on the scheme remained the same you could stay on it indefinitely. As these were skilled farmers there was no element of training involved on the scheme, other than safety training for the job. The work done was very varied and used everybody's skills to their best advantage.

The scheme was very popular with farmers and with communities who

both saw a tremendous return for the wages paid.

In March, 2010, I became minister for Social Protection and the RSS transferred with me to the Department. Many people came to me to extend the scheme to non-farmers with the same rules and I set about doing that.

Time was short as at the time the financial crisis was rocking the government and I knew our time was limited. As it happened the

government lasted until February the following year.

I quickly put my plans together and went to the Department of Finance with my proposals. They would not accept them but did grant me 5,000 places on a scheme that I called Tús, in the hairshirt budget of 2011. They did put a caveat on it that participants could only stay on the scheme one year. On the basis that a half a loaf is better than no bread I accepted what was on offer and it was announced in December 2010 and I had it up and running by early February 2011.

Unfortunately, my successors in the role as Minister have not really built on the scheme as I had planned it but I will outline here what was intended and what I would do if given the chance.

My plan was that eligible people for schemes would start on the Community Employment (CE) Scheme for three years and get training in whatever skills interested them as well as doing community work.

At the end of the three years, if they had not gotten employment they would transfer onto the Tús scheme and there would be no limit to the time they could spend on this.

This would be better for the community in terms of service and give continuity. It would be a lot better for the participants as it is well proven medically that forced unemployment causes mental health issues and physical health issues as well as affecting people's self-esteem. It is also depriving the community of vital services that participants, all of whom would be voluntary, could provide.

For me the situation is as the election slogan says “a lot done, a lot more to do”.

## WHAT IS TÚS?

The Tús initiative is a community work placement scheme providing short-term working opportunities for unemployed people. The work opportunities are to benefit the community and are provided by community and voluntary organisations in both urban and rural areas. The Tús initiative is managed by local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta for the Department of Social Protection, which has overall responsibility for the scheme.

## 2022 INCREASE IN TÚS PAYMENT

From January, 2022, a €5 increase per week applies for people receiving the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and on schemes such as Community Employment, Tús, the Rural Social Scheme and the Work Placement Experience Programme.

**For more information on Tús, visit the Citizens' Information website at: <http://bit.ly/3qtmSBK> or the Dept of Social Protection's dedicated page: <https://bit.ly/gov-Tus-scheme>**

# TIDY TOWNS AWARDS

## 847 ENTRIES IN 2021

- Volunteers praised for work in unprecedented times
- Glaslough wins Young Persons Tidy Towns Award
- Mullingar takes gold for Litter Awareness

### MAIN WINNERS:

Ireland's tidiest village: **Geashill, Co Offaly**  
Ireland's tidiest small town: **Abbeyleix, Co Laois**

Ireland's tidiest large town: **Cobh, Cork**  
Ireland's tidiest large urban centre: **Ennis, Co Clare**

Regional awards: **Abbeyleix, Co Laois, Glaslough, Co Monaghan, Kilsheelan, Tipperary South, Ennis, Co Clare, Cobh, Co. Cork, Blessington, Co Wicklow.**

Covid-19 community awards: **Cobh, Co. Cork, Listerlin, Co Kilkenny, Ballina, Co Mayo.**

Agent Brite litter awareness award: **Mullingar, Co Westmeath.**

Young persons in tidy towns award national winner: **Glaslough, Co Monaghan.**

Young persons in tidy towns awards: **Wicklow, Co Wicklow, Cobh, Co. Cork, Clohamon, Co Wexford, Glaslough, Co Monaghan.**

Sustainable development goals award large town and urban centre: **Ennis, Co Clare.**  
Sustainable development goals award village and small town: **Bruff, Co Limerick.**

Climate action and air quality award village and small town: **Abbeyleix, Co Laois.**  
Climate action and air quality award large town and large urban centre: **Dalkey, Co Dublin.**

EPA circular economy award: **Rush, Co Dublin.**

Additional circular economy award: **Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan.**

Supervalu and AslAm inclusive communities award: **Balla, Co Mayo.**

The Gaeltacht award: **Beal an Mhuirthead, Co Maigh Eo.**

Gum litter taskforce national award: **Monivea, Co Galway.**

RIAI town challenge award: **Oranmore, Co Galway and Castlegregory, Co Kerry.**  
RIAI shopfront award: **Ennistymon, Co Clare.**

RIAI good windows award: **Dalkey, Co Dublin.**

Leave no trace award: **Kinvara, Co Galway.**

Heritage award: **Kilteevan, Co Roscommon.**

Tree project award: **Athboy, Co Meath.**

Water and communities overall award: **Delgany, Co Wicklow.**

All-Ireland pollinator plan - local authority pollinator national award: **Buncrana, Co Donegal.**

Islands award: **Bere Island, Cork.**

**The full list of winners of the Supervalu Tidy Towns awards 2021, held in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, is available at: <https://www.tidytowns.ie/>**



**Ennis was the overall winner of the Tidy Towns Competition this year.**

## HORACE'S DIARY



### NO MASKING THE TRUTH

I'm just back from a community development meeting and without being critical of the ability of the chair, if he was a medic he wouldn't be able to diagnose a decapitation.

He said the Government should ensure that anyone who bought a Garth Brooks ticket should get a PCR test within 24 hours, as having no taste is a symptom of Covid-19. What if tomorrow never comes?

Anyhow, yours truly played a blinder which partly made up for last week at Zumba class.

Unfortunately, I was asked to leave the work wellbeing zumba class on Zoom. The letter from HR mentioned something about speedos being inappropriate which I felt was being a bit old school.

And the local writing group I'm in is doing my head in. Everyone's got a gag that only they find funny. That reminds me, have you heard about the sandwich that walked into the community cafe and asked to see the menu. The waiter replied: 'Sorry, we don't serve food here.'

Meanwhile, local overweight lovebirds Jack and Jill have signed up for our centre's FECK-IT programme (Fun Eating Cooking Kayaking-In Tipperary). We've written their story up as a nursery rhyme to warn kiddies of the dangers - it's so easy to happen:

Jack and Jill went into Aldi to get lots of biscuits and sweets. Now Jack can't keep his heart rate down and Jill's got diabetes.

Which reminds me of why we had to close the playground: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, the structure of the wall was incorrect so Humpty won a hundred grand with Claims Direct.

And finally, following COP26 I hear the people from Baile Áthas Community Centre are in foul humour - they spent ten grand on what they thought were solar panels but they ordered sonar panels by mistake and are now listening to community radio from North Korea. Beats Newstalk. Every cloud I say!

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



## O'Devaney Gardens 17 years after first plans announced

- A land-grab in slow motion

Dublin City Council's plans to develop a council-owned site in central Dublin has taken many twists and turns in the last 17 years, and construction has yet to commence at O'Devaney Gardens.

Originally a 278 flat social housing complex, a previous public-private partnership, between the council and the developer Bernard McNamara, collapsed in 2008.

In recent years O'Devaney Gardens has become a battlefield between those who want public land to be used primarily for social and affordable housing and others who think that partnering with private developers can deliver more homes or a better 'social mix'.

The site is currently subject to at least three legal wrangles.

### BY LAOISE NEYLON

Dublin City Councillors are seeking independent legal advice as to whether they can retract their decision to transfer the land to the developer Bartra, after it significantly changed the plans that the councillors signed off on.

Bartra added 279 more homes in its new plans, changing the height and density of the scheme meaning the O'Devaney Gardens development will reach 14 storeys at the highest point.

Adding so much density has real consequences for quality too and architects have raised concerns that 400 of the new homes won't have adequate access to daylight in the living rooms.

Some say the new development will tower over the nearby cottages and local residents have hired a legal team to take a judicial review. As such it is hard to know when the development will proceed.

Meanwhile, Bartra is bringing a high court challenge of its own, against An Bord Pleanála, which stipulated in the planning permission that the developer cannot sell any of the private homes in bulk to a corporate landlord or institutional fund.

### LAND GIVE AWAY

In 2015 and 2016 Dublin City Council managers brought forward plans to develop three large council-owned sites in the city O'Devaney Gardens in Stoneybatter, St Michael's in Inchicore and Oscar Traynor Road, in Coolock.

In January 2017 a majority of councillors agreed to the council going out to tender for private developers to build a mix of private, social and affordable homes on those sites.

At that stage, only eight of the 63 councillors opposed the plans.

But by the time the tenders came back a couple of years later the housing crisis had deepened significantly, the council selling public land to private developers had become a focal point for anger and the political reality had shifted as a result.

When councillors met in November 2019 to vote on the O'Devaney Gardens deal, housing activists and protesters disrupted the meeting, chanting "homes for need, not for greed."

Some councillors had concerns about how much the 'affordable' homes were going to cost, while many said that the council had got little from the developer in exchange for valuable public land in a prime location.

Architect and housing commentator Mel Reynolds said that the deal between the council and O'Devaney Gardens was incredible because it made the value of the land disappear.

"The unbelievable thing is that they start off with an asset but then they just give it away for free," he said.

Ultimately the land couldn't be transferred to Bartra without the



councillors agreeing to it. So to persuade some who were uncertain the council managers cobbled together a side-deal.

They said that an Approved Housing Body could buy some of the private homes too and use them for affordable housing, specifically a cost-rental scheme, where rents are based on the cost of building.

That made little sense though, said housing commentators, because for a cost-rental scheme to be affordable, the price of the homes needs to be kept as low as possible.

It would be very difficult for an Approved Housing Body to rent the homes to people at affordable rates if they paid Bartra around €450,000 each for them.

There were other homes for sale in the area for a lot less than that, but in 2020 the council appointed two approved housing bodies to negotiate a cost rental scheme with Bartra.

The details of that scheme have not yet been agreed, he said.

### A DONE DEAL?

In November, 2019, the majority of councillors agreed to transfer the land to the developer Bartra based on plans to build 768 homes, a mix of 50 percent private, 30 percent social housing and 20 percent affordable homes.

Council managers said that the new homes would be of very high quality and a spokesperson for Dublin City Council said that they would be better than anything available in the Smithfield area.

But when Bartra submitted its plans to An Bord Pleanála it was for a significantly different development. The new plan is for 1047 homes, with towers scaling 14 storeys at the highest point.

The increased number of new homes meant an increase in the number of social and affordable homes too, still, many councillors did not welcome the changes.

### COUNCILLORS

Independent Councillors, Cieran Perry and Sophie Nicoulaud and Independent Left Councillor John Lyons tabled a motion for the council to seek legal advice and take back the site.

"We have disposed of the land to them and I believe they are not adhering to the agreement we assented to," said Perry.

It isn't clear whether a majority

### STATEMENT



Dublin City Council  
Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath

"Negotiations are ongoing between Bartra and the Approved Housing Bodies (Circle and Tuath) with respect to the provision of the cost rental units at the proposed O'Devaney Gardens Development," said a spokesperson for Dublin City Council.

# 'regeneration' can erase a community

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'S ROLE IS HUGE - SAYS FAGAN

- "They have to run your blocks down to get the land."

of councillors want to take back the O'Devaney Gardens site but they supported the proposal to seek legal advice to find out whether it is possible.

A Dublin City Council spokesperson said that the council welcomes the extra homes on the site, which includes an increase in the number of social and affordable homes.

An Bord Pleanála might have rejected the original plans and decided that they didn't conform with national regulations because the development wasn't dense enough, he said.

"I'm very keen to move ahead with a major housing development," said Dublin City Council Chief Executive Owen Keegan.

Neighbours of O'Devaney Gardens are mostly keen to see the site developed but are very dissatisfied with the height and density of the proposed scheme.

Locals say the development is "monstrous" and totally out of line with the character of the historic area, which is made up of traditional cottages, terraces and laneways.

Lorcan Sirr, a housing lecturer in TU Dublin said the proposed development was "incredibly inappropriate."

It looks set to join a growing number of largescale developments that end up in the high court under judicial review.

### SELLING TO FUNDS

In September Bartra got planning permission. The permission contains a condition that prevents them from selling the private apartments in a block to a corporate landlord or institutional fund.

Earlier this year the Minister for Housing introduced a ban on institutional investors buying up houses in bulk, but Bartra is building apartments.

Bartra is applying to the high court to have that planning condition quashed.

It argues that in all the other developments, the ban on selling to institutional investors only applies to houses and duplexes, but not to apartments.



• Rita Fagan and colleague in 2020 making the point: This is Community Development!

Community activist Rita Fagan is on the regeneration board for St Michael's Estate in Inchicore. In 2008 she was involved in protests together with grassroots activists from O'Devaney Gardens, Sean McDermott Street and Dominic Street.

Back then the O'Devaney Gardens residents were well organised and had good community infrastructure she says. They had a tenants association, a women's group and an after school club.

The residents wanted the council to do basic maintenance, she says. Instead, the council came up with an idea to regenerate the area.

Their plan involved privatising the land and handing over five prime sites in the city to the developer Bernard McNamara.

Gentrification is a major problem in Dublin.

"They live on very rich land in the inner city," said Fagan. Residents of O'Devaney Gardens were, she pointed out, "living on 14 acres of land beside the Phoenix Park, on bus routes."

After the public-private partnership with Bernard McNamara collapsed, the O'Devaney Gardens complex was allowed to deteriorate, said Fagan: "They have to run your blocks down to get their hands on the land."

She said that people grew tired and frustrated and accepted offers of housing elsewhere, including

in Cabra. So when it came to the latest plans to privatise the land, "the grassroots community wasn't there anymore. The structures were weakened so they didn't have the capacity to fight,"

### ST MICHAEL'S ESTATE

Fagan has been on the board of the regeneration of St Michael's Estate for 21 years. They fought to keep that land, also 14 acres of prime land, in public ownership. Dublin City Council is now developing it for fully social and affordable-rental housing.

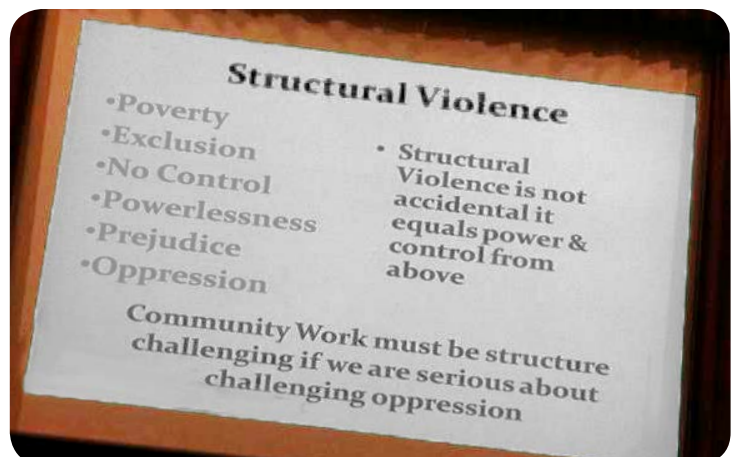
She hopes they will put in for planning permission early next year.

"It shows that community

*"The grassroots community wasn't there anymore. The structures were weakened."*

development has a huge role in how communities can manage to have the capacity to fight the state and to fight the market," says Fagan. "In order to get homes for people who need homes."

It is unlikely that many of the original families will come back to O'Devaney Gardens now, she says. "It's a really sad story. Communities were wiped out and robbed."



• A slide presented by Rita Fagan at a conference in Maynooth University in 2014 highlighting the challenge of "structural violence".



# 12 years ago: Residents views

## Children reared & families moved out as wait became inter-generational

In 2009, two residents from O'Devaney Gardens were employed as regeneration workers. Ruth Murray and Nadine Murphy were already in some shock at that stage, yet still held out hope. They wrote a fascinating piece for us (see our archive online).

In our Spring 2009 edition (Issue 28) this is how they introduced themselves.

**Nadine:** "My family have lived in O'Devaney for three generations. My Nanny was one of the first tenants, my grandparents lived here, I still have a sister, cousins and my children have cousins living here. When my child was six, I hoped to be in my new home for when he was having his debs, giving it plenty of time. His debs is in less than a year!"

**Ruth:** "I have lived in these flats for 12 years, I got my flat the day before my child was born. I am from the north-west inner city of Dublin and also have extended

• *Once a community: O'Devaney Gardens, as shown on Google maps in July 2018, prior to demolition. Inset: Ruth Murray (standing) and Nadine Murphy in 2009.*



family living in O'Devaney, including a sister, nieces and nephews. My children have cousins here. When I was pregnant with my youngest child, the dream was to have a new home for his education. He started school this September, still with no facilities.

Today, one lives near the area, the other has moved to a new suburb. Their children have grown up and Nadine is now a grandparent.

In effect, a new generation grew up while "regeneration" rolled on through not years but decades.

## WHAT ARE 'SMART VILLAGES'?

- *We're going to find out more in 2022*

Workshops are being held around the country to promote the concept of smart villages - now embraced by the EU (and as highlighted on our back page). Here's how the scene is developing in one region covering parts of two counties:

The 'North Kerry, West Limerick: Smart Villages, Stronger Communities' project is an initiative led by North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD) and West Limerick Resources (WLR) in association with KPMG Future Analytics and UCD.

With support from LEADER, the project aims to unlock new ways towards achieving sustainable growth and development in rural communities in north Kerry and west Limerick.

The 'Smart Villages' project was launched in September with a seminar (titled 'Co-Developing Smart Villages - Towards Stronger Rural Communities') where speakers from across Europe discussed ways to implement the concept in rural areas.

Suzanne Rowley, LEADER programme manager with West Limerick Resources, pointed out that communities had "experienced significant challenges over the last number of years", yet the people were able to innovate and adapt.

"This initiative will support them to shape their future in a co-operative fashion, looking at opportunities for future development at community and regional level, and preparing them to face

future challenges such as climate change and the transition to an increasingly digital world," she said.

Robert Carey, programme manager with NEWKD, said that their research in recent years found "significant pockets of disadvantage and depopulation in the North Kerry region which local community activists found alarming".

"It highlighted the need for a new process of community-led development for the area," he said. "The smart village model provides us with the opportunity for fresh approaches, which - when underpinned by the expertise provided by KPMG and the cross-border collaboration with West Limerick - offers even greater opportunities for innovation".

The project involves a combination of detailed data analysis, extensive public consultation and capacity-training workshops - all implemented by a project team led by KPMG Future Analytics.

The work will lead to a co-produced integrated development plan for the North Kerry - West Limerick region.

"This plan will be directly informed and delivered by local communities, ensuring that they are empowered to shape their own sustainable futures. It also offers an important opportunity to capture and examine lessons learned by rural communities in coping with and adapting to the challenges presented by the pandemic," he said.



## WHAT ARE 'SMART VILLAGES'?

Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement strategies to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular by mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies.

## SMART WORKSHOPS

The first of four workshops to introduce community leaders to the 'Smart Villages' concept took place online in November and more workshops are promised in 2022. It is hoped they can be delivered face-to-face along with consultation sessions in each village.

More info: <https://nkwlsmartvillages.ie/>

Also see back page for national update.

## COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAMME

# €5m for community groups with ideas for climate action

€5 million from the Climate Action Fund has been allocated towards an open call for 'Climate Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing Projects'.

Applicants have until January 27th to apply for support for their ideas through the Community Climate Action Programme, under five themes: Home/energy; Travel; Food & waste; Shopping & recycling; Local climate & environmental action.

The call for applications is open to organisations operating at a regional or national level - for example, not-for-profit organisations, community and

voluntary organisations, social enterprises, non-government organisations, universities, third level institutions and libraries. Partnerships and consortiums are encouraged to apply.

The application process is being managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. It has held support sessions online - the webinars are available through Pobal's website.

The overall focus is on "climate education, capacity building and learning by doing - moving beyond 'raising awareness' to build the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to respond to the challenges of climate change at a community level".



• A child holding a plastic globe. Where is that plastic now?

Over the coming three years, the Community Climate Action Programme will see €60m invested in community climate action projects and initiatives, as well as capacity building.

Organisations can consult this webpage to find out more about the fund:

<https://bit.ly/PobalCCAP>

There is also a dedicated email for anyone with specific queries: [CCAP@pobal.ie](mailto:CCAP@pobal.ie)

# €2.6m for Town Centre First Plans

The Department of Rural and Community Development has promised €2.6 million to 26 towns in the first ever Town Centre First Plans, targeting common problems in town centres such as dereliction, traffic and lack of public spaces. **REPORTS HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN.**

The towns, one per county, range in population from a few hundred to around 10,000. Each one will each receive €100,000 through their local authority and will be expected to develop their own master plan.

"Each local authority will now work closely with local community groups, retailers and the other members of the Town Teams in devising and delivering on the objectives of their respective masterplans," said the Department in a statement. It said a national Town Centre First Policy will be published shortly.

The 26 chosen towns haven't been twiddling their thumbs, waiting for funding to fall into their laps.

Skibbereen residents proposed the repatriation of derelict buildings in the town centre, while Killlala residents suggested floors and stairs should be added to the round tower to generate more tourist stopovers in the Wild Atlantic Way town.

West Cork TD Rory Jackson (Green Party) shared on Facebook that previous work undertaken to redevelop Skibbereen could benefit



• Clane, Co. Kildare.

from the funding.

Locals want the town to become more pedestrian and cycle friendly and there are calls for a link road from the N71 to Market Street.

Clane in County Kildare undertook an 'Economic Health Check' in 2018 and local Councillor Pádraig McEvoy welcomed the funding, saying: "This award unlocks the opportunity to progress toward detailed design that will be guided by the requests submitted by the public."

Clane recently saw a new public library open, while challenges include heavy traffic on main street.

In August, Lusk in County Fingal completed its Lusk Vision 2030, a community-led action plan which involved public engagement through meetings, workshops and surveys with local actors. Primary proposals included better facilities for children and teens and developing more public and green spaces in the town centre.

Lynne Barker, organiser of the

Lusk Action Group, said the timing is perfect for the Fingal town.

"Lusk has seen a huge increase in population in the last 15 years," said Barker, also writing on Facebook. "Our amenities and infrastructure have not grown in tandem."

The town will now form an implementation group for its Lusk Vision 2030 and she said the funding "could not be coming at a better time."

Announcing the funding, Minister Heather Humphreys said that this was the first phase and "other towns will be afforded opportunities to develop such plans as we move forward." The funding is being delivered as part of 'Our Rural Future', the Government's five-year strategy for rural Ireland

## USE THE LAW

The Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage recently held the first in a series of discussions to look at "the opportunities and challenges in addressing dereliction, vacancy and urban regeneration".

At that meeting, calls were made for existing laws to be enforced and revenue from fines for dereliction to be collected.

You can watch the proceedings via: <https://bit.ly/OirHousingComm-VidDec21>

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS CAN NOW LEAVE MORE QUICKLY

The Government has agreed to make permanent a measure brought in during the pandemic to give survivors of domestic violence access to rent supplement without having to be means tested.

A pilot scheme was introduced in August, 2020, after concerns rose during lockdowns that at-risk adults, particularly women, were trapped at home with violent partners. In the first 12-month period of the scheme 55 women availed of the support.

"It has been a hugely significant measure particularly in the nine counties that have no refuge, and has, without doubt been a life-saving intervention," said Miriam Kivlehan of Safe Ireland.

The support becoming permanent is undoubtedly one of the silver linings to Covid-19's dark clouds. The policy change followed lobbying by West Cork Women Against Violence and Safe Ireland, with support from Sinn Féin's housing spokesperson, Eoin Ó Broin.



In November of this year, Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, announced plans to make the domestic violence rent supplement a permanent feature of housing supports.

Minister Humphreys said it as a "valuable support for people who endure what can be a silent and terrifying experience".

Miriam Kivlehan of Safe Ireland said "Covid was the catalyst".

She added: "We are delighted that Minister Humphreys has acknowledged its role in empowering women to safety and its contribution to the whole of government response required to eliminate violence against women."

## HOW IT WORKS

If you are a victim of domestic violence you can apply for rent supplement on referral by Tusla or a Tusla-funded service provider.

Rent supplement is provided for three months without a means test.

"You will only be required to pay a minimum contribution towards your rent, regardless of your means for this period," says the Department of Social Protection. The support can be continued for a further three months - however, this is subject to the usual means assessment and eligibility criteria.



## Cape Clear island is ready to welcome refugees in 2022

BY HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN



• The approach to Cape Clear on a bright day. INSET: Calendar cover.

Cape Clear Island is ready for 2022. The Gaeltacht community on the southernmost inhabited point of Ireland has raised funds and established language connections in anticipation of welcoming a Syrian refugee family in the near future.

Cléire Community Sponsorship Group, or Cuaisín, formed in November 2020.

"We were trying to link the Celtic year into it, so I thought Samhain (November 1st) was a good time to start," said Mary O'Driscoll, a founding member of the group. "And we thought by the time we came to Bealtaine (May 1st) we would have the family, but we're about a whole year off!"

A Community Sponsorship Group needs at least five members; when the feeler was put out on Cape, 18 people immediately replied.

"The positive reaction was brilliant. It brought a section of us together to work on it, and it strengthened our little community group," said O'Driscoll.

### EXCEEDING GOALS

The group's first attempt at fundraising was hosting a virtual walk, totalling the distances participants walked locally into one trek from Cape to Damascus and back. But the real money-maker was a calendar. The 2022 calendars include island photos and "seanfhocail", or words of wisdom, from the Cléire Béaloideas collection of 1940. Selling the €10 calendars from a handful of businesses on Cape and stores in Skibbereen, the group has exceeded their expectations.

"Our fund is flying up now," said

O'Driscoll. "It was totally sponsored so it is a total profit. We have enough now for two families."

The group needed to raise a minimum of €10,000 to support one sponsored family; By the end of October they had €17,000 and can add on €2,000 in donations-in-kind. "I'm optimistic we're going to get to €20,000," said O'Driscoll.

Even though they originally planned for only one family unit, O'Driscoll said once they heard a sister of the parents was also in need, they had no qualms.

"When we put out the call on Whatsapp, 'Would we agree for two families?' within an hour they all said, 'Yes, we'll work it out, just say yes'."

### GIVING BACK WHAT CAPE CLEAR GOT

"It is nice to think we're sharing and giving back what was once given to us," said O'Driscoll, referring to the resettlement program organized by Peter Robinson between 1823 and 1825. The British Government sponsored emigration as a form of relief and pacification for the south of Ireland after a period of civil unrest and a partial famine in 1822. Four Cape Clear families of farmers, recommended by their parish priest and Robinson, emigrated to Canada in 1825.

"It was lovely to think that they had gone in 1825, and we're just returning the compliment to somebody else."

### FOR FAMILY & COMMUNITY

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) has accepted thousands of refugees since its creation in 2015, a majority of whom go through EU Relocations and UNHCR-led Resettlement. An alternative to these strands, Community Sponsorship Ireland enables local communities to do the groundwork of preparing for and welcoming refugees. A Regional Support Organisation (RSO) provides the training and support in preparation for receiving a family. Nasc, based in Cork, is the RSO for Cléire Community Sponsorship Group.

Cuaisín has been working alongside other community sponsorship groups through their preparation period. They completed online training with Cahersiveen, a community that's pivoting to sponsorship since asylum-seekers there went on hunger strike, leading to the phased closing of that Direct Provision accommodation.

O'Driscoll believes Community Sponsorship Ireland is a superior alternative to the Direct Provision system for asylum seekers.

"I think it's good that they come from where they are now directly to here, without going through any provision centre," said O'Driscoll. "The fact that we have so much preparation to do, it means we know what we're taking on and we understand the background of it, rather than having them hoist it upon a community without having a

group in place to understand where they're coming from and what to do for them."

### WHEN THEY ARRIVE

They don't have a guarantee yet, but O'Driscoll said signs were pointing to an arrival in December or early in the new year. It's likely IRPP would allocate a family to the island with a similar background: rural and farming.

"We're an aging population, so we definitely need new blood here," said Mary O'Driscoll.

A big draw to take in a family is the guarantee of children for the primary school on the island, which currently has 5 students. A 50-minute ferry ride from Baltimore, the island has a year-round population of 110.

By the time training concluded in November, the group had compiled the family's settlement plan, including contact details for key bodies, a plan of integration, information on State services enrollment, housing, language learning and more.

"I put a little notice on our Skibbereen Notice Board (Facebook group) looking for Arabic speakers, and I got an overwhelming response," said O'Driscoll. "It's just brilliant. People want to support us and help us when people get here, and are just dying to get involved."

**To find out more about the IRPP, visit:** [https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Irish\\_Refugee\\_Protection\\_Programme\\_\(IRPP\)](https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Irish_Refugee_Protection_Programme_(IRPP))

## Sanctuary running opened my eyes to Direct Provision

*“The more we see that there are dire needs, community development will come to the fore.”*

### 1. Name a favourite artist/performer?

Mario Rosenstock - I could listen to him anytime of the day or night.

### 2. What is the most recent book you read?

The only books I read nowadays are children's books for my 7-year-old son. We've read the full series of Tom Gates's books (by Liz Pichon). They're hilarious.

### 3. What are you watching on tv?

I'm a big fan of Netflix, because you can press pause. I binged on The Queen's Gambit - after 24 hours I had seen the full series.

### 4. Who is your favourite comedian/comedy?

Frasier - I have all the boxsets. It's intellectually funny but down to earth.

### 5. Who are two of your all-time heroes?

John and Pat Hume, for obvious reasons. They regularly got bullets in the post and had to leave the house at short notice. She was very heroic behind him.

He also got the credit union movement going in Derry. He knew how to promote an idea, but he was also intuitive in knowing when it was time to step back and let people at it.

She was a teacher, so she was the chief breadwinner when he wasn't earning money. She kept the whole show on the road in the background.

They came to UCC in 2005 to launch a book with us called 'Helping Ourselves: Success Stories in Co-operative Business and Social Enterprise'. It was a privilege to meet them.

### 6. Name two social inclusion issues in Ireland today not getting the focus they deserve.

they deserve.

Firstly, Direct Provision and the conditions that we all but force people to live under without allowing them enough freedom. I joined the Sanctuary Runners initiative set up by Graham Clifford and became somewhat familiar with the issues they face, cramped conditions, an unhealthy environment...

Knowing people in DP through the running has changed my perspective. On a cold or wet morning, running equalises everyone.

Secondly, financial inclusion and exclusion. I'm on the board of MABS Support nationally - there's a huge role in educating young people... financial resilience. We continue to have 10/15% of the population who suffer some kind of financial exclusion.

### 7. Is Community Development going to get stronger or weaker?

The more we see that there are dire needs, community development will come to the fore.

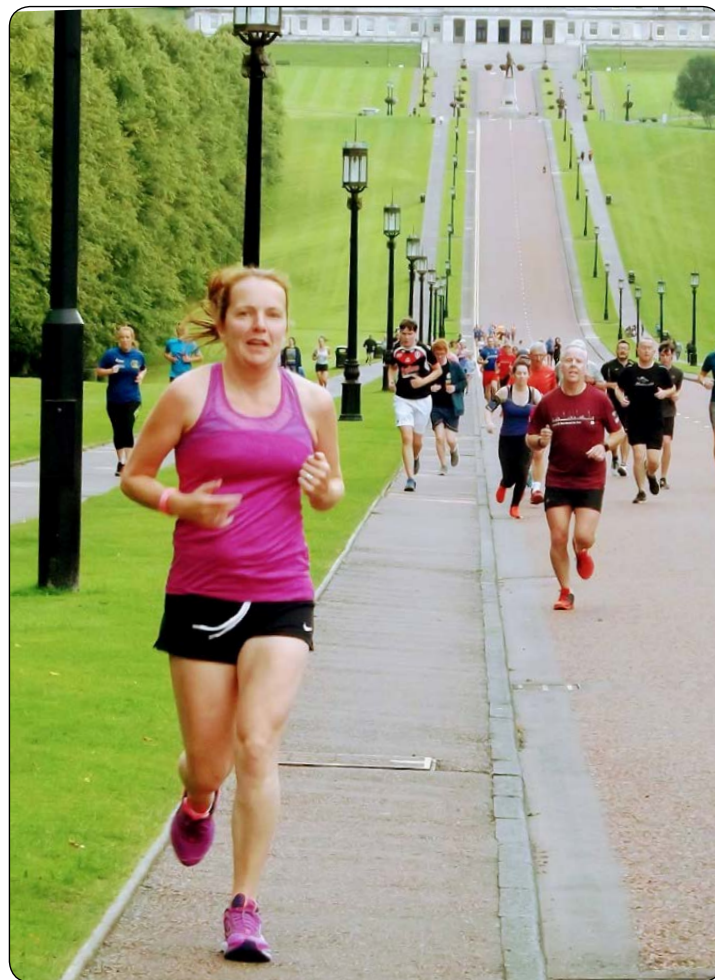
Communities will have to rally and deliver much-needed services, and that's where the co-operative model really fits. The islands for example suffered from crises over the years and the communities there mobilised themselves.

The more we realise we all have something to contribute, the better.

### 8. We previously covered your report calling for legislation to regulate money-lending. Where are we now on that issue?

The cogs are in motion and the will is there to change it. It is moving in the right direction.

In early 2019, Pearse Doherty (SF) brought a bill forward to cap the rate charged by moneylenders at 36% APR. The Government itself has now (proposed) to cap the cost of credit at 1% per week - essentially up to a maximum of 48% flat interest. It



• Olive McCarthy taking part in the Stormont parkrun, Belfast. She is a senior lecturer with the Department of Food Business and Development and director of the Centre for Co-operative Studies at UCC.

sends a clear signal that a cap will be introduced.

This year, we made a submission to the Oireachtas that is undergoing legislative scrutiny at the moment.

### 9. What would help most for credit unions to reach their potential?

The biggest challenge credit unions have at the moment is the low level of lending, but put that aside. When you look at any co-op that is struggling throughout history, you can usually pinpoint it to one or other of the co-op principles that aren't being implemented properly.

The principle of education, training and information is (not stressed enough). There's an information deficit.

I take 4th year commerce students and when they start they don't quite grasp the credit union model. By the end of that module they've all joined their Credit Union.

A lot of young people are into ethical approaches to doing business such as upcycling and people-based services. They're telling me there's a real opportunity here for credit unions to reach out to that mindset among young people - that it's not profit based, that when you borrow from a credit union it's a very different kind of lending.

### 10. Your research on flaws in the 'Buy Now-Pay Later' sales pitches to consumers was published recently. Why are poorer people at risk?

(Cont'd on next page)



(Cont'd from previous page)

The impulsive nature is the problem. If you miss a payment, eventually your debt could be passed onto a debt-collection agency and it's largely unregulated.

The big issue for me is the habit. It's too easy to buy stuff on credit without much by way of credit checks. For younger people, click this button and away you go. It gets them into bad habits. In my day, we had to save before buying. I felt huge pride buying my first bike aged 12. Having to save holds you back in terms of consumption. Buy-Now, Pay Later makes consumption too easy.

## 11. Why should people consider applying for courses provided by UCC's Centre for Co-operative Studies?

UCC has the only centre like ours in the country.

We have very specialised masters programmes. We have an on-campus 12 months M.Sc. in co-ops, agri-food and sustainable development. Students spend seven months in the classroom and five doing research with businesses, projects or co-ops. It's very applied and we get a lot of speakers in to give students the exposure to practice.

The placements they do are usually tailored to their interests and we've had students on placement, for example, with Change By Degrees (a social enterprise), the Quay Co-op, Carbery and FDC.

We normally do a lot of field trips - we were out last week to visit the zero-C farm in Carbery in West Cork which is 100% owned by four Irish milk co-operatives.

We have a range of scholarships to cover fees and stipends - just ask.

Another course we do is an online masters in co-operative & social enterprises. It attracts people working in the sector, looking for leadership development. It is tailored for those who are working full-time, volunteering, or who have caring responsibilities.

## What other research are you and colleagues doing?

I'm researching energy efficiency in low-income households, particularly around retro-fitting, while my colleagues are currently carrying out research into agri-advice, men's sheds, co-ops and elder care.

- in conversation with Allen Meagher.

### More info:

W: <https://www.cubsucc.com>

E: [o.mccarthy@ucc.ie](mailto:o.mccarthy@ucc.ie)

# Following in my RTÉ father's footsteps

## - Dementia-inclusive radio on Near FM



• In studio: Limerick poet Ron Carey and Breda Swan from Dublin with broadcaster Karen Meenan.

### BY KAREN MEENAN

My interest in dementia-inclusive radio stems from both my parents. My dad Gerry Tierney worked in RTE at the weekend as a radio presenter in the 1970s while keeping down the day job as a civil servant during the week. He died very suddenly from a massive heart attack when I was thirteen years old.

Many years later, my mother Kathleen Tierney was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease - she died in 2016 almost reaching her 90th birthday.

Upon clearing out the attic of our family home we found the long forgotten Grundig tape recorder and BASF reel-to-reel tapes which were a part of our bittersweet childhood. I felt the urge to learn how to be a radio presenter.

NearFM in Coolock on Dublin's northside offered a course for people interested in radio, and so having spent a lifetime admiring presenters like Marian Finucane and Olivia O'Leary, I figured the time was right to learn how to share the wonderful world of dementia on the airwaves.

My first series 'Reminiscence on the Radio' is specifically designed to spark memories for our older listeners - a reeling in the years on the radio if you like! This is a combination of news clippings, songs from that year, Eurovision and Oscar winners, sports highlights and of course stories from our special

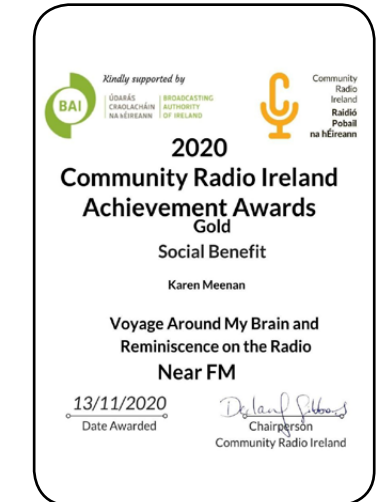
guests who remember what life was really like back in the '50s and '60s. Many of my guests have dementia, but you wouldn't know which ones - everyone remembers the stories of



their youth!

The next series 'Voyage Around my Brain' is a conversation with people from the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) who have studied the brain and its complexity. They are joined in the studio by people living with dementia and/or their caregivers. The format is similar - each guest chooses a song and recites a poem for listeners, while the chat is about dementia. The format aims to remove some of the stigma about living with this disease.

'Talkin' About Neurodegeneration' is a closer look at the different types of dementia, again using the same format of special guests choosing the playlist and reciting their favourite poems for our listeners. We have brilliant programmes about Alzheimer's Disease, Lewy Body Disease, Young Onset Dementia, Vascular Dementia, Multiple System Atrophy, Primary Progressive Aphasia, depression, anxiety, mental health, sensory impairment (hearing and sight loss) and one on communication - how we talk about dementia.



• Nam vide scripta maluisse ad, pri nostrud accommodare.

Many people have been diagnosed with dementia or 'a touch of dementia' without being told what type or what stage. Imagine being told you had cancer or 'a touch of cancer' without being told what type or what stage?

I'm now producing a fourth series called 'Atlantic, Pacific and Beyond' looking at global equity, health equity, economic equity, race equity and brain health equity. If you have an interesting story to share about living with dementia, or would like to learn more about brain health, please contact me. I'd love to hear from you!

E: [karen.meenan@gbhi.org](mailto:karen.meenan@gbhi.org)

## LISTEN TO NEAR FM

Near FM is the community radio broadcasting arm of the Near Media Co-op. It is a licensed, communally owned, not-for-profit radio station based in Coolock that operates as a democratic co-operative, open to all.

Near FM volunteers broadcast 24 hours a day, 365 days year.

Listen live:

<https://nearfm.ie/livestream/>

# Seeking solutions to climate change? Mayo has got your goat

BY GRACE BARRETT

We can tell the age of trees by counting the rings of their trunks. We can tell the age of a horse by looking at its teeth. But how can we tell if a species of Irish goat is thousands of years old? It may seem like an unusual task, but this is how the story began of a small community along the Wild Atlantic Way working hard to protect and preserve the Old Irish Goat for future generations.

Their efforts are over a decade of a dream in the making. In 2009, an English historian named Ray Werner published an article for the Heritage Council contending that Ireland had a native breed of goat, the Old Irish Goat, that was still roaming our lands and worthy of conservation.

And so began the quest to prove Werner correct. This meant comparing living goats to those from the past, that pre-dated modern goat breed imports into Ireland. The answer to that improbable question was inspired by a mounted goat's head in Mulranny, dating from 1897. From there, comparisons between the DNA from mounted specimens in the natural museums of UK and Ireland to living Old Irish Goats formed the basis of the verification process. All told, from the collection of the first sample to the published science paper, this took five years.

In January 2011, Werner flew into Knock airport and visited Mulranny, Co Mayo, adding confirmation to the DNA findings of the volunteers. The Old Irish Goat was alive, well, and munching on nuisance shrubbery on the west coast.

How has the establishment of their identity led to landscape conservation?

Case in point: this year, after a break of almost a century, the Old Irish Goat was re-introduced by the Mulranny Centre to Dublin's Howth Head in partnership with Fingal County Council.

Wildfires in the area had become more frequent, and with the decline of traditional grazing, gorse and bracken spread and the quality of the heathland declined. The goats will hold a significant responsibility towards managing this growth, so reducing the risk of fires. In addition, they enrich local and traditional biodiversity as the Old Irish Goat is a critically endangered species.

The first phase of the project saw 25 goats brought to Howth, under the



• TOP: Goats Cleveland and Neit.



• LEFT: Sean Carolan with Norman the Old Irish Goat.

**THE Old Irish Goat Visitor Centre and Sanctuary in Mulranny, Co. Mayo is the only one of its kind in Ireland. Following extensive refurbishment, with support from LEADER, it was officially relaunched in September, with LEADER funding of €154,456 to develop its craft shop in the centre. The official opening was performed by local TD and former communities minister Michael Ring. GRACE BARRETT visited recently.**

guardianship of goat herder Mellisa Jeuken. It will also trial, for the first time in Ireland, the Norwegian "No-fence" system which employs GPS tracking.

The No-fence system has the potential, through the creation of virtual boundaries, to resurrect the virtuous traditional role of the Old Irish Goat, as a natural remedy to weeds and woody shrub that present a fire hazard, reducing landscape maintenance cost and enhancing biodiversity.

The Old Irish goat naturally has the ability to tackle the problems Howth and many other parts of the

country face, due to their grazing behaviour and efficient digestive systems.

As the Old Irish Goat Society explains, "They effectively offer a more economical and sustainable solution to managing the landscape."

What could prevent this gentle animal from thriving?

Sean Carolan said, "The biggest obstacle is a lack of legal protection. Ironically, this cultural icon, that has shared our history and helped us through hunger, and which ought to enjoy the full and wholesome protection of the state, can be shot, culled or crossbred into extinction without ceremony. There is no

legal protection for native breeds in Ireland."

"We want the Old Irish Goat recognized officially as an Irish breed. And we want to achieve a population of 1,000 goats. That's the figure we need to get to essentially save the breed," he said.

He has campaigned widely on the issue, speaking out at conferences.

To put this campaigning in perspective, up until the 1920s, there was a quarter of a million Old Irish Goats in Ireland, after which British and Swiss goats were imported to the country. Of 100-150 feral Old Irish Goats in Mulranny, about 30 are of the old variety.

Cyclists and walkers of the Great Western greenway pass by largely unawares that a 5,000 year old species grazes on the hills above.

A visitor centre and gift shop, the Old Irish Goat Interpretive Centre, is now open as of spring of this year. The gift shop supports the running of the centre, the costs of animal husbandry care for the goats, and also showcases the work of local artists who supply the shop with quality Irish crafts.

What are the obstacles to more unusual projects such as these getting funding?

"The obstacles to obscure projects attracting funding are, lack of time, people, skills, strategy, facilities and finance," said Carolan.

How can this be sustained?

"We would like to see the Old Irish Goat return to every parish in Ireland. We want to re-introduce people to a side of their heritage that has been forgotten about," he said.

W: <https://oldirishgoat.ie/>

## TÚS & RSS SUPPORT:

South West Mayo Development Company sponsors three workers, two through the Rural Social Scheme and one through the Tús scheme. They play crucial roles in animal welfare and public liaison at the Old Irish Goat Visitor Centre.

On the east coast, Melissa is the sole full-time employee of the Old Irish Goats for Howth project.



# FOOD JOURNEYS

## COOKING CHALLENGE:

# Create pizza in Portlaoise!

## - using local ingredients

- Is it possible to make a pizza with only ingredients sourced from around Portlaoise town?
- Yes, but it takes determination: Laois-born activist, artist and community gardener Lisa Fingleton proved a point by milking a goat, grinding oats, and picking eggs, tomatoes and herbs to make the first ever Portlaoise Pizza!

### BY LISA FINGLETON

Some people might not realise what a challenge this was especially since I am no expert in baking

Even though we grow a huge amount of cereal in Ireland, we import almost all of our wheat for bread and pizza making. For this project I used organic, gluten free oats from Vicarstown - grown by Kevin Scully from the Merry Mill. Kevin showed me how to grind down the wheat using a quern stone. Because it contained no gluten I had to bind it together with eggs and rapeseed oil - not a very conventional pizza base!

Rapeseed Oil used to be produced in Stradbally, where I grew up, but for this project I had to source it from the Laois/Tipperary border (35 miles away). All the other ingredients were sourced within 15 miles of Portlaoise. For the sauce I picked all the tomatoes, basil and oregano in my dad's polytunnel.

### CHEESE WOES

Cheese proved to be the biggest challenge but thankfully I was rescued by Collette Duff who lives just outside Portlaoise town in Ballyfin. Collette showed me how to milk her beautiful goat Malika and together we made goats cheese for the pizza.

The cheese really highlighted the preciousness of our food resources as Collette had to save milk for days in order to make 300g of cheese.

On Sunday, October 3rd, I cooked the first ever 'Portlaoise Pizza' at the Abbeyleix Community Garden, before the Applefest event, and served it up to all attending, including arts officer Muireann Ni Chonail and arts curator Vincent O'Shea. They were licking their lips for more of course. Honestly, it tasted delicious!

• Lisa's pizza performance began after she was invited by Laois County Council to take part in the Local Live Performance Scheme 2021. Nationally, the scheme (now closed) was funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



## Another scary 1%

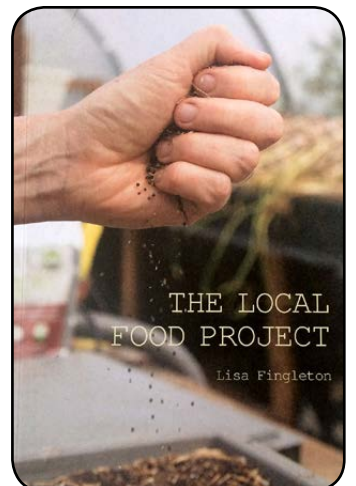
Lisa is co-owner of an organic farm that also supports social farming, near Listowel, Co. Kerry. It featured in a report in this magazine in 2018.

She is concerned we are "losing the capacity to be self-sufficient, despite what we know about climate change and carbon footprint". Every September, she co-ordinates a 30 Day Local Food Challenge.

Her book *'The Local Food Project'* (reviewed on our website) was written after she stopped for a quick sandwich and found it contained over 40 ingredients flown in from around the world. It explores the power of growing and eating local food. Her work is motivated by the following questions:

- Why are only 1% of our farms in Ireland growing vegetables, the lowest in Europe? (The 1% we hear more about are the 1% who own most wealth).
- Why are we so disconnected from the food growing in the fields? Why does labelling make it difficult to understand where food is from?
- Why are we importing so much food when we could grow our own?

Lisa's latest book *'The Last Hug For A While'* has just been published. Find out more at: <https://lisafingleton.com/>





## "Edible landscapes" simply sound better

BY GRACE BARRETT

How much does a community need to sustain itself? In the case of growing its own produce, a flower bed as small as 2x2m can do the trick.

The Edible Landscape, a grassroots project based in Westport, Co. Mayo, is engaging with people about climate change by talking about food.

And how are they going about that?

The Edible Landscape Project (ELP) is a social enterprise that has devised a novel and unique approach to encourage more people to grow and consume food in an environmentally-sustainable, climate-smart way.

A Food Forest sounds, well, kind of yum. It has a much better ring to it than say, "strangely texture-less fruit and veg brought to you across continents by freezer-truck". And indeed even on a rainy Saturday afternoon in late September, I spot trees in the garden still bearing fruit.

So how is a Food Forest garden different to a regular community garden, as we'd understand one to be? We speak with David Whelan, lead coordinator for Edible



• David Whelan.

Landscape Project initiatives.

The Food Forest is a low-input garden, which makes it more sustainable. A key example of this was when there was a heatwave last summer, the garden remained in full, healthy bloom, as its flora did not rely on large amounts of water to sustain it. ELP offers workshops for people to learn how to plant and maintain their natural habitats sustainably this way.

The idea is that the gardens are planted in layers – trees, shrubs, and ground cover. Every plant is present for a reason, whether it's to benefit soil, to attract insects (or detract them), all with a focus on pollination and encouraging plants and trees to bear flowers and fruit. Every plant takes carbon from the air, and traps it in the soil. The garden is located on the grounds of the Quay Community Centre (QQC) in Westport.

Volunteers maintain both the Food Forest and the Community Garden,



• ABOVE: Pupils from Murrisk NS planting a Cox's Orange Pippin tree with the help of Terri Metcalfe at the launch, in November, of the Food Forest Education Programme. PHOTO: FRANK DOLAN

*A Food Forest sounds, well, kind of yum. It has a much better ring to it than say, "strangely texture-less fruit and veg brought to you across continents by freezer-truck".*

and little maintenance is required for the Food Forest. According to Whelan, current social enterprise mentoring from South West Mayo Development Company has been invaluable to them in helping them grow their social enterprise.

For a low-energy consumption garden, initiatives like these promote high-energy community action.

The project started in 2012 in Westport, planting trees- fruit and nut varieties, mostly along the railway walk, and the Great Western greenway. Since then, the message is spreading further afield through various initiatives, including the Food Forest.

The project won the national SuperValu Tidy Towns 2015 and 2016 Sustainable Development Award.

As Whelan said, "Food and land management and agriculture contribute quite a lot to our carbon emissions. We're here to let people know there are solutions to the climate problem, and those solutions, for the most part, also relate to those issues. The one thing we can do to reverse the effects of climate change

relates to our food choices. Food, land management and agricultural choices."

ELP's point of entry into the climate conversation is with their Food Forest Workshops in schools. Primary school groups learn to plant trees, grow food and begin to make simple but vital changes in what and how they eat, to improve their health, to strengthen their communities and to protect the planet.

The area capacity they're trialling for the Food Forest Education Program is a 2m x 2m space – low maintenance and perfect for primary school gardens. This can be increased incrementally depending on the site and the capacity of the school.

The first Food Forest workshops were rolled out in Westport and Castlebar during the Autumn.

The project aims to expand workshops throughout Mayo in 2022 and nationally from 2023.

"If we do the right things in terms of the environment, the right things in terms of food tourism, we do the right things in terms of biodiversity, we have a healthier environment, and we have a more vibrant economy as a result," said Whelan.

## OECD'S 2022 RURAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN IRELAND

Ireland will host the International Rural Development Conference of the The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2022.

The 13th such conference will bring more than 250 delegates including ministers, policy-makers and practitioners from across the OECD region to Ireland to consider the theme of 'Building Sustainable, Resilient and Thriving Rural Places'.



It is the first time that Ireland has hosted this conference and it follows the publication of the

Government's rural development policy, 'Our Rural Future'.

More conference details will be available early in 2022.

When first announced in mid-November, the event was intended to be held in person, subject to prevailing public health guidelines.

The OECD is an inter-governmental economic organisation and a forum for its 38 member countries. Members pledge to uphold democracy and the market economy,

## ACCESS FRESH DATA ABOUT YOUR AREA ON 'GEOHIVE'

The Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) in November launched an updated 'GeoHive' - described as an online treasury of interactive maps, data and apps.

It says the GeoHive provides "unprecedented access to information about Ireland that can be accessed by everyone".

"The Geohive allows public service bodies, commercial organisations, not-for-profit groups and the general public to more easily find, analyse and use data on all aspects of life in Ireland."

The OSI claims GeoHive is "very easy to use" even by people without technical skills.

Check it out at: <https://osi.ie/blog/geohive-explore-for-yourself/>



# More bees will hum in spring when 300,000 bulbs planted around country flower

*PRESIDENT: Planters made "a profound statement"*

Come next Spring, 300,000 more flowers should bloom thanks to planting by thousands of people nationwide.

**President Michael D. Higgins** said those who took part made "a profound statement of their real desire to protect the life we share on this planet".

Seeds from three flower species, the beautiful Crocus-Barr's Purple, Yellow Garlic and Grape Hyacinth, were planted in Autumn as part of a 'Bulbs for Bees' idea that caught on.

There are 49 Local Development Companies and they provide countrywide coverage. With each receiving 6,000 bulbs, they made sure all were planted. Amid puns that people were "buzzing to be involved" the bulbs were distributed and set in soil, with hundreds of groups joining the effort - from men's sheds to school pupils and GAA teams.

In Westmeath, **St. Lomans GAA** dropped the ball and got planting. In north Dublin, a Tús team started to distribute the bulbs with members of the **Hilltop Eco Garden, Raheny**, buzzing to get stuck in.

In Co. Limerick, members of **Kilmallock Men's Shed** and **Elton Tidy Towns** knew the drill, while in Leitrim, 115 **Girls' Brigade** Ireland members in **Glencar** and **Manorhamilton** thought it was a bright idea.

No doubt the puns were flying in great numbers as bees should be this Spring. But there is a very serious side to it. As **President Higgins** said:

"Our pollinator populations are declining at an alarming rate, as excessive use of pesticides, urbanisation processes and climate change threaten the sustainable food production and food security on which mankind depends."

If, in Spring, you notice parts of the country looking more purple and yellow than before, cast your mind back to #BulbsForBees. If you played a part, congratulations!

The campaign was led by **An Gaisce/The President's Award**, with support from the **Irish Local Development Network** and the **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth**.

It was approved by the **National Biodiversity Data Centre**.



## REGISTER TO VOTE

The Draft Register of Electors for 2022 – 2023 is now being prepared.

Are you registered to vote? Check your name is on the Register. It's never been easier - we've checked it out:

<https://www.checktheregister.ie>



## ARISE SCHEME: €680k GOES TO 50 SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

€680,000 has been shared among 50 organisations under the Awareness Raising Initiative for Social Enterprise (ARISE) scheme. The scheme is designed to raise awareness of social enterprises and their positive impact in communities.

A high number of applications were received and the funding was increased from an initial provision of €500,000.

Among 42 groups to receive funding of up to €10,000 are:

- Féach, Co Wicklow is a support group for parents of blind and visually impaired children (€10,000).
- Sensational Kids, Co Kildare, provides subsidised therapy supports to children of all abilities (€9,000).
- Siel Bleu Ireland, Co Dublin, offers exercise supports for people in residential and day care centres (€10,000).
- Comharchumann Forbartha Cill tSeadhna Teo, in Geesala, Co Mayo provides meals on wheels for older people, along with a community laundry service (€10,000).
- Waterford-based Grow It Yourself encourages people nationwide to grow fruit and vegetables (€10,000).

Eight more applicants are to receive up to €50,000 and the full list of awardees is available on the Dept. of Rural & Community Development's website, at: <https://bit.ly/DRCD-ORF-socent>

The announcement was made by Minister Heather Humphreys on Dec. 3rd.



## EARLY YEARS PAY SET TO IMPROVE

The trade union representing childcare and early years educators has welcomed an increase of €69m in funding for the sector announced as part of the Government's Budget 2022.

Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe, said the funding will be used "first and foremost to improve conditions for workers".

While broadly welcomed, full details are awaited and sustainability concerns remain an issue for providers. Transition funding is also being provided while a new funding stream is decided upon.

SIPTU and business representative group Ibec have previously highlighted that the sector is in crisis and services are stretched beyond capacity.

As Ibec points out, the sector caters for more than 200,000 children in 4,600 childcare and early years education settings and employs almost 31,000 childcare professionals.

Many marched in protest with SIPTU prior to the pandemic. The trade union represents around 6,000 workers in the sector and spokesperson Darragh O'Connor said, "It would appear from the budget announcement that the Government has heard those calls."

The €69m increase in funding will be introduced next September when the new core funding stream comes into effect.

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, "This core funding stream will be worth €69 million to providers in 2022 and €207.3 million in a full year from 2023 on."

SIPTU believes this will make a difference. It pointed to the Annual Early Years Sector Profile, produced by POBAL which found that early years



• Childcare and early years staff and supporters from Co. Donegal protesting in Dublin in 2020.

educators, who constitute 55% of all staff working with children, on average earn just €11.91 per hour. Meanwhile, a separate survey found that 42% of early years professionals were actively seeking work outside the sector.

"People simply cannot afford to stay in a job they love," said Mr O'Connor.

"However, if the funding is effectively spent,"

he expects to see "thousands lifted out of poverty and an improved Early Years sector for children, parents and those working in it."

Also next year, the National Childcare Scheme's subsidy will be extended to all children under 15, benefitting up to 40,000 children. By 2028, the Government plans for investment in the sector to increase to €1billion p.a.

## CURRENT CHILDCARE SCHEME DOESN'T MATCH OUR NEEDS

- Frank Murtagh cites work in Westmeath to boost educational retention

**F**rank Murtagh is the CEO of Westmeath Community Development. Of the current childcare scheme introduced by former minister Katherine Zappone, he says:

The Government introduced a new National Childcare Scheme in November, 2019, and while the idea was good - to provide subsidised childcare to people who are working - there is an issue.

If the scheme isn't changed people in disadvantaged areas will not qualify for subvention and services in disadvantaged areas may no longer be viable. The Government have taken steps to address this, but they need to give some kind of subvention until such time as the problem is solved. There is a concern that services could close in the interim.

Before the current scheme, you could see that it was inherently unfair - if you were unemployed you



could use our services and it would cost you a fiver a week. If you were working, it was costing you €55 a week, yet your neighbour could be getting our service for €5. The new childcare scheme was an attempt to address this.

From our point of view however, the school-age Childcare Subvention Scheme is what made our services viable. You could plan your services and all that.

Our services were set up from an educational retention point of view - to keep the children in school. The research shows that first and second year is when the big drop-off happens



in disadvantaged areas, but that can be traced back to poor performance in primary school.

Our services were set up so that the children get a light meal and get their homework done. That means the child will perform better the following day. They don't mind going in because their homework's done and they won't get in trouble with their teacher.

Their parent, whether they're in a good position or a bit chaotic - they know the homework's done, so they're happy too.

The levels of absenteeism are reduced. Participation in school is greatly enhanced by an after-schools programme. My colleague Linda Jo did her thesis on this. It (and other research) shows that children stayed

in school longer with these supports.

And like a lot of things, one problem is that this work is funded by the wrong department. It's funded by the Department of Children when, arguably, it should be funded by the Department of Education. It's seen as a childcare service, but if you ask me why we do it - we do it for educational retention. And the evidence shows it works.

But we're not (primarily) doing it to provide childcare - it's an education project. We shoehorn ourselves into childcare and try to adapt to the childcare rules.

Now, this service may not be viable.

- In conversation with A. Meagher.



# One great thing about Westmeath Community Development!

**BY FRANK MURTAGH**



• **L-to-R:** Frank Murtagh, CEO, Westmeath Community Development; SICAP participants; A pool at Center Parcs.

**Frank Murtagh, CEO, was asked to tell us one great thing about Westmeath Community Development - which is going since 1995. Here's what he choose to highlight:**

"If I was picking one, for example under SICAP (the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme) I'd pick the successes we have had assisting people into employment. The approach we have taken, while not unique, had led to fantastic outputs.

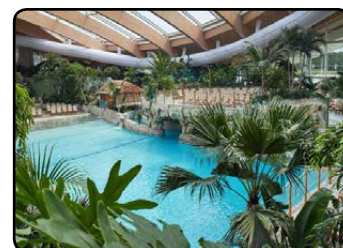
"For example, everybody has heard of Center Parcs which is in Co. Longford. From the start, we engaged with them in relation to employment opportunities.

"We worked with them to devise training programmes. For example, prior to the announcement about Center Parcs, we had never ran a lifeguard course. Since then, we have run numerous lifeguard courses and numerous SICAP

clients have ended up working there as lifeguards.

"If they hadn't done the course, if we hadn't put it on - combined with our CV and interview prep and employment skills training - those opportunities wouldn't have been missed.

"We have repeated this model, before Center Parcs, with other employers - from retail to hospitality to healthcare - and it has always worked for us. It also means we can show communities tangible results and it is something we as a company are very proud of," he said.



## Budget 2022 not bad, not brilliant

**Frank Murtagh, CEO of Westmeath Community Development, was interviewed about Budget 2022 and related matters by 'Changing Ireland':**

He was pleased with the 10% budget increase for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. SICAP is in many ways a staff-led programme, he said, and they looked forward to recruiting new workers in 2022.

"We were one of the 49 companies in the ILDN and we were delighted to see the SICAP budget increased. We appreciate the work from the officials and the Department," he said.

However, as the government's pre-eminent social inclusion programme, it was, he said, still "significantly below" the levels of its predecessor programmes back as far as 2008.

Asked about the fact that there was no increase in funding for the Community Services Programme (CSP) he said:

"We would like to see the CSP opened up for new applications, but they're not accepting new applications."

He said other areas of concern include the planned changes in relation to Local Employment Services and Jobs Clubs.

"We have a Jobs Club here, we were unsuccessful in bidding and that has major implications for our company and our staff."

While he welcomed new steps taken in regards to childcare, it remained an "area of concern".

He described the budget overall as "not bad, not brilliant".

## NEXT EDITION!

### COUNTY WESTMEATH:

Six primary healthcare workers, all women, from Westmeath Traveller Project, talk about their work. While housing is a struggle nationwide, conditions are better in Westmeath, due to the project's nation-wide, and because the team has good relations with Westmeath County Council. Asked as we finished why no men are on the team, they replied: "We're working on that!"

### ATHLONE:

There are streets in one large housing estate that would have been knocked by now, such was the dereliction. This has happened in parts of Limerick and Dublin. However, thanks to the steadfast efforts of local volunteers the area is on the up. Padraig Higgins and Delores Walsh tell their story.

Also in Athlone, David Nesengani, has become well-known as a volunteer. For many years, he helped refugees in his own country, South Africa, until the tables turned and he and his family had to flee for their own lives.

### MOATE:

"I'm here 37 years and this is the best thing to happen here," said Marie Flemming from Mount Carmel Drive Residents Association, pointing to new concrete kerbs, gravel paths and heaps of muck. Within two months this patch of ground in Moate will be transformed into a playground.

**CHANGING WESTMEATH**

## Walking the Camino is communal, like being in a zombie movie!

Would you follow in her footsteps? Journalist **Grace Barrett** was an avid hiker and stuck to non-religious routes until this year when she tried the **Camino de Santiago**. She found an undoubted serenity on the walk and aches and pains aplenty. Thankfully, she brought the right footwear.



• Grace Barrett.

As dawn breaks in a small Spanish village, a line-up of figures appear silently on the horizon, swaying and hobbling strangely in unison. But this is not a scene from *Night of the Living Dead*, or some depiction of a zombie apocalypse.

These are pilgrims. And they are making their way to Santiago de Compostela with sore joints, blistered feet, and bouts of tendonitis.

I've heard the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) spoken of over the years, often and unsurprisingly with religious reverence. An avid hiker, I was more interested in the less denominational walks.

It was only when a friend in France decided to start walking the Camino that I realised this walk resonates with the religious and non-religious alike. She wanted to renew her spirits after the exhausting sequence of lockdowns in her country.

I began to pack my bags, planning to join her for two weeks in Spain. This in itself is an exercise in expertise. When you're going to be carrying all of your belongings on your back throughout the pilgrimage – which can be hundreds of kilometres depending on where you start – it's no time for packing half a dozen novels.

I whittled down my basic kit into a 30L backpack.

Footwear is a matter of life and death. My friend, already a few hundred kilometres into her journey from France, explained sagely "Bring trail runners a size too big. Anyone who didn't on the Camino is suffering now."

I've never thought about socks so much in my life. In the outdoors shops I visited, staff met my endless questions with cheer. Seemingly if they had not done the pilgrimage



themselves, they knew someone who had.

Most pilgrims commence the path alone, and encounter other pilgrims along the way, be that by a brief passing greeting of "buen Camino", or by forming more lasting acquaintance.

I flew with Ryanair to Santander and via train arrived and began the journey from Leon. A group my friend and I fell in step with and remained with for the pilgrimage had started in St. Jean Pied de Port, a 780km distance to Santiago. I felt like a fair weather tourist in comparison.

The pilgrimage is as solitary or as social as you wish it to be. It is certainly important to maintain your own rhythm of walking. I'd mostly walk alone and rejoin our group in the evenings where we'd recover, compare soreness, and enjoy storytelling over *tinto de veranos*.

Whatever your religious or spiritual persuasion, it'd be hard for the journey not to make a strong impression. Space and time out from our modern distractions and day to day responsibilities is a luxury. As any pilgrim or hiker knows, there is a very powerful alchemy in the simple act of walking in nature.

During the summer months, it is sensible to avoid the heat as much as possible and start very early, walking

through the dark villages at 5 or 6am and into the countryside where you can see shooting stars on clear mornings.

On some mornings, mists would roll across the fields as dawn broke, giving the impression you were walking through clouds. The Camino, especially away from the highways, is beautiful.

It may be a long and arduous walk, but it's hardly remote: villages and towns are dotted along the way and the Camino sometimes blends with bigger cities like Leon and Sarria.

It is quite affordable. If you are willing to stay in lodgings with basic comforts, a dormitory bed in an albergue can cost between around 8-15 euros per night, and there is usually a pilgrim's menu on offer at a reduced price.

Currently, indoor mask protocols are adhered to, and albergues often space out bedding supply to allow for distancing between groups/social bubbles. At the time, Spain required a negative Covid PCR test to enter the country.

I met and walked with people from all over the world, mostly fellow Europeans, but some from the US and Canada.

Everyone has a reason to want to be on the pilgrimage; it's usually born of a need for space and reflection rather than a spontaneous desire for a holiday. Often times it was to start a new chapter after

the myriad stresses and strains the pandemic wrought on families and individuals everywhere.

The "Spirit of the Camino" is real: the whole experience seemed to be comfortably cloaked in camaraderie and in some, invisible way, your path felt protected. This was in the form of daily kindnesses from other pilgrims, clergy, inn keepers and shop owners you encounter along the way, but also whenever something was lost or was needed by a member of our group, it always seemed to turn up at exactly the right moment.

Despite the physical hardship, in many ways the pilgrimage offers freedom. Away from the usual stressors, the mind is focused on only one thing: moving forward on the trail.

Ritual is a strong presence; from the ritual of walking every day itself, to the ritual of gathering stamps in your pilgrim passport at various churches and albergues along the way. The ritual of meals, the ritual of sleep. In a way, the ritual of simplicity.

## WHAT'S THE CAMINO?



While walking takes off in Ireland, there are also excellent options abroad and the Way of St. James is a major pilgrimage route of medieval Christianity from the 10th century onwards.

It is a network of pilgrims' ways or pilgrimages leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James the Great in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition holds that the remains of the saint are buried.



# Volunteers should benefit as EU embraces 'Smart Village' approach

BY CON MURPHY\*

Why is there a big movement on the 'Smart Villages' idea now?

To ensure that 'Smart Village' protocols are followed from now on, the EU is tying all community funding to the Smart Village approach.

□ Programmes such as LEADER must now adhere closely to the planning concepts of Smart Villages.

□ To ensure Ireland doesn't lose out on the hundreds of millions in development funding available, this year a group comprising the majority of Local Development Companies hired eTownz to develop a curriculum to standardise Smart Village training across the country.

Having a standardised training manual and programme benefits all communities.

As Declan Rice, CEO of Kilkenny LEADER Partnership, puts it, "Communities that are 'smart' are those that learn from others and share their own learning. The smarter each community is, the greater intelligence reservoir becomes available to us all. It's not a race with one winner."

The current communication methods used in the Community Development sector are hampering the efforts of the hard-working NGOs.

There are dozens of groups operating in the community development training space, each with their own programmes, ideas, and training methods. There are no standardised communication protocols, nor are there any common community development training programmes.

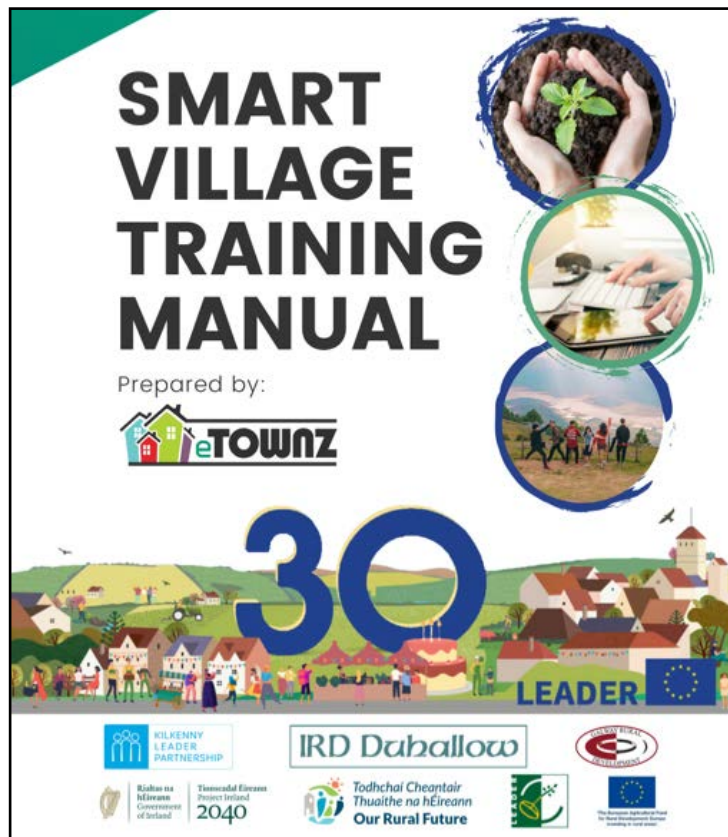
The results are often a cacophony of disparate ideas, and development plans that cannot sync with each other, making inter-community collaboration nearly impossible.

**Why there are issues with current processes?**

□ Communities are fragmented. Developing consensus within and between different communities has been challenging.

□ Research is data driven, but finding accurate data to conduct research with and using these in a

*"In the old plans, no consideration was given to human capital that forms the community."*



• What are Smart Villages? They are communities using innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities.

*"The Smart Village approach helps because it seeks to standardise the boring processes of community development so they can be automated."*

formal community plan has been difficult.

□ Compared to other sectors, there is a cumbersome transfer of ideas, detailed experience and know how.

Current community planning methods are outdated.

Unfortunately, community development plans were originally devised by engineers and architects, back in the days when a development plan was only considered in regard to infrastructure.

While infrastructure is essential to a community, the people are the

community, and in the old plans no consideration was given to human capital that forms the community.

Along with this issue, the engineers and academics who wrote the plans choose to write community development plans like they would a thesis. These plans were often not focussed on providing easily understood information and actionable plans for the community members.

Therefore, few read these plans, and they generally sat unnoticed and unused in local libraries, while the community groups muddled along with no common plan to unite them.

These plans made no use of the hugely beneficial digital tools available to us today.

**The Smart Village approach helps because:**

□ It seeks to standardise the boring processes of community development so they can be automated.

□ It creates a register of key local assets, stakeholders, goals and, lastly, projects and metrics. Each asset is tagged in the digital plan so that no community asset or opportunity is neglected. (The register must be kept up-to-date).

□ Plans can be tailored to the needs of individual community volunteers and their interests. This is crucial, as the actual community development is undertaken by community members, not academics.

**Benefits of a standardised training manual:**

□ Standardised definitions and community planning processes.

□ Digital tools and online platforms to make planning easy.

□ Frameworks for collaboration and knowledge-sharing among communities.

□ Training on structuring community development committees, volunteer engagement and empowerment.

The Smart Village development framework heralds a new phase, one we all stand to benefit from.

\* Con Murphy works for eTownz.