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## • **SLIGO**

20 year old law still punishing Travellers

## • **OFFALY**

Inside the small rural domestic violence project receiving worldwide calls

## • **CAVAN**

Christina embraces self-employment for people with disabilities.

## • **DUBLIN**

- Daylight robbery as apartment plans block natural light.  
- Darndale launch for leadership prog.

## • **MEATH**

SoSaD now in five counties. Volunteer tells how group has saved lives.

## • **WEST CORK**

Skibbereen example of how community mental health projects take on heavy loads.



## REFUGEES: An bhfuil Dhá Chéad Míle Fáilte againn?

(Have we got 200,000 welcomes in us?)



Grateful new arrivals in Wexford seek assurances



What will it take for communities to help refugees to integrate fairly?



**Solidarity**  
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# 21 YEARS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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coverage of  
immigration  
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## FRONT COVER Read these stories online:



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**MAIN:** Olena Syniuenchko, refugee/translator; Lisa O'Flaherty, co-ordinator of North East West Kerry Development's Moving On Project – which organised a Jobs Fair in Tralee; and Olya Marymtseva, refugee/translator / Kerry Education and Training Board. #SICAP

Photo by AM.



**BTM LEFT:** Olena Doldokarova from Ukraine expresses the gratitude of 40 refugees in a hotel in Co. Wexford to Minister of State Joe O'Brien while also outlining to him their concerns and hopes. She was speaking at a gathering organised by Wexford Local Development. #SICAP

Videos online.

Also see pages 6-7.

Photo by AM.



**BTM RIGHT:** Sligo LEADER Partnership organised a trip to Enniscrone for over 100 refugees. #SICAP

Photo courtesy @SligoLeader.

## INDEPENDENT

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

## ABOUT US

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SUPPORT

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

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## Ireland, the land of 100,000 welcomes - but 200,000?



There should be a war tax (eg 1%) imposed on corporations earning profits of over €1m to help finance communities to support refugees.

Ireland thankfully opened its doors to take in war refugees from Ukraine and the response from Irish people has been fantastic, but this could run for years.

We are a rich country partly because multi-nationals are attracted here by low corporation taxes and the space provided for "tax efficiency". Now we are in an emergency and those who can afford to pay more tax should do so.

Why do communities need more support?

The Ukrainian refugees coming here need to put down roots and connect locally if they are to connect nationally with Ireland. The support and integration of tens of thousands of refugees will place greater demands on the Community Sector than even the pandemic did.

Staff in Local Development Companies and others have done wonders in the early weeks

of the war, but they have more than enough to do to support existing groups. While there is some elasticity in how Local Development Companies operate, diverting resources from current targets comes at a cost to groups already dependant on them for support through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

Community Sector demand for more resources was highlighted last year - even before refugees came here from Ukraine - when 124 community groups applied to become part of the new pilot Community Development Programme. (While the aim is to expand the programme, only seven were chosen for the pilot).

Refugees seem for now largely unaware of our housing crisis. Housing absolutely needs to be addressed in new and fair ways so we build sufficient homes to match demand.

At present, the new arrivals are at risk of being moved around geographically between emergency accommodation hubs. This was done in the past, sometimes to subdue the legitimate complaints of asylum-seekers trapped in Direct Provision and to stop them organising. That should not happen again.

To work with any community the members of that community need to be centrally involved, to be part of the decision-making. The Ukrainians' ability to contribute will depend not just on the resources made available from government, but how well they are facilitated to organise. The challenge is to see that community development principles and practices are followed. It won't be cost-free.

One minister predicted 200,000 refugees could come here and calls have been made by NGOs for one member of government to be made responsible for overseeing the arrival and integration of refugees. The NGOs also said the State cannot depend indefinitely on volunteers.

The Government also cannot ignore the needs of refugees fleeing other wars and persecution. We are a country that now welcomes refugees and we can be proud of that once we look after all our guests. But are we giving a Chéad Míle Fáilte, or if numbers rise - a Dhá Chéad Míle Fáilte?

*Allen Meagher*

### FILE A REPORT FOR US!

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



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#### Front Cover:

MAIN PICTURE: Olena from Ukraine gives thanks and outlines the concerns of 40 refugees in a hotel in Co. Wexford. BELOW: Sligo LEADER Partnership organised a trip to Enniscrone for over 100 Ukrainian refugees in Sligo.



### 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.

# POSITIVES IN AN EMERGENCY

## 21 reasons why Ireland is a better place today for taking in refugees

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

1) While refugees don't know what Ireland was like 10 years, 20 and 30 years ago, they're thankfully coming to a country that is peaceful, one that has recovered from a banking, economic and unemployment crisis and one that has embraced equality and diversity. Here are 20 more reasons why Ireland is a better place today for refugees.

2) Our broadband situation is improving especially in rural areas and it is now possible to work from home. Digital hubs are being set up nationwide.

3) Millions of euro have been invested in renewing our towns and villages and action is being slowly taken to reclaim derelict buildings. (This must speed up now with demand for more accommodation and community services).

4) While we have less pubs nowadays, the number of community cafes and Meals on Wheels services has increased.

5) Prior to Covid, there was hardly anywhere to sit (for free) apart from bus stops and public parks. Refugees are now coming to a country with good public seating and walkways in towns and villages.

6) Undoubtedly, transport is a challenge and many refugees are likely to (have to) take to bicycles. Cycling and cycle lanes are now receiving record investment.

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE & COMMUNITY-LEVEL PROGRAMMES

7) They are also coming to a country where Local Development Company staff have experience co-ordinating a response at community level to emergency situations.

8) A silver lining from Covid was that Community Fora were set up around the country. They have been re-instigated in response to the war in Ukraine and the arrival of refugees.

9) The refugees are coming to a country that has invested in its public libraries – turning them into community hubs with modern technology and better access for all (and late return fines were abolished).

10) We have a national network of over a hundred Family Resource Centres.

11) The Social Inclusion and

Community Activation Programme has been long recognised as pivotal to supporting communities and thankfully government funding was increased in December by 10% (though it is still short of the funding levels a decade ago).

12) The expanded national network of Volunteer Centres helps people wishing to volunteer and links them with local organisations.

13) We have Public Participation Networks operating in every local authority area and they bring together groups that will play a crucial role in connecting with and supporting refugees.

14) Rules for Community Employment (CE) Scheme participation were loosened up in late 2021 to allow more people take up places. CE is critical to the provision of many community services and the staffing of buildings, parks and other community assets. While it is a challenge to attract applicants when the economy is at near full employment, CE could provide an entry route into society for Ukrainian refugees, especially those without English.

15) Support from the State for social enterprise is increasing every year. Again – most timely.

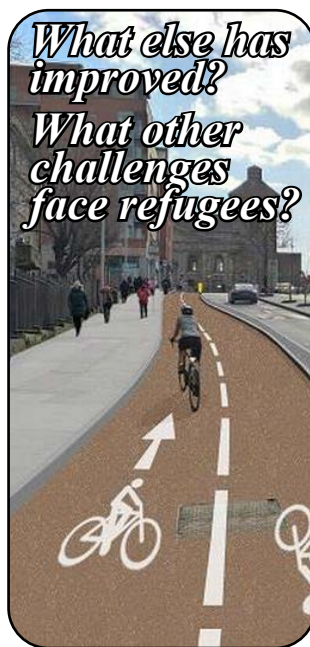
16) We have a Failte Isteach programme that could be replicated or better resourced to rapidly expand to meet the demands for English-language teaching. These initiatives are in the main run by volunteers.

### DIVERSITY & MINORITY PROTECTION

17) Domestic Violence support became a government priority during the pandemic and new refugees are to open in the nine counties without any. When it is also recognised – as it must be – that there is also a need for more Ethnic Minority Community Development Projects focused on domestic violence, then a recent report (flagged in this edition) shows the way.

18) A new pilot Community Development Programme was launched in 2021 with a view to expanding beyond the initial seven projects. They are focused on supporting minority groups and these pilot projects should soon deliver lessons to aid expansion.

19) The government took a



• Cycling is affordable and safe.  
Above - a proposed bike-lane for the Liberties in Dublin.

bold step last year to regularise the status of undocumented people who are here for more than 4 years. However, there is a new divide between the quality of the treatment being given to refugees fleeing Ukraine and those fleeing war and persecution elsewhere (Yemen, Palestine, Afghanistan, etc). War is war and this must be addressed.

### LOCAL COLLABORATION

20) At local government level, while we lost our town councils in 2014, we now have municipal districts that are well-established.

21) Collaboration is improving. As Paul Rogers points out (see page 28) the State began from 2008 to move away from collaboration with the Community Sector by partly embracing privatisation to provide community services. Funding for networking declined during this period too. Collaboration doesn't grow like nettles (loved in Ukraine). It must be supported by the State - and it can be - as shown through the Place-Based Leadership Programme launched in January to nurture a community response to crime in Darndale and Drogheda.

## ON THE OTHER HAND:

✗ Is the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) on its own enough? Do we need a new Ukrainian Refugee Settlement and Development Programme? Will the network of Volunteer Centres be sufficient? These questions need to be addressed well before 100,000 or indeed 200,000 people arrive into Ireland. In late April alarmed NGOs raised similar concerns, saying this was even bigger than Covid for the Community Sector.

The Sector - while given a lift in recent years through the setting up of a new dedicated government department, new funding initiatives and pilot programmes - still has not recovered from cuts over a decade ago. It cannot stretch like lycra.

✗ Our mental health services are notably not as strong as needed.

✗ How many refugees will the Government take in? Local Development Companies among others need numbers to plan and need to be adequately resourced. Otherwise we risk letting down refugees. Despite the fantastic voluntary initiatives at local level these need long-term support.

✗ The community sector is constrained by high insurance costs - campaigners say this can be tackled.

✗ Should some GDPR requirements be relaxed in emergency situations?

✗ Child protection is a major challenge.

✗ Our anti-racism and hate crime legislation is weak - though change is on the horizon.

✗ While the campaign against Direct Provision was a success, many people remain trapped in DP accommodation chiefly because of the housing crisis. The Government's ability now to build new homes fast and fairly will determine if Ukrainians can really settle here. Like Syrian refugees in Greece and Lebanon, they risk becoming long-term residents of refugee camps.



# REFUGEES: Wexford's community response

## UKRAINIANS HUNGRY TO KNOW: HOW LONG THEY CAN STAY HERE & WHERE

**BY ALLEN MEAGHER**

There's no doubting our efforts to empathise with Ukrainian refugees, but I need further training.

One woman I listened to, Julia Syrodemko, has lived here happily for 13 years with her husband and two sons. Councillors in Gorey and Wexford town said she has been a help to new Ukrainians coming here with no English.

However, Julia's own parents won't leave Ukraine. Even though they have been to visit Ireland three times, she is having a very hard time getting them to come over again - for their own safety - even for a few months.

"They are retired and don't want to change their lives now," she said. "Even though they often have to go to the basement because of bombing alerts."

"They are destroying whole cities. It is unbelievable. They bombed a maternity hospital in my home town," she said.

I asked the name of the town. I didn't know it. How many hospitals have been hit? We are all in shock that Russia attacked Ukraine, but the difference is vast now in experience.

"I visited Kiev the week before the war. Nobody there believed there was going to be a war," said Julia. "My city, it is gone now. Even when we go to reconstruct, it will take a long time."

I could find nothing comforting or helpful to say and mumbled something about war in Ireland until we found peace 24 years ago. What do you say? The normal Irish thing is to offer words of comfort, but this is ongoing. I was lost for words. I stood on streets levelled by bombs in Northern Ireland, but it wasn't the same. Whole cities were not destroyed; people moved, but whole city populations did not have to flee.

In Co. Wexford, when the minister visited on April 13th, community workers said they themselves need more training - to know how to be their best among people suffering ongoing trauma.

Community workers are used to working with groups of traumatised or marginalised people of all ages and many backgrounds, but they are trained to engage in development work, not emergency relief work. Nonetheless the response by community workers and voluntary groups has been exceptional.

"It's been phenomenal... We can't explain it," a community worker called Sandra told the Minister. A callout for volunteers to help in

Rosslare, to name but one place, was over-subscribed.

Minister O'Brien said, "I've worked for almost 20 years (with refugees) and I've never seen such a widespread public response and openness to refugees."

While SICAP-funded workers in Co. Wexford leaped into action - at least one barely after recovering from Covid - and worked all hours to provide co-ordination between the new ad-hoc volunteer groups, established community groups, businesses, state agencies and workers such as the Gardai and the local authority, they were not doing a job they usually do. Just as firemen will take charge and provide aid at the scene of a traffic accident until ambulance medics arrive.

In this case, the wait is for trauma care, information and long-term resourcing.

"We have €20,000 for community groups this year and now we're allowed use that with the refugees," one community worker told me.

"That's buttons," I said. He nodded. Obviously, more funding will be needed or local groups who rely on support will be left disappointed.

The nitty gritty of life for 20,000 and soon 30,000 people needs to be worked out in a timely fashion. The government moves slower than refugees, slower than voluntary groups, yet it brings cohesion and co-ordination that no other body can. Minister O'Brien, in his replies to my questions, got the message across that properly looking after the refugees was now the government's number one priority - with weekly meetings taking place at the highest levels.

### HISTORIC

The trauma experienced by refugees fleeing sudden war and able to fly here almost directly from bombing and barbarity puts demands on our under-performing mental health services.

Clr Leonard Kelly is the chair of the SICAP subcommittee of the Local Community Development Committee. He wanted the HSE to provide mental health supports to all new arrivals.

"Everybody should have a brief intervention when they arrive to see how they are," he said. It was "critical from a stress management point of view".



• Wexford Local Development SICAP worker Emily O'Rourke showed us around the temporary free shop for refugees in Rosslare Europort.



• Wexford Local Development CEO Brian Kehoe with Minister of State Joe O'Brien in Rosslare Europort. Below: The meeting in the Danby Hotel.



Minister O'Brien promised to check with the HSE on this.

At the same time, a Wexford volunteer called John, urged the government to keep Rosslare Europort and our airports open, but to give voluntary groups the support

they need to help refugees, for example by setting up new transport links.

Said John: "I'm not affiliated to any party and I know we have lots of problems. But what we have done in opening our doors will be





• Cllr Mary Farrell from Kilmuckridge where 14 refugees arrived unannounced to a local hotel one night recently and Cllr Leonard Kelly from Wexford town.

PHOTOS: Changing Ireland.

***“What we have done in opening our doors will be remembered in history.”***  
***- John (volunteer)***

• Cont'd from previous page.

remembered in history, because not every country is as active and quick.”

John's wife is Lithuanian so he feels closer to the situation than others.

“I would compliment you. If ye didn't allow it we couldn't facilitate it. I have relations in other countries and they are so proud of the Irish. And I'm proud because of it. So thank your government for that,” he said.

## HOW MANY?

A community worker – also called John – told me he would like the government to put a figure on the number of refugees it expects to have the resources to look after.

Community workers want clarity about the long-term plan and in that context it's fair to ask – how many refugees can Ireland feasibly take in, accommodate and care for. Back in the pre-famine early 1840s this island had a population of 8,000,000 so you could argue we've room for another

million people at present today.

What resources is the government willing to commit to this project? Will it impose a war tax on corporations or the general public or will the EU fund it? The hosting of up to 200,000 refugees (to quote the agriculture minister) won't run for long on goodwill alone.

Not that we should ever refuse people fleeing war, but we do so regularly – through the EU's policies of pushing back and refusing to rescue refugees crossing the Mediterranean. They are often black people.

Oxfam has said you can't differentiate between war refugees and the UN's head has said the EU's approach is racist, while acknowledging at the same time that EU countries – including Ireland – deserve praise for opening up to help Ukrainian people.

Meanwhile, as I await further training, I try to put myself in their shoes.

# Olena & Artim spoke for 40 refugees

**W**hen Minister of State Joe O'Brien visited the Danby Hotel in Co. Wexford, the 40 refugees there seized the opportunity to ask about length of stay, learning English, getting jobs and renting apartments.

There were upwards of 20,000 refugees thought to have landed in Ireland by that week, so these folk were lucky.

The two English speakers Olena Dolfdokarova and Artem Tiupin were to have reported back to the 38 others hungry for information.

Olena said, “We need to know English... Then we will start working... Then searching to rent an apartment. So far we don't know how to do that. So far, we are learning the steps of integration.”

Minister O'Brien said they are very welcome and that the Irish government and Irish people are very happy to stand in solidarity with Ukrainians.

So how long can they stay in Ireland?

The Minister assured them they could stay a long time, while acknowledging that he knew they need it confirmed on paper. Community groups are supporting the refugees to get the necessary permissions to stay.

And how long can they stay in this hotel, they wanted to know. They are just getting to know each other – the various Ukrainians from different parts of the country are



• Olena Dolfdokarova (centre) pays tribute for the support provided to date and outlines the concerns of fellow refugees staying in the Danby Hotel, Co. Wexford. On left: Artem Tiupin who hopes to resume his studies.

becoming like brothers and sisters, not wishing to be parted, or moved. Locals have been very welcoming and they have already made friends.

The Minister said, “I wish I could give you a straight answer to that. There are hundreds of people coming in every day and we're trying to source temporary accommodation for them while at the same time planning medium and long term options. People may be moved (from the Danby). Some accommodation is temporary. I can't give anyone a guarantee how long they will stay in this hotel at this time.”

## YELLOW PAPER

While our lives continued on much as before, Ukrainians woke up on February 24 to the end of the world as they knew it. They feel safe here being on an island on the edge of Europe. But they want information. What future have they? How long can they stay? Until they have official documents granting them permission to stay they worry.

Information is hard to come by and only two of the 40 accommodated in the Danby Hotel speak English.

The hotel provides food and visiting Irish volunteers are very kind, offering clothing, lifts, a friendly cuppa and more.

As much as we might assure them that they won't have to go back for a long time, some only have stamps for 90 days. What happens next?

They are likely aware of the statement made by the European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen guaranteeing that all refugees have the right to live and

work in the European Union for up to three years. But what if she is replaced: They need it written on paper.

All want to get their hands on the ‘yellow paper’ – an official stamped document that assures you of at least a year in Ireland. (Refugees can apply for permission to live in Ireland for one year under the Temporary Protection Directive and the permission can be extended after that).

Meanwhile, the trauma is ongoing. Refugees here often had to leave behind older relatives unable or unwilling to leave. Many men could not leave – husbands, brothers, boyfriends, cousins, friends – males of fighting age.

As the war continues, volunteers here will do their phenomenal best and hopefully with the fully resourced support of the Irish Government.

# REFUGEES: Family homes essential

## Hosting suits us: We've taken in 4 people - and we don't need or want to be paid

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

‘Changing Ireland’ has followed a Kildare family over the weeks and now months as they have taken in refugees. Their neighbours have done likewise, but Matt – a dairy farmer in his early 50s – was the first to move and the first to take in refugees in his locality.

At the latest count, four Ukrainians – two of whom we spoke to – are settling into Matt’s home. It’s a large, colonial-era, three-storey house with adequate spare rooms since siblings moved out years ago. Refugees staying in the area have now enrolled in local schools, registered with local doctors, been greeted by local community groups. Many are seeking work and they are becoming part of the local community. For instance, one woman who played violin professionally back home now plays in the local church.

Irish families offering homes were able to move at lightning speed compared to Government and even the Red Cross. Back in late February, Matt told me his ambitions.

“We have a big house and spare rooms and I was watching the news and made my mind up. I checked with Dad (his father Noel is in his 80s) and with Tom (Matt’s younger brother) to see if they were okay with us welcoming refugees. They were fine with it,” he said.

And so they set about refurbishing their spare rooms. “We want it to be nice for them,” he said in early March, with arrivals imminent. “We are in touch with a mother and her daughter who are still in Ukraine. There is also a family in Poland who could be here anytime soon.”

He found success by joining the Association of Ukrainians in the Republic of Ireland. “I also contacted the Irish Refugee Council and the Red Cross,” he said.

He was under no illusions.

“I hardly got any work done on the farm those first weeks. And this is not a short-term thing. These people could be with us for a long, long time, so it is not something you undertake lightly,” he said.

The mother and daughter he told me about in early March made it out of Ukraine and I met them two weeks after they moved into Matt’s house. Natalia and her daughter Anastasia told us they did not see the atrocities others will have witnessed and they know they are lucky to get out early.

*He acknowledges other hosts might need cash, but said: “It would change it. That’s not why we are doing this.”*



• A hand-made sign for Natalia and Anastasia that says "Welcome" in Ukrainian.

*“I am an optimist,” said Natalia from Kharkiv. “I see possibilities, but many will come with hatred and bitterness. It will be more difficult for them.”*

### MUM WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME

“I am an optimist,” said Natalia. “I try to see possibilities, but others who come here – especially after all the bombings they experienced – many will come with hatred and bitterness. It will be more difficult for them.”

When they reached Poland Natalia

and Anastasia heard through word of mouth about the farming family with whom they now live.

Matt was partly inspired by thinking of what his late mother would have done if she heard refugees were fleeing war for Ireland.

“She would have done the very same. I know she would have,” said Matt.

Now there are more Ukrainians

living in their house than Irish.

A fortnight after the first two Ukrainians moved in, a third woman – a schoolfriend of Anastasia – joined them. They picked Yulia up from Shannon Airport on a Sunday night.

“The plane will be full of people fleeing,” said Matt, heading to the airport. “It is sad but most of them won’t know where they’re going to in Ireland and they won’t get to stay with a family.”

### SO FAR SO GOOD, BUT EARLY DAYS

A few days after they picked up Yulia, he reported: “She came with just a small shoulder bag. That was all. She seems to be settling in. Ask me again in a month’s time – that would be more realistic. But it is good for her and for Anastasia, they are glad to be reunited.”

### RED CROSS DELAYS

He had plenty to say about those wishing to take in refugees who were stymied by delays at the Irish Red Cross.

“We registered with the Red Cross, but they never called. It was more word of mouth that worked for us. But I know three families around here who want to take people in and prefer to do it through the Red Cross – and they went weeks without hearing from them.”

I put questions from Matt, from his neighbours and from his Ukrainian guests to Minister of State for Rural and Community Development, Joe O’Brien (the video interviews are on our social media) and he was satisfied that the Red Cross had set targets and deadlines for calling all Irish families who wish to provide refuge. The wheels are now in motion.

### RURAL YET CONNECTED

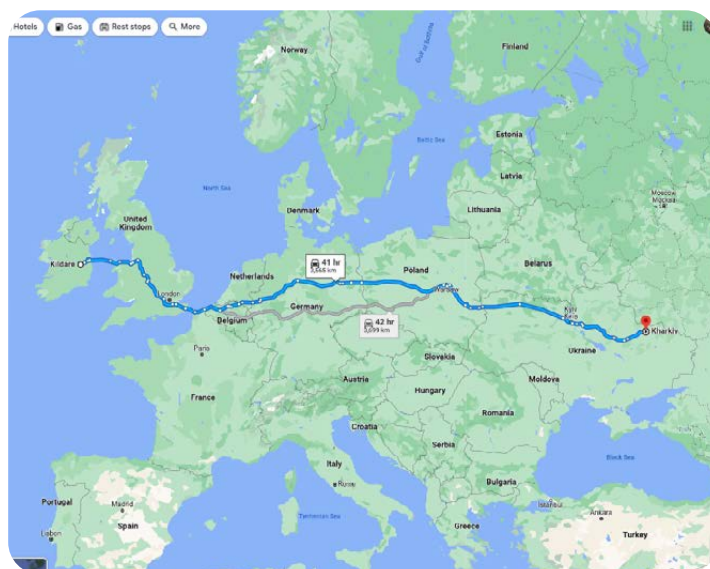
While rural life won’t appeal to everyone, this area is rural but not isolated. It is only three miles from the nearest big town – within easy reach of schools and public services.

### NATALIA COOKING

Asked how they felt about living



• *Natalia and Anastasia travelled around 3,700km from Kharkiv - by car, on foot, by bus, plane and jeep - to Kildare.*



• *Cont'd from previous page.*

on a farm, Natalia said they were city dwellers, but connected to nature.

"We are from Kharkiv, but we have a house in the country for holidays. Here, some evenings I cook Ukrainian dishes for Matt, Noel and Tom and they like it," she said. She thinks their diet has improved since she arrived. She has introduced the Kildare household to nettle soup and by the sound of things there won't be a nettle left standing in Ireland for long, such is the Ukrainian grá for nettle soup.

"Dad has bad hearing, but they're actually after clicking," said Matt.

## WEATHER & WIFI

Do they complain about anything?

"They say the house is a bit cold," said Matt. Hot water bottles and more storage heaters may be called for in wintertime. Yet their new home is far superior to an army tent or even a hotel room.

The internet connection is just adequate enough for Anastasia to continue with her graphic design studies through online classes – a silver lining from our years with Covid. Her mother is pleased that, despite being 3,700km from home, her daughter's education was only briefly interrupted.

"One thing I have to do urgently is get better wifi," said Matt. "They need good internet."

And this kind Kildare family was not finished. They still had two vacant rooms and, a fortnight after Yulia's arrival, a 29-year-old Ukrainian woman who did not know the other three joined them. She heard about Matt's family purely through word of mouth. It is she who now plays violin in the local church and offers music classes.

Matt explained how she came here faster than government agencies could move: "We have been friends for years with a Polish woman and through her we got to know other Polish people, including a hairdresser whose cousin back in Poland was helping refugees as they crossed the border. I'm cutting a long story short, but that's roughly how it worked - word of mouth."

They were basically vouched for.

## WORD OF MOUTH

Recently, a local priest called Matt to see had he room for a family looking for spare rooms but their needs proved greater than the old house could provide for. "Instead, through pure word of mouth they are going to my neighbour's place. They had a stand-alone, refurbished house. It only took a few phone calls and they flew over and moved in.

"We're just wanting to help. There's no vetting, no nothing. It's swift. I know the government have to do it their way, but it's going to take forever," he said.

Meanwhile, more neighbours wish to take in refugees and Matt has become in a matter of weeks a leading local volunteer organising accommodation for refugees and linking them to community, educational and state services. His background in the GAA helps.

However, when a friend suggested he go on KFM, Matt declined.

"We don't need publicity," he said. "We just get on with it and we're getting all the help we need."

He commended community groups in the nearby town who have assisted the refugees staying in his home.

## PAYING FAMILIES

He is opposed to the idea of paying households to host refugees. At €400 per month, his house could be in line for close to €5,000 per annum, or €20,000 if the payment was paid by the number of refugees hosted:

"It's not the same. It would change it. That's not why any of us are doing this."

He nonetheless accepted that some families would find a payment helpful to cover transport costs, etc. Meanwhile, all Ukrainian refugees here are entitled to social welfare and can access jobs and public services as if EU citizens.

## ADVICE TO OTHERS

He would naturally like to see more Irish people take in refugees.

"An awful lot of Ukrainian families won't find Irish families to go to. And they will hate being in hotels."

He advises: "If you're going to offer people a room, you've got to be 100% about it.

"It's a long-term thing and it's not for everyone. The first week it's a big novelty, but remember Ukrainians are independent people. You have your own routine, your own ways in the kitchen. Now you have others sharing the kitchen. That won't work in many families. But it's working fine for us."

*\* Some names have been changed in this story. Nobody in our Kildare household wanted publicity for doing something that many thousands of other Irish households are doing.*

**For more news  
join us on:**



**Changing Ireland** @changingireland · Mar 11

Good & bad news in #Moyross today.

First the good!

After political heat last year over plans for the community, Minister @EamonRyan came to listen to locals day. He toured the area & experienced the cul-de-sac effect of poor planning & the need for access and local industry.



3 7 15

**Changing Ireland** @changingireland · Jan 31

Many have paid tribute to the late Ronnie Fay whose death was announced this morning. Pavee Point has lost a co-director. The late Ms. Fay was also chair of Community Work Ireland (which supplied these images). Full PP & CWI tributes here - [changingireland.ie/tributes-paid-...](https://changingireland.ie/tributes-paid-...) [pic.twitter.com/NapDpq9xS7](https://pic.twitter.com/NapDpq9xS7)



11 33

**Changing Ireland** @changingireland · Apr 12

Doon on #FridayThe13th - a date you can't forget! @changingireland's been bowled over by the appeal and community credentials of #SocialFarming eg - in Kerry & Monaghan. Read more here: [changingireland.ie/social-farming...](https://changingireland.ie/social-farming...) And here: [changingireland.ie/social-farming...](https://changingireland.ie/social-farming...)



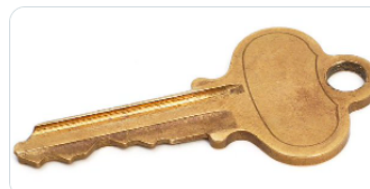
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**Changing Ireland** @changingireland · Mar 11

Q: Why are some community centres open 365 days of the year while others are under-used?

Is it:

- (a) A shortage of volunteers
  - (b) Insurance
  - (3) Only one person has the key!
  - (4) Not enough people available for CE
  - (5) Groups don't know they can hire the centre
- OR something else?





# VOLUNTEERING

## New centre aims to tap into spirit of volunteering in Offaly

- Volunteers have 461 groups to choose from  
- Official launch by Minister

BY RAY LUCEY

Offaly Volunteer Centre officially opened its doors at Bury Quay, Tullamore, on Friday, March 4th. As chairperson Martin Buckley, founder member of Pullough Community Shop which recently won the 'Unsung Hero of Offaly' award, said, "The future of Offaly volunteering is well and truly established and I am proud to be part of something that is outstanding."

He said it gave him "great pleasure to be able to showcase what we have to offer" adding that, over the last two tough years, volunteering showed that "small acts of kindness can still have a huge positive significance."

Zsé Varga, volunteer centre development manager with the national organisation Volunteer Ireland, said, "The project was funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and my role was to get the people around the table, which we did and we now have a really good board - versatile and enthusiastic. They worked as volunteers for months in the evenings to make this magic happen."

Deirdre Fox, Offaly Volunteer Centre manager, said of the board, "They are an incredible, selfless board that work tirelessly for the development and spirit of volunteering in Offaly." She described the new centre as a "bright, inviting and welcoming headquarters for the community of County Offaly" and thanked Offaly Local Development Company, which for many years provided a county volunteer service, for helping them to transform that service to become Offaly Volunteer Centre.

Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity, Pippa Hackett said, that it was



• At the Offaly Volunteer Centre official opening: Aileen Costello, support officer, Nina Horan, development officer, Minister Joe O'Brien and Deirdre Fox, manager.

volunteering that brought her initially into politics and emphasised that, "the acknowledgement and recognition of volunteers is really important to keep things going."

Minister of State for Community Development and Charities, Joe O'Brien, acknowledged all stakeholders and especially the board of Offaly Volunteer Centre "as without their dedication and vision the Offaly Volunteer Centre would not be here today." He said, "It is a milestone on

a significant journey [to go] from a Volunteer Information Service to a full Volunteer Centre."

Offaly already has a vibrant volunteer network with 461 groups registered with the Offaly Public Participation Network (PPN). The Offaly Volunteer Centre liaises with the PPN and will promote increased awareness and connections between volunteers and organisations. All in all it will bring the concept of volunteering in the Faithful County to new heights.



• Martin Buckley, chairperson of Offaly Volunteer Centre, speaking at the launch.

PHOTOS BY RAY LUCEY.



• Among the many councillors at the opening were Cllrs. Clare Claffey & Cllr. Mark Hackett pictured here with manager Deirdre Fox (centre).

# Participation

## FAI wants 50,000 more female players by 2025



• ROI captain Kate McCabe greets fans.

SOURCE: @KATIE\_MCCABE11 ON TWITTER.

In April, Ireland secured a 1-1 draw away with Sweden in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup Qualifying campaign.

The Swedish team was ranked second in FIFA's World Ranking (December 2021) and the timing of the Irish team's improved performance is perfect, as the FAI aims to increase the number of female players by 50,000 by 2025 (and increase the number of male players by 28,500), bringing the total number of soccer players in the ROI to 300,000.

The association's current strategy also seeks to have 40% female representation across the FAI board, its general assembly and committees by the end of 2023.

In recent years, the association has begun running female-only coaching courses and leadership training programmes for women. Former FAI board member Ursula Scully, from Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, said participation rates by females are improving and it is something she had witnessed at local level.

She reported to the FAI: "For example, during my time we went from running girls' leagues within my local league at U12s, U14s and U16s to now running leagues at every age group from U10s up to U18s."

On International Womens' Day last year, she said of female participation: "A clear pathway where players can progress to the very highest levels in the game is vital."

"Participation is key to the game. Growing the game at the grassroots level through schools and clubs exposes more girls to the game and provides them with more opportunities to play longer and more competitively," she said.

Ultimately, Ms. Scully wants to see a professional national soccer league for women established and "participation levels in the grassroots game that match that of the boys and men".



## Couple volunteering since 1975

*- Back then driving 13 kids in a car was okay if you'd won a cup*

**BY BROOKE GREHAN\***



**T**housands of people have given years to coaching sports teams - all voluntary. One couple in Limerick epitomise that dedication and accolades have been heaped on Margaret and Billy Grehan who coached and supported youngsters for over 40

years.

Billy is now 82 years of age and the couple still turn out to support local teams.

As Pat Hannon, one of their fans put it, "People tend to pay compliments to great people after they have passed on" whereas he wanted to "acknowledge their contribution" while they are both alive and well.

His online tribute sparked a flurry of responses thanking the super-duo who led many a youth team to victory on the soccer pitch.

Here, Margaret and Billy's grandchild Brooke Grehan interviews them about: why they volunteered, the difference it made, and female participation in sports:

Margaret and Billy have been resident in Granville Park, Limerick, for well over 40 years. They are best known for their devotion to their club Granville Rangers FC which they helped found in 1975. I interviewed them about the joy of coaching, clashes with the Gardai, the difficulties clubs today face regarding volunteers and rising participation of females in soccer.

Asked why people should become coaches, Billy said, "I'll tell you why I did it. I wanted to give back to the children under me what I got when I was growing up from my coaches and to be able to pass my knowledge onto them."

Funnily enough, Billy and Margaret never had any difficulty getting people to volunteer with Granville Rangers, but transport was a real issue.

Billy said, "Granville was never short of volunteers. We had two people for every team. But only two of us had cars and we had to drive them around everywhere."

"I had thirteen one time hanging out of my car, bringing them home from a match, and the guards above at Childers Road stopped us. 'Where are ye going?' one of them roared at us. Luckily, one of our team managers was a guard and he was a great lad. He got on the phone and rang the guard who'd stopped us and he says, 'Listen here! I know this man you're after stopping and do no more about it. He's taking children off the road.'"

As Brian Hinchy (one of those who joined in paying tribute this week) said, "Legends don't come along too often but when two come at the same time that is to be cherished."

**Did Granville Rangers improve the community?**

The pair agreed, "It did". Margaret continued: "We had sports days, different tournaments with different estates. and it occupied the children and they weren't hanging around the streets. Most

*"I had thirteen children hanging out of my car one time and the guards stopped us. 'Where are ye going?' one of them roared.*

*Luckily, one of our team managers was a guard."*

*- Billy Grehan.*



• The couple's Hillman Avenger had a black roof they sprayed orange to match the club colours.

evenings we'd meet up, so it helped in that sense"

**B:** "When we were on the estates, all the children and all parents got involved and then they were all above in the hall. The Church hall every Sunday night, playing the Match of the Day music, all dressed up in their colours and playing. We had great tournaments"

**M:** "They were all 5-a-side and all called different English teams; Liverpool, Man United, Man City and all that. And it ran for weeks and then it went to quarter finals, semi finals and finals."

**B:** "And all the parents were there - it was great."

**M:** "A brilliant atmosphere."

**How many girls' soccer teams were there in Limerick back then?**

**B:** "Well, there were very few wasn't there?"

**M:** "Girls' soccer is only there in the last 20 years that's all. There was no competition for girls' soccer there was only community games and almost every parish would have a girls soccer team in community games."

**Is there a Granville Rangers girls soccer team?**

**M:** "Yes, just since last year."

**What are the main challenges for getting more females into soccer today?**

**M:** "I think the main challenge is trying to get the parents involved as well - that's the difficult thing. Most parents are working different shifts. But they're making progress with the girls teams now."

**In your opinion is there a lack of interest in girls' sports teams?**

**M:** "Not so much now, there was I think in earlier stages but then the girls started playing with the boys up to U12. So that helped getting the girls involved in that but now they have their own age groups. And they're making big progress now, I think most clubs have a girls soccer team or more than one with different age groups. So it has come on a lot."



• Super supporters Billy and Margaret Grehan continue in retirement to support local teams.

\* Brooke Grehan (17) was on placement with 'Changing Ireland'. She is a 5th year pupil with John the Baptist Community School, Hospital, Co. Limerick. She hopes to become a writer.

# Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service

## First thoughts on hearing of Ashling Murphy's murder

When staff and volunteers in Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service heard a woman had been murdered in Tullamore in broad daylight, and before they knew who the victim was, they thought it could be somebody they knew through their work.

As manager Anne Clarke said: "Sometimes we go out home on a Friday and hope that some women are alive on Monday - that's how high risk the violence is in the community. You have women who are being threatened (with murder), threatened with weapons, and there's physical assault. When it's really bad women are being beaten within an inch of their lives.

"They're afraid then to prosecute because of a fear of the perpetrator. The women who are experiencing really high levels of coercive control are totally traumatised."

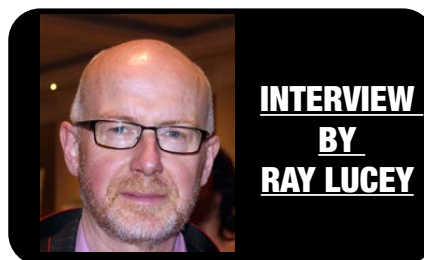
She said, "It was shocking to hear about such a random daylight attack, but that level of violence is in the community and is happening in the homes. A home should be a place of sanctuary and should be a place of calmness and safety. Women are terrified. They're not walking on egg shells, they're walking on broken glass."



• The late Ashling Murphy.

## HARD-WORKING STAFF GET CALLS FROM AS FAR AWAY AS TENNESSEE IN THE U.S.

**- Offaly project works with male as well as female victims**



**INTERVIEW  
BY  
RAY LUCEY**

**A**nne Clarke, manager of Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service, says, "There are women today who are alive by a hair's breadth."

**It takes more than a moment for that to sink in and it puts an incalculable value on the work done by Anne's project.**

**"We are mitigating women's lives every day," said Ms. Clarke, adding that they feel "humbled that women and men choose to contact us for support, that they choose to let us guide them through to safety."**

**Here is her interview with reporter Ray Lucey, beginning with how Covid highlighted the need for significantly more support for victims of domestic violence:**

**RL: Was there an increase in people seeking your services during the lockdowns?**

**AC:** During Covid, we saw our figures rise by just under 50% in 2020 and that stayed on trend for 2021. Our client contacts went up significantly: 829 in 2019, to over 1,700 in 2020 and 2,700 client contacts in 2021.

Clients needed more support during Covid-19 and there were more high risk cases that required more intense attention and more Domestic Violence Orders.

We had clients who had to leave the home quite quickly and there were threats to kill, and use of weapons. Really, there was a huge fear - a lot of women were very fearful in their homes and looked for support.

### SUPPORT MEN AS WELL

We had some men having to leave the family home during Covid-19 as well. Our services are a bit different, because we actually support men as well. We are one of the few services that does that - we provide support to both the male and female victims in Ireland.

A lot of the time it is more difficult for the man to come forward because society says - how could you have been harassed, intimidated or bullied by a woman? Society says men should be stronger. That kind of image we have of men makes it harder for a man to disclose abuse, because of that stigma.

### WOMEN WON'T LEAVE THEIR COUNTY

We have no refuge at all in Offaly. We're a rural county and there's next to no public transport out of towns and internet access is poor.

I speak predominantly about women because they are over 80% of our clients. A lot of times, women won't

leave their county. They base their decisions on how it would affect their children, if they have to come out of school, miss out on extra curricular activities, supports or family - then they won't leave.

Therefore it's really important that we have some form of emergency accommodation. Right now, we're looking at providing three safe houses in three different parts of the county which means no matter where you are you'll be in close proximity to your supports and be safe. We're trying to get that project off the ground and get funding for it.

**RL: How long has ODVSS been in existence?**

ODVSS is marking 25 years this year. It was formed in 1997 after a family lost their niece to domestic violence. A group of women got together once they realised there was nowhere for anyone to go. They started it up from very meagre beginnings and it just grew - into a service now providing one-to-one, emotional and practical contact support in a crisis. We do court accompaniment. We do all the processing and paperwork for the court. We accompany the person into court, and provide support afterwards and we can do remote court hearings.

We ran the same service all the way through Covid-19.

Our support groups moved quickly online. We bought Samsung tablets for clients to access technology and to stay in touch. Our (direct) outreach was reduced during Covid-19 obviously, but is back up again.

We do teen-dating awareness programmes, going into schools to talk about what is healthy and unhealthy in a relationship and what is consent.

We have in-house counselling, providing extra support for clients who need it to recover from the trauma they've been through.

We run a 'Freedom Programme' twice a year that looks at the various tactics of perpetrators, so you can inform people what the red flags are. If they are going into another relationship, they'll know how to be able to spot that, but it is also for the professionals - so when the woman talks about the perpetrator they have an understanding of what that means.

We also do 'Helping Hands'. It's a programme for children who witness abuse and it really looks at how they can regulate their emotions and feelings.

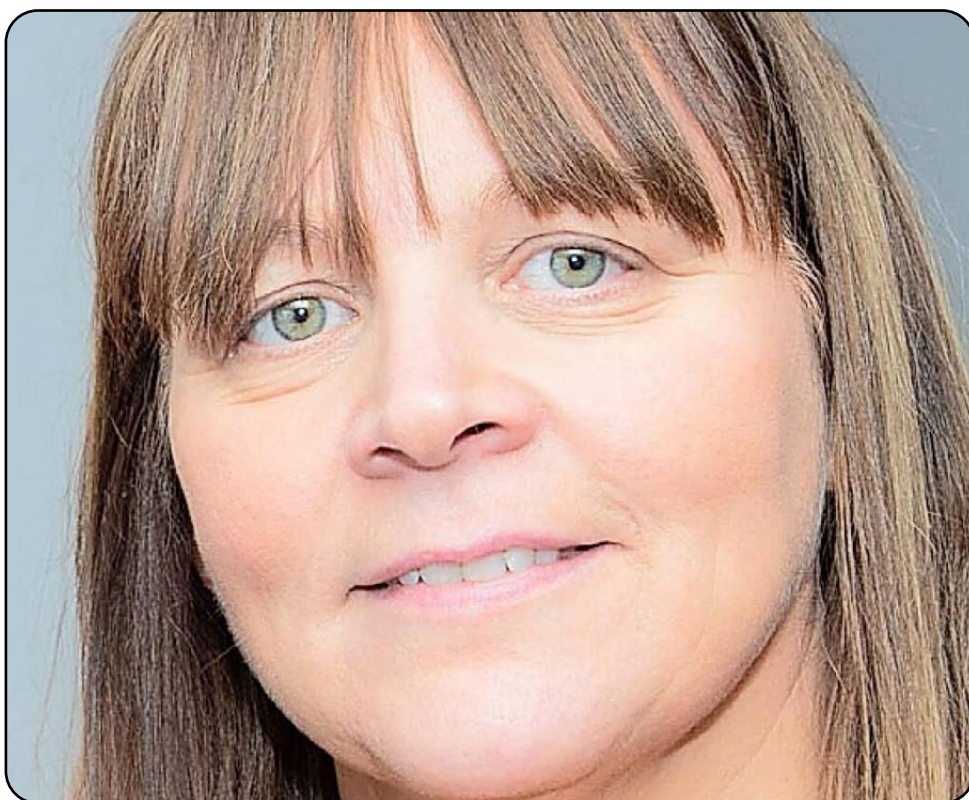
We have two helplines, one main helpline, and one active during Covid-19. We also have a text support line for those who can't speak verbally, so they can text and we can text them back.

For a small service in the Midlands we do quite a lot with the budget we have.



*The increase in domestic violence during lockdowns and the murder this year of a woman while out jogging, in Tullamore, Co. Offaly, led to a national enquiry about gaps in the level of support provided to women at risk of violence. Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service was set up in the aftermath of a previous deadly incident in 1997 and it does remarkable and mostly unseen work supporting female and male victims.*

*Here, Ray Lucey speaks to manager Anne Clarke.*



• Anne Clarke, Manager, ODVSS

• Cont'd from previous page.

## TENNESSEE CALLING

Across all our social media platforms we constantly get DMs (direct messages). During Covid-19, the amount of women around the world messaging us for support and information was unreal. It's because our social media is quite strong. Only the other day we got a DM from a lady from Tennessee.

We're just a small service in Offaly, but we look up their nearest support service and pass that information on to them.

We are contacted from North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, Dakota, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, the Philippines, Scotland, France - it went worldwide during Covid-19 to be honest with you. We couldn't get over it and we were asking ourselves - how are these people finding out about us? It was because we were very, very active on social media, because we had to keep getting the message out that we were still providing support during Covid and that we are still here.

Staff worked weekends and everything, because Covid-19 offered the perpetrators the perfect storm. They want to isolate their victims from all their support networks, so obviously that was perfect: You couldn't go 2kms past your house. You couldn't mix in households.

All the respite stuff and engagements that a person would normally have outside that abusive home were now gone. So our message was that we're still here, still providing support, that nothing had changed and if you needed help just give us a call.

That message went far beyond Offaly and right around a good part of the world.

## HAIRDRESSERS & BARBERS

We also run a lot of awareness campaigns and we run training for hairdressers, beauticians

and barbers, because obviously you have a good relationship when you go to the same one for years. They hear things and see things, so we train them.

## ABUSERS CAN TRAIL VICTIMS INTO WORK

We liaise with businesses regarding domestic violence in the workplace because we know that domestic violence doesn't stop when you leave your home. Your work can be sabotaged, you can be stalked at work, there can be multiple emails, multiple phone calls. Maybe you can't go to work because of a beating the night before or you could have high absenteeism.

## SAFE WORK SPACES

We work with employers to create safe spaces so people feel able to disclose and know they will get support from line managers and HR. In support of this type of work, there is legislation going through the Dail at the moment that will give 10 days paid leave for victims of domestic violence.

We also give people 24 hour alarms that go direct to the Garda and they have a responsibility to respond very quickly to that alert if it's pressed.

We do a lot for a small service.

## FINANCIAL ABUSE

At least 80% of women who come to us experience financial abuse and that is a huge barrier to leaving the home, so we run a project sponsored by the Giving Circle of Ireland. It's called 'Begin Again' and it gives one-to-one life coaching. It helps those who want to put their CV together, learn interview techniques, and whatever else they need. We've had some clients go back to college and some go back to work. We have outside facilitators and a counsellor - there's a good team behind the whole 'Begin Again' service.

## POST-SEPARATION ABUSE

A woman is at higher risk when she leaves an abusive relationship and she remains so for 3 to 6 months afterwards. When the perpetrator recognises they're losing control they increase the abuse even more and shift it up a gear.

It doesn't (always) stop when you leave; post-separation abuse can be huge and women are re-traumatised going in and out of courts for access and maintenance. Or they're being stalked, or the children are being used or weaponised by the perpetrator.

But through our support and domestic violence orders and safety planning we can support that person (when) living in the home becomes not an option, because of the level of abuse.

\*\*\*\*\*

We often hear 'She's an intelligent woman', but it doesn't matter if you're intelligent, because if you're being subtly controlled, sometimes you don't know until it's too late. And if the perpetrator is an upstanding member of the community, who's going to believe you?

### RL: Does that often happen?

What we can't underestimate is that if the perpetrator is so good at grooming you and you fall for it, he's also good at grooming the community and grooming all the supports around you. So, when you come forward and you disclose something - who's going to believe you? That's what women are facing every single day.

The children are often the invisible victims here. They're dismissed almost. We should have more children's support. We should make sure that children receive trauma support so we can break the cycle going forward.

### RL: Do some kids grow up to do it in later life (become perpetrators of domestic violence)?

It's sometimes a repeated pattern, yes.

# Offaly Domestic Violence support service

## ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT COULD BE A MODEL FOR OTHERS

**Anne Clarke, Manager, ODVSS, speaking to Ray Lucey:**

We run an ethnic minorities community development project - not just in Offaly, but also in Longford, Laois, Westmeath and Roscommon.

Basically, it's a community development project that is training champions within the communities to raise awareness of domestic violence - because what might be acceptable in somebody's home country might not be acceptable here.

It educates and trains people to understand and it looks at language barriers, refugee status, lack of financial support, all of that. There are barriers for women coming forward, so we're constantly working with all the ethnic communities out there, getting the message out where they can get support in the Midlands.



**ED'S NOTE:** Read the *Ethnic Minority Community Development Pilot Project (2018-2020)* report, available online, for more information, or contact ODVSS directly.



### Shame and stigma and The fear of becoming rejected by own community

33 out of 54

Lithuanian speaking respondents think shame and stigma is a barrier

Shame and stigma is one of the largest barriers for Pakistani women

62.5%

57%

of the Russian speaking respondents indicate that shame and stigma is a barrier

More than 40%

of the Pakistani respondents identify the 'fear of becoming rejected by own community' as a barrier

## Male victims: They can't leave as easily

**Anne Clarke, Manager, ODVSS, speaking to Ray Lucey:**

In this country, we have a history where a woman, if she is a victim of abuse, leaves with her children. But a man doesn't have the same freedoms, because they can't literally get up and leave with their children because there is no refuge for men. There is nowhere for them to go and there is minimum support. So, it's really difficult and a lot of times men remain in the abuse - because they have nowhere to go.

If they have to go, they leave the family home but are unable to bring the children with them. So

the children remain with the perpetrator and that is really unusual because that doesn't happen to the female victim. The majority of the time the female victim will be able to leave the family home with her children and have access to some form of accommodation, be it a refuge or safe house, or a family member. It can be quite difficult for the male client.

### DENIED REFUGE: SONS WHO ARE VICTIMS

RL: Are there any refuges at all for men?

AC: No, none, nothing. We were able through a discretionary fund to support men throughout Covid-19, but that is now coming to an end and so there is nowhere for men to go.

Also there are some women's refuges where if one of your sons is of a particular age you can't bring your son (e.g. some over 12 or some over 16) so you won't be able to get your son into a refuge if you are leaving.

So there's a lot of work to be done ensuring that there's emergency accommodation for victims both male and female.



## ONE GOOD THING TO COME FROM COVID

Anne Clarke, Manager, ODVSS:

We know that 1-in-4 will experience domestic violence in Ireland and 1-in-3 will experience coercive control in their lifetime.

It's shocking. And according to the Istanbul Convention and a 2014 report from the Fundamental Rights Agency, 79% of women will never disclose the abuse and will continue to experience it. A lot of the time they're afraid to tell somebody in case it gets back to the perpetrator and things get worse.

They minimise it to cope. They go from one incident to the next and they don't remember the last because it's all about what's happening now.

It's almost like a hostage situation. Your sense of self and your thought processes are completely hijacked. You're constantly thinking 'What's the next thing that's going to happen?'

It's a vicious circle of power and control and it is so detrimental to women's mental health, to their identities, their self-worth, their self-confidence.

I think the 79% (who don't come forward) reduced slightly during Covid-19. That's because everything was so amplified. We saw it in our services. More new clients contacted the service for the first time. At the end of the day, Covid-19 did (push) people forward to get that support.

## 7 HIGHLY TRAINED STAFF + VOLUNTEERS



**Anne Clarke:** It's a very difficult service to volunteer for. You have to be specially trained to understand the complexities, because if you've to give advice or support to somebody you have to know what is correct support. Otherwise you could be putting that person's life at risk.

We have 7 staff and volunteer numbers vary (usually 5-10). We have 2 support workers, an ethnic communities development worker, an administrator, a financial administrator, a counsellor as well as an intern and we are hoping to add to that.

It's a vocation because the subject matter isn't for everybody. So the support staff in particular, myself and the ethnic communities project person - we're highly trained to be able to pick up on high risk situations and know the correct safety responses. (Our work involves) a lot of safety planning with women to assess: Is this somebody that needs immediate support because their life is at risk? You can't really put that responsibility on a volunteer, it wouldn't be fair.

We have a very active board of management and they're very passionate about bringing the service forward and identifying those gaps to ensure that everybody who needs support receives support.

# NEWSLETTER

## West Cork's domestic violence service produces a unique resource

BY RAY LUCEY

Recently, West Cork Women Against Violence (WCWAV) published the 80th edition of their 'West Cork Whisper' newsletter.

It is immensely practical, thoughtful and clearly laid out and the publication is useful to any and all working / volunteering in the domestic violence sector - no matter where in Ireland you are.

This is not only because the 'West Cork Whisper' is the only one of its kind published in the country, but because of the quality of the content.

They are to be complimented on reaching their 80th edition - check it out - subscription details below (it's free).

In the meantime, Maria Mulholland, co-ordinator of WCWAV, said she is glad to see that domestic violence has become a government priority and she hopes to see the opening of more domestic violence emergency accommodation.

"There was one major benefit from Covid for the domestic violence sector. It exposed the dearth of refuges and safe housing spaces available to victims," she said.

"Covid highlighted that the old-style, communal refuges are no longer fit for purpose as these were unable to take their normal numbers because of Covid, reducing already scarce places in refuges by 50%."

The scarcity of emergency accommodation was recently highlighted by Tusla.

### REFUGES NOW A PRIORITY

Mulholland said, "A recent accommodation review of domestic violence spaces conducted by Tusla identified that at least 60 new units of accommodation are required in 10 locations across Ireland, including in Cork and West Cork. These areas are now a priority."

In February, the Department



• Photo courtesy of the 'West Cork Whisper' newsletter.



• Marie Mulholland.

of Justice published and sought the public's views on a new National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. Mulholland hopes that this third national strategy will lead to "radical change in prevention, protection, prosecution and policy areas".

### LUCKY BREAK

So, how did the projects such as WCWAV handle the increase in demand during Covid? They adjusted like other frontline community groups.

In West Cork they also got a lucky break.

Mulholland said: "We worked remotely, while ensuring we were always on the end of a phone for anyone who called. We placed ads in local press and media to let those who needed us know that the service was still operating and that we were still here for them.

"We worked closely with

our local Garda division to devise a process and protocols for transporting women and children to safety.

"Very importantly, we were given the use of holiday homes by owners who lived outside West Cork - for use by those most in need of emergency accommodation due to domestic violence.

"During the lockdowns, we worked longer hours and if truth be told we are still dealing with the aftermath of the increase in domestic abuse due to Covid and lockdown restrictions," she said.

### SUBSCRIBE TO THEIR NEWSLETTER

For a copy of the West Cork Whisper, email: [admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie](mailto:admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie) Alternatively, you can subscribe via this link: <https://bit.ly/WestCorkWhisperSub2022>

### FOLLOW THEM ONLINE

WCWAV is active on Twitter and Facebook. Their website is: [www.westcorkwomensproject.ie](http://www.westcorkwomensproject.ie)

## 2002 law is still denying Travellers a normal nomadic life in 2022

*He connected the rise of tourism in Ireland in the '70s and '80s with a "huge uproar to civilise this type of people," pushing Travellers towards city limits in an "out of sight, out of mind" strategy.*

**BY HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN**

The Sligo Traveller Support Group hosted a Facebook Live panel on February 24 to discuss the accommodation and homelessness crisis in Ireland, especially the challenges facing the Traveller community.

Speakers on the panel included Bernadette Maughan, manager of Sligo Traveller Support Group; TJ Hogan, political outreach worker with Mincéirs Whiden; Rose Marie Maughan, national traveller accommodation policy officer with the Irish Traveller Movement; and Fr Peter McVerry, founder of the Peter McVerry Trust.

Determining the number of Travellers experiencing homelessness is the first barrier. "In the collection of homeless data, there is currently no ethnic identifier...there needs to be," said Rose Marie Maughan.

She shared figures collected by the Cork-Kerry Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group in 2018, that showed approximately 85% of Traveller families in the southwest would come under the EU's definition of homeless. For national homeless data, Travellers are estimated to make up 20%, even though the group only accounts for one percent of the total population.

Government bodies do not recognise situations such as overcrowded accommodation or couch surfing under the banner of homelessness. Hence it is unclear how many people are actually homeless.

"These stats are way beyond a crisis point," said Rose Marie. "It seems that only when the housing crisis and homeless crisis has impacted on others, now Travellers have a voice within that. I think we need to reflect on that."

TJ Hogan and Fr Peter McVerry provided the historical contexts for the current crisis of homelessness in the Traveller community.

"The hard reality within Ireland at the moment is Travellers were first taken off the roads," said Hogan. He connected the rise of tourism in Ireland in the '70s and '80s with a "huge uproar to civilise this type of people," pushing Travellers towards city limits in an "out of sight, out of mind" strategy.

McVerry connected the homeless crisis to the breakdown in social house building.



• On the panel: Rose Marie Maughan, TJ Hogan, Bernadette Maughan and Fr Peter McVerry.

"Government and local authorities reduced their building of social housing and pushed everybody who needed housing on the private sector...it can't cope," said McVerry.

He cited a drop in annual council house construction from 6,900 in 1985, to 75 in 2015.

Bernadette added that in the national budgets given to local authorities, more money goes to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) than to social house building.

Moving to a more personal note, Bernadette shared anecdotes of Traveller families surviving in desperate living situations. One family is living for more than two decades without running water in Mayo. Another family with many children was restricted to a 20-foot trailer. She claims although the relevant government departments have money available to provide help to families in these circumstances, local authorities sometimes block progress. And while every local authority may have a homeless action team, Bernadette believes they do not want Travellers represented.

The disconnect between the local councils and the national government was exemplified last year in an

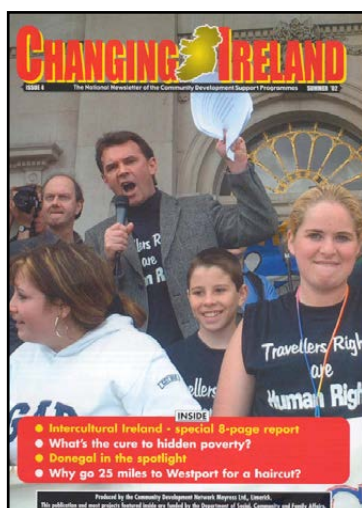
investigation by the Ombudsman for Children at Spring Lane halting site in Cork City. The office reported "overcrowding and serious risks on the site for children" and overall failures "to comply with and implement the minimum requirements of the Traveller Accommodation Programme." Cork City Council disagreed with the report, and noted various challenges delaying work.

Bernadette, in agreement with the other speakers, called for "an action-based campaign" so that Travellers are seen to stand up and are taken heed of.

Each member indicated the need to call on other marginalised groups to action against accommodation failures, such as refugees or asylum seekers in direct provision.

"Housing policy and housing for all should be a constitutional right," said Hogan, saying the first step should be the government declaring a national emergency on accommodation.

Previous government initiatives included providing 3,100 units of accommodation for Travellers by the year 2000. By 2005, 900 housing units and approximately 600 Traveller-specific units were provided.



### FLASHBACK TO 2002

'Changing Ireland' covered protests by the Traveller community and allies in 2002. In our fourth issue, we joined a thousand protestors on the steps of the Department of the Environment and Local Government objecting to legislation allowing for the jailing and/or fining of those camping illegally and the confiscation of their homes. That law remains unchanged.



## MARY HURLEY IS NEW SEC. GEN'L OF DEPT OF RURAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



• Mary Hurley at an event in 2015 in Roscrea. PHOTO BY CHANGING IRELAND.

Mary Hurley has been appointed as the new Secretary General of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Ms Hurley, a UCD graduate, previously served as an assistant secretary at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. She previously held responsibility for policy areas such as local government, fire and emergency management, homelessness, regeneration, community and rural development.

A statement issued by the Department stated, "Over the course of her career, Ms Hurley has worked across a number of departments, including the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, where she played a key role in the 1916 commemorations."

It added: "Ms Hurley was appointed to the position of Secretary General following an open competition run by the Public Appointments Service and the Top Level Appointments Committee."

Making the announcement in March, Minister Heather Humphreys said she was looking forward to working with Ms Hurley: "Mary has gained a wealth of experience across the public service and I have no doubt she will make a significant contribution to her role as Secretary General."

Ms. Hurley was preceded by Kevin McCarthy who, in January, was appointed Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

## CALENDAR OF DEPT'S FUNDING DEADLINES PUBLISHED

# €15m Community Centres Fund is part of an "unprecedented" €150m package

- Centres can apply for €10k to €300k grants

A new Community Centres Investment Fund will see €15m spent upgrading and refurbishing community buildings across the country. The fund was announced in March and complements funding schemes worth over €150m to communities this year.

A calendar featuring details and deadlines for all the major funding schemes for communities has been published to make it easier for community groups to see where they can apply and to plan ahead.

The main announcements in March drew attention to:

- The new €15 million fund to upgrade and refurbish community centres.
  - The focus on Remote Working through initiatives such as Connected Hubs and Town and Village Renewal Scheme.
  - The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which is designed to tackle vacancy and dereliction.
  - Significant investment in walkways, trails, rivers and lakes under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Fund.
  - Focus on ambitious projects which make a lasting impact to communities.
- Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, pointed out that there is now "unprecedented" support from government for rural communities through various funding programmes.

The funds, some of which are still open for applications, include:

- Community Centres Investment Fund. (Registration is open now; Applications will open 7 June 2022).
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme – Streetscapes.
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- CLÁR.
- Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme – Connected Hubs.
- Dormant Accounts Fund Social Enterprise – Capital Supports.

As Minister Humphreys said, "The funding is available – so identify good projects, make your applications strong and get them into my Department."

The rural investment packages are underpinned by the Our Rural Future and Town Centre First national policies.

Under the new Community Centres Investment Fund, groups can apply for grants ranging from €10,000 to €300,000.

Minister O'Brien commented: "There is little point in having great infrastructure if there are not the people using those facilities to deliver the many community and voluntary programmes and schemes across the country. That is why I am committed to supporting the Community & Voluntary sector to maximise its impact in communities throughout Ireland."

The challenge of making best use of community centres was recently discussed at cabinet sub-committee level, as Minister Eamon Ryan told this publication.

W: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/fec91-community-centres-investment-fund/>

W: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-rural-and-community-development/>



# Our Rural Future 2022 Funding Calendar

# WORK: Tailored support pays off

## Self-employment for people with disabilities

- Course sponsored by Pobal and supported by Open Doors

BY HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN



• Hannah Ní Shúilleabháin.

From last September, people with a disability who wished to start their own business had an opportunity through the Self-Employment for People with Disabilities module within the Continuing Professional Development programme at Technological University Dublin.

The first course ran for 12 weeks of lectures and 4 more weeks to complete a business plan and present it to a panel of funding advisors. The course includes lectures, guest speakers looking at the entrepreneurial topic of the week and successful entrepreneurs with disabilities.

“By having people within the community talk about their challenges and be open and honest about the issues they face and how they overcame them, it turns out for many that was the most impactful part of the programme,” said Professor Thomas M. Cooney, professor of Entrepreneurship at TU Dublin and the module co-ordinator. “It made them believe it was possible.”

Sponsored by Pobal and supported by the Open Doors Initiative, the twenty participants did not have to pay for the module and were allocated a business mentor from their Local Enterprise Offices for one-on-one support.

Participants could choose how much they wanted to utilise the programme’s scope, whether just to develop their business idea, complete their business plan in order to receive 5 ECTS credits, or pitch to a panel of industry professionals.

Accessibility was key to the success of the course. “Online really works because it enabled participation from across the country,” said Cooney, citing how participants joined in from ten counties.

“There was a huge geographical spread that wouldn’t be possible in person,” said Cooney.

Recorded lectures allowed participants to rewatch lectures if they had any health conflicts on lecture day or wanted to freshen up on the lesson.

### IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES

In his 2020 paper\* titled ‘Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland’, Professor Cooney highlighted how specific challenges arise for people with disabilities beyond the normal obstacles of entrepreneurship, reasoning why tailored support for people with disabilities is necessary.

Challenges identified through international research (quoted in Cooney’s 2020 paper) included:



• Prof. Thomas M. Cooney gives a TEDx talk on the subject of self-employment for people with disabilities.

***“We need to get the message out that self-employment is a real option”***  
***- Thomas Cooney.***

- Disinterest / discrimination / lack of understanding by personnel in lending institutions and business support services.
  - Difficulties in obtaining start-up capital due to poor credit ratings (often caused by low income employment or unemployment).
  - A lack of role models.
  - Loss of income received through social welfare (although in Ireland’s case the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance negates this challenge for the first two years).
  - Lack of access to appropriate support or training not tailored to their individual needs.
- Previous tailored support was limited in Ireland, partly due to the inaccessibility of location-based initiatives, or the lack of targeted funding and supports for those living with disabilities.

“This work cannot be about delivering courses alone,” said Cooney. “We’ve got to change the conversation around labour market activation for people with disabilities to be more than just ‘getting a job’. We’ve got to include self employment as part of the conversation, and to ensure that welfare supports enable that to happen rather than be a barrier to it.”

### SUCCESS TO BE REPEATED

By the close of the 2021 course:

- 11 of the 20 participants achieved the academic accreditation of 5 credits.
- 7 students made presentations to a panel of banking and investment professionals for advice on funding.

Cooney expects a half-dozen businesses to start up from the plans devised during the programme.

Damien English, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, told the department in February that a post-course survey “was hugely positive” and Enterprise Ireland plans to deliver diversity and inclusion training for Local Enterprise Office staff this year to help staff “understand the needs of all entrepreneurs seeking assistance.”

Due to receiving 38 applications for its first iteration, a repeated course was anticipated from the beginning. Professor Cooney confirmed the course has secured an undisclosed-sponsor to deliver the programme over the next three years, starting this September.

“We need to get the message out that self-employment is a real option,” said Cooney.

The application process for the Self-Employment for People with Disabilities 2022 course is expected to open in June. In the meantime, those interested can email Professor Cooney with any questions they have about the course.

E: [thomas.cooney@tudublin.ie](mailto:thomas.cooney@tudublin.ie)

\* Professor Cooney’s paper ‘Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland’ (16 pages) is available online.



## “If they did it, so can I”

**-Christina McDonald, owner of Grá-Nua**



• Christina McDonald, owner of Grá-Nua.

***“You don’t really hear much about disabled entrepreneurs and people starting their own businesses with disabilities.”***  
– Christina

Christina McDonald completed the 2021 course with a business plan for selling preloved fashion items for women. She is based in Co. Cavan and is currently selling on Depop as “Grá-Nua.” She shares her experience:

“I was diagnosed with MS in 2016. I was working two jobs and I found myself becoming disabled overnight.

“I kind of feel like in Ireland the system is a bit flawed, especially for adults with disabilities. If you’re on social welfare they push you to get a job; when you’re on disability, they don’t. After I got married my

disability got cut to 70 euro a week. I can’t live off that.

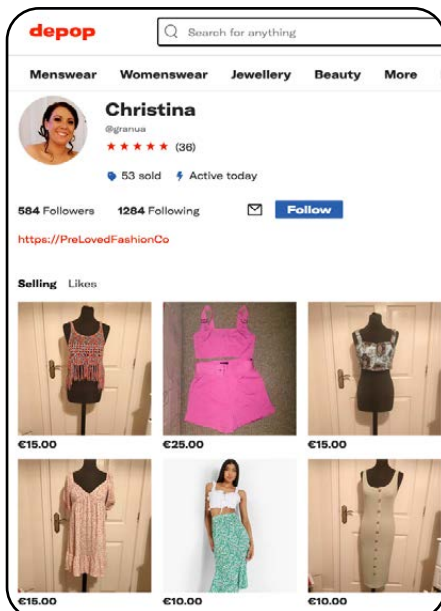
“Over the past two years there hasn’t been much employment opportunities for people with disabilities. I’m not able to work a physical job, or the Monday to Friday, 9-5. I thought, ‘I’m going to work for me, I want to do something I’m passionate about, and I’m going to be my own boss.’

“The course was great, I’ve never had an opportunity like this before. I wouldn’t have gotten this information anywhere else. There is no other course like this in the country. Whether you’re going to start a business or not, [Professor Cooney] gave us tools to understand how. This course will open your eyes to what you need to think about and the step-by-step process in developing the business plan.

“One of the main things [I came away with] is confidence. You don’t really hear much about disabled entrepreneurs and people starting their own businesses with disabilities. With the guest speakers, all of the entrepreneurs were people with disabilities who faced the same struggles. It really gave me the confidence to say, ‘Well if they did it, so can I.’

“Just go for it!” she advised. “You have nothing to lose. You might as well take matters into your own hands. If you’re passionate about starting a business, don’t let a disability stop you from achieving what you want.”

– BY HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN.



## APPOINTMENTS TO POBAL’S BOARD

In mid-February, Minister Humphreys announced six appointments to Pobal’s board, namely: Dr. Breda McTaggart, John Curran (not the former minister), Niall Garvey, Derville Brennan, Sean Sheridan and Pat Bennett.

Pobal works with the Department of Rural and Community Development, among other government departments, to support social inclusion and local and community development - delivering around 40 programmes, schemes and services on behalf of five government departments and other bodies. In 2021 it distributed €765 million to local and national community organisations.

The new members have considerable collective experience:

- Niall Garvey is CEO of Muintir na Tíre.
- Dr. Breda McTaggart is the head of the Department of Social Sciences in IT Sligo.
- Derville Brennan has over 19 years’ experience managing European Structural Funds programmes.
- John Curran is the manager of Donegal Volunteer Centre.
- Sean Sheridan is a retired public servant who spent most of his career with Donegal Co Co.
- Pat Bennett, now retired from a HSE chief officer post, previously served as the head of the Family Support Agency.

The Board currently comprises of nine women and seven men.

## SLIGO PUPIL’S ‘THANK YOU!’ BADGE TO BE ISSUED NATIONALLY

Norah Doe from 5th class in St Paul’s National School, Collooney, Co. Sligo, is the overall winner of a national art competition to design a commemorative ‘Thank you’ badge for volunteers who helped out during the pandemic.

Norah’s design is being commissioned by the Government in recognition of the contribution of all who volunteered in response to the national emergency.

The competition was run by the Department of Rural and Community Development in association with Volunteer Ireland.





# MEATH: Visiting projects

## COMMUNITY WORKERS GATHERED FOR 1ST TIME IN 2 YEARS TO SHOW OFF COUNTY TO VISITORS

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Volunteers, activists, community workers, public officials and local public representatives across Co. Meath hosted a visit by Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O'Brien, and his officials on Jan 31/Feb 1st.

Spirits were high among the community groups as Spring beckoned and the country emerged from the restrictions of recent years. On the two-day tour of the royal county, all the groups we met projected energy, enthusiasm and optimism. They also made clear how critical their work is and what they needed.

The Minister has visited projects in various counties and he chooses to listen more than speak - and people were frightful about their needs in providing support to groups responding to unemployment, suicide, mental health and issues specific to migrants, Travellers, older people and schoolchildren. Some projects are entirely volunteer-run, while others have staff support.

Among the ten groups visited were Family Resource Centres, a community-run Tourism Information Office, an outreach centre, mental health projects and more.

The projects visited receive various supports (eg funding, personnel) through government programmes such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, the Tus Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme, the Community Employment Scheme, the Dormant Accounts Fund, and more.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CO. MEATH?

They listened to criticisms and helpful suggestions to improve the government's delivery of support to marginalised people and to the community groups that seek to empower those very people.

### SOSAD

- They visited a volunteer-led group (SoSad in Navan) and heard directly from people who received treatment for depression and who told us of friends dying by suicide who may not have died if they had known more about the very services everyone present is determined to promote.

### TÚS & RSS

- They heard from Tus supervisors saying one year placements were not long enough. The Rural Social Scheme is not as good as it was when first launched in 2004 - it has drifted from the original idea to give small-time farmers an extra source of income while their valuable services are utilised for community good.

### SCHOOLKIDS

- They met a dozen schoolchildren who once had a difficult, near-2 hour walk to and from school, encountering many obstacles along the way. They now have a bus service (even though they don't live in a rural area and therefore didn't qualify for the Dept of Education's bus). The bus they travel on is part-funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund and attendance has shot up to 95%.

### BACK TO WORK

- The ministers and his officials met a man with a helicopter in the field behind his house. After becoming unemployed, Capt. Aidan Garvey dreamed of setting up a small business and with support from the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme he has established a helicopter training school.

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- They heard people ask for a re-opening of the highly-regarded Community Services Programme - and that may well happen later this year, people were told. And that's just to mention half the projects visited.



• Staff of Meath Partnership outside new premises near Kells to welcome Minister Joe O'Brien. The occasion was the first official visit in person in two years for most if not all of the groups the Minister met. He was accompanied on the tour by locally-based Minister of State Damien English.





*The ministers and their officials met a once unemployed man with a helicopter in the field behind his house.*



• **Meath Partnership Staff:** Barbara Gaynor, Rural Social Scheme, and Tús team leaders Tina McCabe and Patricia Lynch.

## MINISTERS' VISITS ARE GENUINELY IMPORTANT

Visits such as these bring everyone together, something that's more important than ever after two years in a pandemic. They help to highlight the work by fabulous collectives led by volunteers. They shine a light on issues that marginalised people face and the solutions they identify and politicians value listening to people on the ground.

### COMMUNITIES WELCOME ATTENTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

In Ireland, the role of senior politicians visiting community groups is an important one. They go to listen and to focus public attention on a group's reason for existence and on their often life-changing if not vital work. While celebrities often get behind an issue, ministers and public representatives willingly get behind whole communities.

It is a great opportunity to get everyone involved to focus on the organisation's core mission and promote what they do.

On more informal occasions (when something is not being launched or opened) the numbers are often kept low. Where practical however, community groups hosting visits by government ministers also often invite local councillors, TDs and senators not in government. The more who know and value your work the better.

*The best to lead are often those who have direct experience of poverty, discrimination and/or stigmatisation.*

### WHAT IS 'COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'?

Community development is about empowering people from the bottom-up through collective action. It encourages people to identify solutions to the challenges facing their communities and to seek social change.

Community development is carried out by collectives of volunteers, activists and civil society and public service workers who seek to change Ireland. The best to lead are often those who have direct experience of poverty, discrimination and/or stigmatisation. These groups fight injustice and inequality to change society for the better, one community at a time, often in very effective ways. Community development is an inclusive and often slow process. It happens on the ground, behind the scenes, while crime, violence or hate receives the bulk of media and public attention.

### THE ANTITHESIS TO RACISM & FASCISM

Community development - as happens daily throughout Ireland - is the antithesis to fascism, to racism, to homophobia, to inequality, and to rampant consumerism.

### VIDEO REPORT

We published video & further reports on Youtube and on our social media, with Meath people speaking about the importance of family wellbeing, mental health, representing migrants, success stories and local solutions. See: <https://bit.ly/ChangingMeath2022>



• **FLYING HIGH WITH THE BACK TO WORK ENTERPRISE ALLOWANCE:** Michael Ludlow, CEO, Meath Partnership, and Karen O'Reilly, SICAP job coach and mentor, Minister of State Joe O'Brien, Capt. Aidan Garvey, Minister of State Damien English, and Paul Geraghty, Principal Officer, Dept. of Rural and Community Development.



• **ABOVE:** Carol Murphy, general manager of SoSad Ireland, Marie Johnston, co-ordinator of SoSad Meath, and Minister Joe O'Brien.

# MEATH: Visiting projects

## Great to see community work first-hand, said Minister of State Joe O'Brien

Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O'Brien said it was "great to see first-hand" the work that communities are carrying out with support from the Departments of Rural and Community Development and Social Protection, among others.

On his tour of Co. Meath, he said, "One job of Government is to

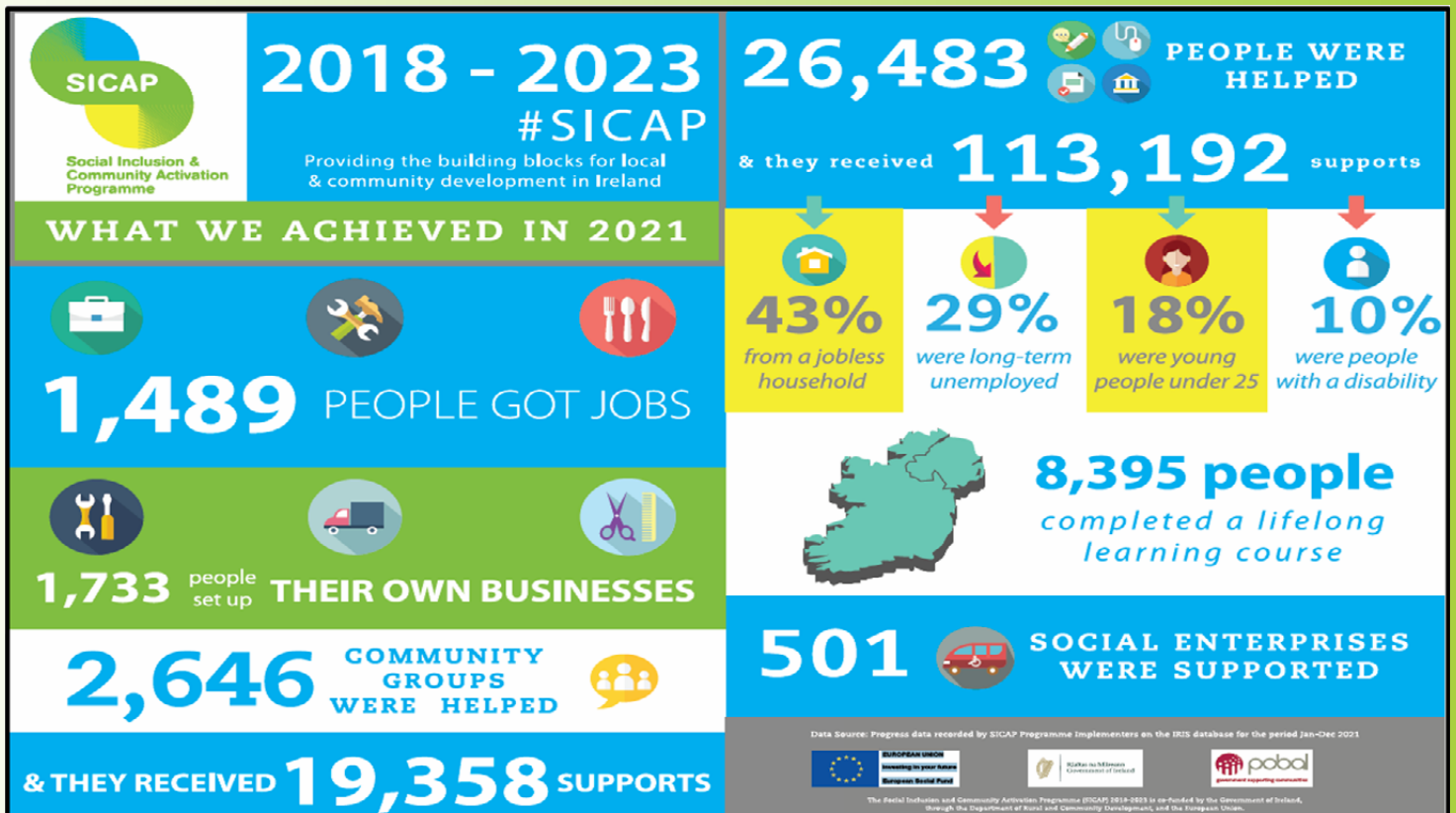
support communities so that they can develop to become vibrant and inclusive."

The projects he visited all showed "the resourcefulness of local communities in identifying an issue and developing a plan to address it and enhance all aspects of the community."



• **Pictured at Trim Family Resource Centre:** Minister of State Damien English; Justyna Doherty, Trim FRC co-ordinator; Brandon Regan, IT co-ordinator - Trim FRC/ TUS participant; James Coogan, caretaker, Trim FRC/ TUS participant; Minister of State Joe O'Brien; Aoife Whelan, TUS Supervisor, Meath Partnership; Kathrin Franke, Fáilte Isteach co-ordinator, Trim FRC/ TUS participant; Michael Ludlow, CEO, Meath Partnership; Paul Geraghty, Principal Officer, Dept. of Rural and Community Development; and Cllr Ronan Moore, chairperson of Trim FRC.

## What SICAP achieved nationally in 2021







• Roisin Traynor, Meath Wellness Hub project officer, Mary Farrelly, SICAP community development worker, Paul Geraghty (in background) Dept of Rural & Community Development, and Monica Nelson, manager of the SICAP Programme & Meath Wellness Hub.



• Meath Partnership staff Angela Farrelly, SICAP community development worker and Sarah Smyth, SICAP project officer, with Minister Joe O'Brien.



• **ABOVE:** Cultúr in Navan provides English language and other supports to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The project is run entirely by migrants themselves and is supported through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. Cultúr was one of seven organisations chosen last year to be part of the €1m Community Development Pilot Programme.



• **ABOVE:** Lee Macnamidhe, volunteer, Minister Joe O'Brien, Marie Johnston, co-ordinator of SoSad Meath, Carol Murphy, general manager of SoSad Ireland, and William 'Handsome' Johnston, volunteer.

# SoSad: Every county should have one

- Lee Macnamidhe tells why he shares his story



• Lee showed us his semi-colon (;) tattoo. He said, "The semi-colon symbolises that your story is not over. A lot of people have got that tattoo for suicide prevention."

No better person than a volunteer who benefitted from a project to explain its importance. Lee MacMalighe put it plainly:

"Save Our Sons and Daughters is a suicide-prevention service. But it goes much deeper than that. If you're struggling in any way or form, they'll look after you.

"I've been here on three separate occasions over the past 8/9 years. At first, I thought you had to be suicidal to use the service, but no you don't. I was down and depressed. I started using the service and they got me from down really low to up.

"My depression kicks in on and off. I'm very open. I struggled really hard for a long time and I got back up and then I shared my story on Facebook. It was only a positive experience – there was no backlash.

***"I've put a lot of people onto them. They're using the services and it's keeping a lot of my friends alive."***

"Sharing my story - it helped me a lot to know that everyone was there for me. I wasn't looking for attention. I felt great with the help I got here (from SoSaD) and – around the time I lost a friend through suicide – and I just wanted to push people to start talking. The more people talk the better.

"So I'm very open, but other people want to keep it in.

"Some people have come up to me recently and asked 'How do I get into counselling?'. They just don't know what way to go about it. They're too afraid to actually come into the building. I tell them about SoSad and how they can give you different avenues.

"SoSad is starting to get more and more popular. Fair play to them, they've done a brilliant job. I've put a lot of people onto them. I'm glad they're using the services and it's keeping a lot of my friends alive.

"I've lost people through suicide and I'd rather if they had come to me first, because I would have put them onto these services. It's very hard.

"SoSad is unbelievable. Unbelievable."

- in conversation with Allen Meagher.

## SOSAD'S MISSION & REACH

SoSaD's mission is to help prevent suicide and improve the lives of all people affected by depression and suicide.

While most of SoSaD's offices are based in towns in five eastern counties in the republic - in the towns of Cavan, Dundalk, Navan, Portlaoise and Carrickmacross - it is national in its aspirations and anyone can ring 24/7 for support.

Remember it's not just for if you are feeling suicidal, but also for anyone who wants to talk about self harming, depression, bereavement, stress, anxiety, or simply to talk. You might have concerns about yourself or someone close to you. Ring: 1800-901-909.

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





# MEATH: Social inclusion

## CAMPAIGNERS CLAIM 100% SUCCESS WITH UNIQUE NAVAN SCHOOLBUS

**S**tudents from Windtown, Navan, Co. Meath, who previously struggled to reach school on a daily basis in all weathers, met in February with community minister Joe O'Brien and officials to highlight the value of their unique urban schoolbus and to call for ongoing support.

Taking the Flexibus to Beaufort College means pupils from the other side of town can reach school dry, in time for a breakfast and without having to miss homework club after school, **REPORTS ALLEN MEAGHER.**

Five of the six pupils who met the minister are now doing their Leaving Cert and all were described as "very motivated" with solid career aspirations and plans for the future.

Until 2017, Beaufort College pupils from the far side of town who walked for nearly an hour each morning often arrived wet, tired and hungry. Students frequently missed days and some quit school early. Local councillors had sympathy for them, especially in winter weather on dark mornings, and supported calls for a dedicated bus service.

What began as a pilot scheme proved to be an overwhelmingly success. A school completion officer told us it had effectively achieved a 100% success rate. Previously, children from the Windtown area had an average school attendance rate of only 80%.

The students did not qualify for a Dept. of Education schoolbus, because their average walk of 4.5km through Navan's busy urban terrain was 0.3km short of the guidelines.

Last year, when the service seemed to be in jeopardy during the pandemic, parents rallied and walked the bus-route with their children, successfully highlighting the need for it to receive continued funding and support. At that point, the Department of Rural and Community Development became involved.

*The students did not qualify for a Dept. of Education schoolbus, because their average walk of 4.5km through Navan's urban terrain was 0.3km short of the guidelines.*



**"IT'S MADE THEM FEEL PART OF THE SCHOOL"**

When, on Monday, Feb 1st, the six students met Minister O'Brien for lunch in the offices of Meath County Council, they spoke about the value of the bus service.

"They were very clear they wanted to be in school and they wanted this transport service," said school completion programme co-ordinator Christina Nestor. She hopes that funding for Windtown schoolbus (currently funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund) will be "ring-fenced" for the future.

"The success for our young people is that they have consistent transport to school every day," she said. They also now reach school everyday in time to join the breakfast club and they take part in the after-school homework club before taking the bus home.

"It's made them feel special and feel part of the school community," said Ms. Nestor.

**"YOU'RE SETTING A GREAT EXAMPLE"**

**- O'BRIEN**

During his visit, Minister O'Brien said, "I am delighted to meet these wonderful students here today who were fortunate to benefit from the Windtown Student Bus Service, funded by my Department. This bus service is a tremendous asset in the avoidance of school dropout and the successful completion of their secondary education. You are setting a great example for your peers, your family and other members of the community."

Ms. Nestor told us, "It has been 100% successful. When I say 95% attendance, the 5% (absent) may be due to young people who are sick or who have genuine reasons for their absence from school."

"They are all very motivated," she added.

Recalling the successful campaign last year for the



• TOP: Christina Nestor, local School Completion Programme co-ordinator.

• 2ND FROM TOP: Minister Damien English, Meath Co Co Cathaoirleach Sean Drew, Minister Joe O'Brien and Cllr Yemi Adenuga.

• ABOVE: Local Links is a national service and is known in the Navan area as Flexilinks. The map shows the route across Navan.

• BELOW: 2021 protests when the service was in doubt.







# LIFELONG LEARNING

## Limerick City Education Network launches strategic plan

BY RACHEL MAHER\*

• *Cont'd from previous page.*

service's retention, she said, "The parents were extremely pro-active. They campaigned and they walked the distance and we got media coverage. It was very much the parents voice with our support as well, as school completion officers. We really were engaged in community development."

She recalled receiving a call from the Department of Rural and Community Development about their interest in supporting the initiative.

"We were chuffed. They had heard of the benefits of the bus project," she said. She thanked Minister O'Brien again for his support. "I want to see the money ring-fenced," she added.

She had many people and agencies to thank, including the friendly bus drivers, Miriam McKenna from Flexibus (aka Local Link) which funded the initial pilot, Fiona Fallon from Meath County Council, Cllr Eddie Fennessy, parents led by Mark O'Halloran, successive principals of Beaufort College, Enda Lydon Principal of Naomh Eoin in Windtown, and Meath CYPSC. She also thanked Cllr Yemi Adenuga and Navan-based Minister of State, Damien English, who were both present for the school pupils' meeting with Minister O'Brien.

### "WE NEED ALL THE FUNDING BACK".

Looking to the future locally and nationally of the School Completion Programme, Ms. Nestor said, "We have four project workers, including myself, but we need a fifth person. In the recession, we lost 30% of our funding; we got 5% of that back last year, but we need all the funding back."

The School Completion Programme, in Navan and across the State, is supported through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme, funded by Tusla.



At the launch of their new strategic plan, representatives of groups who are members of the Limerick City Education Network (LCEN) renewed their commitment to providing community education across Limerick city.

The network provides a forum for the promotion, provision, coordination and development of community education in Limerick city.

The network is frequently cited as an example of best practice nationally.

For example, **Karen Wallace**, from Moyross, spoke at the launch about her own experience with adult education and how it helped her achieve the success she has today.

She said she took every opportunity the community gave to her by trying out the various classes provided until she found her niche in the community.

Karen has now progressed to third level education, attending TUS, where she studies community development.

**Mabel Mescall**, who also took LCEN courses, is quoted in the new strategy document, saying how "grateful" she is for adult education. "Learning does not stop," she says.

Fellow student **Margaret Wallace** recommended adult education for "learning new skills, improving old ones and making new friendships."

LCEN community development worker **Mary Hughes** outlined their vision for "a thriving high quality and co-ordinated community education sector accessible to all in Limerick city".

**Patrick Fitzgerald**, also a LCEN community development worker, said that "the voices of both learners and participants were central to the process" of devising the plan.

Launching the new strategy, **Mayor Daniel Butler** stressed the importance of community education:

"At the heart of the LCEN are the people in Limerick communities who continue to engage and attend community education classes".

**Triona Lynch**, a representative of Limerick and Clare Education and

Traning Board, spoke at the launch about the national Adult Literacy for Life Strategy\* which is achieved through collaborative partnerships that engage learners and supports their educational needs.

Triona also highlighted how LCEN "is cited as an example of best practice nationally, one supporting coordination and collaboration".

Its new strategic priorities include:

1. Co-ordination of Community Education provision
2. Capacity-Building, support and quality assurance
3. Promotion, outreach and awareness-raising
4. Policy development and advocacy.
5. Governance and operational management

For more, visit:

- <https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/>
- <https://www.lcen.ie/>
- <https://www.aontas.com/>

\* *Rachel Maher is a student of Mary I. College, Limerick, and was on shared placement with 'Changing Ireland'.*

## Confused by adult V. community V. lifelong education?

- In plain English Mary Hughes explains the differences and overlaps

We asked Mary Hughes from Limerick City Education Network (LCEN) about the overlap between adult education, community education and lifelong learning and she put us straight.

Ms Hughes pointed us to LCEN's description of community education:

"Community education is for the community within the community. It takes place outside of the formal education sector and aims to enhance learning, foster empowerment and contribute to civic society.

In her own words, she explained: "Community-based adult education takes place within people's local communities, meeting the needs of the community

and in disciplines sought after by the community. It is a learner and community led process."

"Adult education overlaps with this as people can often find what they desire within their community, but they may have to look at Further Education campuses or Higher Education venues outside of their community," she said.

"Lifelong Learning is an acknowledgement that learning can be accessed and should be encouraged at all stages of one's life. Lifelong learning can be formal, informal, accredited and non-accredited and usually take place in all areas of one's life," she added.

Aontas, the national

network defines community education as "adult learning which takes place in local community settings across Ireland. It is learner-centred and responds to the needs of the local community."

"Community education has a track record of effectively engaging with people who wish to return to education but may not have the confidence or opportunity to do so in a formal setting," adds Aontas.\*

Meanwhile, the Citizens Information Service has this to say: "Community education provides flexible learning options in your community. Education programmes are based on individual and local community



• *Mary Hughes, LCEN.*

needs. Programmes may be organised by the Community Education Services within the local Education and Training Boards or with the help of local groups. Courses are part-time." \*\*

\* <https://www.aontas.com/community/community-education-network>

\*\* [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/returning\\_to\\_education/adult\\_education.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/returning_to_education/adult_education.html)

# CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Skibbereen mental health project shows "how a community can effect change"

## Lisheen House & other independent services take on a large load



BY HANNAH NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN

**L**isheens House, a children and adolescent counselling service, is moving onto the main street of Skibbereen. The charity has purchased a building on North Street in hopes the visibility and larger space will improve their in-demand efforts.

"By having a presence in the town and by people seeing it, they'll associate it: if I need help, that's where I can go," said Mick Kearns, co-founder of Lisheens House along with Noreen Murphy. Kearns believes the building will make a big difference in addressing the long-term mental effects of the pandemic: "We're preempting the surge that's going to be there, and having a dedicated centre will meet that increased demand."

Last September, Lisheens House received a €140,000 loan from Clann Credo Community Loan Finance for the new location. On Facebook, Murphy called the new centre a "testament" to the community spirit in West Cork.

After two years as a one-room operation, Lisheens House - West Cork's first independent, dedicated child and adolescent counselling centre - opened on Ilan Street in 2016. Its name commemorates the house Noreen Murphy built with her husband Donal before he died of suicide in 2007.

The centre in Skibbereen includes counselling rooms, art and movement therapy spaces, and a second-hand furniture shop. The counselling service does not receive government funding and is primarily supported by furniture sales, and otherwise by personal fundraisers, such as a



• **Main photo:** Lisheens House and Wellness Centre is a community-centered mental health service in West Cork. **Inset:** Founders Mick Kearns and Noreen Murphy.

donation in lieu of wedding favours.

Kearns likens the community support of the charity to a boomerang.

"By giving us their odds and ends, the public ends up getting a building back that's there to be used," he said. "It's a true example of how communities can effect change, and just another example of a sustainable community enterprise where if people support you, it actually stays in the community. Once the building is finished, the penny will drop that each of them who supported us contributed towards this being there."

### INCREASING DEMAND TO PREEMPT A CRISIS

"In January (2021) we would have seen a doubling, even tripling, in demand in some weeks," said Kearns. "Normally we'd expect to field about ten calls a week—that went to 30 calls a week in early January."

He connects this rise to that of the Covid case numbers. The overwhelming prompt: uncertainty.

After the lockdown of March 2020, the charity employed two additional play therapists to share the load of counselling originally placed on one. These counsellors practice primarily off-premises, but Kearns plans for the new building to

house the majority of future sessions. "Younger children, they need a kind of stimuli," said Kearns. "So we'll customize the rooms to make them appropriate for younger people to feel comfortable. It's conducive to them opening up and developing a relationship with the therapist."

Lisheens House offers its free counselling service to children as young as seven.

"As a community-centred organization we don't say no to anyone," said Kearns. "The age profile of people looking for help, unfortunately, is lowering."

Kearns believes Lisheens and other independent services take on a large load unaddressed by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) under the HSE.

"There's huge waiting lists and staffing problems that compound the waiting lists," said Kearns.

Last July, Newstalk reported 2,559 children on the waiting list, with 250 waiting over 12 months according to Freedom of Information Figures. The *Irish Examiner* reported a 7% drop in waiting list numbers last August, but data was incomplete due to the cyberattack on the HSE. The HSE told the *Examiner* 94.9% of young people were seen within 12 months in community CAMHS services as of August.

"The hardest thing is to reach

out," said Kearns. "If you did reach out and are told, 'Sorry you have to wait,' it's a real slap in the face."

CAMHS provides the assessment and treatment for under-18s and their families experiencing mental health difficulties once referred by their GP. The majority of adolescents are treated through Community CAMHS, or outpatient methods, which can include meetings with professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists and speech & language therapists.

The *Medical Independent* reported last September that, although some 99 disciplinary CAMHS teams were planned in a 2006 policy document, there were only 72 community teams in place around the country.

"Accessibility is vitally important," said Kearns. "All expert opinion of that service is that it's really not fit for purpose in its current existence."

As Cork and Kerry held the highest share of children on waiting lists from late 2020 to mid-2021, Lisheens House is in a position to fulfill their mission of de-urbanising mental health care.

"We'd envisage instead of people going towards urban areas, they'd migrate to where services are available," said Kearns.



# HOUSING IN DUBLIN CITY

## ROOM LIGHTS MAY BE ON 24/7 AS TOWER PLANS DISMISS DAYLIGHT

• *Cont'd from previous page.*

The Irish Hospital Consultants Association (IHCA) shared its criticism of the government's budgeting for mental health services in August when launching its Mental Health pre-budget 2022 submission. It commented that while the budget of €1,114.1 million for 2021 is higher than in 2009, "given the population growth since then, the current mental health budget is actually €2,000 per 1,000 population below the spend 13 years ago."

A total of €1.149 billion has been allocated to mental health in Budget 2022. Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, announced the funding of two new CAMHS telehubs in a push to provide more alternative out-of-hours mental health support services.

### WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN ACHIEVE

Community-run charities are a community among themselves, sharing goals and strategies in fundraising and outreach. Lisheens House depended on the advice of TalkToTom in Gorey to get started, and is providing guidance to Open Arms Kerry as they grow. The collaboration between mental health charities leads to strategies that work and are easily transferable.

"Keep it simple," Kearns advises. "You're not going to fix everything, but you can make a difference."

Lisheens House looks forward to the possibility of fulfilling what CAMHS cannot in West Cork, and at an equivalent standard of practice. "We're quite anxious that this will be comparable with best standards," said Kearns. "We're adamant that it will be held up as a beacon of how communities can actually - once they pull together in support of social enterprise - get results that show what it can do."

### NEW OUTLETS IN CLONAKILTY & BANDON

Since opening its used furniture shop in Skibbereen, Lisheens House has added two more outlets in Clonakilty and Bandon. The shops are now all branded as Lisheens House Homeware and Furniture.

The charity hopes that, as the new furniture shops bring in revenue, new support services will follow to these locations. The idea is that income derived in each town will be re-invested in that town.

Donations of furniture are welcome (call 086-4066348).

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

Twitter: @lisheenshouse

Also on Facebook.

Helpline: 023 888 8888.



• *Lights on in apartments in shadow.*

**Imagine having to leave the lights on day and night to see your way around your home, because developers planned for little daylight. This in an era that sees mental health, wellbeing and energy saving as of great importance.**

### BY LAOISE NEYLON

While Dublin desperately needs new homes, some architects are urging caution about plans to build high rise schemes where tall blocks overshadow each other for much of the day.

**Orla Hegarty**, assistant professor of architecture in UCD, says that high density can be achieved without very tall buildings.

Dublin is less suited to high rise than many other cities because of its latitude as well as the damp weather, she says. "Our sun is really low in winter," she says. "Lower-rise buildings mean that light can get to ground level between buildings and deeper into rooms."

Sunlight also cannot dry the rain on those streets and the high-rise buildings can create wind corridors.

A lot of people think that high rise in Dublin will be similar to New York, says Hegarty, but it won't be: "New York is at the latitude of Barcelona."

For those who will live in the new homes at O'Devaney Gardens - half of which are social and affordable housing - there could be problems in relation to daylight.

Planning documents show that 400 of the new homes won't have adequate access to daylight in their open-plan living-room-kitchens.

The guidelines say that combined living-room-kitchens should have 2 percent average daylight factor, and even that is low, say some architects.



• *Modern apartments in Dublin in good sunlight.*

"Something like 5% would be far superior to 2%," says **Paul Kenny**, assistant professor of architecture and planning at UCD.

Daylight is essential to health and well-being, says **Amy Hastings**, an architect who specialises in sunlight and daylight.

"There are considerable health implications associated with insufficient access to daylight including disruption to circadian rhythms, which can result in insomnia, gastro-intestinal problems, depression and cognitive dysfunction," she says.



• *A woman and child outside a cottage in The Claddagh, Galway, in May 1913. Poverty, discrimination, a lack of tenancy rights, and taxes for decades on windows and on glass meant that little light penetrated such homes. (Incidentally, this was one of the first ever colour photographs taken in Ireland. The photographers were Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon-Alba from France).*

## DAYLIGHT ROBBERY



## NEWS: Pilot in Darndale & Drogheda

# Crime response: 24 people start new community leadership programme

In response to shootings and the activities of crime gangs in Darndale in Dublin and Drogheda in Co. Louth, a new place-based Leadership Development Programme was launched in January.

The programme supports a dozen local leaders in each place to help them develop together and address challenges in their areas.

“Sadly back in 2019 there were a number of shootings in Darndale and shortly after that we were asked to host a meeting between the justice minister at the time and the community – to see how community and statutory organisations could come together to address some of the key challenges,” said Paul Rogers, CEO of Northside Partnership, speaking to our colleagues in Near FM.

The 24 participants embarking on the 18-month exercise include local residents and representatives of local community groups and statutory organisations.

Backed by €188,650 in funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development, the programme is also being delivered on foot of recommendations in Jack Nolan’s report (the ‘Darndale Socio-Economic and Community Plan’).

Mr Rogers - in his interview with Near FM’s Donie Tarrant - said the upsurge in crime led to calls for a community response. That wasn’t as simple as it sounded. Adding to the challenge, he said, was the fact that State agencies no longer work as collaboratively with communities as they did 13 years ago.

He said it is “at the heart of how we work in Northside Partnership” to always seek to collaborate. “But since 2008, that kind of mechanism has not been as effective, because the State has been retreating into contract management. Previously, we had good opportunities for dialogue... but those kind of opportunities are disappearing,” he said. “Our challenge was - how do we find a space for community, residents, statutory organisations to come together?”

By good fortune, Mr Rogers attended a seminar organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development in November 2019 at which Dr. Bob Worrall and community leaders from Scotland gave a presentation about Place-Based Leadership Programmes.

“They said how well it was working over there,” recalled Rogers.

“I thought this was an opportunity



• Children from Darndale at a sing-along in Darndale Belcamp Community Centre in December.

Source: Darndale Belcamp Village Centre on Facebook.



• Seized in Darndale: drugs, cash, weighing scale and mobile phones.

Source - Garda Síochána



• At Northside Partnership’s Place-based Leadership launch.

for us to bring people together.”

He connected with the Scots after the seminar and put a proposal to the Department of Rural and Community Development. It was approved in February, 2020, and, though Covid delayed the launch, it has now begun.

Rogers hopes it will nurture relationships between community representatives, drug and addiction services, the HSE, Gardai, Tusla, Dublin City Council and so on.

“The participants will get perspectives from others and take a deep dive into the challenges.

“Time is the one thing we have to give to understand what the challenges are - as seen from a residents’ perspective and other perspectives,” he said.

The programme will give people time to pick apart the challenges, explore the issues and hopefully

come back with solutions.

Each person will have access to professional coaches.

“How can Northside Partnership contribute to a solution? How can the Gardai contribute? How can Dublin City Council contribute?” he asked.

Joe O’Brien, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development attended the induction day in Darndale.

He thanked all involved including Northside Partnership, Paul Rogers, Dr. Rob Worrall, and Ciaran Reid and the team in Louth Leader Partnership.

Darndale and Drogheda are by no means the only communities beset by gang crime and he said it was a “very important and meaningful programme” and expressed confidence that learnings from the

initiative “can be built upon and expanded to other communities in Ireland”.

Also speaking at the launch, Niamh McTiernan of Northside Partnership said:

“Place Based Leadership will ensure that local leaders develop the collaboration skills needed to address the challenges their communities face.

“The issues identified in both Darndale and Drogheda are complex and will require a response from a number of different sectors. An important element of driving change will be a strong coalition of mutually invested organisations working with the local community. This approach will make a lasting impact and bring forward the solutions required.”