

# CHANGING IRELAND

NOT FOR PROFIT

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - COLLECTIVE ACTION - EMPOWERMENT - SOCIAL INCLUSION - [www.changingireland.ie](http://www.changingireland.ie)

## TOP TIPS

- All in communities is already useful - let's hope it's regulated!



## TAKING OWNERSHIP

- We bought the bank

Conversations About  
Activism and Change  
Independent Living Movement Ireland  
and Thirty Years of Disability Rights  
Edited by Sarah Fitzgerald



## ACTIVIST AUTHORS

- Rarely heard stories of disability activism



## NEW CDPs

- New Community Development Projects in Limerick, Galway and Dublin

# Why communities summer



## Our streets

## Ask Dubs about dining out



## Our water

## Ask Ardee about pop up pools

**CITY / COUNTY COUNCIL NEWS**  
• BACK PAGE AND INSIDE



## Our paths

## Cycle anywhere

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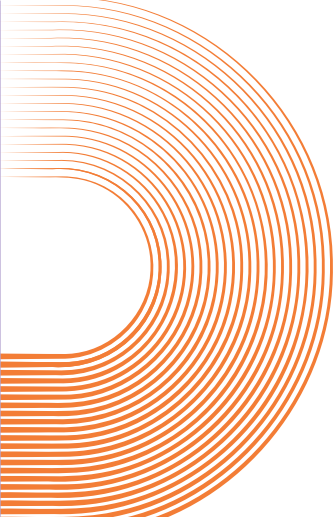


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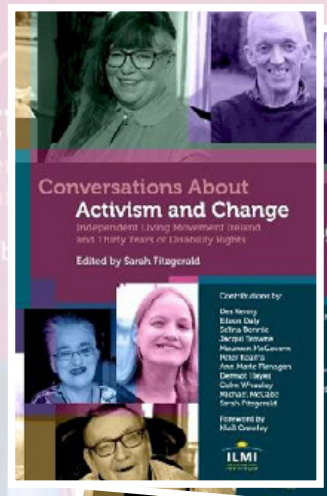
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### MEET US ONLINE



### 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 aim to give people who are rarely heard a voice.

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

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

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

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

### SUPPORT

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



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



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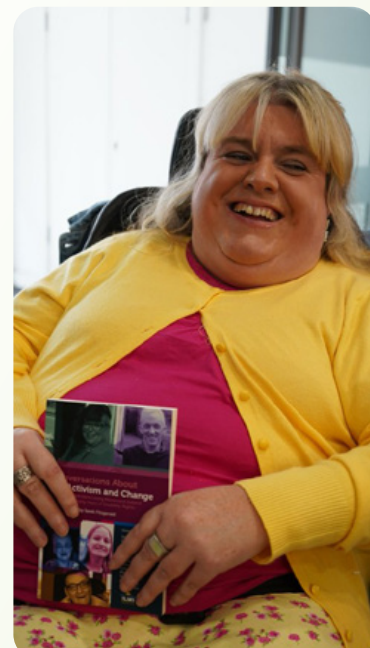
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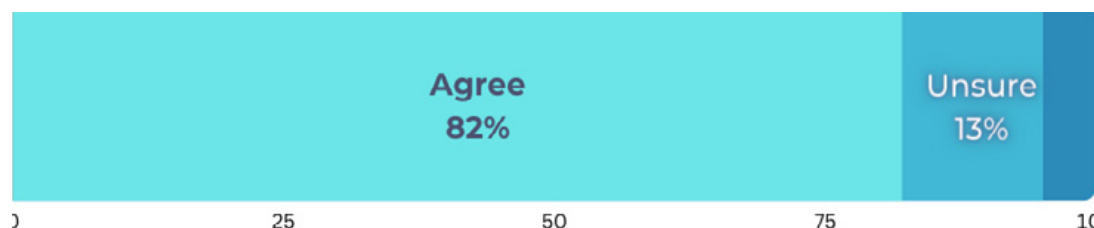
## READERSHIP SURVEY

This survey was carried out anonymously using the Survey Monkey platform last year and garnered 130 responses from approximately 700 requests.

Due to the anonymity factor, we could not get back to people to respond to individual expressions of interest in getting involved. Kindly contact the editor directly.

Thanks to all who gave their time and opinions.

**82% agree: Changing Ireland brings to my attention issues and groups of which I was not aware.**



**54% agree: "Changing Ireland really makes me think and affects how I work."**



ANONYMOUS READER SURVEY 2022



## Communities enjoy summer, but need to be heard



The summer is high and there is plenty to do to.

Apart from community-run festivals, of which there are many, people can throw a street party, cycle a greenway or - more long-term - seek to acquire one of Swim Ireland's pop-up pools. Communities could also press their local authority to follow Fingal's lead and open community sitting rooms. Kathy Masterson reports from various parts of the country on how to make the most of the summer. We hope these articles will inspire others to follow.

Meanwhile, community workers hope Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, will urge the Government to take a zero-tolerance attitude to child poverty. That was one of the main proposals at this year's Social Inclusion Forum (report on pages 32-33). The Government may not like all that was proposed, but the issues are deadly serious

and, as Minister Humphreys assured everyone present, "The Government listens to what you tell us at the Social Inclusion Forum".

One of the fundamentals for strengthening vulnerable communities is giving them a stronger voice. The addition of three new Community Development Projects - in Limerick, Galway and Dublin - to the new Community Development Programme is welcome. In this edition, we hear from Travellers in Limerick who have a new project, and from Clare where their project is running for two years.

The recurring point both made is that, at long last, especially in Limerick's case, Travellers in these places have a voice. The projects are viewed very positively by allies in the sector. As a HSE representative said, the CDP gives her team "the opportunity to work with the Traveller community, rather than doing things for them, and that's a massive step forward".

She called for the new Community

Development Programme to be mainstreamed.

Island communities seem largely pleased with the new Government strategy for Ireland's offshore islands. But, what a wait - 27 years! Let's hope it works.

Avid readers of columnist and agony uncle Horace won't have to wait so long. He took too much sun, but will be back in the Autumn. Meanwhile, there is a bumper crop of news stories, features, reviews and updates in this edition.

Finally, if you glance at page 4, you will see some of the survey results that helped to shape Changing Ireland's strategic plan. We are indebted to Ciaran Lynch for his guidance on that journey and are pleased to have a strong vision for the future, ensuring we remain true to our values, respectful of all stakeholders and loyal to our readers.

*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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### 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.

## SOME GROUPS FEAR LOSING FUNDING FOR SPEAKING OUT



Early findings from a new survey exploring restrictions on the voices of community, voluntary and non-governmental organisations reveal that there is a nervousness among some over speaking out.

The Freedom to Advocate survey was conducted by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) and its two key early findings are:

1. A fear of being seen to oppose government policy is, to differing degrees, silencing the sector.

2. Dissatisfaction with how findings from consultations/other engagements are incorporated into policy and legislation is alienating organisations.

Liam Herrick (pictured above) the ICCL's executive director, raised the issues during a discussion on "Identifying and countering threats and restrictions on freedom of association facing the NGO/Community and Voluntary Sector" at The Wheel's recent conference.

## DID YOU KNOW POBAL HAS OVER 700 STAFF?

*'Pobal' means community. The not-for-profit organisation has over 700 staff and administers funds of more than €600m p.a.*

*• Pobal works in the areas of local and community development, social inclusion, early childhood care and education, peace and reconciliation, equality, labour market supports, and education and training.*

*• Some of the groups supported by Government through Pobal include the long term unemployed, young people, farmers / fishermen, families, Travellers, older people and ex-prisoners.*

*• This year, Pobal marks and celebrates 30 years of work.*

For more, turn to page 8.

# AI WILL PUSH COMMUNITIES IN NEW DIRECTIONS

- Community groups should prepare for coming opportunities



• AI is coming at us fast and ideally we would approach slowly. Above - Pat Kennedy by a volcano in Nicaragua.

## BY ALLEN MEAGHER

**Will AI be a help in community development? "Definitely," says Pat Kennedy, CEO of eTownz.**

**Does AI have the potential to destroy humanity? "Absolutely", he replies, quoting warnings from its inventors.**

To many in rural Ireland, the acronym remains associated first and foremost with impregnating cows and Kennedy agrees that AI is coming at society at a "headspinning" speed.

Nonetheless, his community-focused company is currently putting it to good use and he was able to easily, over the phone, list a half-dozen ways that AI can be of benefit to community-based organisations and not-for-profits.

## 6 WAYS TO USE AI

"The community development sector in general should take advantage and use AI tools designed for business in a community development setting," he said, listing for example:

**1. It could help you write your social media content.**

**2. It's going to be a help writing legal documents.**

**3. It can help with storytelling** – you might have a report on Tidy Towns, or a match, and you might not be good at writing stories, but if you provide a summary of what's happened at a match, or a Tidy Towns update, it'll write a proper version for you.

**4. It can also help with reports**, for example your annual report. It will be helpful with structured documents such as tenders, grant and planning applications. It won't do them for you, but it will take some of the hard work out of it.

**5. It could help with administration**, setting up emails and setting reminders and so on.

**6. Creating images**, people can use it to come up with posters, with cover pages for your plans – you might want an AI-generated image of what a

playground in your area might look like in the future.

AI in forms such as ChatGPT and ChatPDF is already free, online, for anyone to use – including community development workers.

## SAFE FROM MASS LAYOFFS

"This has been going on for years. There are thousands of AI tools out there now, but ChatGPT made AI famous because it is user-friendly," said Kennedy.

He like many believes it will truly change society.

"People in law firms and in marketing are doomed, but if you're a chef, a plumber, or a youth or community worker – AI isn't a threat to your job.

"Looking at the bigger picture, the world is in drastic need of huge change and this tool may be what was needed," he said.

He said that AI will present challenges and opportunities within communities – such as what to do when people have more time in the community as industries experience mass layoffs and high-tech societies move to shorter working weeks.

"We're going to have to rethink the five-day working week," he said.

Meanwhile, community development workers will be freed from "a lot of the paperwork" and they will have more time to do their actual work.

"It's a gamechanger. In eTownz, we're helping towns come up with plans. There is nothing more complex than the community and AI has ways of analysing huge amounts of information quickly.

"On the downside there's likely to be a bigger digital divide," he warned.

"AI will take over many roles done by humans. Human-like AI machines will work in old folks homes and some people will love them, some won't."

The stuff of science fiction is becoming reality.



## COMHAR NA NOILEÁN WELCOMES NEW ISLANDS STRATEGY

The Irish Islands Federation, better known as Comhar na nOileán, has welcomed the Government's new islands policy, saying that "the islands are now all the better for having a specific policy and action plan". It commended officials for hard work done to generate a whole-of-government approach to issues facing islands and welcomed islanders' involvement on future decision-making.

Máire Uí Mhaoláin, CEO, speaking on behalf of the network of 16 islands, said:

"Comhar na nOileán and many islanders welcome the national islands policy. We feel that it is a good foundation on which much can now be achieved.

"Without going into the detail of the action plan, we especially welcome the formation of an interdepartmental group on which Minister Humphreys will sit, as well as representatives from the islands. This will allow many challenges to be addressed in real time.

"We believe that Minister Humphreys and her officers had a job of work to do to engage other departments in accepting that they also have a role to play in regards to the Irish islands. We commend them for that work.

"The policy and action plan is a living document and there will be challenges, but it is a significant development and the islands are now all the better for having a specific policy and action plan than heretofore," she concluded.



• Comhar na nOileán commended Minister Heather Humphreys - pictured here at the launch on Arranmore - and her officials on the actions proposed in the new plan.

# Housing scarcity on islands is tackled in long-awaited policy

80 actions included in whole-of-government strategy for islands, first in 27 years

Barriers facing islanders wishing to build homes will be removed as part of 80 core actions promised in the Government's new islands policy.

Under the new strategy - the first for 27 years - the Government's forthcoming planning guidelines for rural housing will recognise the unique challenges that island communities face. Additional funding will also be provided to support islanders who wish to turn vacant and derelict properties into homes. These measures, alongside digital hubs on all islands, improved broadband, better healthcare and infrastructure, should make a major difference.

The 'Our Living Islands' policy was launched on June 7 by Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys.

"As a result of delivering this policy, we will see more people living on the islands and more people working on our islands, with good career prospects, regardless of where their employer is headquartered," she said.

Speaking at the policy launch, held on Ireland's second most populated island, Arranmore in County Donegal, the Minister added:

"We will see islands contributing to, and benefiting from, the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate-neutral society. And we will see our island communities, and especially young people, having an active role in shaping the future for their own islands," she said.

The new strategy reflects a whole-of-government approach, and its publication was accompanied by a three-year action plan up to 2026. Both are available for download from the Department's website.

### Among the highlights of the action plan are:

- Additional support through the Government's Property Refurbishment Grant Scheme, aka Croí Cónaithe, as part of an effort to turn vacant or derelict buildings on islands into long-term homes. Existing grant ceilings will be increased by 20% in recognition of the additional costs involved in construction on offshore islands.
- Vacant Home Officers will identify vacant and derelict properties on the islands.
- The Government's forthcoming planning guidelines for rural housing will recognise the unique challenges that island communities face.
- E-Health Pods will be piloted on offshore islands to give residents and families improved access to health appointments.
- Supports will be provided to remote working facilities on islands.
- A commitment to high-speed broadband for island-based schools, digital hubs and Broadband Connection Points.
- Supports for outdoor recreation activities such as cycling and swimming, and expanding the Walks Scheme to more islands.
- Increased job opportunities, including apprenticeships on islands.
- More investment in infrastructure such as piers and roads, and the completion of the upgrade of coast guard stations of units servicing islands.
- Support for the development of Waste Management Plans for island communities.



• Looking out towards the beautiful but uninhabited Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry. The Government's new islands strategy aims to make island living more attractive.

PHOTO: A MEAGHER.

**Offshore islands with an average population greater than two based on Census 2011-2016.**



## Pobal holding events to mark 30 years of "enhancing social inclusion"

Pobal recently held an event in Monaghan, the first of four events to mark its 30th anniversary and to "highlight the progress made in last three decades to achieve social inclusion, equality, and community development".

The inaugural event - 'Enhancing Social Inclusion in 2023' - took place on May 29 in the Íontas Theatre in Castleblaney. It focused, as will two further events planned for Galway (on Sept 6) and Cork (date to be decided), on "Pobal, Government and communities working together to create an inclusive society".

The series of events will conclude with Pobal's national conference in Dublin Castle on November 2.

Pobal administers a range of programmes and schemes on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Social Protection, as well as the Department of Health/HSE, the Department of Justice, the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, the Department of Transport, and a number of EU bodies.

Pobal CEO Anna Shakespeare opened the event in Castleblaney.



• Speakers and panellists in Castleblaney (l to r): Domhnaill Harkin, LGBTQ+ advocate and ShoutOut committee member; Siobhan McLaughlin, Donegal Travellers Project co-ordinator; Anna Shakespeare, Pobal CEO; Rosarii Mannion, Pobal chair; Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body; Jacqueline Fallon, director of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

She said: "Our 30th year is a unique opportunity to showcase the remarkable work of the organisations, local groups, social enterprises, charities and early learning and care providers working alongside Pobal in the Monaghan region.

"Pobal makes a significant

difference to individuals, children and families.

"Now more than ever, the programmes we administer on behalf of Government are providing critical support and assistance to those in need of it most."

She added that it was "wonderful" to meet and bring together people

from community organisations and early learning and care providers across Monaghan, from Pobal, and from Government.

To find out about future events, see: <https://www.pobal.ie/anniversary>

## Bairbre Nic Aongusa pays tribute in Monaghan to "our partners" in social inclusion



The keynote address at Pobal's 30 year celebratory event in Monaghan was by Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Assistant Secretary for Community Development, at the Department of Rural and Community Development, who said:

"For the last 30 years Pobal has worked on behalf of Government across many areas, with community and inclusion always at the heart of their service.

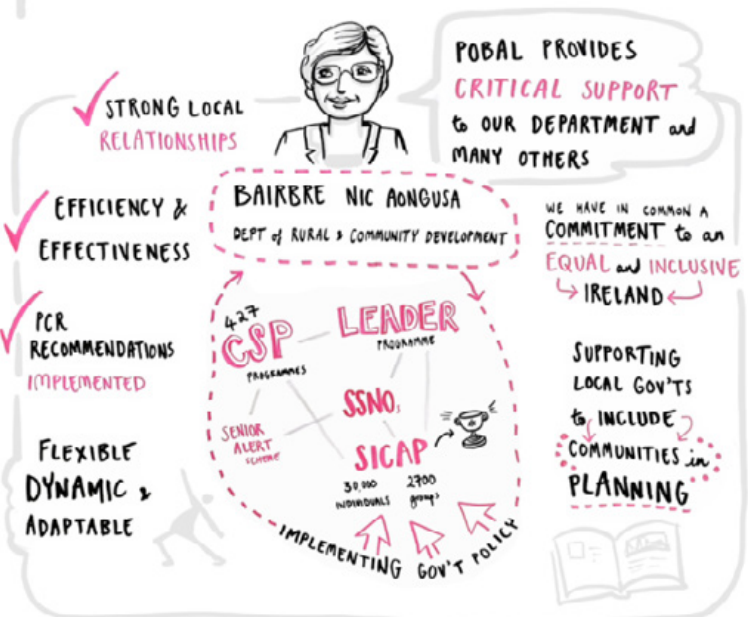
"Since its foundation in 1971, the

Department of Rural and Community Development has continued to build and develop its programmes to deliver positive change for individuals and communities across Ireland, and this would really not be possible without the tireless support of our colleagues in Pobal.

"I am delighted to commemorate Pobal's 30th anniversary and to hear about the many ways in which Pobal, Government and the communities we serve work effectively together to enhance social inclusion and support communities.

"One of the key aims of Government is to provide strong community supports to empower and develop communities that value the health and wellbeing of all," she said.

She paid tribute to community groups, local agencies and representatives from the community and voluntary sectors - "our partners in this work".



• A sketch showing Bairbre Nic Aongusa speaking at Pobal's event in Monaghan.



## 49-member network has new team

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) has a new team of four. The network represents the country's 49 Local Development Companies as they work to create real and lasting change with marginalised communities. The new staff are:



**Carol Baumann** is a Dublin native, long-settled in Galway. Her career in local development began 25 years ago and her career has always had social justice at its core.

She has a track record leading complex organisations in challenging operating environments.

In building this team, Carol says she "hopes to draw on its wide range of competencies, experience and expertise to drive the local development sector forward".

She worked with Galway City Partnership as education and training co-ordinator, before joining Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) supporting the then network of 51 local companies.

Her most recent role was as a

senior manager with COPE Galway, delivering social services to a range of groups.

In joining the ILDN, Carol sees the unique strengths and capacity of the local development sector and is committed to working with ILDN members and stakeholders in building further on the successes of the past.

She was hired as CEO last September and leads the ILDN's new team.



Spiddal, Co. Galway-based **Conall Greaney** has a deep interest in the environment, sustainability and social justice issues and is the ILDN's finance and administration officer.

He studied at Dundalk Institute

of Technology (spending a year on Erasmus in Bremen) then transferred to Leeds Metropolitan University where he graduated with honours in European Finance and Accounting.

He worked in Dublin as an accounts assistant for a contract cleaning company and was promoted to finance manager there before returning to the city of the tribes in 2008.

Before joining the ILDN, he was responsible for finance at Galway-based safety clothing and equipment company Anchor Safety Ltd.



**Michelle Mullally** is the ILDN's new programme, impact and communications manager. Her role centres on understanding, measuring

and demonstrating the impact of the work of the ILDN's 49 member organisations.

Michelle's career has been varied with a common thread of impact measurement and stakeholder engagement.

She graduated from UL in Business and French and gained NGO experience with Sightsavers International before moving into event management. She spent ten years with Google before moving back to her hometown of Kilkenny in the early days of the pandemic where she worked with Veri Connect, who partner with LDCs on biodiversity and social inclusion projects (eg Wild Work, Nore Vision).

Outside work, Michelle is the vice chairperson for her local community led creche. She has also dipped her toe back in team sports joining her local 'Mothers and Others' Ladies Gaelic football team.



Donegal native **Philip O'Donnell** joined the ILDN as Research, Policy and Rural Affairs Officer in April. His role at the ILDN involves identifying and articulating key policy priorities for ILDN members – particularly rural members – and working to ensure that these priorities are embedded in relevant policy.

Before joining the ILDN, Philip held various research and lecturing positions at DCU Business School, while he completed his PhD. Most recently, Philip was involved with an international programme of research titled 'Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Development'.

Philip's research has focused primarily on informal economic activity in poor and marginalised contexts, and his work has been published in leading academic journals and presented at various research conferences worldwide. His other research interests include social entrepreneurship, community-based entrepreneurship, and family business.

Away from work, Philip has a keen interest in sport, and is a playing member of his local GAA club.

## President congratulates TASC at 21

When the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, better known as TASC, was set up in 2001, think-tanks of any kind were a rarity in Ireland.

TASC was different because it challenged policy researchers and decision-makers to take a bottom-up, not a top-down approach.

At the time, "cautious conservatism" prevailed in the public policy sphere, said President Michael D Higgins on April 28, when he welcomed guests to Áras na Uachtaráin to celebrate TASC's 21st anniversary.

Present for the occasion were TASC staff, supporters, board members and co-founder Proinsias De Rossa. The think-tank now has a staff of 13.

It's likely TASC is on President Higgins's Christmas card list, as he spoke for 40 minutes straight on the occasion – focusing on economics, social inclusion and TASC's work.

"Historically policymaking in Ireland can be characterised as largely reactive, technocratic, 'top-down', not strongly influenced by the institution of social partnership, but rather by powerful vested interests," said President Higgins.



• TASC staff and board members with President Michael D Higgins.

"By engaging in research and public outreach concerning inequality, democracy, and climate justice, in the current political, economic, and social environment, TASC has increased public knowledge of economic and social policy, been a source of information and ideas as to the improvement of working conditions, and its work has been vital in the facilitation of a just transition," he said.

He strongly supports participative decision-making as advocated in 'The People's Transition', TASC's

report from 2020, which viewed climate action as an enabler of local development, giving people and communities ownership of the transition to zero-carbon societies. He agreed that this approach should "enhance public support for a just transition by tackling inequality".

At length, he complimented TASC for addressing topics on inequality and democracy in Ireland and the EU.

**Watch the speech here:** <https://bit.ly/3qz6Y58>



# CREATING COMMUNITY SPACE

## Greenways in Ireland 2023



• Fiadh McKeogh (9) stops to take in the views along the Waterford Greenway near Dungarvan.

PHOTO: K. MASTERTSON.

Completed greenways that are currently in operation are: the Tralee-Fenit Greenway, the Waterford Greenway (from the city to Dungarvan), the Great Western Greenway from Westport to Achill, the Old Rail Trail from Athlone to Mullingar, the Limerick Greenway from Rathkeale to Abbeyfeale, and the Royal Canal Greenway from Maynooth in Co. Kildare to Cloondara in Co. Longford.

They are being put to good use. For example, North East West Kerry Development reports that it is “currently supporting a group of disadvantaged young people to learn how to cycle and this culminates in cycling the Tralee-Fenit Greenway”.

The Suir Blueway in Co. Tipperary also features a walking and cycling trail for 21km, and a further 32km of waterway along the River Suir for canoes and kayaks.

### NEW ROSS ON WAY

The South East Greenway follows the abandoned railway line from Waterford to New Ross and on upriver alongside the River Barrow. It will cross over the Red Bridge and bring visitors on a mesmerising trip through the Mount Elliot Tunnel.

The greenway is a joint venture between Kilkenny, Wexford and Waterford County Councils. It primarily passes through County Kilkenny and, in 2019, Kilkenny County Council secured €8 million funding for the project from the then Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

60 years since a train last exited the tunnel and crossed the bridge, the greenway is scheduled to open fully by next summer.

Close by, the Waterford to Rosslare Greenway is in the planning stages.

### IN THE PIPELINE

Other greenways in the pipeline include: Youghal-Middleton, Athlone-Galway (as part of the Dublin-Galway Greenway), Connemara, Clew Bay, further sections of the Grand Canal Greenway in counties Kildare and Westmeath, and the Blessington Lake Loop in Co. Wicklow.

### SWORDS / FINGAL

Not all locations are suitable for the provision of a dedicated greenway. However, local authorities and other organisations are beginning to prioritise walking and cycling infrastructure, in both urban and rural areas.

For example, in March, Fingal County Council, supported by the National Transport Authority (NTA), launched two public consultations seeking feedback on proposals for new cycling and walking infrastructure in Swords.

Fingal County Council’s director for environment, climate action and active travel, David Storey says the proposed works are in line with a vision for active and sustainable travel.

“Active Travel is choosing to get where you’re going using your own energy. That means walking and cycling for everyday life and includes kids taking their scooters out, parents pushing buggies, and people walking to work or school not just those walking for exercise or leisure. When communities choose Active Travel they enjoy safer journeys, better mental and physical health, and cleaner air because not taking the car everywhere means we produce fewer carbon emissions and have calmer roads.”

## Let the kids reclaim streets



• A Playful City director Neasa Ni Bhriain, Mayor of Fingal, Howard Mahony, and Robert Burns of Fingal County Council, with local children at the Playful Street launch.

Communities in Fingal are taking part in a pilot this summer that aims to replace cars with kids, transforming neighbourhood streets into safe places to play.

The pilot is the first of its kind in Ireland and sees Fingal County Council partnered with not-for-profit organisation, A Playful City, which works to engage communities to create more playful, healthy and inclusive public places.

It describes playful streets as a low cost, safe and easy way to create areas for children and adults to play and socialise by limiting vehicular access for a specified period of time.

Communities are currently being invited to register their interest in joining the Playful Street Pilot Scheme through Fingal County Council's website.

Robert Burns, director of housing and community development with the local authority, said: “While we call it Playful Streets, it’s very much a community street (as) it’s about allowing communities to be closer. This is an opportunity for neighbours and their children to come together, to meet, to chat, to get to know one another.”

Neasa Ni Bhriain, creative director with A Playful City, commented:

“Playful Street is all about giving communities back their

streets to use like we all did when we were young.

“The key thing about playful streets is they should be regular. So they should happen once a month or once every couple of weeks. And it’s really back to the old school games, if you remember red rover, tip the can, hopscotch. It’s about the adults coming out and showing the games to the children, the games that they used to play.

“It’s about getting children outdoors, it’s about seeing the space, the road and the street outside your own home as a place to play.

“One of the key things about playful streets is making it safer, so that’s about reducing access to drivers onto the street, stewarding them on if they absolutely need to come onto the street,” she said.

A Playful City was launched in 2017 and soon led to neighbours on Sheriff Street closing their street to traffic and coming out to play. The organisation takes a community development approach through “listening to and collaborating with community members and stakeholders of all ages”.

Its colourful website has many suggestions, although clicking through for more information is almost as tricky as hopscotch: <https://www.aplayfulcity.com>

A Playful City is also on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



**Kathy Masterson explores** (pages 10-13) **how people are reclaiming and creating community spaces in Ireland.**



At local level, public participation networks, local development companies and local authorities can guide groups with ideas towards funding and support. Check their websites.

## STREET FEASTS: 968 held in 2022



• *Street Feasts are a great excuse to eat good food, meet new people who live near you and have a bit of craic.*

**S**treet Feast encourages people to gather with their neighbours to share food and have a chat al fresco. All you need is a space: either a front garden, a street or laneway, a shared green area, or even a community centre.

The official national Street Feast dine-out took place countrywide on Sunday, June 25. Ireland's national day for lunching with the neighbours aims to help build community and tackle social isolation. If you missed the official date, you can always organise one for another day by enquiring with your local authority about closing off a street - or plan now for next year.

Established in 2010, and supported nationally by the Department of Rural and Community Development, the idea has grown steadily over the years.

Last year, a whopping 968 Street Feast events were held nationwide and an estimated 89,056 people took part. Those who register receive a free party pack in advance of their big sit-down.

### A FORCE FOR GOOD

Sam Bishop is a co-founder and the co-ordinator of Street Feast and he spoke of "Ireland's wonderful community spirit" as evidenced by the popularity of the simple idea.

"At its heart, Street Feast is about connecting with your neighbours over great locally-sourced food, but it's also about building resilience and sustainability in our neighbourhoods.

"Making and sharing food together is a special act and can be a huge force for good; a way to find common

ground and to share culture. It doesn't matter if you live in an apartment or house, all you need is a space to bring people together," said Bishop.

Minister of State for Community and Rural Development, Joe O'Brien said:

"Just sitting down, chatting, having something to eat – it sounds very simple but the power of it is extraordinary for the individual; for that sense of community... to stave off all the things that have been challenging people, like isolation and mental health.

"When you feel part of a community those challenges are easier to manage – you can keep them at bay.

"I was privileged to attend a number of Street Feasts in my own constituency of Fingal. The atmosphere created simply by the power of bringing people together was electric in Skerries and Balbriggan, and I look forward to attending more," he concluded.



## COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT, TÚS AND RURAL SOCIAL SCHEME WORKERS BACK 5% PAY DEAL



• *CE workers from Roscommon. Source: Fórsa.*

A new pay deal will benefit over 1,600 employees of organisations that manage Community Employment (CE), Tús, Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and Job Initiative.

In April, SIPTU and Fórsa trade unions balloted 800 members on a 5% pay increase and a new mechanism for pay negotiations for CE workers across the country.

The proposals were recommended by the Workplace Relations Commission following discussions with the Department of Social Protection, which funds the schemes.

The ballot saw 82% voting in favour of the deal on a ballot turnout of 60%. Fórsa official Tony Martin said: "This is a group who provide an essential range of services in their communities, but who haven't seen a pay improvement in a long time."

Some Fórsa members said it had been 14 years since they saw a rise.

Fórsa said the new mechanism for pay engagement was "really very significant".

"It will mean we can commence discussions on the link between project funding and remuneration as early as this year," he said.

Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Joe O'Brien welcomed the deal.

Minister Humphreys said, "As Minister for both Social Protection and Rural and Community Development, I absolutely recognise the vital role that these schemes play in local communities right across the country. They support a range of vital local services in areas such as childcare, meals on wheels and the maintenance and upkeep of local amenities.

"I wish to acknowledge the valuable and dedicated service that these supervisors and team leaders provide in running these schemes all over the country. We simply could not sustain a lot of our local community services without their work," she added.

*For more, see page 14.*



# CREATING COMMUNITY SPACE

## Can't get to a pool? Swim Ireland can bring a 'Pop-Up Pool' to you

Swim Ireland launched its Pop-Up Pool initiative in 2022. Currently it has two pools located in Oldcastle, Co. Meath and Leixlip, Co. Kildare.

The Oldcastle pool will be transported to Cootehill in Co. Cavan in August.

A third pool is hoped to be in operation in the coming months.

Ashley Hunter, head of participation at Swim Ireland tells KATHY MASTERSON more about the Pop-Up Pool initiative.

The pools stay in a location for five to six months, which enables us to have as much impact as we can. When the third pool is up and running there will be a pool moving to a different location every two months.

Our procedure for identifying suitable locations goes two ways: a local authority or local sports partnership can approach us and request information on the pool, and to host it. Or, Swim Ireland will look at locations that have poor provision for swimming, and we will approach the local authority in that area.

The first step (for community workers seeking a pop-up pool for their area) is to engage with an executive or council member in your local authority, or your local sports partnership, and have a conversation to see if it's a possibility.

It costs €25,000-€30,000 to move the pool each time. There's a considerable amount of work involved. While it is a temporary structure, there are water and electricity connections, there are groundworks, you have to get planning permission. It's a substantial structure.

The local authority and the local sports partnerships work to identify locations and find a suitable site. Then we will engage with the local schools and community groups to let them know how it works, and the costs. Then we will start to engage with the general public and let them know about the general swimming sessions, and the Learn to Swim programmes - we run a variety of



• Instructors and learners in a pop up pool. The pools are 12m by 3.4m and hold 45,000 litres of water.

PHOTOS COURTESY SWIM IRELAND.

### *Every few months, the pools move to new locations*

different programmes.

Swim Ireland purchased the first pool, and the marquee and equipment as part of a pilot initiative, which was supported by the Department (of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media). The pools were funded by the Department through Sport Ireland.

We don't receive funds for the running costs of the pool, but there are some funding streams that are allocated to the pop-up pools. We work collectively with the local councils and local sports partnerships in funding and running the pools.

We reach out to the harder-to-reach groups, like the lower socio-economic groups, and support them to bring their members to the pool. We try to reduce our costs where we can so that the pool is affordable for schools and community groups.

The pools are fully accessible. They have a ramp, a hoist, and large changing areas. The water is heated to 30 degrees, and the temperature inside the marquee is heated as well,



so it's a really pleasant environment.

We work with a huge number of people with physical disabilities, visual impairment, learning difficulties, autism.

When the pool is in use by a particular group, it's a private environment, so that works really well for people who are body conscious, or people with autism. The feedback we get from people is that the private environment is a really big plus.

We recruit staff from the local communities where the pools are based as well. For applicants who are unqualified, we can provide lifeguard training. Or for anyone who hasn't completed their swim teacher training, we can support them to do that. It gives people the ability to seek work elsewhere when the pool moves on.

To date, the pool has been to Donabate in Co. Dublin, Blessington in Co. Wicklow, and Tobercurry in Co. Sligo. The impact we've seen has been massive. The pools have been

really well received by all parts of the communities using it.

We've heard so many stories from people about what it has meant to them.

We've had schoolkids who had never been in a swimming pool before, and we get them in, get them water confident. The mother of one child with autism said the pop-up pool changed the way he looked at that type of environment, and he really enjoyed going.

A lot of people who have poor mobility have used the pools also - older people, or people who have injuries from accidents. One man who had chronic back pain after an accident used the pool every morning before work and he found it really helpful, he felt he was in less pain. That meant that he was then less reliant on healthcare services, he was able to reduce his physiotherapy visits. There are a long list of benefits, it's a fantastic facility for everybody in the community.



## Relax in a community sitting room - Fingal County Council finds a new way to share space

BY KATHY MASTERSON

A TV streaming Netflix, a table with board games, and shelves full of books, the cosy space is just like any other living room in homes around the country.

However, this living room is housed within a community centre in North Dublin, one of three that opened earlier this year as part of Fingal County Council's pilot Welcome Rooms initiative.

The facilities, located in Rivervalley Community Centre in Swords, and Parslickstown House in Corduff Resource Centre in Dublin 15, were launched in January to help provide a network of friendly drop-in locations.

All of the Welcome Rooms feature comfortable seating, a television, tea and coffee-making facilities, and books and games, as well as toys for younger children. They are free to use, don't require pre-booking, and visitors can stay for as long as they like.

Linda Ennis, principal community officer with Fingal County Council explained: "We have a team of community development officers who are very skilled in what they do. They work across the whole of Fingal. The idea came from [staff who saw] something similar in the UK, where it has become quite popular in the last couple of years.

"We were very interested in it; we looked into it, looked at the type of policies and things that the UK are using. It was good practice, already established in the UK, but we couldn't come across an example of it in Ireland. So we think that we're the

*In the UK, the concept is focused on fuel poverty. We scaled it back to a living room within a community centre that's welcome for all purposes.*



• A community sitting room in Fingal.

first local authority to do it."

Fingal County Council community officer David Mitchell led the initiative and approached the local authority's 36 community facilities to find a suitable space to house the pilot project.

He told Changing Ireland: "In the UK, the concept is pretty much focused on fuel poverty. We didn't really want to go down the avenue of dedicating a space to that, and the messaging around it. So we scaled it back to a living room within a community centre that's welcome for all purposes.

"And it's not just seasonal. It started in January, but we're actually continuing on throughout the whole year. It's a shared space that people can just drop in with no obligation to do anything, to buy anything, or talk to anyone."

### ARE MANY PEOPLE AVAILING OF THE NEW FACILITY?

"It varies from site to site. The space in River Valley gets really good use. We've teamed up with an existing group that is there, but we're getting a lot of unique visitors who are using it as well. The other two centres would have pretty strong footfall, they have 60 to 70 people a week," said David.

Each site cost about €3,000 to set up, revealed Linda, adding: "It's very much for people who are dropping into a living room space and there isn't anything that they have to worry about, in terms of: 'Who's going to be here? Who do I have to talk to? Do I have to engage in a planned activity?', anything like that.

"You're coming in, you're having

*A homeless family didn't want to tell their children that they were homeless. They use the space in the afternoons for homework.*

a cup of tea, the telly is on, there's board games, there's things to read, there's newspapers. You can stay as long as you want, you can pop in with a pal and have a chat.

"In the background, the staff in the centre are keeping a little eye on things, just to see if there something that they could help and support with.

"As an example, in one of our centres, we heard recently that there is a homeless family in the area who didn't want to tell their children that they were homeless. They asked could they use the space in the afternoons for homework and whatever.

"The centre manager was then able to signpost this family to the relevant support agencies in the area. So there's a bit of background support for people who are using it."

Linda continued: "We found as well that there may be parents who had been placed in accommodation in the Fingal area, and have since

moved on, but their children are still in school in the area. They may have to hang around during the day and wait for the kids. So this is a space that they could go to and they don't feel they're in the way or anything. They can get in out of the cold, have a cup of coffee."

The following feedback about a Welcome Room comes from a member of a group in the BASE resource centre for adults with intellectual difficulties:

"I am a regular in Parslickstown House. It was a brilliant idea for them to do a Welcome Room. It is great for the community to use. It is also a way to ease your mind.

"You can play Jenga, Connect Four, chess, snakes and ladders, and Ludo also, you can play cards. You can also read books and you can watch Netflix. The Welcome Room also has toys for kids. You can write poems and write stories."

Some of Linda and David's counterparts from Dublin City Council have expressed interest in setting up welcome rooms in their own area, and have visited the facilities in Fingal.

Robert Burns, director of community development with Fingal County Council welcomes enquiries and thinks there may be "immense interest".

In Fingal, any plans to open new welcome rooms depend on space.

As Linda said, "Our community centres are very, very busy. But other facilities that don't come under our remit may be interested in doing it. We would happily work with them on developing the space. This was a pilot to see how it would work and it's working really, really well."

# PAY IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

## WARNINGS TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER-MANAGED PROJECTS "BEFORE THEY COLLAPSE"

"We are sleep-walking into the collapse of a huge and essential range of services if we don't address the shortfalls in funding which thousands of not-for-profits are experiencing," warns Senan Turnbull, who has a lifetime's experience in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

"We have entrusted delivery of services to the wonderful volunteer-led local and national groups. We have to recognise their realities before they collapse. We can't have quality services on the cheap," he says.

He and others, including national networks and trade unions (*see Issue 79, Changing Ireland*) have sounded an alarm over low pay, high staff turnover and high vacancy rates in projects that communities rely on for support.

"In the past, most of these organisations had salaries pegged to public-service rates and there was a real recognition from state-finders of non-salary costs. Since the banking-caused crisis, these relativities have been broken and the only way salaries and overheads can now be met is by cutting services," he said.

Senan previously worked for Area Development Management



• Senan Turnbull.

(now Pobal) and as a director of services with Fingal County Council. He has experience serving on the voluntary boards of at least 16 organisations, including Fingal Age Friendly Alliance, the Ballymun Social Regeneration Fund, the Citizens Information Board, Waterford Area Partnership, Dóchas and the Charities Regulatory Authority.

"Staff must be treated fairly or they will seek employment elsewhere and what will we do then to assist people with health and age challenges, who will run youth, social inclusion, education, drugs, homelessness, sports or arts programmes. Respect our volunteer culture. Fund it properly as we depend on it for so much," he appealed.

Welcoming the report on the issue from The Wheel/TASC, (*see below*) he said, "Without proper staff remuneration and a recognition of increased operating costs the not-for-profit sector which delivers so many essential services will not be in a position to continue to deliver quality or quantity in the future."

Some organisations had already "drastically cut services" to pay overheads", he said.



Catherine Kelly, Deputy CEO of WALK in Dublin, also welcomed the publication of the report by The Wheel and TASC.

"The staff of these community and voluntary organisations work so hard. They are underpaid and undervalued by the State. Their commitment, dedication and level of performance is immense. These services will close without them."

"We are constantly in staffing crisis and vulnerable people and families suffer as a result. It is so important that we keep this conversation going," she said.

Helen Buggle, residential care manager at Smyly Trust Services, agreed: "If the voluntary organisations continue to lose their people, vulnerable service users and their families will be left exposed to more suffering. The staff in many of these voluntary organisations do not want to leave, but we are working on 2010 pay scales," she said.

"We were deemed public servants when we were asked to bail out the banks and were told our pay would be restored when the economy got back on its feet. However once that happened we were no longer seen as public servants," she said.

- By Allen Meagher

### REPORT: Low pay hitting morale and communities

A new report by The Wheel and TASC says many staff are "working on the cheap" and staff turnover of up to 33% is becoming the norm in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The report calls for immediate state funding "to prevent the looming collapse of essential public services". In the meantime, services are not expanding and morale is taking a hit.

The report 'The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector' focuses in particular on staffing, demand for services and funding in hundreds of Section 39, 10, and 56 organisations. These not-for-profits are contracted by the State to provide essential public services countrywide in areas including health, disability, family support, children, care of older people, homelessness and addiction. Their plight has previously been highlighted by trade unions SIPTU and ForSa.

Not being state bodies, their staff are not legally entitled to the same pay as public sector employees despite delivering often identical services.

The Wheel/TASC report says "in some cases" pay increases of up to 15% are now needed to bridge the gap

with staff doing similar work in state agencies like the HSE. The report recommends that representatives from Section 39, 56 and 10 organisations are part of future public sector pay talks.

#### The report also calls for:

- Public service contracts that cover governance and regulatory costs.
- Recognition by the state in policy that many public services cannot be delivered without the sector.
- Funding for pensions, training, travel and other costs.
- Multi-annual funding.

As the report points out, while the issues remain live amid a cost of living crisis, staff continue to leave for higher paying posts. It also provides background - from 2008-2010, the sector was hit by harsh cuts, and when public sector pay was restored in 2017, there was "no equivalent for the community and voluntary sector".

The report can be downloaded from The Wheel's and TASC's websites.

### NEWS ARCHIVE



• For more coverage on the issue of pay, see our Winter 2022 edition. The cuts referred on this page were reported on in past editions (eg Summer '09).

• Visit: <https://www.changingireland.ie/digital-magazine-archive/>



# Social enterprises employ 84,382

*First ROI data also shows social enterprises generate €2.34 billion p.a.*

A new report 'Social Enterprises in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise' provides comprehensive insights into the sector in the Republic of Ireland for the first time.

The data collected through various methods shows that there are currently 4,335 social enterprises in Ireland employing 84,382 people – three per cent of the Irish workforce.

A further 74,824 volunteers work in social enterprises, including 30,324 board members.

The total income of social enterprise was €2.34 billion in 2021, representing 0.63% of Ireland's GDP.

The data was drawn from desk research, stakeholder consultations (with 87 participants) and 13 interviews with sectoral organisations. In addition, 725 surveys were completed, giving a response rate of 16.7%. The survey data was analysed and forms the core of the report.

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, whose Department commissioned the report, said, "The report clearly shows how significant this sector is for Irish society and the

economy."

It found that, for instance:

- There are approximately 8.5 social enterprises per 10,000 inhabitants.
- 75% of social enterprises focus on their localities, while 15% operate internationally.
- 84% of social enterprises use multiple sources of income
- 48% of social enterprises are over 20 years in operation.
- 16% of social enterprises are under four years in operation.
- 43% of social enterprises are in rural areas and 57% are in urban areas.
- 46% of social enterprise volunteers (excluding board members) are over 50 years old.
- 63% of board member volunteers are over 50 years old
- 68% of social enterprises are concentrated in: childcare; community infrastructure and development; health, youth and social care; heritage festivals, arts and creative industry.

Minister Humphreys said further research was sure to take place.

The work was carried out by a consortium consisting of Amárach Research, Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

The ILDN called the results "heartening".

The report states that, if anything, its findings may be "understated". It was agreed in advance to exclude some entities such as credit unions and most Section 39 organisations from the count.

"The delivery of this baseline data for the first time at a national level represents a critical milestone for the sector", states the report. "It will facilitate the recognition and promotion of the sector and it also provides a robust foundation for future policy development."

The report relied on the definition of a social enterprise as outlined in the Government's National Social Enterprise Policy (2019-2022). (See page 31 to read that definition).



• Scan to read the draft policy.

## Theatre Fest aims to reach all Dubs

*600 bought €10 tickets last year, while access programme makes attending easy*

Now is a good time for community groups to start planning ahead for the autumn, and any community group in the wider Dublin area should consider attending the Dublin Theatre Festival (DTF) as it aims to be super-inclusive and participatory.

10 per cent of tickets for selected festival productions will be available for €10. These are for people under 30, unwaged, freelance artists and arts workers. Last year, 596 people registered for '10 for 10' tickets.

This year's festival runs from Sept 28 - October 15.

Meanwhile, the festival's Access Programme aims to boost participation and access and, last year, 18 assisted performances were programmed in the festival.

As Sharon White of DTF says, "We recognise that there are barriers to attending the festival and the All In Access Programme aims to eliminate obstacles."

DTF will provide Irish Sign Language interpretation, captioning, audio description, and relaxed performances for many of the shows.

To encourage wide society participation the festival offers:

- Assisted performances for

audiences with some types of sensory disabilities or impairments.

- Free companion seats for individuals who need company or assistance to attend a show.
- Access passes designed to simplify the booking process. These allows people to book wheelchair spaces and reserved seating in advance. If you or your group registers for access passes, you receive automatic discounts and, if helpful, complimentary companion tickets.

- Access guides provide full venue and location details.

DTF will also try to provide additional services (eg transport) in response to individual needs.

The festival programme will be published at the end of July and registration opens for the various initiatives around that time, or make an early enquiry with DTF now (details below).

The assisted performances are programmed in conjunction with DTF's venue partners and, says White, "Early registration enables us to identify other services or opportunities to develop the programme."



• 'No Magic Pill' will be performed at this year's Dublin Theatre Festival in September/October. Already this year it has won an Irish Times 'Audience Choice Award'.

Photo by Emilija Jefremova.

### ALL IN TICKETS

DTF is also seeking expressions of interest for participation in its All In Ticket Initiative, a scheme that provides groups and individuals with access to the festival with significantly discounted and complementary tickets.

The All In Ticket Initiative is available (but not limited) to the following organisations:

- People with disabilities / groups or individuals and their carers.
- Welfare groups.
- Immigrant, integration and refugee associations.
- Community groups.

### MORE INFO

E: [access@dublintheatrefestival.ie](mailto:access@dublintheatrefestival.ie)  
T: 01-677-8439.

## PHILANTHROPY POLICY TO BE LAUNCHED LATER IN YEAR

A public consultation on Ireland's first proposed national philanthropy policy ran from May 23 to June 30.

The Department of Rural and Community Development said the new policy should "set out clear objectives, and specific actions to enable philanthropy to grow and thrive in Ireland for social good."

"This National Philanthropy Policy developed by Government in collaboration with key stakeholders is intended to deepen understanding and knowledge, create an enabling environment and accelerate engagement with philanthropy in Ireland for social good," it said.

It expects that the new policy will be launched later this year.



• Scan to read the draft policy.

## 100 GROUPS BACK MANUAL AIMING TO IMPROVE MEN'S HEALTH

International Men's Health Week was held in the run-up to Father's Day and the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI), in collaboration with nearly a hundred partner organisations, published a helpful manual for men across the island of Ireland. It challenges them to become 'Action Men' by following ten tips to improve their health and wellbeing.



"The manual doesn't preach or lecture, it simply explains why an action is needed, what can be done about it, and how to find support," said Colin Fowler of MHFI.

Already 30,000 hard copies of the publication have been distributed, in addition to 40,000 electronic downloads.

You can download the manual at: [www.mhfi.org/ActionMan2023.pdf](http://www.mhfi.org/ActionMan2023.pdf)

# Family Resource Centres

## THIS YEAR WE NEED €3.3M MORE - Community Development works as proven by past 25 years



• Keep fit is probably one of the more under-rated yet crucial pieces of work that FRCs support. Celebrations in the Mansion House included a performance by Mountview Zumba Goldies from Mountview FRC. Photos by A. Meagher.

### BY ALLEN MEAGHER

They are seen by funders to be in a great position at grassroots level to deliver services. However, Family Resource Centres (FRCs) continue to stress they are not mere service providers and that community development must underpin their work. Meanwhile, many FRCs are struggling with tight funding, an increase in population and more calls on them for support.

On May 9, the national representative body for FRCs in Ireland, called for an additional €3.34 million in core funding for this year to ensure they can continue to support children, families and communities throughout the State.

The Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) says that 83 of 121 FRCs are not receiving the minimum necessary level of core funding "to ensure sustainable service provision".

**Fergal Landy**, CEO of the FRCNF, said, "Last year, in partnership with our core funder Tusla, the FRCNF identified a figure of €166,400 as a minimum level of core funding required to operate an FRC. A



• Fergal Landy.

significant number of FRCs are not currently receiving this minimum."

"FRCs need a minimum level of core funding of €173,000 for 2023, a total additional investment of €3,344,637 from 2022. This is not a reflection of the true cost of delivering an FRC (yet) it would allow FRCs currently receiving less than the minimum core funding to increase their capacity to deliver support to their respective communities," he said.

He emphasised that FRCs are unapologetically hyper-local, in favour of collaboration and opposed to competing with others in the sector (for funding). He stressed that FRCs were uncompromising in regards to community development.

He added that the additional funding sought would mean that "more children, families, individuals, and communities will be supported and empowered". It would also have a multiplier effect as more resources can then be accessed for those communities "through the leveraging of other potential funding opportunities."

In a discussion on what challenges the next 25 years would present, Landy felt the focus should be on localism and on how FRCs can navigate that space.

**Louise Moran**, outgoing chair of the FRCNF, congratulated all involved in the FRC programme and she stressed its "human rights-based approach to community development and family support across the life-course".

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, and in response to people displaced by the war in Ukraine, FRCs have been to the fore in leading community-based initiatives that have formed a vital part of the State's overall response," she said.

The FRCNF launched its 2022 annual report at the event and, later this year, it will launch a five-year strategic plan to guide FRCs forwards.

### PIVOTAL POINT

Landy concluded: "The National FRC Programme is again at a pivotal point. The important space we occupy - between communities and the wider system - represents a valuable counterbalance to the State model of service provision. It presents an important strategic opportunity to weave informal and formal supports to empower communities to achieve their optimal wellbeing."

"Key to the continuation of this support is an increase in funding



(Cont'd from previous page)

(so) FRCs around the country can continue to deliver their vital work," he said.

## CHILD POVERTY

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman addressed the gathering. He pointed out that "an additional four per cent of funding was provided last year and I recognise (that) is only to begin to recognise sustainability issues."

He complimented FRCs on being able to "attract funding from other State actors and the private sector" and encouraged them to continue doing so, including accessing EU social funding where available.

He acknowledged that "the universal accessibility of FRCs allows for the early identification of need and the provision of appropriate responses".



• Minister Roderic O'Gorman said extra funding given last year was just the beginning in recognising FRC sustainability issues.

He said he hopes FRCs will get to play "an elevated role in the fight against child poverty". The evidence demonstrates that the wrap-around supports at local level is the best way to create and sustain resilient children, resilient families and resilient communities.

After the celebrations in the Mansion House, there was a meet and greet with TDs and Senators in a nearby hotel. Almost all of the political parties were represented and a number of independent Oireachtas members also attended.

## STATISTICS

Examples of the support provided by FRCs in 2022 include:

- 90,000 people were beneficiaries of community-based initiatives;
- 60,000 counselling sessions;
- Food banks that served 30,000 children and adults;
- 26,000 education courses and initiatives were provided; and
- 30,000 adults received administrative support such as interview skills, training and IT.



• ABOVE: Staff celebrate the Family Resource Centre 25th anniversary event in Dublin's Mansion House.



• ABOVE: Former minister Dermot Ahern recalled when there were only 10 FRCs. When his time was up as minister there were 100. "It's been a good 25 years. Money spent on FRCs is money well spent," he said. Pat Bennett said he sits on a number of boards and knows that, "There would be no programme without volunteers".



• ABOVE: Leanne Barret, co-ordinator of Westport FRC, Co. Mayo, spoke of the importance of the third national strategy on gender-based violence. She recalled the history of the West's regional network providing a community response to domestic abuse. The network is now 20 years old.



• ABOVE: Daniel Quirke from Listowel FRC, spoke about Family Resource Centres working with a rural LGBT+ population, listing the many activities and meeting points in various localities in Co. Kerry to support people.

• ABOVE: Vane Renghen spoke about how valuable Hill Street FRC is to the area. She described her journey from 'Participant to Leadership' in the FRC.

• RIGHT: The Connecting Voices Choir took to the stage for the 25th.



## SPEED-DATING FOR NOT-FOR-PROFITS SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS



October 4 will see the return of a match-making event with a difference in Dublin city centre. People will not head to the Custom House Quay building on George's Dock seeking romance, but to become part of something bigger - by joining a not-for-profit group or charitable organisation.

Boardmatch Ireland is the only Irish charity which specialises in not-for-profit board recruitment and its annual Charity Trustee Speed-Dating event provides an opportunity for both groups and individuals in Dublin and neighbouring counties to meet.

While Boardmatch primarily provides its services online, including board reviews, training, and a free online matching service, this one-day event every autumn allows for direct, face-to-face interaction. This year's event will be the fourth of its kind.

"It allows individuals to meet as many charities as they would like, ask their questions in real-time, and network with other prospective trustees," said Susan Colgan of Boardmatch.

"During the pandemic, we took a break from hosting this event, however, we came back in 2022 after a three-year hiatus with great success: more than 40 board and committee appointments were made," said Susan.

"The atmosphere in the room is palpable, and our feedback shows that not only is the event a great way of building connections, but is also really enjoyable," she added.

Groups wishing to take part pay €100 while individuals pay €20. The organisations taking part will be from Dublin and surrounding counties of Meath, Louth, Kildare, Wicklow. Boardmatch may hold a speed-dating in Munster next year.

Boardmatch receives funding through the Scheme to Support National Organisations which is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

W: <https://www.boardmatch-trustee-speed-dating.ie/>



## MIDLANDS TRAINING FOR A JUST TRANSITION



The end of peat cutting and the closure of associated enterprises is having a major impact on communities in the Midlands region.

To make a just transition to a climate-neutral economy fair, various initiatives are being supported by the Government, including a 'Just Transition' training and mentoring programme currently underway in the Midlands.

The 'EMERGE' programme is engaging with people from community and voluntary organisations, local authorities, employers and statutory bodies in the Midlands.

Launched last December, it runs until October of this year and aims to "help the impacted communities take ownership of the new opportunities created by climate action". It guides them towards funding for high-impact projects and it will showcase eight projects as part of the training.

The programme is also producing toolkits to help participants turn their ideas, insights and actions into practical projects.

Activation plans will then be developed for participating communities to support the delivery of new opportunities and projects.

The training for impacted communities covers East Galway, Kildare, Laois, Longford, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath. Engagement began with 16 face-to-face workshops in April and May, while webinars were also held to explain Ireland's climate policy.

The programme is being delivered by the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office, Urban Foresight, and The Wheel. The programme is funded through the Government's Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund.



## New project to retrofit homes in rural counties passed over by private sector providers



• Transport Minister, Eamon Ryan, officially launched 'Retrofit Ready'.



• Carol Baumann, CEO, ILDN, Fintan Kennedy, chair of Sligo LEADER Partnership and Barry Lowe, Sligo Leitrim Energy Agency.



• Paul Skinnader, executive director, Pobal, said Retrofit Ready is one of the 17 projects funded under the Community Climate Action Programme, administered by Pobal.

### BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Private sector companies are not beating down the doors in County Leitrim to convince householders to retrofit their homes. Nor is it happening in neighbouring, rural counties. In the meantime, the earth is burning up due to climate change and householders are losing out on a chance to save on energy bills.

However, a solution is on the way in four rural counties; led by community champions and technology advisors who hope to encourage rural homeowners to band together and retrofit their homes.

The scheme is one of 17 projects backed by the Government's Community Climate Action Programme (Strand 2) and it was officially launched by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan, on May 5.

If the scheme being piloted in counties Cavan, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo proves a success, it will be expanded to take in counties Galway, Mayo and Donegal, quadrupling its impact. It hasn't happened before now because – with the best will in the world – there was nobody to do the heavy lifting.

Gavin Forkan, managing director of PlanEnergy which employs 20 technical advisors on renewables



• Gavin Forkan of PlanEnergy.

and energy efficiency, spoke at the launch, which was held in the Atlantic Technological University in Sligo (where his company is based).

"The dispersed population means that it's less attractive for retrofit contractors to do a bunch of houses in for example rural County Leitrim that it is in urban areas," he said.

"The core of this project is that we will develop a community-led retrofit service - with the materials, tools and techniques developed in the communities for communities to run retrofit projects, overcoming the barriers that they currently face.

Retrofit Ready is spearheaded by a consortium led by the Irish Local Development Network with PlanEnergy, Sligo ATU and four local development companies - Sligo Leader Partnership, Leitrim Development Company, and Cavan County Local Development. It will be administered through Pobal.

"We're focusing on four counties that have around 110,000 homes and, if we're to align with national targets for retrofit, then 25,000 homes in those four counties need to be upgraded by 2030," said Forkan.

### STUMBLING BLOCK

"The aim is to transfer technical knowledge to the community retrofit champions. Those people have the key role. Owen McConnon (Cavan/Monaghan) and Kyle Flynn (Sligo/Leitrim) are our local champions," continued Forkan.

"This is a full-time paid resource in the counties where we didn't have that resource before. It was always a stumbling block when we came to executing a project at local level.

There was nobody to lift phones, there was nobody to drive a project forward. And this is the point of this role," he said.

### UNDERWAY

"We've got a busy couple of years ahead. Phase one is underway, the initial assessment of where we stand - analysing the knowledge gap in local community," he said.

That means talking to retrofitting contractors and understanding the challenges facing communities – some being poorer than others.

"Not every solution fits every house or every family, so it really needs to be very flexible and that's phase two – bringing together groups of homeowners for funding applications.

"Some communities will be quite wealthy and they'll be well able to execute a project, so we need to have a different set of messages for those communities as for other communities.

"We see knowledge going in two directions. We'll be learning how to establish community-centred energy working groups. Communities will be learning by doing a lot of the work themselves. We'll be guiding them, but they'll be doing much of the work."

Developing a toolkit that captures the learning was important.

"Then we'll have the ability to replicate in Donegal, Mayo and Galway, and that would quadruple the number of homes we can target.

"This project could lend itself pretty well to other sustainability initiatives around community-led biodiversity," he concluded.



- Project starts in counties Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan and Leitrim. May expand to Donegal, Galway and Mayo.



• Some of the attendance at the launch of 'Retrofit Ready'. Photos by A. Meagher

**"Watch the solar panels go up right across this country"**  
- Minister Eamon Ryan

(Cont'd from previous page)

## RYAN'S FORECAST

Minister Eamon Ryan believes that the narrative on climate action is about to change.

"Mark my words - things are about to change. It's changing here now," he said. "We got the first quarter figures last week and ten thousand houses have been retrofitted, ahead of where we said we'd get as we ramp everything up."

"Watch the solar panels go up right across this country. Changes in agriculture will happen, because the myths that farmers are against this is not the case. This urban versus rural green nonsense - it will stop. And we need to change the transport system. That's probably the hardest part," he said.

Talking of "green energy, green agriculture, green jobs", he said, "When people hear 'We need to act on climate change', some ask 'Why should I do it? The Chinese aren't doing it. Why should I do it when we're so small?'"

"I say, 'That doesn't matter - our size. And that's not true that the Chinese are not doing it.'"

The Minister for the Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport, fresh from a visit to China, in March, was impressed at what he saw.

"We met one company in China delivering 45 gigawatts of solar. I spent a fantastic 10 days there, in honour of Saint Patrick, and we were blown away. If we think Europe

is going in this direction and so is America - well, we're only catching up with China where seven million engineers a year graduate."

## MAUREEN'S KITCHEN

"The great thing about taking action is that everywhere is central, everywhere is on the front line, everywhere has the same opportunity to be centre stage, because it's local as well as global."

"And we in this country have every chance to be good at this," he said. Earlier that day, he met a homeowner who retrofitted her house.

"We were in Maureen's kitchen, she going on 69 and she's just got the house done up, with the heat pump outside."

He remarked on the relationship she built up with the development worker who persuaded her "to get out of the house and let them put in the insulation, put in the heat pump".

"She spoke such simple truths about the benefits, saying 'I should be paying 70 euro a week' (for heating). Instead, she was saving money."

"It's hard for that lady Maureen to change, to get out of the kitchen for two months, at a cost of 60 grand, but she did it," said the Minister, wishing the Retrofit Ready Scheme well.

# Not-for-profits taking over vacant buildings



• John Stack, chair of North East West Kerry Development (NEWKD) receiving the keys to their new building, the former Bank of Ireland on Main St, Castleisland, Co. Kerry. NEWKD bought the building last year.

Photo by John Reidy

Recognition of the importance to communities of having a shared space where people can avail of services, or simply gather socially, has been steadily growing in recent years. In the last year alone, various funding schemes were announced to help provide more community hubs across the country.

In December 2022, funding of €6 million was announced under the Building Acquisition Measure (BAM) of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme to purchase and redevelop 29 vacant and derelict buildings and convert them into community facilities. This follows previous funding of €7.5 million announced in June 2022 under the same scheme to redevelop 36 derelict and vacant properties into new community hubs.

The programme sees former banks, Garda stations and courthouses taken into public ownership and reconverted into hubs.

For example, in Ardee, Co. Louth, the Dee Hub community centre took over the old credit union building on Castle Street.

In Castleisland, Co. Kerry (pictured) the local development company for north, east and west Kerry took out a loan from the local Cara Credit Union and bought the former Bank of Ireland premises on Main Street.

## NEW COMMUNITY CENTRES

Also in 2022, the Community Centres Investment Fund provided capital funding of over €45 million to renovate and upgrade 850 community centres.

This year, the Community Centres Investment Fund features a New Builds Measure which will see €20 million invested in building new community centres. Grants of at least €1 million up to a maximum of €6 million are available per project. Planning permission must be approved and applicants must provide at least 10% in match funding. Applications for the scheme were to close on July 3.



## Travellers in Limerick city again have a voice after silent decade

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

It has been over a decade since Limerick Travellers Development Group shut, amidst cuts to funding for community projects.

Over the years that followed, Travellers in the State's third largest city lost their voice when it came to representation and they had little or no say in decisions concerning their community.

On May 29 of this year, Travellers got their voice back with the launch of a new, city-wide, community development project called Limerick Traveller Network. Led by women and based in Ballinacurra Weston, on the south side of the city, the project is now part of the new national Community Development Programme.

Olive O'Reilly, a project volunteer from Castletroy, said, "What's so important about it is that Travellers in Limerick had no voice for so many years."

The new project is inclusive of Travellers throughout the city.

"Why it's so different is we have Travellers from every part of Limerick city in this. That's very important for us as a community because we feel we have no voice. We decided to come together and do it for ourselves."

Asked were all the city's Traveller families involved, Margaret O'Brien, replied:

"It is only fair to have every single family represented and every family has a say. We have 16 members in our network and each of those members represent a site and a housing area for Travellers.

"Everybody gets on absolutely brilliantly, everybody is motivated and very passionate about the cause. All of us want to work together to make a change for Limerick and to



• Members of the highly dedicated team behind Limerick Travellers, including members of Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service which will host the project.  
Photos by A. Meagher.

bring about a more positive future for the next generation," she said.

The Network is the one of three additional projects to be brought under the wing of the new Community Development Programme. It was officially opened by Minister of State, Joe O'Brien, who said, "I'm coming up on three years in this job and this is going to be one of the moments I will look back on with really powerful memories."

"I was struck last October when we met the founders of Limerick Travellers Network, because you showed unparalleled commitment, passion and determination. You showed huge willingness to organise, to push your message. You very much encapsulate the spirit of what community development is about. It's really good to be here and see you all again and to say that you're now in the Community Development Programme."

Limerick Traveller Network is hosted by Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service.

Minister O'Brien also announced, during the launch, that two other projects were to be funded under the programme - Amal Women's Association in Dublin and AMACH! LGBTI+ Galway. Representatives from both projects were present for the announcement.



• Watch interviews and launch coverage online.



• Hanan Amer, chair of Amal Women's Association, a Muslim civil society project led by women, was pleased that her group was also afforded CDP status.

## Minister O'Brien thanks Paul Geraghty

At the historic launch of Limerick Traveller Network, Joe O'Brien, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, thanked in particular Principal Officer Paul Geraghty, who was moving that week to another section in the Department. He had headed up the Social Inclusion and Communities Unit during critical years for communities when the Department's work expanded.

"There's a guy who's made a huge difference in his time and in this space and I thank him for that," said the Minister.

Deirdre Kelly is the new principal officer of the Department's Social Inclusion and Communities Unit.



• Scan for short clip.



• Cameron Keighron, Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O'Brien, Maria Molloy of AMACH! LGBTI+ Galway, Ann Irwin from Community Work Ireland and Paul Geraghty from the Department of Rural and Community Development at the launch in Ballinacurra Weston.



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

## 100 at launch of Clare plan highlighting accommodation, mental health challenges

“For too long, Travellers in Clare have been without a voice,” said Bridget Casey, co-ordinator of Clare Traveller Community Development Project (CDP), speaking at the launch of the project’s strategic plan, in Ennis, on May 30, **REPORTS ALLEN MEAGHER.**

It was a mark of how far the project has come that an estimated 100 people were present for the plan’s launch, among them Minister of State for Community Development, Joe O’Brien.

The CDP is now operational for two years. It came about “as a result of hard work by a number of people over a long number of years,” said Bridgie. “I would especially like to thank Clare Women’s Network, Clare Public Participation Network, Clare Local Development and the HSE for their tireless efforts helping to prepare a successful proposal that led to the establishment of this project.”

She said the actions in the strategic plan were all identified by Travellers and it seeks a strong, informed voice for Travellers in the county.

The strategy highlights the conviction that much-needed and urgent change for Travellers in Clare will come about only if Travellers themselves are at the centre of that change.

The CDP intends to build effective Traveller leadership and a strong Traveller voice, and to strengthen local alliances.

### EVERYDAY DISCRIMINATION

Brian Dillon of Nexus Research said accommodation was “very high up” on the list of issues “and that is reflected in the plan”.

“How do we maintain and demand respect for our culture and the way we live?” he asked. “Travellers are very proud of their culture and traditions.”

Mental health concerns among Travellers the project spoke to were also “massive” and related to all the other issues, including “the everyday experience of discrimination”.

In terms of hope and progression, he said, “We can see the walls and barriers and



• Martin McDonagh, Maja Snycerz, Denise Harvey and Bridgie Casey – staff of Clare Traveller Community Development Project - at the launch of their strategic plan.

***"True community development is trusting communities to develop their own solutions"***

discrimination, but the plan also sets out how to get beyond that.”

It was officially launched by Minister of State, Joe O’Brien, who said at the launch:

“True community development is trusting communities to develop their own solutions and pathways.”

He welcomed that the plan was clear about the challenges and issues facing the Traveller community.

“I am confident that you will in time achieve the goals set out in this plan - establishing and strengthening local alliances, building effective Traveller leadership and, most importantly, giving Travellers in Clare that voice,” said the Minister.

Josephine Fogarty, Traveller health co-ordinator with the HSE, said the CDP gives her team “the opportunity to work with the Traveller community, rather than doing things for them, and that’s a massive step forward”.

She added, “We need to mainstream the Community Development Programme so people are not worried about losing funding.”

Clare CDP was one of the original seven projects selected for the new Community Development Programme when it was launched in 2021.



• Clare Traveller CDP’s strategic plan was officially launched in Ennis, on May 30, by Minister of State, Joe O’Brien, pictured (centre) with Bridgie Casey, project co-ordinator, and CDP supporters.



• Brian Dillon of Nexus Research Co-operative and Anne Marie Quilligan, a social care worker and Traveller, at the launch.

## SLIGO 2030 'ONE VISION ONE VOICE' IS A FIRST

LOCAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY PLANNING



Sligo 2030 'One Voice One Vision' was launched in Sligo City Hall on June 7, by Joe O'Brien, Minister of State for Community Development, Integration and Charities. Elected members, TDs, business, community and social interests across Sligo, including guests from Government Departments, attended the launch.

This is the first Local Economic and Community Plan launched following the publication of the Guidelines by the Department of Rural and Community Development in November 2021.

The Development of Sligo 2030 'One Voice One Vision' is the result of a collaboration between Sligo Council, all the agencies delivering services in the county, and the Sligo community.

The plan sets out the vision for Sligo, and the Sligo brand, which is for a smart, sustainable, and socially inclusive Sligo; one that cherishes its vibrant communities, protects and celebrates its unique environment and rich culture, and is a champion of innovative growth and development.

The approval of the plan by the elected members of Council, followed consideration by the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committee for Planning, Community and Economic Development, Arts and Culture, the Municipal Districts and Sligo Economic Forum inputs, and represents the fulfilment of an important function bestowed on local government under the 2014 Local Government (Reform) Act.

In launching the plan, Minister O'Brien congratulated Sligo on being the first in the country to adopt their new LECP which he said, was a remarkable achievement which illustrated the great extent of collaboration and leadership that exists in Sligo.

He said the plan provides an overarching framework for alignment with other local development plans and initiatives. It will enable all economic, community, social and cultural development, to take place in a planned and coherent manner.

## Galway's new anti-racism network calls for solidarity and housing action

• A rally down Shop Street, Galway city to mark the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 25. Photo courtesy Galway City Community Network.

Photo by Avi Ratnayake.



"I was abused verbally and physically by my landlord in Galway. He threatened to cut my head off and send me 'on a slow boat back to the Congo'," said Wally Nkikita from The Galway African Diaspora, urging others to tell their stories of racism and discrimination.

He was speaking as a member of the newly-formed Galway Communities Against Racism and Discrimination (GCARD) network.

It held a rally on March 25 to mark UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and, more recently, it stood in solidarity with people seeking international protection in Galway. In May, over 150 people were relocated from an emergency direct provision centre in the Travelodge Hotel, Galway city, with only days' notice of the move.

"It tore apart their plans and lives built in the city. This kind of treatment is unacceptable and inhumane," said GCARD.

GCARD was joined by Galway City Community Network in calling on the Government "to live up to its responsibility to keep people seeking International Protection safe".

Nora Corcoran is the co-ordinator of the Galway Traveller Movement Traveller Homes Now Campaign.

Speaking for the group, she said, "It was a horrendous scenario - so many people uprooted without consultation. Vulnerable residents who had only recently managed to gain confidence to engage with services were relocated to areas with limited services. There needs to be a better, more transparent communication system."

The founding groups of the

new network include: Galway City Partnership, Galway City Community Network, Galway Traveller Movement, Galway Council of Trade Unions, Galway Anti-Racism Network, Amach! LGBTI+ Galway, University of

**GCARD would like to hear from similar networks established in other parts of the country.**

Sanctuary Galway, Community Knowledge Initiative, and the University of Galway.

Speaking at the launch, in March, Islamiyah Saudique Kadejo, CEO of Galway-based Gocom Radio, Ireland's first ethnic minority interest community radio station, said, "We all need to understand that implicit bias can form the bedrock of racism so it needs to be named. Anti racism training needs to be mandatory in all workplaces."

Nora echoed his views:

"It is not up to the groups who experience the racism and discrimination to come up with the solutions, but it is up to the majority population to ensure that racism and discrimination is eradicated.

"Institutional racism and discrimination must end," she said.

Also speaking for GCARD, Imelda Gormally, a community development worker with Galway

City Partnership, called "for an end to discourse that is based on a racist, sexist, regressive narrative that is targeting migrant/ refugee communities and hindering the attainment of rights and inclusion for minority communities such as the LGBTI+ communities."

She said, "The group is further concerned about the take-up of these views in the general community given the long-standing experience of racism by the Traveller community... This narrative is hijacking underlying inequalities... based on failed government policies," she said. Instead of sowing discord, solidarity is required.

GCARD wants the State to invest in addressing racism and discrimination, saying, "This needs to start with naming a housing / accommodation crisis."

### NATIONAL PLAN

The group welcomed the Government's launch, in March, of the National Action Plan Against Racism.

GCARD wants socio-economic status added as a tenth protected ground for discrimination, adding to the nine existing protected grounds, namely age, disability, family status, gender, marital status, membership of the Traveller community, race, religion and sexual orientation.

The network is interested in hearing from similar networks that may have been established in other parts of the country. Call Imelda Gormally on 091-768305 or email [imelda@gcp.ie](mailto:imelda@gcp.ie).



## €20M OF €50M COMMUNITY RECOGNITION FUND REMAINS FOR ALLOCATION IN 2024

A new €50 million Community Recognition Fund was launched earlier this year to provide grants over two years to support communities across the country that have welcomed and are hosting families and citizens from Ukraine and other countries.

At county level, the funds were allocated based on the number of new arrivals to each area, with the highest allocations going to the local authorities in Kerry (over €4,400,000) and Clare (over €2,900,000). By comparison, the smallest county allocation amounted to just over €650,000.

In May, a list of hundreds of successful applicant projects was published with Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare, receiving one of the larger grant allocations - €223,000 for the regeneration of its astro-turf.

Elsewhere, Togher Family Centre in Cork is getting a new bus costing €70,000, while Fr. McGrath Family Resource Centre in Kilkenny receives €12,000 to purchase two laptops and to refurbish, repaint and refloor its centre. In Co. Westmeath, Mullingar Harriers is getting €45,000 to develop "a walking path for casual walkers".

The highest award was €1,003,653 for a project led by Tralee Boxing Club in Co. Kerry. Meanwhile, Holycross AFC in Co. Limerick received €500 for sports equipment.

The full list of successful applicants is available at gov.ie

The Community Recognition Fund was launched in January by Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Joe O'Brien and the projects are being delivered by local authorities in conjunction with community organisations.

Minister Humphreys said, "This Fund is recognising the vital role our communities are playing as we continue to deal with many challenges, not least the war in Ukraine."

She said the fund would benefit towns and villages for years to come.

Minister of State Joe O'Brien said the fund "will empower communities across the country in developing projects that directly address local needs."

€30 million of the Fund will be available this year and €20 million in 2024. A minimum spend of 60% must be incurred by the local authorities in 2023 with the remaining 40% in 2024.



• The Mums' and Dads' teams competing in May in a tug of war (the Dads' Team won) as part of the community sports day organised by Togher Family Centre - a recipient of funding under the new Community Recognition Fund. PHOTOS COURTESY TOGHER FAMILY CENTRE - FOLLOW THEM ON



• €25,000 was allocated towards providing an accessible walkway to the beach at An Spidéal in Connemara.

### €509K FOR 111 INTEGRATION IDEAS

Separate from the Community Recognition Fund, a smaller fund saw €509,000 shared recently among 111 applicants who came up with strong proposals for integration.

The Communities Integration Fund has been in place since 2017 and arises from Action 51 of the Migrant Integration Strategy, which calls for funding to be made available to local communities throughout Ireland to promote the integration of migrants and refugees.

"I regularly visit community groups up and down the country and see first-hand how small grants such as this can kick-start small but vital local projects, which in turn make a massive difference in people's lives," said Minister of State Joe O'Brien.

Since its inception, the Communities Integration Fund has supported over 820 projects, with grant funding of close to €4 million.

- By Allen Meagher



## "WE'RE BUILDING VERY GOOD PRACTICES" SAYS CAVAN CULTURAL CHAMPION

### INTERVIEW BY KATHY MASTERSON

*Tinko Tinev believes the cultural champions project is the missing link between services and the people who need them.*



*The project has already spread from Monaghan to Cavan.*

*It is backed by two local development companies and Tusla.*

Tinko Tinev is a cultural champion in Cavan. Originally from Bulgaria, he lived in several countries during his youth, including Ethiopia and Iraq, due to his parents' diplomatic work. He says this exposure to new cultures at a young age helped him to "break down stereotypes".

Happily for Tinko, his experience of moving to Ireland was very positive. He said: "I didn't just feel welcome, I felt at home. I don't know what it is. Ireland just made a lot of sense very quickly."

### VERY POOR

Since becoming one of Cavan's 20 part-time cultural champions, Tinko has mainly worked with members of the Roma community from his native Bulgaria.

The project he works for is backed by Tusla and Cavan County Local Development. (See opposite page for more information).

"The cultural champions project helped us prepare, as representatives of our communities, to deal with the social issues. I set up small groups with the Bulgarian Roma. They are very underprivileged in my country, and many of them have very poor education. The list of needs they have, it's just unbelievable," he said.

The work the cultural champions do is not just limited to translation and linking people with services. For instance, they have often helped families to acquire basic food items.

### GOOD PRACTICE

Tinko believes the project is the missing link between the services and the people who need them.

"The social welfare services, they're very institutional. They're limited in how they can approach service users. And we are not; we are there and assessing the needs and reporting the needs, most of the time this is missing. We're building very good practices, this could be multiplied in different areas."

Tinko also teaches English classes as he believes the lack of English is the biggest challenge facing the Bulgarian Roma.

He remarked: "They can't function in the community for such basic things. If they had basic English that they would be able to manage 90 per cent of what they're calling me for."



• Bulgarian Roma in Cavan meeting staff from agencies providing services.

*"They don't get social welfare. Many of them don't get even child benefit. It's astonishing when you realise the amount of services they should be getting, and they're not."*

"They don't go shopping. They don't have a social life. They don't go anywhere because their funds are so limited. They're barely surviving. They don't get social welfare. Many of them don't get even child benefit."

"It's just astonishing when you look at them and you realise the amount of services they should be getting, and they're not," revealed Tinko.

"When you're with limited income, living isolated, you feel like you're not really at home here. And now all these people from the HSE and the social welfare, they're coming to our meetings, and talking to them and assessing their needs. It's a huge confidence boost. Some of the families have qualified for a family income supplement. And suddenly it makes a huge difference to have that extra bit of income."

"If you live in isolation, like the Roma community, they would never meet HSE representatives on their own, and the HSE would never even find their needs," he said.

### NOT A TARGET

Does the project also provide a way to encourage integration between locals and new communities?

Tinko says that aspect "is not a target", but happens naturally as families benefit from the extra supports.

### IRISH BREAD

Tinko is a long-serving member of the board of the Cavan Cross Cultural Community (4Cs), which incorporates more than 108 nationalities, and oversees work by him and the other cultural champions in the county.

"With the 4Cs, we showcase the migrant community to the local community with different events; through food, song and dance, and doing presentations in schools. So in the minds of local people, we're not people that came to eat the bread or steal the money of the Irish people. Everyone is here just to work and pay taxes like everyone else," he explained.

"Every nationality is kind of locked within its own group. Taking them out from their comfort zone and bringing them to an international event, and inviting Irish politicians and Irish community groups (so they are) facing each other and trying each other's food and trying the dances - it kind of melts things. You know each other afterwards. It's easy to respect a person, instead of an unknown group of people."



## Need for intermediaries identified through anti-poverty programme:

- Cultural Champions project has received praise from many

A network of Cultural Champions in Cavan and Monaghan, who speak more than 20 languages between them, are working with the child and family agency Tusla and others to reach out to people new to Ireland.

In these two counties, Cultural Champions from countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia now help to bridge the gap between newcomers here and service providers.

The work (see opposite page) involves showing families how to access supports and services available to them and their children, and providing a translation service. One of the project's aims is to ensure early interventions are made with vulnerable families to help prevent family breakdown and reduce the number of children being taken into care.

The project began in Monaghan in 2018 after Monaghan Integrated Development became aware of issues, while conducting work under the Social Inclusion and Community

Activation Programme with Fáilte Isteach and Tusla.

The project has since been established in Cavan, where there are now more than 20 Cultural Champions. It is supported by Cavan County Local Development and also has the backing of Cavan Cross Cultural Community (4C), an association that works to promote interest in multicultural development.

Champions are garda vetted and given training in parenting, child protection and advocacy through Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board and Tusla. Each cultural champion is urged to establish support groups within their respective ethnic communities. They are paid an hourly rate for the work.

The project has received much praise from state agencies and other services and has produced tangible results.

Tusla has said: "The work the cultural champions do helps keep families together. We know that in

some cases some children may have ended up in foster care system but the work Cultural Champions has done has helped those families to stay together."

Tearmann Domestic Violence Service in Cavan are on the record saying how the cultural champions assisted domestic abuse survivors in making formal complaints in a number of cases that came before the courts.

- By Kathy Masterson



## Volunteering while in Direct Provision

Mhammed, Musa and Salami



• Living in Direct Provision and volunteering: Mhammed (left), Musa (centre) and Salami (right) .

**Sofia Clifford-Riordan**, a policy, advocacy and programmes officer with Dublin City Community Co-op, has written a paper exploring the volunteering experiences of people in Direct Provision.

She found was "an eagerness" among asylum-seekers to volunteer. It was partly explained by **Kristin Kristjansdottir**, a social inclusion officer with Dublin City Volunteer Centre, who pointed out that many such people used to be volunteers in their own countries, that it

was "a part of their culture, personality and vision".

**Mhammed** used to volunteer at a music project in his native Morocco to help steer young people away from drugs and alcohol.

"When Mhammed arrived in Ireland, volunteering was a natural undertaking to continue," writes Sofia. "Being a proficient English speaker, Mhammed began to volunteer in the cross-cultural classes."

He also volunteers in a charity shop and a local community

garden.

**Musa** showed Sofia a picture of himself volunteering on St Patrick's Day, an Irish flag painted on his smiling face. "I thought then I am officially an Irish person," he said jovially.

**Salimi** from Nigeria used to volunteer in her local church. Now, she is involved, with her three sons, in canal clean-ups. She also volunteers for two half-day shifts a week in a St Vincent de Paul charity shop.

**W:** [dublincitycommunitycoop.ie/](http://dublincitycommunitycoop.ie/)

Our selection here consists of five commemorative days for each month and so does not include all.

### JULY

- 1 - International Day of Cooperatives
- 18 - Nelson Mandela Day
- 25 - World Drowning Prevention Day
- 30 - International Day of Friendship
- 30 - World Day Against Trafficking

### AUGUST

- 9 - International Day of the World's Indigenous People
- 12 - International Youth Day
- 19 - World Humanitarian Day
- 30 - International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances
- 31 - International Day for People of African Descent

### SEPTEMBER

- 8 - International Literacy Day
- 21 - International Day of Peace
- 28 - World Maritime Day
- 29 - International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste
- 30 - International Translation Day

### OCTOBER

- 1 - International Day of Older Persons
- 2 - World Habitat Day
- 10 - World Mental Health Day
- 11 - International Day of the Girl Child
- 17 - International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

### NOVEMBER

- 16 - International Day for Tolerance
- 19 - World Toilet Day
- 20 - Universal Children's Day
- 25 - International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
- 29 - International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

### DECEMBER

- 2 - International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 - International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- 5 - International Volunteer Day
- 10 - Human Rights Day
- 18 - International Migrants Day



# BOOK REVIEW

## Legendary lessons in rarely told stories of grassroots struggle and change

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Books about activism are rarely published in Ireland or abroad, however the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) has just published one such book and immediately won international interest.

As **Damien Walshe**, the ILMI's CEO says, "Books from the disability activist community are internationally rare. Sales to the USA were notable from the first week the book went on sale in early May."

An easy, enjoyable read, 'Conversations About Activism and Change' warns against activist complacency, rails against the multi-billion Euro disability industry and calls for Ireland to move away from the medical model of disability (seen as disempowering) and replace it with the social model (many of society's barriers can and should be removed).

Other campaigners could learn from these disability activists. They used their time during Covid lockdowns to produce a series of podcasts that led to the publication of this fantastic publication.

"From start to finish and cover to cover, it was people with disabilities who ran this project, coming up with the concept, running with it, writing, editing and funding the publication," said Walshe.

A neat 138 pages, it features pieces from 11 disabled activists from across Ireland - Des Kenny, Eileen Daly, Selina Bonnie, Jacqui Browne, Maureen McGovern, Peter Kearns, Ann Marie Flanagan, Dermot Hayes, Colm Whooley, Michael McCabe, and Sarah Fitzgerald, who also edited the book.

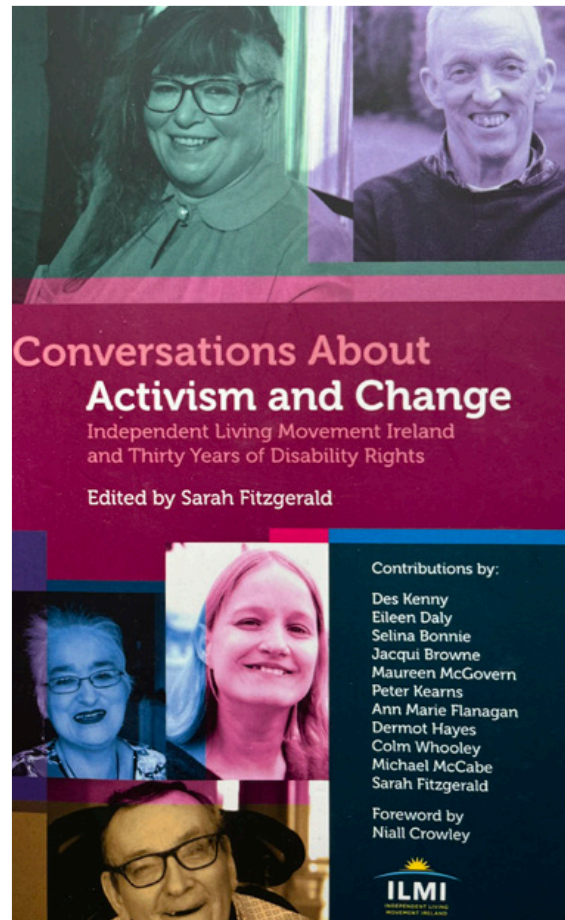
"The book is authentic in every aspect of its creation and is a true oral history of the disability rights movement," she said.

The ILMI's vice-chair **Selina Bonnie** says: "Most of the Irish disability rights movement's stories have only been shared orally, transmitted mainly from activist to activist, or have been lost when treasured comrades have passed."

Often, younger disabled people are unaware of what went before, of the struggle, the heroes and the torch that is being passed onto them.

"This book is part of reclaiming that 'hidden history' about the struggle for the liberation and self-

*Younger disabled people are unaware of what went before, of the struggle, the heroes and the torch that is being passed on*



*"We need to take back control. If we don't, we're just going to become a commodity generating an income for an ever-growing disability industry."*

determination of disabled people in Ireland," added Bonnie.

I like how the story is told in 11 chapters by the very people who became radicalised, who began to look at themselves anew and wanted social change in the world around

them.

Upholding disability rights is now an international obligation on the State since Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People in 1981. However, there are warnings from contributors that the

future may not be a bed of roses for disabled people (the term preferred by many activists).

"I would remind people of activism fatigue," warns **Des Kenny**. Calling for collective action, he says, "There is a danger that in having won some rights, we are regressing from an equality perspective."

He, among others, is anxious for Article 19 of the UNCRPD to be implemented in Ireland.

"People don't want to be locked up in nursing homes. To achieve this, are we prepared to crawl up the steps of the plinth at the Dáil like (US campaigners did)?" he asks.

All the contributors espouse community development principles. As **Maureen McGovern** says, "Once people build themselves up, nothing can bring them down."

She hated herself for years. "I didn't think I deserved to be here, but that was due to all the negative attitudes coming at me."

"Disabled people must build capacity with each other and must be employed at disabled people's organisations," she says.

Disability activists often die younger, and one person who gets repeated mentions by contributors is Martin Naughton. He passed away in 2016 at the age of 62, having had a profound influence on others.

Bonnie recalls her first sight of him: "Out of nowhere this man in a hat I'd never met before flew in the room in his power-chair. There was this sense that the king had arrived. Even the highest-ranking politician seemed to respect him. I remember thinking, Who is that? It was Martin Naughton."

Bonnie, who feels "quietly optimistic" about the future, ended up working for Naughton, including preparing placards for protests and bringing flasks of tea down to campaigners outside the Dáil. Bonnie later led campaigns, including battling to have society recognise that people with disabilities are sexual beings and can be parents.

"Although it's not as unusual for disabled people to become parents today, many improvements are needed to make life easier for disabled parents," she writes. "For example, baby-changing areas in public spaces are often not accessible to me and other wheelchair-using



(Cont'd from previous page)

parents."

Wider society is unlikely to think about these barriers unless they are brought to people's attention.

However, as **Jacqui Browne** says, "We can bring about physical changes, but getting the more hidden but really important social issues addressed can be much harder."

She also tells readers of her definition of a true disabled people's organisation (DPOs):

"The situation at the moment is that we have a lot of disability organisations, especially disability service providers, that claim to represent us but are not run or directed by us. In a true DPO we are not clients. We are the organisation."

Little if anything at all would change, as Fitzgerald adds, without teamwork. "We all know that real social change can only be brought about if we work together as a collective."

County Clare's **Dermot Hayes** recounts his time doing just that, as a shop steward fighting for women's rights in the 1970s. That activism fed into a life of campaigning for broad social change, including for disabled people.

"The charity model is still there," he writes. "The big organisations are embedded in the charity model and jobs and livelihoods are dependent on it. ...We want rights, not charity," he says.

"We need to build a movement of disabled people who see independent living and human rights as a way forward. The charity model is not the solution," he says.

Co-authors agree. **Colm Whooley**, who acquired a disability in a motorcycle accident, says however that disabled people have "lost ground" and "the disability industry has become stronger".

He said that if disabled people do not "take back control" then "we're just going to become a commodity generating an income for an ever-growing disability industry."

On a positive note, as he points out, "When I had my accident, the general public's attitude to disabled people was in the Dark Ages compared to where we are now."

'Conversations About Activism and Change' is published by **Martello Publishing** and is available to buy or order in all good bookshops (€12.95 RRP)

Buy online: <https://linktr.ee/ilmconversations>

# New Wheel CEO Ivan Cooper on why he's like a magpie

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

The Wheel's new CEO, it was announced in April, is Ivan Cooper, formerly the organisation's director of public policy. While he is widely known for his work, he is also a history buff, a cosmologist, a keen cyclist, and one of the many Dubs living in County Wicklow.

His wife Orla Keegan also works in the community and voluntary sector - as director of bereavement in the Irish Hospice Foundation.

While it is not a trade union, The Wheel advocates for over 2,300 member organisations that together employ over 59,000 staff and that engage over 54,000 volunteers annually. We asked Ivan about his family and his hobbies and interests outside work.

"I'm keen on film and cinema and I'm a big reader, especially of history and geography. I'm into cosmology and I'm a big Wikipedia fan - to be honest, I'm like a magpie with my curiosity," he said.

"I like hillwalking and tennis and especially since Covid I like to keep fit. I walk and cycle," he said. He swears by a folding bicycle he bought through the Bike To Work Scheme, which he uses daily on his commute.

His longest cycle was when he and a friend once cycled from Dublin to West Cork.

He and Orla like to travel by campervan nowadays, especially to Mayo and Kilkenny, two counties where his family have connections.

"I always support Kilkenny in the hurling. And we are keen rugby fans," he said. He didn't mention supporting Mayo in the football, so it's safe to assume he has been shouting for Dublin.

"I'm very fortunate in that both my parents are alive - they're Dubs and we can trace our family's roots in Ranelagh back to the 19th century.

*"I always support Kilkenny in the hurling."*



## CLAIMS TO FAME

Has Ivan's family any claims to fame?

"Well, my great-grandfather on my mother's side, John McLoughlin, was responsible for building the portico to the Mansion House in 1867 or so. And a grand-uncle designed the Stag's Head pub," he said, acknowledging that every time he walks into either establishment he feels pride.

## VOLUNTEERING

In terms of volunteering, Ivan served for a number of years on the board of St Catherine's, a school in Greystones for people with special educational needs. He gives governance advice locally when asked and has previously supported Wicklow Hospice Group and Bray Partnership.

## STATE DEPENDENCY AND SECTOR SALARIES

He takes up the post at a time when community groups and charities face new challenges, not least in retaining staff on historically low salaries.

Pointing to the State's dependency on charities and community organisations to deliver many essential services and develop communities, he said, "Funding arrangements often do not reflect this reality."

As he told Changing Ireland in January, there were over a thousand unfilled posts in the community, voluntary and charity organisations at the end of last year as better pay elsewhere lured people away.

"Unfilled posts manifests as people being left without services. And those people are invisible - the system doesn't collect data on people who are without a service that isn't there. Vulnerable people in the community are going to be left without services," he said at the time.

"The only way to resolve the issue is to increase pay. Pay levels in the sector are too low, and they have been low for years, if not decades, since the recession," he added. "We need to see a very significant increase in the grants paid to voluntary sector employees."

In the run-up to Budget 2024, the Wheel called on the Government to invest in public services and address a 10% pay deficit in community and voluntary sector services.

## DEIRDRE GARVEY

Deirdre Garvey led the organisation for over 20 years from its founding until December 2022. She moved in January to become the secretary general of the Irish Red Cross, taking over from Liam O'Dwyer. The Wheel expanded during her time and now has 32 staff.

# PLACE-BASED LEADERSHIP

## 42 FROM DARNDALE AND DROGHEDA GRADUATE FROM LEADERS' COURSE

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

There was a 100 per cent attendance from Darndale and Drogheda for the final three workshop days of the Place-Based Leadership Programme. A first of its kind nationally, the 18-month programme should lift the communities concerned by boosting the leadership potential within. It proved very popular among its 42 participants and the programme is expected to run elsewhere shortly.

Speaking at the graduation ceremony, held in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, a representative from the Department of Rural and Community Development said it meant a lot to him personally as well as professionally that the programme had run so well.

Paul Geraghty, principal officer until recently with the Department's Social Inclusion and Communities Unit, has family connections in the communities concerned and he said it wasn't difficult for him to relate with the challenges facing those on the programme.

He said, "For me, the key strength of the Place-Based Leadership Programme was not so much the content, but more the connections that were made. It was great to see people who are already leaders in their areas come together, share stories, share experiences, and gather strength from each other - so they can continue to work for the betterment of their areas.

"It was one of the most inspirational courses I've seen happen and it was great to be in the room, during a number of visits, with people who are striving to make improvements for their community.

"I saw gardai, people from addiction services, people in community development, all coming together with a common purpose - to improve and better the places where they live."

He thanked the two groups saying, "I was born in Drogheda and I have relations in Darndale. And I grew up in Balbriggan, equidistant between Drogheda and Darndale. This was very personal for me - to see it happen in the first instance and then to see it go so well."

Speaking afterwards, Dearbhail Butler from Darndale and co-ordinator for the programme with Northside Partnership, said they had "100 per cent attendance" for the graduation - all 24 participants from Darndale and 18 from Drogheda.



• Community leaders with programme providers at their graduation in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.



• Dearbhail Butler of Northside Partnership.

"Imagine all that expertise in one room to make positive changes," she said.

"The two groups had never met before, yet they bonded so quickly. That was clear from the language they were using and the discussions they were having. They have similar problems in both areas.

"Already, the Drogheda group is planning a trip to Darndale and vice-versa," she said.

Participants on the programme included local residents, staff and volunteers from community groups and staff from state organisations such as Dublin City Council, An Garda Síochána and Tusla. They all commit to 13 full-day sessions.

In Mullingar, one of the workshop facilitators was Dr Sean Redmond, who has published research in the past about criminal networks in Ireland and their influence on children who get involved. A civil

servant from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on assignment to the University of Limerick, his talk about drugs and intimidation was "absolutely amazing", said Dearbhail.

Afterwards, Maria Williams, a resident in Darndale, gave a powerful account of life in Darndale.

Not everything about the programme's delivery was perfect. "The residents found that sometimes the course was a bit wordy," said Dearbhail.

However, overall it was a major success and she is sure it will be repeated elsewhere.

### GARDAÍ DON'T GET COUNSELLING

"The 18 months really helps with building the relationships. Halfway through the course, you had residents who were frustrated with the gardai giving their views, but they got to hear then from the Gardai, about what it was like for them to arrive on a scene and then they get called away to somewhere else.

"We learned that the guards don't get any counselling and one of the good things from the programme is that now five local Gardai are signed up to do trauma training," she said.

"There is talk of them now running the programme in two more places," she said. "If they get the chance, go for it. I would highly recommend the programme if you get the opportunity. Our CEO in

Northside Partnership, Paul Rogers, would be open to talking to any organisations interested in it."

Rogers first came across the concept of place-based leadership development when he attended a talk by UCC graduate, Dr Rob Worrell. He had proven the programme's worth developing leadership locally in urban areas beset by violence in Kenya, Uganda and Guatemala.

"So, we pursued it and Minister O'Brien and Paul Geraghty were very supportive. Our two groups piloted the programme and because of its success it should be repeated... it's just a matter of finding a funding stream for it."

In September, the Darndale and Drogheda groups will meet for the final evaluation.



• Kate O'Brian, home school liaison in St. John's National School in Drogheda, with Dr. Rob Worrell, after receiving her PBLDP certificate at a graduation ceremony, in Mullingar, on May 25.



## It was an eye-opener - they got us to think outside the box

BY KATHY MASTERSON



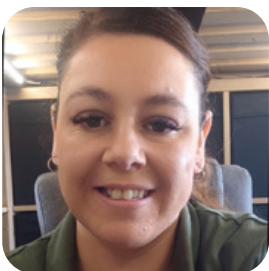
• Local resident Ann Heyden who works in Darndale/Belcamp centre, receiving her PBLDP certificate from Paul Geraghty, principal officer in the Department of Rural and Community Development and Dr. Rob Worrell.

We spoke to two Darndale participants who took part in the Place Based Leadership Development Programme – while the course was ongoing.

Tamara Kearns benefited a lot from being a participant. A Darndale resident, she works with Northside Partnership on its Healthy Food Made Easy project. She said: “It’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I’ve learned so much and made so many connections.

“We were introduced to each other just as people, not as their job title or organisation. It’s about building connections with other services and residents. It’s a different mix of everything and there have been a lot of boundaries broken down. It brought everyone together; residents were introduced to all the services that are provided, and we support each other.

“There are still a lot of boundaries in the way, but



• Tamara Kearns from Northside Partnership.

the programme gives you the skills to think outside the box. You see the faces behind the services, and you realise that we all want the same thing, just some people might have a different way of going about it.”

She says one team-building exercise made a particular impact on her.

“We were put into groups and they asked us to build straw castles. We were given straws and masking tape and had to work as a team and the goal was to have a castle that was still standing at the end of it. At the end we realised that we could have all worked together, instead of in our groups. We would have had loads of hands to build one big castle. That was about teaching us to think outside the box,” she said.

The participants reached out to other local residents and held a meeting to discuss local issues. According to Tamara, the challenges include a lack of a meeting space for local organisations.

She said: “We have lots of different groups in the area. It’s a fantastic area for sports, but we have no general meeting space. Like the women’s group has nowhere they can just meet up and have a cup of tea and a chat. There’s lots of requirements before they can do that, you need to look at insurance, you need to be set

- 42 residents and community-based workers in Darndale and Drogheda have completed an 18-month programme aimed at developing solutions to the challenges posed in their areas.
- The Place-Based Leadership Development Programme (PBLDP) was created in response to an increase in gang-related activities in the two localities, and to encourage greater collaboration between residents and people working in the community, such as gardai, HSE staff and community development workers.
- Deemed a success, it is likely to be repeated elsewhere.
- The PBLDP was supported by €188,650 in funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development.
- In Darndale, the programme was delivered by Northside Partnership, while in Drogheda it was administered by Louth Leader Partnership.

up as an organisation. And they don’t want to do all that.

“I do understand that there has to be protocols, but at the same time, that means you’re putting things on the long finger.”

Tamara continued: “The whole thing has been very eye-opening for me.”

She added that she was “really glad” to have signed up for it and it ran “very smoothly”.

“I’d definitely be up for doing more. The connections that I’ve made have really helped me to settle into my new role.”

Paul Kirwan, a health promotion and improvement officer with the HSE, was also a participant.

He explained: “When I started in my role in the HSE I was assigned to the

Coolock Area Network, and Darndale falls within that. I’m from the area so I was very familiar with it.

“The Northside Partnership circulated their leadership course to everyone. I thought it would be a great way to network, and get to know people who were already working in the area.

“It’s very broad. I wasn’t sure what to expect at first. There’s a good mix of people – residents, community services, Tusla, Northside Partnership, youth services, the guards.

“I thought it might talk about: ‘How does my service fit in with your service?’ but it’s not about that. It’s showing people how to be leaders in their community.

“We practice exercises

around teambuilding and building trust, and we’ve been having those difficult

*Everyone learned to put aside their own agendas*



• Paul Kirwan, health promotion officer with the HSE.

conversations. It’s not targeted at anti-social behaviour. It’s targeted at how to build the leadership skills of all people in the area to help shape the area for the better.”

According to Paul, the course helped the participants to see the bigger picture, as opposed to the individual goals and agendas of their respective organisations.

He added: “My role in the HSE had been shaping how I was viewing things. But in the course, I can take off that hat and look at things as a resident.

“The programme isn’t built for any specific service.

**COMMUNITY SPACE:**  
*Darndale is fantastic for sports, but groups have nowhere to meet up for a cup of tea and a chat.*



# DUBLIN: Community development

## TONY KELLY ON WHY DUBLIN'S DORSET STREET COMMUNITY HAD TO CHANGE

BY KATHY MASTERSON

In 2017, residents of Dorset Street and surrounding areas joined forces to clean up their area, which they felt had been “plagued” with a high concentration of so-called massage parlours.

In January of this year, an umbrella group comprised of residents and businesspeople in the area took home an IPB Pride of Place award for their efforts to make their area a better place to live and work.

The District 7 Community Alliance, which represents seven residents associations in Dublin’s north inner city, won the Community Resilience (City) Category.

Since 2017, the group has been working on plans to rejuvenate the locality and create a vibrant urban village.

“There was a big concentration of massage parlours on Dorset Street - there were about nine of them along the road. One day, the kids were getting off the bus and there was a man getting serviced by one of the women in a lane.

“The residents said enough is enough, and we got together and picketed every one of the parlours. The guards got involved and the last parlour was raided by the gardaí, immigration, Dublin City Council and the Revenue,” revealed District 7 Alliance chairman Tony Kelly.

Encouraged by the success of that campaign, residents contacted their local public representatives to find out what else could be done to improve their neighbourhood.

Tony continued: “We had a meeting with Brendan Kenny (former Deputy Chief Executive of Dublin City Council), the residents and business association, and told him how we thought the street was going. He told us: ‘I’m going to put €25,000 on the table for you to get an architect and put a plan together for Dorset Street from the ground up’. He saw that we had something rare in the city – the businesses and residents working together.”

Together with local architects Kelliher Miller, who Tony says have “a great grá for the area”, the group put together the Dorset Street Together Plan over the course of 18 months.

In October 2018, an exhibition was held at 54-55 Upper Dorset St to present the draft Community Plan and invite feedback from the wider



• Too many fast food takeaways and unattractive shopfronts on Dorset Street.

community. The pop-up shop ran for two months and was visited by over 700 people.

“Too many chippers”, unattractive shopfronts, a lack of on-street parking, the closure of two community centres, and traffic problems are just some of the issues that the plan set out to tackle.

Tony remarked: “We lost both of our community centres during Covid. One was sold and the council closed the other one. You have TDs and councillors saying we have to integrate, but where are we supposed to do it? That’s another battle for another day. We’re hoping to get the council community centre re-opened.”

The concrete central median strip along the street is also “a bone of contention”, according to Tony.

The plan suggests removing the central median to create space for

wider footpaths, new cycle lanes, and parking bays.

It also suggests guidelines for improvements to shopfront designs and facades, and measures to restore and conserve the area’s Georgian and Victorian architectural heritage.

The creation and improvement of green spaces in the district forms a core part of the plan, including the development of a mini plaza, a micropark, and a ‘quiet village centre’.

The plan also includes a proposal for the creation of a ‘National Botanical Way’, which it describes as “a specially enhanced pedestrian route from Parnell Square linking to the Botanic Gardens via Blessington Street and Basin”.

The document raises the issue of ‘transience’ as one of the challenges facing the neighbourhood,

pointing out the high number of Airbnb properties and student accommodation around Dorset Street.

It also lists the “lack of mixed-use” businesses as a problem in the area, alongside photos of several local takeaway shopfronts.

A 2021 article by the Dublin Inquirer highlighted concerns from the proprietors of some migrant-run food outlets, where they spoke of a lack of consultation on the Dorset Street Together Plan.

According to Tony, the businesses are “well-represented” on the business association by local restaurant and deli owner Tom McKeon and were given the opportunity to join the association.

“When we held the open days, a few of the businesses were worried it would cause their rents to go up. We told them we want to try to encourage



• Volunteers from Dorset Street receive a Pride of Place Award.



## *Dorset Street Together is now seven years into its plan to transform neighbourhood once plagued by massage parlours*



• *Brendan Kenny, former CEO of Dublin City Council.*

more businesses to open up on the street. A few of them don't want to see any change happen on the street.

"Dublin City Council even introduced them to their Shopfront Improvement Scheme, but there was very little take-up of it among the takeaways," he said.

As Dorset Street is one of the principal thoroughfares to the city centre from Dublin Airport and the M1, the group also came up with a concept for a 'Gateway to the City' festival.

"In 2019 We went back and asked Brendan Kenny if we could have a festival, and he said 'No problem'. So we established the 'Gateway to the City' festival for Dorset Street and the area around it. We expected about 1,000 to 1,500 people, but about 6,000 people attended," explained Tony.

The festival has not been held since 2019 due to the pandemic, but Tony says Dublin City Council "has promised that the Gateway to the City festival will be back up and running".

The implementation of the plan has faced a number of setbacks. As well as a global pandemic, a shakeup of electoral areas saw the District 7 neighbourhood moved to the Cabra-Glasnevin district. In early 2022, the Greater Dorset Street Together Plan was again put before the local authority, and was approved by the 14 councillors from the new electoral division.

Dorset Street certainly lives up to its 'Gateway to the City' label, and features in both Bus Connects - the National Transport Authority's plan for a new bus network around the city - and Metro North plans, which complicates matters slightly.

Therefore, a working group made up of representatives from each of the groups and organisations was established.

"We had our first meeting before Christmas where we went through the plan. Bus Connects is specific to Dorset Street so a group was set up for Dorset Street separate from the other areas around it.

Bus Connects and the traffic department took away the plans and they're going to come back to us and see what can be done," said Tony.

After several years of planning, campaigning and setbacks, residents are yet to see any of the points on the plan make the transition from paper to pavement.

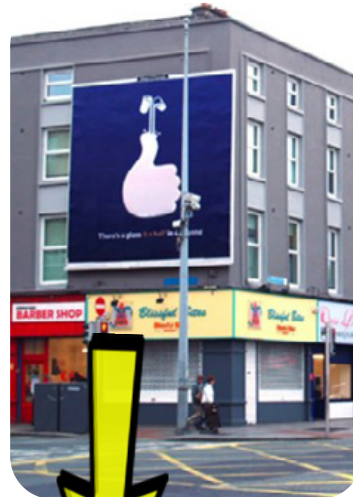
With all the relevant groups now finally taking the Dorset Street Together Plan into consideration, those living in this much-loved part of Dublin are hopeful their vision will eventually become reality.

Tony concluded: "This has been going on six or seven years now. Brendan Kenny had a vision from the beginning, and the architects are still on board with us.

"It's a very strong community. A lot of us have been here a long time. My wife's family are here three or four generations. People have deep roots in the area. And then you get new people coming in, and they bring a new aspect to it too. There's a real love for the area."

***Unattractive shopfronts, a lack of on-street parking, the closure of two community centres, and traffic problems are just some of the issues that the plan set out to tackle.***

• *Too much signage on the corner building.*



• *Problem solved!*



• *Dorset Street Together-a street event held in 2019, photo courtesy DST on Facebook.*

## WHAT'S A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE!

A social enterprise - as defined in the Government's first National Social Enterprise Policy (2019-2022) - is as follows: "an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector. If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission."

*Read the latest survey findings about social enterprises on page 15.*

## NEIGHBOUR'S DOG WON'T STOP BARKING. WHAT CAN YOU DO?



• *Jack (above) knows its best to keep quiet at night, but not all dogs are that sensible.* PHOTO BY TONY GREHAN.

A survey of UCD employees last year found that while 80% of people knew the law on dog-fouling, dog licences and keeping dogs on a leash, only 18% were aware of all eight legal responsibilities on dog owners.

Not every dog owner obeys the law, but there are remedies.

For instance, what are your rights when a neighbour's dog won't stop barking and you are unable to resolve the issue with the dog owner?

You can make a complaint to the District Court and look for a hearing. Once you get a court date, you must notify the dog owner using a special form, which is available from your local authority or District Court. The form can also be downloaded from the Citizens Information website.

That website in clear English covers all the laws and obligations on dog owners. It includes advice in relation to guard dogs and dangerous dogs. The more people know the law, the less likely people or pets are to come into harm's way.

W: [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)

## Whole of Government approach needed to tackle poverty and social exclusion

A zero-tolerance approach to child poverty, a travel allowance to replace the travel pass, and employment quotas for marginalised communities were some of the suggestions that emerged from this week's Social Inclusion Forum (SIF).

The Social Inclusion Forum is part of the Government's structures to monitor and evaluate the State's strategy to address poverty and achieve social inclusion for all.

Launched in 2020, The Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025 is the current national strategy, and the theme of Social Inclusion Forum 2023 was Revitalising the Roadmap: Progress and Priorities. A Mid-term Review of the Roadmap has also been published. Both documents are available online ([gov.ie](http://gov.ie)).

For her part, Minister Heather Humphreys, who opened the forum, said, "It was encouraging to see analysis from the ESRI that found that Budget 2023, combined with one-off measures to reduce the cost of living, were effective in protecting most households from rising prices over the winter.

"However, while a useful monitoring tool, it does not give us the full picture. And that is why meetings such as this are so important, because as policy-makers we learn from listening to your lived experience.

"Let me assure you that the Government listens to what you tell us at the Social Inclusion Forum," she said.

\*\*\*\*\*

In advance of the Forum, Community Work Ireland (CWI) and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland had hosted workshops to identify issues of concern to people affected by poverty and the organisations working with them.

The workshops reflected the four themes of Social

Inclusion Forum 2023: core essentials - the cost of living and income adequacy; social inclusion and children; social inclusion and older people; and expanding opportunities for employment.

A report on the key messages for the Forum that were gathered during earlier workshops stated:

"There should be a zero-tolerance policy for children and young people in poverty. There are significant, long-term impacts on the life chances of people that experience poverty and social exclusion as children. Addressing child poverty requires a whole of Government approach, with a focus beyond the immediate need in order to ensure long-term, sustainable goals."

The forum was told by Paul Ginnell of EAPN:

"Short term measures, such as the energy subsidies provided by the Government, are needed, but they are not sufficient to address the issues in the long term.

"More proactive approaches and whole of government work is needed to effectively address the underlying and root causes of poverty and social exclusion," he said.

It was also felt that the Government should put more effort into targeting supports.

"Regulation of energy prices is also urgently required, and schemes to retrofit houses needs to be fast-tracked," he added.

### USE TALENT, EXPERTISE

In regards to accessing employment, Athlone-based community development worker Jeyald Antony welcomed the fact that Ukrainian bus drivers can now work in Ireland. He further suggested:

"The recognition of qualifications for migrant workers needs to be drastically improved to avoid displacing talents and

*CWI and EAPN Ireland said the key issues covered at the Social Inclusion Forum "are not new and are not unknown".*



• Participants in SIF 2023, including Ann Irwin from Community Work Ireland, Paul Ginnell from the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, Senator Eileen Flynn and Minister of State, Joe O'Brien.

expertise." He also called for recruitment quotas for people from marginalised communities.

Maura, another Forum attendee, pointed out that "while Ireland in economic terms is at full employment, many still can't access work" for various reasons including transport.

Transport was "often inaccessible and expensive, making work pay more difficult", said another participant.

"The free travel pass is a joke," said Ann Irwin of Community Work Ireland, quoting people from rural areas who took part in the earlier workshops.

Another participant said of the free travel pass: "There is no transport to access. An allowance should be paid in lieu of the pass to those that live in rural areas and where there is no public transport."

On the theme of cost of living and income adequacy, one participant spoke of being "appalled at the standard of accommodation"

while carrying their Census enumerator role.

Another warned: "People are forced to choose between eating and heating - it is much worse than we actually thought, way beyond what we could even imagine."

### NORMALISING POVERTY

Carol Baumann of the Irish Local Development Network had three tips from a group discussion she took part in about improving opportunities for employment:

1. Jobs must be sustainable and well-paid. Transport issues kept coming up, especially for disabled people.

2. Tackle digital exclusion.
3. Appoint a commissioner for older people.

Another contributor said there was "too much reliance on the use of foodbanks. We have begun to normalise poverty. People in the Traveller community don't

have basic needs".

The forum heard in detail about homelessness, food poverty, fuel poverty, digital poverty, and access to healthcare as challenges faced by households with low incomes.

The CWI and EAPN Ireland said that the key issues participants heard at the Social Inclusion Forum "are not new and are not unknown".

"They have been stated and repeated in one guise or another at many of the SIFs and in other policy spaces. The legacy of Covid-19, current international events and unprecedented inflation have deepened the poverty and social exclusion experienced by many people and communities to levels that will be difficult to address without immediate, consistent intervention by the State."

- By Allen Meagher and Kathy Masterson



## "Community development saved my life" claims Senator

**Senator Eileen Flynn says now is the time to invest in community development. She thanked Department she had "many run-ins with" for platform to speak.**

**BY ALLEN MEAGHER**

Senator Eileen Flynn, addressing SIF 2023, said she "started as an activist at 18", yet never thought she would end up working where she does now.

It saved her life, she said.

"I never wanted to be a community development worker or a youth worker," she told the 130 attendees.

"I thought community development was all about sitting around drinking cups of tea, but that is part of the work, bringing in somebody, speaking with them, showing them the light, giving advice."

"A lot of people who are in addiction, homeless, on the edges of Irish society, they don't need your help – they need support to be empowered in their own lives to work for themselves and for their own communities," she said, calling for more investment in community development.

She herself went back to college at 25 years of age, as a mature student, and graduated with a degree in community development.

"I felt my passion to do something in life that would bring about social change, not just for the Traveller community, or for myself. Community development is not about change for the few, but for the many."

### RUN-INS WITH DEPARTMENT

She thanked the Department of Social Protection for the invitation to speak, because she had "many run-ins with the Department trying to bring about meaningful change for people suffering from economic disadvantage".

She spoke about empowering people and taking collective action where she grew up, in Labre Park, Ballyfermot, the country's oldest halting site in Ireland.

Where previously people with a problem with the local authority would ask community workers to make a call, now they make those calls themselves.

"That's empowerment," she said. "Community development creates the



• Senator Eileen Flynn addressing the forum on June 1.

***"People who are in addiction, homeless, on the edges of Irish society, they don't need your help – they need support to be empowered"***

spaces for it to happen."

"We don't see the change in a week or a year," she said, but it was evident.

### CAMPAIGN WIN

She recalled being part of a campaign led by Migrant Rights Centre Ireland to get state recognition

for undocumented people.

"In 2022, they got documented. I was so privileged to be part of that campaign – to learn about the others in our society. It brought about change for a few thousand migrants in our country," she recalled.

The SIF discussed how to overcome ageism and how older people could live life to the full.

Senator Flynn viewed the discussion from a Traveller perspective: "When I think of older people – I'm 33 – if I got a health evaluation they'd mark me down as a 45-year-old. Travellers don't have the privilege of living into our 80s and 90s."

### JOBS ARE A ROUTE OUT OF POVERTY

Another theme looked at through SIF was education and employment.

"A long-term sustainable job gives you a route out of poverty," said Senator Flynn. "And community development does that work with poor communities."

Recalling how for some years after 2009 the community sector was "cut, cut, cut" she called for more investment now.

"We don't value community development work, yet when community development is done right, 150% it can work and does work."

Considering the impact of the cost of living crisis on communities, she said, "Now more than ever we should be investing in community development work."

She also pointed out, "It is a profession. People study it for years and it does change lives."

And it goes beyond simply changing lives.

"For me, community development saved my life. It saves many Travellers' lives – when people see a way out, see they do have a voice."

Pointing to successes because of community development in St Michael's Estate, Inchicore, she said, "It can work, it is a way out of poverty."

In regard to inclusion, she said instead of just talking about it, "we should be seeing inclusion – in the Dail, in supermarkets, in our hospitals and all our services."

She drew attention to the launch recently of the National Action Plan Against Racism by Minister of State, Joe O'Brien.

"We also need to see an equality strategy," she concluded.



• Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, formally opened SIF 2023.

# VOLUNTEERING

## White House was surprised by scale of volunteer input to welcome 'Mayo Joe'

The voluntary effort that made US president Joe Biden's recent visit to Ireland a success surprised White House staff.

They were impressed by the "calibre and number" of volunteers who stepped forward to welcome home Ballina's famous son.

"They couldn't understand how we could mobilise over 200 people within a couple of days," said Sheila Garvin, volunteer co-ordinator for Ballina 2023.

Sheila's volunteers worked alongside the US Secret Service during the visit, as did their counterparts in County Louth's Cooley Peninsula, which was also under the global spotlight when US president Joe Biden made his historic visit to the lands of his ancestors.

As the self-styled 'Mayo Joe, son of Ballina' gave a rousing address on the banks of the River Moy, most people watching would have been unaware of the role played by a 260-strong team of volunteers, which included locals and blow-ins from various parts of the world.

The timing helped. A couple of years ago, 'Ballina 2023' was established as a 20-strong group, most of them volunteers, to organise events for 2023's year-long celebration of the 300th anniversary of the formal establishment of the town.

Once the date of the presidential visit was confirmed, a call for more volunteers went out and, within days, Sheila had a list of 260 people offering to help.

"We worked with Mayo Volunteer Centre. There was huge interest," she said. It was different from routine volunteering.

BY KATHY MASTERSON AND ALLEN MEAGHER



• Above - volunteers outside St. Muredach's and later President Biden speaking outside the cathedral. Main photo - Ballina 2023 volunteers on the day of Biden's visit. Image Credit - Arlene Molloy.

### ON THE DAY

The team created rosters and a volunteer database, and fitted volunteers out with vests and hats.

"On the day then we had check-in admin, we had people at the security entrances, everyone

had to be scanned. We had counters at entrances clocking numbers, because the Secret Service wanted to find out how many were in attendance. There was also general stewarding and ensuring crowd safety," said Sheila.

### WHITE HOUSE

"For most events, you would have your committee who would run it and do all the organising. We were following the lead of what the White House and the Secret Service wanted. We were the assistants.

"The White House were impressed with the calibre and number of volunteers. They couldn't understand how we could mobilise over 200 people within a couple of days."

Sheila was delighted for young adult volunteers who can add their involvement to their CV – saying they worked with the White House.

### COCKCROW

Volunteers were not the only people up at cockcrow on the day of Biden's visit. Local and central government staff were also involved. One told us of going on duty from 5am to look after the media as they were escorted to the various sites Biden visited.

Members of local community and business groups were also to the fore including Ballina Chamber of Commerce and Ballina Community Clean Up.

### PALESTINE

In terms of activism, pro-Palestinian local residents hung a large banner from their home in support of the beleaguered country. As the campaigners said, "It's a rare occasion when one of the few men in the world that can end Israeli apartheid comes to your own home town."

The intermittent lashing rain aside, it was a memorable day.

## COUNTY KILDARE VOLUNTEER AWARDS

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2010-2025) has as one of its strategic objectives to recognise, celebrate and communicate the value and impact of volunteers and volunteering.

Kildare and other counties are doing just that. For the second year running, Kildare Volunteer Centre hosted a special awards event in the Spring to celebrate the work of volunteers across the county. The awardees are pictured here.





# Who'll go first?

**- Honey co-ops could transform Irish landscape and fill producers' pockets**

**- UCC students' modelling shows the potential**

**BY LAURA BYRON**



• Laura Byron is studying for a MSc in Co-operatives, Agri-Food and Sustainable Development in UCC.

**Ireland does not yet have a honey producers' co-operative, but that could change if farmers listen to Cork students.**

A group of UCC students this year set up a hypothetical co-operative to find out if small Irish honey producers would be better off working together, as they do in other countries.

The findings are encouraging and farmers could join the proposed co-op by setting aside land for beehives, earning more income in the process and contributing more to biodiversity.

The hypothetical honey co-op was set up using guidelines from the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society and its aim was to buy honey from co-op members, package it, and create a high value honey brand to be sold. The students found that at least seven people with similar economic needs would need to come together if the proposal was to work.

The test run was conducted by four students from UCC's Centre of Co-operative Studies who are studying regenerative agriculture, a type of farming that increases biodiversity, enriches soils, improves watersheds and boosts ecosystems.

## BEE CO-OPS COMMON IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Celia Cremin, Sophie Sibanda, Ignituous Moyo and yours truly found that the success of the honey co-op model depended on whether or not it would give its members a return on their investments. Expected sales generated from 20 hives could amount to €3,314 per year.

"The results of this research may pique the curiosity of farmers and beekeepers alike. In the face of the threats posed by climate change, regenerative agriculture may prove pivotal in securing a sustainable food system for the future," said Celia.

"Integrating honey production into farming



• *Irish Honey Bee in flight. Source: The Native Irish Honey Bee Society which says "We can plant all the wind turbines and the trees you want, but without this key element, life would not be what it is."*

systems would not only enhance soil function and biodiversity, but also provide farmers with an additional source of income. Despite there being multiple thriving cases of honey producer co-operatives in other countries, there has yet one to be formed in Ireland," she added.

Sophie commented: "There is a shared need in the farming community to address biodiversity decline, and honey production could deliver on this while also providing an additional income support to producers."

Regenerative agriculture has amassed a considerable following across the globe, with large corporates like Danone and Nestlé now rewarding farmers who adopt regenerative practices.

Research quoted by the UCC students included 2019 data from the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations highlighting the role played by pollinators and

how honeybees in particular can help regenerate land and are an indicator of environmental health. Their decline is often a sign of wider environmental problems.

The students proposed that farmers who dedicate land for honey could become co-op members. Beekeepers would also be welcome.

The students are convinced that co-operative business ideas have the potential to advance regenerative agriculture in Ireland.

• *Laura's article summarises findings from an academic assignment she wrote titled 'Sweet Partnership: Honeybees, Regenerative Agriculture, and the Co-operative Business Model'.*

• *For more on UCC's Centre for Co-operative Studies, visit: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ccs/>*

• *Twitter: @UCCCoopStudies. Also on Facebook and LinkedIn.*

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

### FINGAL E-CARGO BICYCLE FOR HIRE FOR €3 / 2HRS

Bringing the messages home on your bike can be a risky affair. Now, Fingal County Council, in partnership with Bleeper, have launched a public eCargo bike service based at Mountview Community Centre, Dublin 15. An eCargo bike is a battery-assisted pedal bike with a 350-litre capacity lidded box affixed to the front.

Fingal County Council's spokesperson on climate action and active travel, David Storey said: "Fewer young people are learning to drive or choosing to own a car and we believe that Active Travel services such as this eCargo bike can plug the gap that people may experience without a motor vehicle."

The bike can be unlocked for €3, which covers 120 minutes of use, then a fee of 5c per minute applies.



### FRIENDLY WATERFORD

The Autism Friendly Waterford initiative was launched in April in a bid to make Waterford Ireland's first officially-recognised, autism-friendly city.

Four Waterford mothers of adult autistic children are leading the initiative and urge businesses, community groups and public services to become autism friendly by undergoing staff training, providing sensory accommodations and giving employment, where appropriate, to autistic people.

### SOUTH DUBLIN LIBRARIES

South Dublin Libraries has launched a new development plan, 'Our Library, Our Future', which sets out a strategy for making the library more relevant, innovative, and impactful for the community.

The plan covers the period from 2023 to 2027 and recognises the vital role that libraries play in society.

W: [www.southdublinlibraries.ie](http://www.southdublinlibraries.ie)

### FIRST 4 COUNCILS WELCOME BIO-DIVERSITY OFFICERS

Kilkenny, Offaly, Cork City and Wicklow are the first four local authorities to welcome biodiversity officers under a new programme that will see biodiversity officers appointed to every local authority by the end of 2024.

They are employed to raise awareness about biodiversity issues and assist in developing and executing biodiversity plans. The Heritage Council is funding the salary costs with an initial investment of €1.6 million.

The biodiversity officers will help with the management of natural areas and will engage with local communities. They will also train colleagues.



### LIVE AT HOME SCHEME FOR OLDER PEOPLE GOES NATIONAL

Local coordinators have been recruited as part of the rollout to all 31 local authorities of the Healthy Age Friendly Homes scheme.

The programme is a cross-government collaboration between the Department of Health, HSE, and Local Government and it provides a rounded model of care to support older people to remain in their own homes where possible. It helps them to avoid hospital admission through the provision of care in the community, and to ultimately avoid early or unnecessary admission to residential care.

Over the course of a two-year pilot, the programme supported nearly 3,000 older adults. The national rollout of the programme aims to support up to 10,000 older adults per year.

Jackie Maguire, CEO of Meath County Council, and host of Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service says the scheme promises "person-centric services customised for each individual older person".



### A NEW GALWAY

Reimagining the Irish City and Town, a joint initiative of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, the Academy of Urbanism and Galway City Council, took place in Galway in late April. It examined sustainable solutions to challenges facing Irish cities and towns.

A visiting German architect described Galway city as like "a mouth full of broken teeth", while singer Steve Wall, who used to love Galway, says it's now "a carpark".

We await proposed solutions in the post-conference report.

### CLARE HOMES

Notwithstanding valid planning objections or delays, Clare County Council hopes to exceed its housing target and see 302 social housing units built over the next two years. It recently signed contracts for the design and construction of 92 housing units across six direct build social housing schemes in the county. Five other schemes are at design stage, potentially providing 89 more housing units.

Approved housing bodies are also working with the Council to deliver projects that promise a further 125 units.

### 42 LOCAL AUTHORITIES EMBRACE FLOWER POWER

All 42 councils and local authorities on the island of Ireland have now formally signed up to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

In doing so, councils voluntarily agree to consider the plan's recommendations when developing their policies, plans and management decisions. They also commit to taking action and to filing reports to help formulate the annual All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Plan co-founder, Dr Una Fitzpatrick, said: "Pollinating insects are in decline on our island, but since the Pollinator Plan began, we have gained the support of many governmental and non-governmental partners and have seen increases in local (bee) populations where actions have been taken to help them."

