

Bumper Edition

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CHANGING IRELAND

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MUTE ADVOCATES

• Some groups
funded on condition
of not speaking out



CROKER INTEGRATION

• Friends made fast at
"crucial" meeting



RECYCLING INSTRUMENTS

• Six examples of the
circular economy.



PHIL & THE UKRAINIAN CHOIR

• Fresh run at Coulter
classic cheers country



PEOPLE AT THE PLOUGHING:

Development workers,
Community leaders,
Ukrainian singers,
Civil servants,
Volunteers

• Pages 12-16

CITY & COUNTY COUNCIL NEWS

• Back page & inside

**"People in communities
are the heroes, we are
just a bridge"**

**Anna Shakespeare talks about
Pobal's 30 years providing a service
to communities and government**

INTERVIEW · PAGES 6-7

ISSN 1649-5985



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FIRST HOUSES IN DECADES IN DELMEGE, MOYROSS

- Long wait by families ends as politicians share cutting of the tape



• Deirdre O'Driscoll, Moyross Partners, new residents Jane McCarthy and John Mitchell, and Tracy McElligott, estate management development worker with Moyross Residents Forum. Jane said they were eight years on the waiting list. They moved into the Fr Peter McVerry housing in Delmege Park three weeks before the official opening held on July 10.

Photos by A. Meagher.



• The 14 new modular homes in Delmege Park, Moyross.



• Resident Jane McCarthy watches as Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien prepares to cut the tape with the help of Gerald Mitchell, Mayor of Limerick, Francis Doherty, CEO, Peter McVerry Trust; TDs - Maurice Quinlivan (SF), Willie O'Dea (FF), Kieran O'Donnell (FG); Cllr Sharon Benson (SF); and others.

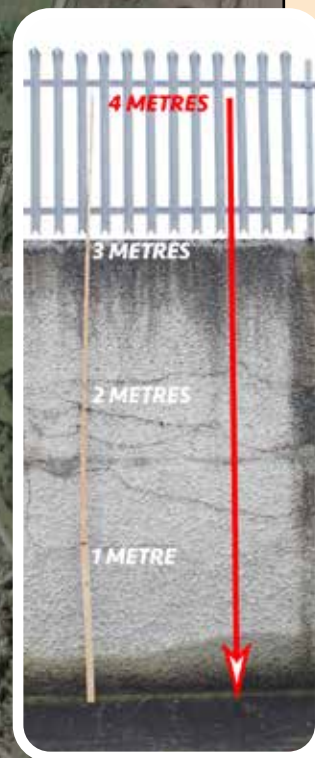
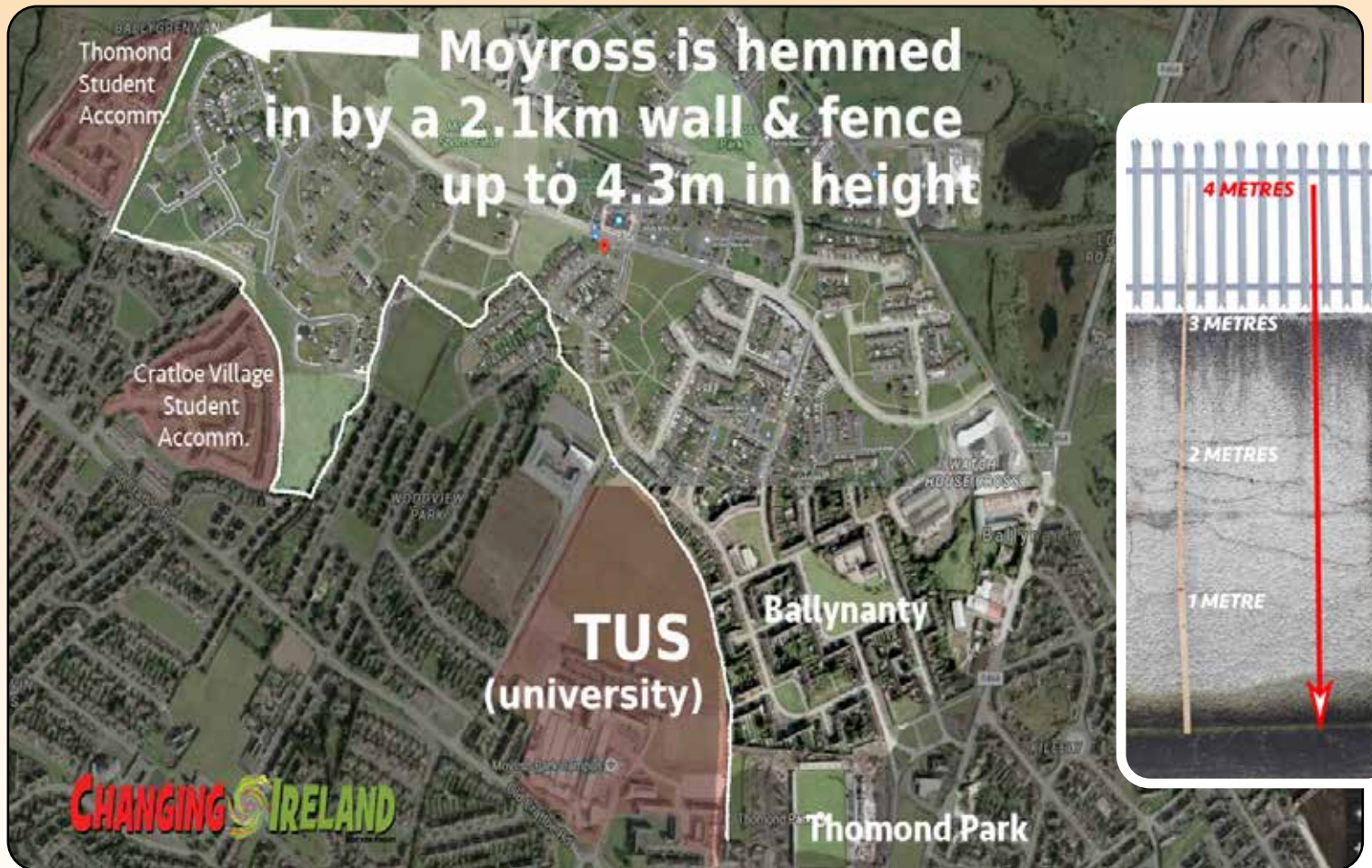


**Meeow...
Don't miss
out!**

**Tell a friend
to subscribe
today!**

(Email: editor@changingireland.ie)

• Thanks to reader Ruth Hunter for this photo of her cat reading the summer edition!



CLASS APARTHEID

• Community leaders in Moyross accused local councillors in late September of supporting class "apartheid" by opposing plans to open a road from Moyross through Caherdavin, connecting with the nearby university (TUS). For more, see: changingireland.ie



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 5 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

Listen to others! What plans have we for World Toilet Day?



The advice from Pobal CEO Anna Shakespeare for anyone starting off in community development is: "Be yourself. Listen."

Her organisation distributes millions of euro in funding to community groups on behalf of government and this year Pobal is celebrating 30 years on the go.

Anna's words of advice came to mind while chatting to a community worker in Wexford recently who said of her team's integration work: "We know our communities and what every community wants is a sense of peace."

The search for peace is also the reason Ukrainians leave their homeland, she added.

She and her team - funded through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) - have frequent conversations with people in communities hosting refugees (pages 18-19). They are never dismissive of people's concerns. They listen. They have an ear to the ground and, like the vast majority of places, have had no trouble to date from the far right. (Of note, a new report written by Helen Lowry looking at places where there have been protests gives advice and tips - see page 26).

The value of community development work with vulnerable target groups was highlighted at the recent launch of the 2022 SICAP annual report. The programme's 600 workers around the country frequently exceed their targets and, thankfully, Budget 2024

includes a measure to increase funding for under SICAP.

However, in future, more should be done to support Travellers under SICAP. The annual report showed the level of progress for Travellers remained unchanged from 2021 to 2022, despite challenges becoming more acute, especially around housing.

* * * * *

I recently heard of the term "hygiene poverty". On reflection, I had experienced it briefly as a student. Hygiene poverty is when you have to choose between food and hygiene products such as shampoo, soap or toilet paper. But, go a step further. What would you do without access to a toilet? Two recent visitors to our office clearly portray in this

edition (page 27) the pain felt by those who are homeless, and also those without access to toilet facilities - a topic we don't often hear about in Ireland.

We should be grateful to all who advocate loudly on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society. Can you imagine getting up in the middle of the night with nowhere to go?

World Toilet Day takes place on November 19th and is taken seriously in many countries. In Ireland, most people think it's a joke. However, it is past time to start marking this United Nations day annually in Ireland.

Allen Meagher

FILE A REPORT FOR US!

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



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Front Cover: Main photo - Anna Shakespeare, CEO, Pobal - by A. Meagher. Thanks to Tony Grehan for the photo of a mute swan pictured at Lough Gur.



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.

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Networking in the mud



• Laura Mannion, communications manager, and Margaret Larkin, head of operations, Donegal Local Development, at the Ploughing.



• Carol Baumann at the Ploughing with her Rural Social Scheme banner.



• Ploughing People: Sabina Trench, CEO, South West Mayo Development; Minister of State, Pippa Hackett; Martina Earley, CEO Roscommon LEADER Partnership (and ILDN chair) and Jim Finn (former chair).

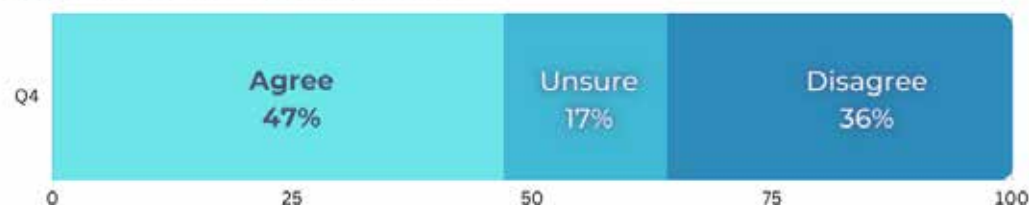
READERSHIP SURVEY

- The Changing Ireland Readership Survey was carried out last year using Survey Monkey.
- Over 700 people were contacted by email and provided with the survey link.
- The survey had a 17% response rate.
- All survey entries were given anonymously and the results were independently collated.

3. Changing Ireland is a good source of ideas and new ways of approaching things.



4. I made contact with someone about a work matter because of an article I read in Changing Ireland.



ANONYMOUS READER SURVEY 2022

AGENCY DISTRIBUTED €901M IN GOVERNMENT FUNDS IN 2022 TO THOUSANDS OF COMMUNITIES

"People in communities are the heroes, we're just a bridge"

- Anna Shakespeare, CEO, on Pobal's 30th anniversary

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Pobal is celebrating 30 years in operation this year. It has expanded rapidly and now has over 700 staff in 12 office locations around the country. In 2022, it distributed €901m on behalf of government departments to thousands of community groups.

It's CEO, Anna Shakespeare, is clear, however, that the agency's 30th anniversary celebrations are not about Pobal as such, but about the communities they serve.

Anna can empathise with managers, workers and volunteers in community groups because she's been there. Before becoming CEO of Pobal, in 2019, she worked for 35 years in disability social care services, the last five of which were with St. Michael's House, a community-based organisation delivering services and supports to people with an intellectual disability. She is also a qualified nurse.

"In celebrating Pobal's 30th anniversary, we have focused on the work on the ground by people delivering SICAP, engaging in community development, delivering early learning and care services, creating spaces in the community, creating interventions and activities in the community.

"Our role is in supporting that. The people on the ground are the ones who deliver. They're the real heroes. From the outset, I was clear it wasn't about Pobal, it's about the tens of thousands of providers - local community groups who do the work.

"Pobal is simply a bridge to the funding out there on behalf of



• Anna Shakespeare in Galway.

government. That's why 'Enhancing Social Inclusion in 2023' is our theme for this year," said Anna.

Asked what she has most enjoyed so far this year, she said, "It's the energy that you feel from the community and voluntary organisations, that genuine feeling you get of a vibrant sector."

Pobal's slogan "Supporting government and communities" also neatly sums up what it does. As Anna said, it is engaged in supporting government and other agencies in the implementation, administration, management, evaluation and data and analytics of 41 programmes, on behalf of seven government departments and the Special EU Programmes Body, and the Probation Service.

"In celebrating Pobal's 30th anniversary... it's about the tens of thousands of providers who do the work"

EXEMPTION FROM EU RULES

As Anna explained in a recent Carmichael podcast (worth a listen) Pobal is not involved in policy: "That's not our role. What we do is we use the data we capture to inform government policy development, to demonstrate to them what's working, what's not."

Pobal, originally called Area Development Management, has what is called a Teckal exemption which means it is exempt from the usual EU procurement rules.

"It's transposed into Article 12 of the EU directive. If the government wants to use us, they don't have to procure us.

"We're not set up for financial

gain. All we need to do is wash our face, cover our costs and where we can, from our management fee only, put some money in our reserves," she said.

NOT ALL DELIGHT AND JOY

Pobal was originally set up to act as an intermediary for the EU to provide certainty about how funding to the Irish government was spent. Corruption across the EU is an issue and keeping an eye on money trails is critically important. Pobal has an excellent reputation in this regard, but it can wear people out at grassroots level.

In a speech that morning, Minister of State Joe O'Brien opened by looking back on his years in the community sector, when he worked in organisations "where, when the word Pobal was mentioned, it's not that everyone exactly reacted with delight and joy".

Nonetheless, the minister had travelled from Dublin to Galway that day with the sole purpose of thanking Pobal and paying tribute, because, as he said, "They're really one of the most important organisations the government co-operates with when we're trying to tackle social exclusion."

"The work of Pobal often goes unsung and it's sometimes misunderstood as well. Pobal helps government and society to achieve what we want to achieve in terms

Early riser Anna advises: "Be yourself. Listen."

Anna and her husband live outside Drogheda in County Louth and they have four grown-up children and two grand-children.

She is involved in her community, including volunteering to support people living in Direct Provision. She fears for many of them if they are made to return to their home countries. "Their stories would break your heart," she says.

Her favourite meal is Irish stew "with loads of potatoes and fresh herbs" and she enjoys the outdoors: "I love to swim. I camp. I cycle. I love walking. I walk my dog every morning. If I can,

I get up at half-past five - I have a head-torch and a day-glo jacket - and I meet a friend down at the church and we do a 6k down to the beach and back," she said.

Asked to name one of her heroes, from past or present, she doesn't hesitate: "Cicily Saunders - she's the unsung hero of the hospice movement."

What other country impresses her when it comes to community development?

"I was in Trento in Italy at the Centre for Local Development and I was so impressed. We were

driven in a bus around a rift valley where there used to be a massive chemical plant for Pirelli tyres. They transformed it into intensive agronomy (grapes, apples, wine), sympathetic architecture in the locality and a booming economy. It blew my mind," she said.

She is currently reading 'Poor' by Katriona O'Sullivan - "astounding" she said, and she looks forward to meeting the author soon.

She "loves" her job, and if she had one line of advice for someone starting off in community development, it would be: "Be yourself. Listen."

(Cont'd from previous page)

of social inclusion and I've seen first-hand the impact of the numerous programmes that Pobal has helped to design, implement and oversee over the past 30 years," said the minister.

Anna said afterwards: "If you're going to pull down a lot of money, there has to be an audit trail. It's not popular, what can I say, but it's necessary."

"We want to simplify the application, audit and reporting requirements," she added.



• Minister Joe O'Brien speaking in Galway recently as Anna Shakespeare looks on during one of Pobal's 30th Anniversary events.

NATIONAL FUNDING PLATFORM

On the grand scale, she hopes to one day see Ireland have a one-stop-shop for funding whereby groups would only have to input their core data once.

"It would be a single place on gov. ie. You would apply online, put your governance information in once, and then whenever you log in, up pop the grants you are eligible for and the live grants you have. You input any new data and an engine at the back would pull the data out and provide it to the people looking for reports in particular formats.

"It's more than an ambition at this stage. With the Department of Rural and Community Development we've met with other government departments and the concept is developing traction. It was discussed at PAC," she said.

However, a national funding platform won't happen quickly. She said that it will require government and organisations to agree on definitions. For example, what's a NEET? (the term to describe a young person who is "Not in Education, Employment, or Training). What's a young person? Is the age bracket for a NEET 15-24, or 15-25. What's a liquidity ratio? And so on.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Anna believes that community development has become more visible in recent years.

"Because of our experience of Covid-19 we have a better societal



• Panellists at Pobal's 30th Anniversary event held on September 6, in Galway, with Anna Shakespeare, CEO, Pobal (left) - Kensika Monshengwo from the Immigrant Council of Ireland; Dr Rita Melia, a lecturer in early childhood education and care; and Martin Ward, co-ordinator of Galway Traveller Movement. Photos by A. Meagher.

understanding of what community development looks like – it's centrality, its importance, the fact that it is the community being empowered to work together and pull together," she said.

She would like to see all the recommendations in the Catherine Day report (worth a google) implemented.

Much community development work in Ireland is carried out with support from the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). The programme continually exceeds its targets and proved critical in supporting communities through Covid and the arrival of refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere. It supports 13 socially excluded target groups and communities. With needs growing, I asked why SICAP's budget has not been doubled or tripled.

"It's €241m over six years. That's not small, it's huge money, and it's partly European funded," she said.

Low salaries in the Community and Voluntary Sector is an issue that goes beyond the level of pay, says Anna: "It's a social inclusion issue, a gendered issue, an equality issue, as well as a retention and recruitment issue. In the Early Years Sector, 98% of the staff are women and they're supporting the families of Ireland and earning the least amount of money. In fairness to the Department of Children, they do recognise that and the government is taking action."

Not all countries have a government department for community development.

"I absolutely think it's important to have a dedicated department for community development," said Anna.

She paid tribute to the Department of Rural and Community Development. It deserves credit, for instance, for advancing "really strong policies", including re-imagining social enterprise policy.

While collaboration is one of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Anna acknowledges that people are not resourced enough or given enough time to collaborate. However, networking and collaboration help nurture good relations: "If you have a solid, trusted, credible relationship with the people, providers and organisations - and remind yourselves of the things you have in common rather than the things you're unhappy with each other about - you're more likely to be successful together," she said.

NEW EARLY YEARS AGENCY

A new agency for supporting Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare is promised by government.

Anna says it is as yet unclear what the new agency will look like, but Pobal will support it, regardless of the challenges it might bring for Pobal.

"The Department of Children commissioned a report, published two years ago which sets out the options for the future. There's a programme board now in place and it is commissioning research to see what the functions of a new agency would be. The agency will be established under statute.

"It has the potential to create challenges for Pobal, but we are not a barrier to its creation. Its purpose

will be to rationalise and streamline the system which is fractured. But it is as yet unclear how all the functions currently delivered through independent companies, such as city and county childcare committees, national childcare organisations and Pobal will be brought together within this new agency."

FEEDBACK TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Pobal strives to respond positively to feedback on improving its bureaucracy. I gave an example involving a complaint by a community group over an arduous, online, funding application process, narrow deadlines and the burden the digital element places on volunteers.

Anna replied at length, saying Pobal takes feedback seriously and she sought more information to be able to address the issue raised.

"We are always trying to improve," she said. Where helpful, Pobal staff will meet voluntary chairs and project managers to learn how to improve the service.

NOV. 2ND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Pobal is celebrating its 30th anniversary by highlighting progress made in the last three decades towards social inclusion, equality and community development. It held regional events in Monaghan, Galway and Cork in the lead up to its national conference scheduled for November 2, in Dublin.

The agency is also planning a separate event to bring its 700-plus staff together for the first time.

"We never normally get together. We will for this unique occasion. Katriona O'Sullivan will be one of the speakers," said Anna.

If Irish stew is on the menu, don't be surprised!

"It's not popular, what can I say, but it's necessary"
- Anna on Pobal's bureaucracy

€431m for Rural and Community Development will benefit all

The overall budget for 2024 for the Department of Rural and Community Development is €431m, up 0.5% on the 2023 allocation. €225m will be invested in Community Development and over €205m is committed under Our Rural Future.

Minister Heather Humphreys said the budget will “help build strong, vibrant, sustainable communities and to further develop rural Ireland”.

It will “ensure communities across the country can benefit from a range of supports, including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, LEADER, and the Community Centre Investment Fund, all of which are making a hugely positive difference in our towns and villages,” she added.

Minister of State Joe O’Brien said, “Budget 2024 demonstrates the Government’s continued commitment to supporting social inclusion, community development, and the community and voluntary sector.”

He pointed to a €4.5m increase for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and to continued funding to support Ireland’s response to the war on Ukraine.



• Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Joe O’Brien jointly announced the budget package.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Department’s Community Development funding includes:

- €21m in funding for the Community Centres Investment Fund, providing funding for the upgrade of existing centres and to support new centres where they are needed, in both rural and urban areas.
- Combined funding of over €110m for SICAP and the Community Services Programme, including €10m of supports under SICAP for new arrivals from Ukraine.
- Increased supports in community development areas, including an additional €1.5m for Social Innovation Supports (up from €1m to €2.5m), an additional €1m for

Local Community Development Committees (up from €2m to €3m), €0.5m to promote responsible dog ownership, and an additional €0.4m to support Water Safety Ireland (increasing from €1.4m to €1.8m).

OUR RURAL FUTURE

Budget 2024 will allow for continued implementation of Our Rural Future through:

- Significant capital investment in rural areas through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (€60m), the LEADER programme (€44m), the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (€19m), CLÁR (€8.7m), the Local Improvement Scheme (€13m), and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (€16m).
- Ongoing support for the walks scheme; an extra €2m to support Tidy Towns and agriculture shows, and an extra €0.5m to promote remote working through the connected hubs initiative.
- Funding for transport services and maintenance and upgrade of essential island infrastructure will increase from €14.2m to €15m.

- Allen Meagher

Civil society responses to Budget 2024

The following is a selection of the many responses from civil society to the overall budget for 2024. While a commitment to social inclusion was recognised, there was criticism over low pay rates in the community and voluntary sector and disappointment that barriers to disability were not lifted and that child poverty will persist.

The Wheel said the budget did not address the “pay disparity” and “staffing crisis facing Section 39/56/10 organisations”.

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network welcomed a reduction in childcare costs, an expansion of the School Meals Programme, and new funding to develop a payment for children in Direct Provision. It called out continuing “disability poverty”, said interventions for low-income families were “insufficient”, and said that not enough funding was allocated to prevent homelessness. It said the budget might dent but would not end child poverty.

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) said it was “pleased that social inclusion has been made a cross-cutting theme of

Budget 2024”.

“These measures affirm the importance - across a broad range of policy areas - of our Local Development Companies who will play a vital role in ensuring that these investments produce positive, lasting impacts for communities around the country,” it said.

“We acknowledge the support of Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister Joe O’Brien and their team in the Department of Rural and Community Development and



• Supporters of Clare Leader Forum marching in Ennis earlier this year.

Department of Social Protection for their commitment to communities in this budget, and although there is still some way to go to achieve a fairer and more inclusive Ireland, we commend the Departments for their increases in investment across key pillars such as social inclusion and integration,” it added.

Jackie Landers, chairperson of the Family Resource Centre National Forum, expressed “disappointment on behalf of our members and their communities that no allocation was announced for Family Resource Centres in Budget 2024”. The network called on the Government to resolve this.

Family Carers Ireland welcomed the extension of supports to more people (for example a single person can now earn €450 per week and still qualify) as a first step in overhauling an “outdated” scheme.

Clare Leader Forum, a disability activist group, expressed profound disappointment with what it saw as a failure in Budget 2024 to tackle barriers facing disabled people in accessing employment and services. “There’s no systemic response. It’s insulting,” it said.

COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT

The Rural Social Scheme will see an increase in funding from €51.2m (2023) to €51.4m (2024). There will be decreases elsewhere with the spend on the Community Employment Programme falling from €366.6m (2023) to €345.1m (2024). The budget for two related programmes also drops: TÚS goes from €102.6m (2023) to €89.2m (2024); Job Initiative goes from €11.5m (2023) to €10.9m (2024).

ENTERPRISE ALLOWANCE

Possibly reflecting the fact that the economy is at full capacity, the budget for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance will decrease from €34.7m (2023) to €32.4m (2024) and the budget for the Back to Education Allowance will decrease from €49.1m (2023) to €35.2m (2024).

HUMAN RIGHTS

€13.55m is being allocated to support equality. It includes funding for women’s organisations, Traveller and Roma organisations, and LGBTI+ organisations. Separately, the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission will receive €8.7m (up 6.1% on its 2024 allocation).

WOMEN'S EQUALITY

The Women’s Collective Ireland welcomed social welfare increases and a 25% cut in childcare costs. It also welcomed funding to tackle violence against women, including the development of a new domestic, sexual and gender-based violence agency.

YOUTH

€77.9m has been allocated to current expenditure on youth services, an increase of 6.8% on 2023.

BIG SPENDS

ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION

Capital spending in 2024 is as follows under these headings:

- Energy Transformation: €425.2m
- Connectivity and Communications Delivery: €378.8m
- Climate Action and Environment Leadership: €91.2m
- Circular Economy Development: €54.6m

LOCAL AUTHORITIES / VOLUNTEERING

CLARA CLARK'S WHEELS OF CHANGE

Trishaws are giving once active folk the chance to feel the wind in their hair again

BY KATHY MASTERSON

The motto of the Cycling Without Age Ireland initiative, launched in 2017, is 'The Right to Wind in Your Hair'. Founder and trishaw pilot Clara Clark, from Blackrock in Co Dublin, says the project reaps significant benefits for people's mental wellbeing.

Clara first heard of the Cycling Without Age initiative through an Irish Times article in 2016. A year later she was pedalling people around in a trishaw - a bicycle with a sidecar.

She told Changing Ireland: "The idea was to take people who can't walk or cycle for themselves for free, slow, cycling spins, piloted by volunteers. There's a lot of people in care homes, and all kinds of places, who don't get outdoors. They're not getting out in the fresh air, and seeing things, feeling that sensation - the wind in your hair.

"I Googled it and I spoke to the founder, Ole Kassow; he set it up in Copenhagen in 2012," she said.

It is not a local transport initiative.

"They're not going to the bank or the shops. They're just sitting on a trishaw, having this experience of cycling. Many older people will have been cyclists in their youth. Suddenly they're back on a bike and they're moving, they're seeing things, and it's the most freedom-giving sensation for people who physically aren't able to do that for themselves. When I saw it, I said 'I want that in Ireland'."

After Clara and her husband Charles Mullan purchased their first trishaw, Clara decided to launch the first Irish Cycling Without Age initiative in the People's Park in Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin in 2017. The event caught the attention of radio stations and media outlets, and Clara suddenly found herself in the spotlight.

"The phone and the email started hopping with people asking: 'Where do I get one? How does it all work?' And I suddenly had a job. I'm not paid for it, but I run it like a business."

The first 35 trishaws were located in care homes, which so far had been the pattern in most of the 50 countries where Cycling Without Age operated.

A second model, featuring community or local authority-run trishaw schemes, developed here after Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council



• Clara Clark, Cycling Without Age Irish founder and pilot with passengers Charles Mollan (left) and John O'Keeffe taking a spin in their local park in Blackrock Co. Dublin.
Photo by Moya Nolan.

The vehicles don't come cheap. A trishaw costs between €11,000 and €12,000 (including a spare battery).

approached Clara in 2020 seeking a trishaw for their new coastal mobility route. This led to the establishment of The Bike Hub in Dun Laoghaire, a separate social enterprise subsidised by the Local Sports Partnership.

Clara continued: "So suddenly we had a whole other model out of the nursing homes. And then other local authorities started popping up and started to order trishaws.

"The other thing we discovered with The Bike Hub is that it's not just for older people. It's for kids with autism, kids with Down Syndrome, blind people, young people with intellectual disabilities. So we now say they are for all ages and abilities."

From that first trishaw in 2017, the initiative has grown to 63 trishaws and counting.

Cycling Without Age Ireland trishaws are now available in counties

Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare Wexford, Waterford, Sligo, Leitrim, Clare, Louth, Kerry, Cork, Westmeath, Kilkenny, and Galway.

The vehicles don't come cheap. A trishaw costs between €11,000 and €12,000 (including a spare battery).

Clara is still at the helm, managing the website, marketing, pilot training and more, all on a voluntary basis. She charges a fee to carry out pilot training, just to cover her costs.

Meanwhile, The Bike Hub has created an online booking system for the trishaws, which they can sell to local authorities or other organisations. They then charge a fee for managing it.

Clara advises any care homes, local authorities or community organisations who may be interested in setting up a Cycling Without Age scheme to contact her directly.

"I can tell them which trishaw to

get, where to get it, what they need like an extra battery and a blanket, where and how it needs to be stored and insured. And I can come and do the pilot training there."

She says the feedback from passengers has been "amazing".

"At a Dublin community hospital I talked to a couple of ladies who had

"They can't believe it's free. We're adding value to their lives, basically. We're adding a bit of fun and craic."

been out (on a trishaw), both in their 80s, both in wheelchairs. 'Freedom, we get out of here!' one of them said, and that's the response that we get all the time.

"Passengers are just blown away, and they can't believe it's free. We're adding value to their lives, basically. We're adding a bit of fun and craic to their lives.

"I've been doing this for six years, and that's what gives me a buzz every single time. And I know from talking to the pilots that they get as much from it as they give.

"One thing I have noticed is that when you take out people with dementia, they start to notice things. They start to connect and ask questions in a way that they don't when they're sitting in a chair. They even start to speak, they start to smile, they start to relax," revealed Clara.

Cycling Without Age Ireland has won a number of awards, including a Dun Laoghaire Local Sports Partnership Award, a Digital Towns Local Digital Hero award, a Nursing Homes Ireland volunteer award, and a Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Academy award.

To find out more about Cycling Without Age Ireland, see: cyclingwithoutage.ie

SOCIAL PRESCRIBERS

*We go to the doctor for a **medical prescription**, but sometimes its a **social prescription** we need*

BY KATHY MASTERSON

A recent survey by Axa revealed that loneliness was a major challenge for many Irish people, with 60% of men and 67% of women saying they had felt lonely during the previous four weeks.

Google 'the effects of loneliness on health', and a list of scholarly articles appears featuring some alarming statistics, with one piece of research even stating that it increases the risk of early death.

Loneliness has also been linked to a higher risk of dementia, mental health conditions, and even cardiovascular disease and stroke.

It's no surprise then that public health workers in Ireland have begun taking it seriously in the last five years. There are now HSE-funded social prescribing services available in 30 locations nationwide, where GPs and other health professionals can refer patients who are struggling with social isolation.

Pauline Mangan is a social prescriber and community development worker with Empower Local Development in Dublin 15.

She told *Changing Ireland*: "The idea is that it's a kind of social prescription. So it's for people that may go to the GP for various reasons. And really what they need is less a medical intervention, but more a social intervention. A lot of the time people go to GPs for loneliness, for mental health issues and stuff like that, or because they're isolated or whatnot, and obviously that contributes to their health and wellbeing."

A GP asks what's the matter, whereas a social prescriber asks: 'What matters to you?'

"A GP can refer someone to a social prescriber in their local area, and the social prescriber would work with them and develop a health and wellbeing plan, looking at what matters to them. The wording they use in the HSE is: 'You go to your GP to see what's the matter with you, whereas a social prescriber asks: What matters to you, what's important to you, and what has happened that's brought you to us?'"

"We develop a health and wellbeing plan, look at what their needs are, what their priorities are, what goals they may have. From that we will develop some actions based on what their interest is in, what's available locally, and we would support them to engage in different activities and groups and courses. It really is as simple as that, but it's done at the individual's pace."

"The support is really as much or as little as the individual might need. Some clients have very little confidence or have been socially isolated



• Miriam Hudson, HSE Health Promotion, with Pauline Mangan, Babs Leonard and Barbara Doyle, all social prescribers with Empower Local Development.

for quite some time, so they may need a little bit of handholding. You may go along with them to a group. Others just need a bit of signposting and they're perfectly able to go off and sort things out for themselves."

Many of Pauline's clients are recovering from mental health issues, or became isolated because English is not their first language.

"The reason that people tend to get referred to us will be loneliness and social isolation, depression, bereavement, recovering from addiction, physical inactivity. After Covid-19, particularly for older people, it was a struggle getting the confidence

to go back out again and engage. People with intellectual disabilities often find they're quite isolated once they finish the State schooling and the support that they've had. People who are unemployed, people who have long term illnesses."

She continued: "A lot of the time it's around finding a local group that they can get involved in, or an activity such as arts and crafts. A lot of people like to do an activity as a way of getting in there first because they don't feel under pressure to talk in a group."

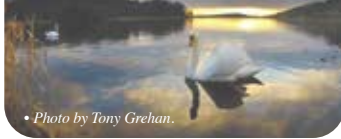
"It's really looking at what the local community centres are offering, what adult education are offering, local activities and courses, women's groups, volunteering, parent and toddler groups - anything that people really feel they need. English language classes, even walking groups."

"Other times people need a lot of help navigating the State services. Whether it's to do with housing, benefits, sometimes you're supporting them with that kind of stuff first."

The service has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both referrers and service users.

Pauline revealed: "I did a case study last year with one of my clients who had done quite well. She said she felt she got her own voice back, she'd started to see that she is 'worth something again'. And she said: 'I'd probably be circling around my own apartment. I wouldn't know where to go, what door to knock on, that (social prescribing) gave me opportunities that I didn't know existed'."

We look at what the local community centres are offering, what adult ed are offering, local activities and courses, women's groups, volunteering, parent and toddler groups - anything people need.



Survey reveals "restrictions" by some funders on advocacy by community-based groups

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A survey will be published in November by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) highlighting how contractual clauses restrict certain groups within the community and voluntary sector from advocacy and speaking out on behalf of their communities.

The preliminary findings have been released to *Changing Ireland* and indicate a problem that persists since Dr Cliona Saidléar, executive director of Rape Crisis Network Ireland, wrote about it in these pages in 2015.* She was concerned by the increasing use of restrictive clauses in funding contracts and its implications for work speaking out on behalf of rape victims. We spoke to a minister at the time about Cliona's concerns.

The ICCL's survey, carried out over the summer, received input from 295 people, over a third of whom said they were working or volunteering with organisations that restricted their advocacy work out of fear of upsetting a funder. Some said it was explicitly written into their funding contracts.

Lead researcher Ronan Kennedy points out that some clauses are legitimate:

"If an organisation is in receipt of state funding to provide services – such as beds for homeless people – there's nothing wrong with those contracts saying, 'These specific funds are only to be used for the provision of these services'. That's perfectly legitimate.

"But it shouldn't go beyond that. The receipt of state funding can't be used as a brake on an organisation's wider advocacy work," he said.

He said that the survey is not an academic study. The geographic spread is uneven (eg 38% from Leinster, 6% from Munster). Over a third of respondents work in community-based health related work. Half the respondents operate at a national level.

Nonetheless, it is the first time a survey of this kind has been carried out and it highlights an issue. Ronan said, "People have known about this for years, it's been whispered about, people know it's a big issue."

While he was pleased with the number of survey responses and said the findings were consistent across all sub-categories (geography, type of organisation, etc) Ronan was reluctant, at this point, to name the bodies people complained most about. The full details will appear in November.



* A protest in Dublin by grassroots organisations against violence against women - from *Changing Ireland's* archive.

"Don't rock the boat"... "Choose between advocacy or service delivery"... "Do (not) upset or challenge authority"

Certain rights guaranteed

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) was established in 1976 by Mary Robinson and others. It has been active since then in monitoring and defending the rights to freedom of expression and association of community, voluntary and non-governmental organisations. It does not receive any state funding.

As the ICCL point out, freedom of expression and freedom of association are guaranteed under the Irish Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"As party to these treaties, the State is obligated not only to protect but also to foster and cultivate a free and open civic space," it says.

"We will publish an annex with absolutely everything we found in November," said Ronan.

For the record, he did say that Pobal barely features and there was not a single complaint about the Department of Rural and Community Development.

We look forward to hearing which bodies may have questions to answer on how they could better support advocacy work.

In the meantime, quotes (see left) that the ICCL received anonymously

from its survey respondents reveal the level of interference in advocacy work. Do any of these statements echo your experience? Or has your organisation free rein to advocate on behalf of your community? We would like to hear from you. Contact the editor in confidence – see page 4.

* <https://www.changingireland.ie/independence-of-ngo-sector-is-at-stake/>

“ At one point it was stated by a public servant in a meeting that the organisation was to choose between advocacy or service delivery. That the organisation couldn't do both.”

“ Member organisations of our networks, without having been directly threatened, are reluctant to be seen to take positions that would be at odds with [Government Department]”.

“ Any direct and indirect funding has the non-political unwritten rule (and) we have to get creative about how we deliver what we wish to do, and we have withdrawn from funding or not applied due to conditionality.”

“ Funding from [State Agency] was withdrawn following a review by [State Agency] that we were not part... We had been extremely vocal about a range of issues and critical of government policy and have always felt that it was a targeted withdrawal. We lost one staff member and a project that had been embedded in the community.”

“ We have been in the room when a senior civil servant said it was not our role to criticise government policy.”

“ There is a cultural tendency in most organisations to do nothing that is likely to upset or challenge authority, such that if you stand out and voice concerns or take a differing perspective you can be silenced, sidelined or ignored.

“ There is no obvious threat but there is an implicit culture of compliance with government departmental objectives that effectively ensure that the more critically-minded are kept out of the picture.”

“ It has often been alluded to, to not rock the boat, or (that) it's not the role of our organisation to bring certain issues to light.”

“ At local level with local authorities... our Service Level Agreement is always referred to and the restrictions within it are often exaggerated. If there's a tender for a new service coming up, we'll avoid media work as it will impact our chances of success.”

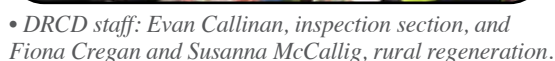
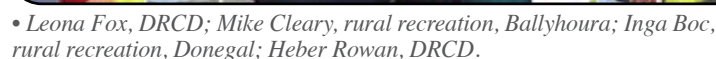
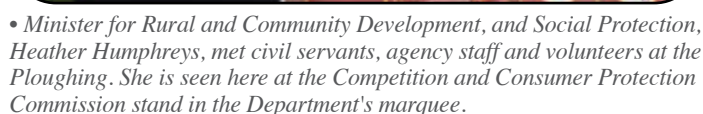
Supporting Communities

- The Department of Rural and Community Development

at the Ploughing

The Department of Rural and Community Development, being more tuned into outdoor life, had

Roll on Ploughing 2024! - **AM**





• Department staff: Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Asst. Sec. and Head of Community Development and Rosie Smyth who works to support PeacePlus and the Community Services Programme.



• Staff members Ivana Connor and Ed Aylward from Leave No Trace which promotes responsible outdoor recreation.



• The climbing wall outside the Department's marquee was popular.



• Megan Gaffney, Leitrim Animal Welfare; Michelle Casserly, DRCD, and Catherine Burns, DRCD, promoted responsible dog ownership with members of the public - with the help of a fluffy dog called Chippie.

NEW ROSTERS SEEN AS THREAT TO COMMUNITY POLICING

Communities have expressed concern over the possible disbandment of community policing teams due to the introduction from November of a new Garda roster.

In Moyross, Limerick, community workers called a meeting to discuss the threat to community policing - seen as essential to connecting with communities.

In Dublin, local councillors expressed concern that the proposed new Garda roster will have "serious negative implications for policing". They pledged to call for the retention of community policing and drug squads at upcoming Joint Policing Committee meetings.

20+ APPLICANTS FOR €20M COMMUNITY CENTRES FUND

€20 million is being made available for the construction of new community centres.

The Community Centres Investment Fund will provide grants of at least €1 million to 'shovel ready' projects in areas currently lacking such facilities.

Following the July 3 deadline, over 20 submitted applications forms are currently being assessed by the Department of Rural and Community Development and it is expected that successful projects will be announced in the first quarter of next year.

Decisions in relation to any future rounds of the Fund will be taken in the context of the upcoming annual budgetary process.

COUNCILS HIRE INTEGRATION WORKERS

City and county councils have been recruiting integration support workers to form new Local Authority Integration Teams.

The teams will provide integration supports to people here as international protection applicants, programme refugees or as beneficiaries of temporary accommodation, so they can live independently in the community.

The countrywide setting up of these teams follows on from the publication in 2021 of a White Paper to end Direct Provision.

Ploughing



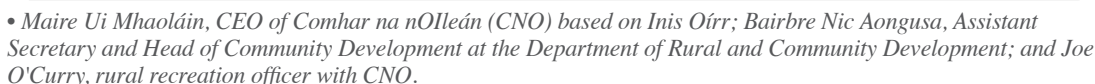
They cover some of the dozens of panel discussions, launches and events in the Irish Local Development Network's marquee.

2. Social farming works: Paid and voluntary models (panel discussion).

4. The importance of wrap around employment services (panel discussion).

6. Agriculture Minister Charlie McConalogue was told of hopes to expand **Safe Tractor Driving Skills courses** nationwide.

• *Westmeath Community Development staff Peter Ormond and Bernie Leavy with Minister of State Peter Burke (centre) at the launch of the Westmeath LEADER Report.*



- *There are 300 people from Ukraine currently living in Kill, Co. Kildare in accommodation that does not allow daylight to penetrate and they visited the Ploughing on the first, rather wet day. Dismissing the rain, this contingent from Kill had nothing but praise for how they have been welcomed to Ireland. They were accompanied by development workers from Kildare LEADER Partnership.*



• *Roisin, Brian and Saorlaith O'Melia from Skerries, Co. Dublin played a few tunes to say thanks from Ceoltas in Balbriggan for a LEADER grant to buy instruments.*



• *Family enterprise in Co. Dublin: Noah Taylor and Alan Taylor show their produce, alongside a proud Hazel Maxwell from Fingal LEADER Partnership.*



• Jim Finn, then chair of the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) and Minister of State Joe O'Brien with staff from the ILDN and local development companies around the country. (Jim has since stepped down after serving his term. The ILDN's new chairperson is Martina Earley, CEO of Roscommon Leader Partnership).



• Charlie McConalogue shakes on a deal with Eamonn O'Reilly from North East West Kerry Development and with John Dalton, Rural Social Scheme participant and co-ordinator of the Safe Tractor Driving Training courses.



• North Tipperary LEADER Partnership staff and supporters with MEP Billy Kelleher at the launch of the organisation's annual report.



• Ciaran Mullooly of Roscommon LEADER Partnership; Michelle Mulally, programme, impact and communications officer with the ILDN; and Jim Finn, ILDN chair. (Jim has since stepped down after serving his term).



• Ciaran Mullooly, Roscommon LEADER Partnership, Minister of State Joe O'Brien; Maura Walsh, CEO, IRD Duhallo; and Arran O'Driscoll, CEO, West Cork Development Partnership.



• Around 30 panel discussions, report launches and presentations took place in the ILDN marquee over the three days - plus live music.



• John Feerick, Sligo LEADER Partnership; Colm Markey, MEP; Shay Riordan, West Limerick Resources; and Allen McAdam, consultant.

Supporting Communities - Local Development Companies and the Irish Local Development Network at the **Ploughing**



• Westmeath Community Development were well represented at the Ploughing - pictured here with Minister of State Peter Burke (centre).



• Philip O'Donnell, the ILDN; Michelle Licciardi, Dublin South City Partnership; and Richard Gavin, Department of Rural and Community Development.



• Rural Social Scheme supervisors David O'Malley (left) and Seán McDonagh (right) with John Feerick, CEO, Sligo LEADER Partnership.



• North Tipperary Development Company CEO Michael Murray, Farmers' Journal editor Jack Kennedy and Jim Finn, chair of the ILDN.



• The ILDN staff team put in three great days at the Ploughing: Michelle Mullally, Connall Greaney, Carol Baumann and Philip O'Donnell.

• Seven members of the Westmeath Choir were at the Ploughing on the first (wettest) day to cheer people with their moving renditions of Ukrainian, international and Irish songs. They were part of the Ukrainian choir of Ireland that recorded Phil Coulter's 'Steal Away'.



Eibhlin Byrne will lead new team to engage with communities before refugees arrive

Former Lord Mayor of Dublin, Eibhlin Byrne (pictured) has taken on a new role to lead a cross-departmental team to engage with communities before the arrival of refugees and people seeking international protection.



"My time as Chairperson of Holocaust Education Trust Ireland has left a deep impression on me, not least (because) of our failure as a nation to be a real sanctuary at one of the worst periods in human history," she said in a statement.

She admitted, as a Kerrywoman with family roots to the same spot going back hundreds of years, she felt "conflicted like many people are" and that she was "very proud of my Irish traditional culture".

"I have accepted the new challenge to take on the role of National Lead on Civic Engagement precisely because I understand at a deeply personal and emotional level how hard it is for all of us to embrace the new while cherishing the old," said the former Fianna Fáil councillor.

"What none of us want or need is for our differences to be hijacked by those with a more sinister agenda.

"I believe passionately in our obligation to assist those fleeing war and persecution," she said.

The team she leads will be have the task of engaging with communities ahead of refugees moving into their areas.

WELCOME

Her appointment was widely welcomed by civil society leaders. Jeanne McDonagh, CEO at The Open Doors Initiative, described Eibhlin as the "perfect person for this onerous but very necessary work".

Dermot Landy, CEO of the Family Resource Centre National Forum, said he was "delighted" to hear she was taking on the role and his network looked forward to engaging with Eibhlin.

Denise Charlton, CEO of Community Foundation Ireland, expressed similar sentiments.

People made friends fast at first national event for community integration

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

"They really undersold this event," said two young Dublin attendees at the National Community Integration Event in Croke Park.

"They should repeat this in the West," said another attendee, from Galway. Meanwhile, a community worker from Limerick, Eimear Quinlivan, felt it was "a good day – worth coming up for". Of course, Limerick people love going to Croke Park.

The attraction on this occasion, a few weeks before the All-Ireland, was to meet with like-minded community groups from around the country that are helping to integrate new arrivals. Understandably, there was a strong Ukrainian representation.

The event showcased the positive work taking place nationwide, while participants discussed the impacts of immigration on mental health, effective integration supports and how to build inclusive communities.

Kseniia Maiboroda, who works as a Ukrainian support worker with Mayo North East, called for more English classes, which would help with integration and with finding employment. Refugees were too often relying on apps to translate. She said it was "good to have an opportunity to speak up about the challenges we are facing".

Fiona Sweeney, a manager with Dublin Volunteer Centre, highlighted the value of volunteering in helping people to integrate into their local community. Volunteering, she said, also helps to improve language skills and much more.

Reuben Hambakachere, who works with Cultúr Migrant Centre, said, "We engage with people from 60 different nationalities and it's really important that they get to experience meaningful participation. We must ask ourselves: 'Did they

really get the support they need?"

"We also need to look at the migrants, not as a problem, but to look at the social capital coming to Ireland and to embrace that, and to be the person to give another person a home away from home," he said.

CROSS-COUNTY

Participants put in a big effort. For example, Olena Korniiets is a member of the Ukrainian Volunteers of Ireland and she wore a beautiful, embroidered dress representing her region for the occasion. She made new friends at the event.

Tetiana Vysotska lives in Roscommon and is involved with the local volunteer centre. "We know other Ukrainians from Roscommon, but it is great to now have connections with Ukrainians in other counties," she said. Her colleague Shannette Budhai, manager of Roscommon Volunteer Centre, was delighted to see the level of networking.

Similarly, Caetana, from Ukraine and now living in the Midlands, said she was "really impressed" by the number of groups she encountered. "We're already thinking of visiting each other," she added.

"CRUCIAL"

The event was organised by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and was opened by Minister of State for Community Development, Integration and Charities, Joe O'Brien. He "felt that an event like this was crucial" - to bring people together, to share experiences, to provide an opportunity for networking - and 'to learn from each other what is working and what might need improvement'.

Look at the social capital coming to Ireland. Let's embrace that.
- Reuben Hambakachere



• Aisha Alameen-Betro, north County Dublin, Fionnuala O'Connell, Cork Migrant Centre, Precious Fregene, Dublin, at the event.



• Olena Korniiets at the Ukrainian Volunteers of Ireland in traditional costume.



• Emma Lane Spollen, Reuben Hambakachere, Kseniia Maiboroda and Fiona Sweeney were among the guest speakers.

Photos by A. Meagher.

"What every community wants is a sense of peace. That's why the Ukrainians are here."

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Changing Ireland visited Rosslare in early 2022 when staff and volunteers with Wexford Local Development were racing to respond to the unexpected arrival of refugees from the war in Ukraine.

The team of community workers backed by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme had a handle on things, but the fresh demands on them meant they put in long hours and had to rely on volunteers to do much of the running.

Marie-Louise Byrne, SICAP community development co-ordinator said, "I'd never seen anything the likes of it. The intensity of it was worse than during Covid."

Flabbergasted by the numbers, one long-standing community volunteer said to another, without thinking: "What about our own refugees?"

WLD has made a name for itself as a well-organised and welcoming organisation and, nowadays staff take news of new arrivals in their stride.

"One of our SICAP priorities was people seeking international protection, so we had experience. People are still settling in and there are issues. English is still almost non-existent and those people feel isolated. We've been doing a lot of

"Relating to people's thoughts, fears and concerns, you take the sting out of it." - Marie Louise Byrne, SICAP co-ordinator

work," revealed Marie-Louise.

"It was heavy going at times, but it's grand now. The work is not as intense and we don't micro-manage like we did at the beginning. We let our two Ukrainian support workers get on with it (see interview on opposite page). There's structures set up and activities and we're talking to people the whole time. But there's no crisis anymore."

In terms of integration, WLD are well connected across the county.

"The most important thing we've done is ramp up having conversations with people. We know our communities and what every community wants is a sense of peace. And that's why the Ukrainians wanted to leave their own country – we all want peace. We don't want division.

"We know the movers and shakers in our communities, who has influence. We know how to have healthy conversations. Relating to people's thoughts, fears and concerns, you take a hell of a lot of the sting out of it.

Marie-Louise warns against "falling into the trap of dismissing people, saying they're racist for giving out about refugees". With the rising cost of living, she says it is tempting for people to "fall into having resentment towards refugees, or towards people on the dole – saying they have their medical cards and all that".

"Put yourself in someone's shoes who's never met someone from Syria. They saw bread cost them 69 cents during the pandemic, and for a while there it

was costing €1.09. People get thinking

'I'm not getting

such-and-such because refugees are getting everything'."

She and her team urge people to think more broadly: "This is quite a rich country. The private contractors (providing accommodation) are making a hell of a lot of money out of this, not refugees."

"People sometimes say, 'They're driving big cars'. Well, how do you think they got here? They're fleeing bombs!"

There have been nearly no protests by the far right in County Wexford (one small one went nowhere).

At local level, integration is working well – and there are many quiet counties like Wexford where they're just getting on with it.

Marie-Louise said, for instance, that "a lot of the lads" in Direct Provision in Rosslare are now working for the haulier companies, mostly in the yard. More are working in the local Supervalu.

"It's that power of contacts," she said. She spoke of local team sports that help to introduce people who might otherwise never meet. A soccer match was organised for Rosslare locals V Direct Provision residents, and afterwards the locals were invited back to the DP centre (which used to be the local hotel) for their medals and refreshments. Some locals were reluctant, but once they crossed the threshold all they talked about was soccer and who scored the best goal. This is integration.

Having healthy conversations and connecting with communities helps to dispel far right lies, says Marie-Louise: "As one of my colleagues says, everyone has the right to their own opinion, but nobody has a right to make up their own facts."

Last spring, there was however one issue that was making conversations difficult; her team was not informed about when new arrivals were coming. Communications have improved since the start of summer.

The community work by Wexford's SICAP team, aided by volunteers, was noticed by national broadcasters early on. Staff and supporters have regularly appeared on radio shows, been interviewed by national newspapers and so on. They see it as an integral part of their work

to engage with the media.

Employment is a challenge even for people with good English and that can annoy Marie-Louise.

"It's a shame to see people here who have medical qualifications and they can't even get work in a care home. You see a dentist working in a restaurant and Ireland screaming out for dentists, but we won't recognise their qualifications."

She is hopeful the HSE will resolve this.

In terms of support from the Department of Rural and Community Development, she is pleased overall.

She might have preferred if the €50m Community Recognition Fund was not an open call.

"It's for the key communities who gave the best welcome and you can understand the rationale behind it," she said.

"But in Rosslare nearly 3% of the population are now either Ukrainian or in international protection. And Rosslare Harbour still doesn't have a community centre. Invest in Rosslare.

"Do the same for Courtown/Riverchapel – they have no secondary school or community centre. Invest in these key locations that were lacking in basic infrastructure and investment way before the new arrivals"

Overall, however, she is pleased with the levels of support.

"Minister O'Brien gets it. He talks about SICAP as 600 community workers. He's the only one who's ever got us," she said.



• Ministers Paschal Donohoe and Joe O'Brien recently launched the annual report of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme for 2022, noting that targets were once again exceeded. For more, visit: changingireland.ie

You put your whole heart into the work, says community worker Julia Syrotenko

- Despite dangers, her parents returned to Ukraine, but many cannot

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Having lived and worked in Co. Wexford for 14 years, immigrant Julia Syrotenko was well positioned to help fellow Ukrainians when they began to land here to escape Putin's bombs:

"I worked everywhere when I came here first. I started in a restaurant and for the last five years I ran a B&B. In Ukraine, I was a teacher in a secondary school, teaching maths and physics."

Last summer, she was hired as a community integration support worker by Wexford Local Development - among 60 or so such workers recruited around the country to support Ukrainians.

For a time, her parents joined her in Gorey, but they missed home too much.

"What can I do - you can't tell your parents what to do. Their roots in Ukraine are too deep and too big. They built their own house and the house is still okay, but they have two bags at the front door if it gets bad."

Asked had many people returned, Julia didn't have an idea on numbers. Not many have, it seems.

"If people still have houses in Ukraine they might return, but for people with nothing left, they have no choice - they cannot return," she said.

LONELINESS

Julia's own children grew up here and her son Dima Merzlyi recently graduated in tv and film production from Bray Institute of Further Education.

"You should watch his documentary*," she said. "He interviewed young people from Ukraine and everybody said the same - they feel loneliness. Everyone here is fine and welcoming and Ireland has been so good, but it's hard for teenagers and they are lonely for home. Older people are lonely as well. They don't want to learn English, they say it's too hard, so I'm trying to run events for them to get them out of the hotels. I've got them into knitting and crochet groups and it gets them out, they start walking around the town. They're meeting new people and are even learning some English."

Changing Ireland first came across Julia's work when we heard about her Walk and Talk initiative - it got people out and about and they learned English in a relaxed



• Wexford Local Development's recent event Women In Business highlighted inspirational stories from Ukrainian women who have set up businesses in Ireland, including self-employment supported through the Back To Work Enterprise Allowance scheme. Community worker Julia Syrotenko (centre, blue) was the main organiser.

Photo by Patrick Browne

atmosphere. (The article is on our website and is recommended reading for anyone interested in new ways of engaging people).



THEY EVEN CALL FROM CORK

Julia laughed when I told her I heard she worked all hours.

"Everyone knows I'm 24/7," she said. "Even Irish people ask me questions. All of County Wexford has my number and sometimes I even receive calls from Cork. If I know the answer I always help, but I'm not Santa Claus," she chuckled.

"Loads of things are different here and everybody coming from Ukraine has questions. They don't even know what bin to put the rubbish in. They

don't know how to pay for things."

She is enjoying seeing groups of Ukrainians become empowered and doing things independently for themselves, helping newcomers with the paperwork and the various challenges. She listed the names of various groups. Wexford people have also formed solidarity groups, for example Wexford friends of Ukraine.

"These are Irish volunteers who helped Ukrainians from the first day. They are doing a lot. Just to give one example, every Friday they organise a speaking club. Last Friday were 115 Ukrainians there!"

Working 24/7, was she herself getting the support she needed at work?

"Absolutely," she replied. "I love my work and I love my team, my team is perfect."

"We don't have this kind of work in Ukraine. We have people who work with children from poor families, but not community work."

NO RACISM

She wants everyone to know that Ukrainians are hard-working:

"Ukrainians are not lazy. Loads of people from Ukraine are working here already."

If Ukraine's war refugees have to stay long-term, many will settle.

"But they need to learn more English. That's the number one issue. And, long-term, obviously

accommodation is an issue. People can't keep living in hotels."

She has neither personally experienced nor seen signs of racism here: "I never hear of anything. I hope it's not a problem from the Irish side."

NEW BUSINESSES

On September 22, Wexford Local Development supported an event in Wexford staged by Ukrainians who have set up businesses in Ireland - for example, a design and print company, a beauty salon, a photo studio and a cleaning company.

The event was to encourage other Ukrainians to set up businesses here.

50 people attended and heard how seven compatriots saw opportunities and now employ 13 people.

"It shows that Ukrainian people are not only working, but are opening businesses and employing people," said Julia.

WITH YOUR HEART

What motivates her as a community worker?

"If you give with all your heart, you want to see smiley happy faces back. That's a result and makes me happy," she said.

* You can watch Julia's son Dima Merzlyi's documentary here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2rM95En9uk>

Ukrainians here embrace song about Derry people fleeing the Troubles

- Hyland's idea to join Phil Coulter with Ukrainian choir cheers nation

BY KATHY MASTERSON

Irish music legend Phil Coulter teamed up with a choir of 40 Ukrainian singers in Ireland in August to release a new version of 'Steal Away', his 1983 song about a couple fleeing the Troubles.

Their public performance, held in Saint Stephen's Church, Dublin, won widespread coverage, including on RTÉ, helping to highlight community work to integrate and support Ukrainians in Ireland.

"It was a lovely boost for everyone working in integration," said Michelle Mullaly, who attended the performance.

Speaking before the performance in Dublin, Phil Coulter said the rehearsals and listening to the choir sing 'Steal Away' in Ukrainian "was the most uplifting experience I've had in all my years".

The initiative was the brainchild of Terry Hyland, CEO at Cavan County Local Development, and was put together in collaboration with Phil and Adeline O'Brien, CEO at Empower, the local development company for Fingal; and was centrally co-ordinated by the Irish Local Development Network.

Phil's song was partially translated into Ukrainian and a national Ukrainian choir in Ireland was formed with support from



• RIGHT: Terry Hyland. ABOVE: Phil Coulter with the Ukrainian choir.



local development companies. The collaborative

project brought Ukrainians together from across the country and some of the national choir members have now started their own choirs locally.

Terry spoke to us about the project's origins:

"Local development companies around the country are at the coalface in terms of supporting displaced Ukrainian people including on the health and wellbeing side. One of the things we set up in Cavan through our Fáilte Isteach programme was a choir. The idea

was that people could mix with Irish people, sing and improve their English. Also, mentally it's good to sing, it's good for the soul.

"Then I had Phil Coulter on the radio in the car, it was 'Steal Away'. And I thought, this song has a lot of connotations of what Irish people went through in our recent past in terms of conflict with a bigger, more powerful neighbour and the history of people having to leave Ireland.

'Steal Away' is essentially about people fleeing the Troubles in Northern Ireland. And I thought that it resonates exactly with the plight of Ukrainian people.

"And there's a lot of fatigue out there amongst the Irish population

in terms of the war on Ukraine, this perception that accommodation is being taken up by refugees that could be used to house homeless people. There's a whole right-wing agenda that's out there.

"So I thought that maybe this song could be used in a way that might help to win back the dressing rooms, so to speak, in terms of the Irish people, and get people to think about 'Yeah, we went through this ourselves'. And then see how people can relate to the plight of the Ukrainians coming here, and what their needs are, what they're going through. And it's a good opportunity for Ukrainian people to understand the Irish history as well."

UKRAINIAN SINGERS MORE HOPEFUL AFTER 'STEAL AWAY'

We spoke to two choir singers based in Westmeath who were involved in recording 'Steal Away'. Olena Kuznetsova and Maria Golubieva (pictured here) and five more members of the Westmeath Choir performed at the Ploughing Championship.

Olena said that choir singing "helps us get to know Ireland better" and that, after she sings, she feels "more powerful, more relaxed, more happy."

"Yes and more energised," said Maria. "Choir singing is a wonderful way to connect with our own people. We became really good friends, like sisters. Singing also gives us the possibility to be included in Irish society and we feel the exchange of energy every time we perform for you guys."



"It's very good for our mental health, with the stress we have," continued Maria. "We can relax when singing. My husband is still in Ukraine, it's really hard. We weren't prepared for this war."

Olena said, "Steal Away is a very romantic song. It's about when it was difficult for some couples to be together back then and to just love one another."

Myroslava Herus, a singer who now lives in Co. Kerry, told us: "Singing 'Steal Away' for me is a new opportunity to feel hope in the future and confidence in the future. This song and this project inspired me with new strength and a desire to create and discover new horizons for myself."

(Cont'd from previous page)

Terry was introduced to Phil Coulter through a friend of his, Young Wolfe Tones singer Andreas Durkin.

When Terry put the idea to Phil about a Ukrainian choir recording a new version of his song, luckily he was "hook, line and sinker".

"He thought it was a brilliant idea, a lovely concept to explore. And Phil jumped in with us from day one. He's doing this on his own back, his own time - we're not paying Phil to do this," revealed Terry.

He added: "What's also happening now is that new choir groups are out performing around the country in their local areas as a result of this. So not only have we formed a strong choir, but also we've been able to get new choirs set up in other parts of the country.

"I think they (the Ukrainians) are getting a real kick out of it, it's very special and they feel like they're doing something worthwhile."

The choir's journey and the process of recording the song has also been documented by a film crew. The group hope to launch the documentary in September.

Terry concluded: "There is a fatigue out there. The war continues on, and there are other natural disasters and things happening. So it's just to keep the focus on the war on Ukraine and that we do have 80,000 people in the country here. They're doing their best, and we're doing our best for them as well."

LYRICS STILL POWERFUL

At the launch, Adeline O'Brien, CEO at Empower, local development company for Fingal, said, "The lyrics of the song are just as powerful today as they were in 1983 when the song was originally released. The choir has provided a safe space for those fleeing the war in Ukraine to express themselves, to find friendship, to seek out new opportunities and to learn English."

Carol Baumann, CEO at the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) said she was "delighted" to have been able to co-ordinate the initiative in conjunction with local development companies across the country.

Work by local development companies with refugees - and many others - is supported by the Department of Community and Rural Development through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Cash is "essential for the inclusion of socially vulnerable citizens"

**BY OLIVE MCCARTHY
AND ALLEN MEAGHER**

The European Central Bank's Cash Strategy spells out eight functions and benefits of cash and it commits to protecting access to cash services for all.

Almost all of the ECB's Cash Strategy functions relate to supporting the financial inclusion and protection of consumers. It recognises that cash doesn't involve a third party - you simply hand it over - and cash ensures privacy in financial transactions.

Cash is fast and secure and cannot be refused except by prior agreement on the means of payment. Strong emphasis is given in its strategy to the inclusive nature of cash, particularly for those who lack or have limited access to digital payments systems. It specifically states that cash is "essential for the inclusion of socially vulnerable citizens, such as the elderly or lower-income groups".

While that is the ECB's strategic outlook, big companies are heading in the other direction. At least one major not-for-profit organisation has partly joined in.

Ryanair refuses to take cash and it's hard to argue with them at 8,000 feet. The company behind Electric Picnic has gone the same way and it warned vendors this year not to accept cash payments.

Even the Ploughing Championship is making cash-paying customers feel like second class citizens. This year for the first time, it charged attendees €35 on the gate - a punishing €10 more than online.

Applus, the company with the contract for National Car Testing, announced plans during the summer to go cashless. Despite the Dáil being in recess, it was forced to relent by angry politicians. Similarly, a year earlier, AIB was forced to backtrack during the summer when it announced a plan to close over-the-counter cash services in 70 branches. After an intense public backlash, the bank "decided not to proceed".

AIB knows the social value of its service. Research commissioned by Ireland's Department of Finance in 2022 shows that the main reason people visit a bank branch in Ireland is to lodge or withdraw cash. People on lower incomes, people aged over 65 and people in rural communities

I have enough money
to live comfortably
for the rest of my
life, if I die by next
Thursday.



were generally found to be more reliant on cash payments and less likely to use online banking.

There are also moves away from cash beyond the private sector. In recent years, the GAA, when announcing local club fixtures, began to demand digital payments only and insisted that tickets should be purchased in advance. Limerick GAA persists with cash-only demands, while in September Tipperary GAA reverted to accepting cash, alongside online ticket sales, for club matches. For inter-county matches, people always had the choice of buying tickets online or in local shops.

Age Action Ireland reports that 65% of people over the age of 65 experience digital exclusion, impacting their ability to access online or contactless financial services. For this cohort, cash transactions remain essential to everyday life. This is also true for those on low incomes.

In 2020, 30% of Irish social welfare recipients were paid in cash. Research by UCC researchers for by Clúid Housing and the Housing Finance Agency showed that people on lower income often manage their finances best - both spending and saving - using cash, because it helps them to feel more in control or because they have had negative experiences with missed direct debits and bank charges.

Money management advisors, such as the State's Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), advise some consumers to use cash to manage certain expenditure as it is more tangible, making it easier to

keep track.

Although the use in Ireland of non-cash payments increased by 52% in 2020, cash remains of significant importance to many.

In the UK, a 2019 report asserted that 17% of the UK population would struggle to cope in a cashless society and would be 'left behind'.

In Sweden and Norway, where there has been a dash from cash, regulators now oblige banks to ensure the availability of cash services because people in rural areas and older consumers say they would find it difficult to cope without cash.

The EU Payment Accounts Directive in 2016 made basic bank accounts available to all.

A Retail Banking Review currently underway by the Department of Finance recognises that a fully cashless society is not an appropriate objective and acknowledges cash as facilitating financial inclusion. Ireland's Financial Inclusion Strategy, which is now 11 years old (and not available online) focused on the provision of a standard banking account to address financial exclusion. This was superseded by the EU Payment Accounts Directive in 2016 making basic bank accounts available to all.

It is essential that a revised strategy emerges to protect and promote access to financial services. It should empower consumers by building financial capability and well-being for all. This must include access to cash and cash services.

Time we all knew more about circular economies

The circular economy may be a relatively new term to most people, but it is a concept that has been around since the turn of the century, *WRITES KATHY MASTERSON.*

The economic model recognises that the Earth's resources are finite, and that like in nature, there should be no waste – everything should be transformed into materials and products that can be used again.

Our current economic system is largely linear; natural resources are used to create products that are then used and thrown away.

The circular economy ties in with the zero carbon movement, and aims to cut down on manufacturing, keep products in use for as long as possible, and reduce waste.

It does this through recycling, upcycling, repairing and reusing items, as well as sustainable design principles, and business models that offer products to share or rent rather than a one-off purchase.

Internationally, governments are beginning to recognise the importance of the circular economy model. Circular principles are central to the EU's Industrial Strategy and the EU Green Deal, and Ireland's first national circular economy strategy was launched in December 2021.

Ireland's National Centre for the Circular Economy is located at the Rediscovery Centre in the repurposed Boiler House in Ballymun.

Describing itself as “a creative movement connecting people, ideas and resources to support greener low-carbon living”, the Rediscovery Centre brings together



• Ireland's National Centre for the Circular Economy is located at the Rediscovery Centre in the repurposed Boiler House in Ballymun. *Source - The Rediscovery Centre.*

artists, scientists, designers and craftspeople through the common goal of promoting sustainability.

The centre also houses four circular economy social enterprises: Rediscover Furniture, Rediscover Fashion, Rediscover Paint and Rediscover Cycling.

It offers workshops and conducts research activities that support national waste prevention and climate action policies.

The Rediscovery Centre also houses an Eco Store selling sustainably made products from its own social enterprises, and more than 20 other independent Irish suppliers.

Here are six of the other social enterprises and initiatives around the country that are working to create a circular economy.

The circular economy in Ireland

TAKE SIX!

BY KATHY MASTERSON

1. Roscommon Women's Network CycleUp project

CycleUp featured in our Autumn 2019 edition (Issue 84) for being an example to others. It is run by Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) and was established after members became concerned about textile waste. They were ahead of the EU in their outlook.

As a social enterprise, CycleUp provides training in textile upcycling and creates new items from unwanted clothing. As well as the circular economy element, the project takes a community development approach, and seeks to “empower individuals through upcycling education and skills development while addressing the issue of textile waste”. The organisation says it works to support the hardest to reach women and families to engage and participate.

Today, CycleUp employs three part-time staff and five Community Employment workers, supported by a team of 14 volunteers. To date, they have upcycled more than 8,000kg of textiles resulting in a carbon saving of 65 tonnes.

For more information, or to shop for products, see cycleup.ie

Siopa Rothar at Galway Shopping Centre. An Mheitheal Rothar runs DIY bike repair workshops for the public at its NUIG premises, where participants carry out repairs on their own bicycles with guidance from volunteer mechanics.

W: bikeworkshops.ie

3. Fingal Co. Council's musical instruments project



• These violins were recycled for presentation to the Seamus Ennis Arts Centre for music lessons.

In 2019, Fingal County Council set up a musical instruments project, where instruments given to the council's recycling facilities for disposal are cleaned and mended.

The refurbished instruments are then distributed to various organisations such as centres for autism, addiction and rehabilitation.

The projects accepts all kinds of instruments, such as guitars, ukuleles, drums, violins, keyboards, electric guitars, and accordions. Accessories such as amps and cables are also accepted at the council's recycling centres in Estuary, Swords and Coolmine.

W: fingal.ie/instruments-project

2. An Mheitheal Rothar, Galway

The idea for An Mheitheal Rothar was born during a meeting of the NUIG Ecology Society. Members suggested establishing a space where students could repair their bikes “in an environment which encouraged peer to peer learning, civic and environmental responsibility and empowered people in their own abilities”.

After almost two years of groundwork and negotiations with the university, An Mheitheal Rothar's ‘Ecospace’ workshop was established on the NUIG campus in August 2012. The organisation now operates a second premises,

Ireland's first national circular economy strategy was launched in December 2021. Circular principles are central to the EU's Industrial Strategy and the EU Green Deal.

4. Recycle IT, Clondalkin, Dublin



• Recycle IT in Clondalkin offer pick-up and collection services for recyclable items.

Recycle IT, based in Clondalkin in Dublin, is a not for profit, social enterprise which creates sustainable local training and employment through electrical, electronic, and metal recycling for reuse.

It offers a drop off service, charity collection and drop-off service, business or community collection service, and home collection service for old, damaged or unused electrical, electronic or metal items.

Recycle IT will take any electrical items with a plug or a battery. It also accepts small battery-operated devices like electric toothbrushes, mobile phones and pocket radios.

In 2022, Recycle IT processed 833,000kgs of electrical, electronic and metal items for recycling.

Income generated by collection and breakdown of waste is reinvested in training and employment and encourages environment awareness.

W: recycleit.ie

5. Change Clothes, Crumlin, Dublin

Change Clothes Crumlin is a community-based clothing reuse hub, offering reuse solutions for clothes at all stages of their lifecycle. It holds clothing exchanges for unworn or lightly-worn clothes, a rental service for vintage occasion wear, and



• Shoppers at a clothing exchange hosted by Change Clothes in Crumlin.

upcycling and repair workshops and services for clothes in need of some TLC. Rags from clothing items that would otherwise go to landfill are repurposed into new products.

Despite only coming into operation in the summer of 2022, by the end of the year Change Clothes facilitated 1,239 clothing swaps and upcycled 53 items, saving a total of 1,292 pieces of clothing from landfill.

W: changeclothes.org

6. The Good Bike Project, Ushers Island, Dublin



• Refurbished bikes from The Good Bike Project ready to be delivered to a Ukrainian family.

Since The Good Bike Project was set up by Paul McQuaid in 2022, more than 2,000 donated and refurbished bikes have been provided to refugees all over the country.

Paul was compelled to set up the project from his bicycle shop, River Cycles, after a friend told him of a Ukrainian mother and children who were in need of bikes to get to school. He kindly gifted them bikes from his shop, but quickly realised that there was a great need for bicycles among the refugee community, so a larger scale response was needed.

Courier company DPD soon offered their assistance, and now deliver three bikes daily to refugees across Ireland.

W: thegoodbikeproject.com

LEADER IN CARLOW AND TIPPERARY

Local Action Groups (LAGs) in counties Carlow and Tipperary were announced on August 30 as the first two local development strategies (LDS) approved to deliver the 2023-2027 LEADER programme.



The LAG in Carlow is led by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in partnership with County Carlow Development Partnership and Carlow County Council.

The Tipperary LAG is led by the Tipperary LCDC in partnership with North Tipperary Development Company, South Tipperary Development Company and Tipperary County Council.

They will receive €4.9m and €7.8m to deliver LEADER in their respective counties.

WHAT IS SOCIAL PRESCRIBING?

Social prescribing gives doctors and health professionals a way to refer patients to non-clinical community supports, recognising that social factors such as poverty, isolation and loneliness can have a significant effect on a person's overall health.

The social prescribing link worker will help the service user to access local voluntary community and social enterprise organisations or services through discussions and depending on their interests.

The service is for people over 18 who have long-term health conditions, including mental health, or those who may be lonely or isolated, or have complex social needs. People who frequently attend a GP or emergency department may also be referred.

HSE-funded Social Prescribing services are now available in over 30 locations around the country. For details of services nationwide see: allirelandsocialprescribing.ie

For more, see page 21.

EMPLOYMENT & MENTAL HEALTH

David Doran has good news on expanding mental health supports

David Doran worked until recently as an employment specialist with County Kildare Leader Partnership. He was one of 40 employment specialists countrywide provided a new support service for people living with mental illness who wish to get a job. Regardless of a person's job readiness or personal situation (eg homelessness) the Individual Placement Support (IPS) helps people to find work.



David used his own experience with mental health challenges to assist his clients in gaining employment and moving forward in their recovery.

He sits on the IPS national steering committee and speaks here about how the IPS has proved its worth since the HSE got behind the service in 2017:

The initiative supports people who are engaged with Community Mental Health Teams to find employment, and support them on their journey to full employment. Or, in many other cases people might be already in employment but might be out on illness because of their mental health conditions, and are linking in with myself to support them on their return to employment.

IPS is funded by the HSE and a host company hosts the service. County Kildare LEADER Partnership host IPS in my case. The local development companies are brilliant because it's like a wraparound service. So if I'm working with Mary, who has never worked before in her life because of mental illness, I can refer Mary (to someone else in the organisation) for help with her CV, or a women's group, or a workshop, things to get her outside and into the community.

The main goal is to find mainstream employment, but we cater for everything else that the client wants to do. It's individual-based; it's totally what the client wants. If someone comes to me and they want to find a job working as a postman, we go that road.

I started the service during Covid time, so it was quite difficult. But since then, about 120 clients have passed through IPS. About 60 of them have returned to employment, 20 returned to education. Others have gone into, for instance, a CE scheme or social farming.

In the last two years, it's really taken off and we've received more funding to hire more employment specialists (see side panel).

I'm speaking from my experience of my own mental health too. You can tell clients your story of where you came from, how you got here, and what a difference it made for you to return to work and have a purpose.

If someone's referred to me, I sit down with them and I give them the spiel of what I do, and the different supports that I can provide,

for instance linking in with employers, doing interview practice, building CVs, motivation and confidence-building.

THERE'S NO EXCLUSION HERE

There's no exclusion here, no matter how ill the client - once they want to return to work, they're referred to me. There's no: 'Well I don't think you're ready right now'.

For instance, I was working with a client who was a very, very paranoid gentleman. He wanted to find work but didn't know how to go about it.

This guy couldn't go outside his door, but eventually we worked with each other on an eventual career plan, step-by-step. And I suggested: 'Do you want to do some volunteering first? Or social farming?'

So, we got him into some social farming. He spent 12 weeks doing that one day a week. He absolutely loved it. He came out of his shell, he enjoyed being outdoors, and got into horticulture.

Now he's doing a CE Scheme. He absolutely



"It's totally what the client wants. If someone comes to me and they want to find a job working as a postman, we go that road."

loves it, he does his three days a week, he gets his qualifications. He said to me: 'I might come back to you during the summer and we might actually look for mainstream employment'.

This is a guy who, the team even said, he wouldn't come outside his house, wouldn't answer his phone.

But we worked together, we stuck with it. He's a prime example of someone using other services, returning to IPS, and now he's ready to go into employment. So the outcomes have been brilliant.

TEACHERS, ACCOUNTANTS TOO

People ask: 'What kind of jobs are they, warehouse jobs? Menial jobs?' And yes, they are, but I have also worked with teachers, accountants, with media producers, people high up in tech. It's a mixed bag of people you're working with.

And returning to work is part of recovery.

You say to people when you're working with them: 'You're the captain of your ship. I'm your shipmate, just guiding you along the way, it's totally up to you where we go with this'.

We try as many different jobs as possible, and if they don't work out, fine. Let's move on to the next one. That's comforting to people.

It's long-term support. It's great when you don't really hear from them, because that often means their life is brilliant again. But we do check in with them. There might be people who are gone off the programme two years, but I'll drop them a text.

We abide by a handbook on IPS which has its items and principles, which is brilliant because you can't sway off. I think that's what makes it a success as well.

An employment specialist has a maximum of 20 clients on a caseload at any given time. That's what the rules say, because you're not going to provide a good service to people if you go over that, someone's going to miss out on something.

NO NEGATIVITY

Thankfully, I haven't had any negativity. I do say to clients: 'If you don't get the job, or if they have an issue regarding mental health or whatever, then it wouldn't be a nice place to work'. And that sells it for the client.

I've had employers give guys a couple a chances. You work with people with serious mental illnesses and they could have aggression or serious things going on in their lives, and they (the employers) have been very catering.

It's catching on. It takes the pressure off the mental health team as well. We hope this year we'll have a national event in Croke Park.

In America, they're working with people with severe disabilities, physical disabilities, early school leavers, people who would have substance issues. I'd like to see it spread out beyond the mental health side of things.

It is very positive that the funding is there. It's continuous roll-over funding, it's embedded in the mental health services. It's an exciting time to be working in the area. And you feel great because you're helping someone, it's very rewarding.

- In conversation with Kathy Masterson

KINDLY EXPLAIN WHAT IS: 'Individual Placement and Support'

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) supports people with mental health difficulties to find work.

After over 30 years of research, it is considered the most effective way to support people with mental health conditions to find and maintain the right employment for them.

Currently, 41 IPS employment specialists are working with Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) covering all 26 counties. Another 11 IPS employment specialists are to be recruited later this year.

IPS's unique approach involves integrating the employment specialists into the CMHTs.

It has been used in labour markets in many different countries, in various settings, including community mental health centres, rehabilitation programmes, supportive housing programmes.

Some people try several jobs before finding employment they like. Each job is viewed as a positive learning experience.

In Ireland, IPS employment specialists work in partnership with the person, the employer, the CMHT, and the Local Employment Services.

They will help anyone availing of CMHT services who wishes to work, regardless of their job readiness, or factors such as homelessness, work history,

substance abuse, mental health symptoms, a history of violent behaviour, cognition impairment, not adhering to treatment, being engaged by the legal system, and personal presentation.

Some people try several jobs before finding employment they like. Each job is viewed as a positive learning experience.

The service helps clients to make a CV, search for a job, prepare for interviews, and supports them along the way. The employment specialists, with permission from clients, make the approach to employers.

The service is advertised in HSE clinics and services. HSE mental health workers can refer people to IPS.

The first steps involve three or four sessions. Ideally, the job search will begin then and clients can continue to avail of IPS supports for as long as they need.

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I've been reflecting on the issues facing the planet and how best to make money from poor suckers like me as the planet goes up in smoke. When I was a student I smoked a lot. My buddy Nick O'Teen got me hooked.

Then I joined a gym and started using Vapes as a substitute. Smoking and vaping is more prevalent among lower income groups and I'm going to sell my brilliant campaign slogan to the advertising agencies - "If Your Life Sucks, Suck These!"

Vaping companies suck the profits out of their product users and have built Vape Empires (Vampires for short). With Vape Shops on every main street in Ireland, it's fair to say that Vampires are rejuvenating ghost towns across the country.

I'm not in a great place at the moment (Ballybrophy train station). Still, I could be in worse places. Spanish football officials warned Luis Rubiales to tone down his behaviour or he

could kiss his job goodbye and isn't that what the eejit did.

I didn't go to the Ploughing Championship this year because I've developed a morbid fear of farmers and culchies which was diagnosed as Agriophobia. It's one of my three new phobias.

I've missed all the local GAA and rugby matches this year due to an irrational fear of physically rough behaviour, known as Aggrophobia. And I can't wear jumpers, cardigans or be close to goats anymore as I have Angoraphobia also.

I've also stopped hillwalking, because the Leave No Trace campaign has given me the jitters. Why can't they just say "Leave no litter"? Leave No Trace sounds like a serial killer's guide to murder.

I could do with a break and was advised to try something new by a youth worker. They know I love entertainment and follow everyone from Dustin Bieber to Ted Sheeran and your one in the funny clothes Larry Styles.

Sensing an opportunity, since I am never on time, I applied to become the new presenter of the Late Late Show. Perfect match. But wouldn't you know, I procrastinated and missed the deadline. Patrick Kielty doesn't know how lucky he got.

Anyway today will be yesterday tomorrow, everything was nothing at some time and change is constant. So no wonder I can't make some sense of anything and can't make any cents from something.

ABOUT HORACE:

A former civil servant, community worker and agony uncle, Horace is utterly solutions-focused and has been writing for 'Changing Ireland' since he was a nipper.

He has addressed everything from world poverty to the price of ice-lollies in Japan.

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

ACTIVISM - TIPS & ADVICE

Anti-fascism report draws on experience in five communities

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A 61-page report titled 'Greater than Fear: A Community Based Response to Tackling Hate and Extremism' was published in early September and draws on experience in five Irish towns countering hate and fascism.

Written by community worker Helen Lowry and published by the Hope and Courage Collective (H&CC - formerly known as the Far Right Observatory) it provides free advice and tips on what helps or hinders community responses to extremism and hate.

Helen worked for many years with Migrant Rights Centre Ireland and this is the first Irish publication to document the response within communities to the recent rise in fascism. It should be useful to youth and community workers and volunteers because it shows how the far right operates and features case-studies with first-hand accounts from locals who took them on.

The publication draws on experience from five places in particular where hate arose – in counties Galway, Cork, Mayo, Kildare and Dublin. It seeks to explain where hate comes from and includes a messaging guide to help frame community responses.

"Even the most experienced organisers and activists went on a learning journey in the case studies shared here," it says and its community to community tips for "if hate comes your way" were hard-learned.

Surprisingly, the report does not mention community development workers funded through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) – yet they will be among those to find the report of considerable interest. There are 600 such workers countrywide employed by local development companies (LDCs) including 100 or so new Ukrainian community development workers hired last year. Under the report's chapter on 'Leadership in Action', LDCs are only mentioned twice, once positively, once negatively.

While they also helped with integration, there is but a single mention of a Family Resource Centre (described as "progressive").

However, the publication isn't a thank you card, and its case-studies draw on experience from five places in particular where events turned nasty - Oughterard, Co Galway;



Ballymun in Dublin; Newbridge, Co Kildare; Westport, Co. Mayo and Fermoy, Co. Cork.

In four of the case-studies, local people rose to support refugees and people seeking international protection, succeeding in three of those places - Ballymun, Fermoy and Newbridge.

In Oughterard, the report acknowledges that the campaign opposing a Direct Provision centre "cannot be solely attributed to the far right, nor can all local participation be labelled as anti-immigration and racist".

In Westport, people mobilised to counter-protest successfully against Christians who were joined by far right activists, to ensure a Drag Queen Story Hour in a local bookshop went ahead.

Overall, the report concluded that, "A critical factor was having people involved who are not afraid to respond quickly and who had shared values, community development

expertise, community engagement skills and life/work experience."

In Ballymun, local football legend Philly McMahon and rapper Adam Muhammad publicly supported Ballymun for All. The group grew in strength and joined a broader coalition Dublin for All that led to the national rally in February 2023 attended by thousands of people.

However, counter-campaigning was difficult when in an information vacuum. It left community leaders on the back foot.

"It emasculated us as community people," said one. The report also states that the "erosion" of the community development space was "a concern" and the case-studies show that "traditional community and civil society organisations and structures were slow to respond in nearly all areas".

As a volunteer in Newbridge told the author, "The response was so dependent on us as volunteers. Paid people in the room [were] there

only on a voluntary basis. Nobody bar H&CC could support us on a professional basis."

The report tackles the question: 'What do communities and society need to flourish in the face of hate?' An ongoing problem says the author is "a lack of recognition and by extension funding for community organising".

There are 30,000-plus community groups in the state, but community organising, advocacy and activism puts you at risk of being penalised or, if you are funded, of losing funding.

The report quotes community workers who said: "Campaigning and activism isn't really a legitimate activity in Ireland. It's not paid for, we'll only fund service provision. So I think we need to pivot from this and legitimise community organising and community work in this manner so individuals don't feel they'll get slapped on the wrist by being at the front of a response like this. I think that's very important".

"This issue won't be going away in the medium to long term," they said.

The report argues that communities need backup "if community efforts are to evolve from fire-fighting to effective inoculation against the far right."

The report outlines the conditions that are facilitating the far right's rise, including the "housing crisis, deepening inequality, cost of living pressures and societal and cultural shifts (which can) be overwhelming for many people".

Pointing out how people listen with their heart not their heads, it says "The far right thrives in an environment of confusion, rumour, and information vacuums."

It says "the chill effect" on politicians is real and that "the more politicians stay quiet or attempt to speak to their agenda, the more emboldened the far right becomes".

It further states that "Ireland is a wealthy country, and this government's choices create the conditions for the far right to thrive."

It lists what liveable communities need: secure homes, trusted healthcare, quality schools, decent work and good incomes, great youth work and a strong community development infrastructure.

Funding of €50m was this year announced for communities that

(Cont'd from previous page)

welcomed refugees. However, this is not mentioned in the report. Nor is the government move during the summer to hire dozens of integration officers (who will be employed by local authorities, not community groups).

The report points out that it “is not a definitive guide” and is instead presented as “a valuable offering that we hope fosters confidence and inspiration, and provides guardrails and signposts in minimising harm and disrupting far-right efforts to spread hate and division.”

In that regard, it is an excellent resource for community workers and people in communities facing difficult situations when trying to protect vulnerable people and counter racism and fascism.

The report is available to download from Hope and Courage Collective's website.

FAR RIGHT OBSERVATORY NOW KNOWN AS THE HOPE AND COURAGE COLLECTIVE

The Far Right Observatory, which has made a solid impression on many community groups fighting fascism, has renamed itself the Hope and Courage Collective and remains focused on far right hate, bigotry and extremism.

It sees itself as “a national civil society organisation that works with community groups, advocacy groups, trade unions, activists and academics to stop hate organising in our communities and workplaces”.

Its members include - Community Work Ireland, Pavée Point, Uplift, the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland, the Irish Network Against Racism, SIPTU, Unite, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, BelongTo, Trans Equality Network Ireland, the National Women's Council and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties.

W: hopeandcourage.ie/
F: [@hopeandcouragecollective](https://www.facebook.com/hopeandcouragecollective)
X: [@hope_courage_ie](https://twitter.com/hope_courage_ie)
I: [@hopeandcouragecollective](https://www.instagram.com/hopeandcouragecollective)

Tom and Brian McDonagh from Ennis speak up for those without homes

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

County Clare cousins Tom and Brian McDonagh visited Changing Ireland's office in Moyross recently. They receive support from the Brothers of Charity in Ennis and were accompanied on their visit by staff members Gerry O'Connor and Ben Panter (a former journalist with this publication).

We put two questions to Tom and Brian - asking them to describe a positive thing in their lives (they said sport and keep-fit) and asking what issue concerns them most.

Both men are Travellers and Clare County Council has a woeful reputation when it comes to Traveller accommodation. Both Tom and Brian wish to see the Council adhere to its responsibilities and they pressed for greater empathy and more action.

They both love their county.

“I love living in Ennis,” said Tom, a keen golfer. “I’m trying to keep fit. I walk into town five times a week. It’s good to talk and walk. And I walk to Mass every Sunday.”

He appreciates having an astroturf facility across the road and a playground nearby. “And I like the statues in Ennis. I do a lot of art.”

Brian's chief sporting passion is hockey - for more see below.

On homelessness, Tom said: “It’s not fair on the them sleeping out rough. I know a whole rake of them, sleeping outside doors, outside phone shops and all. It’s not fair to have people thrown down in doorways like that. I know one fella who slept up against the door and when the



• Tom McDonagh, Ben Panter and Brian McDonagh on their visit.

worker came, they tried to shove him a bit out of the way, tried to wake him up. ‘Sorry Sir, can you get up, I’m trying to get in my doorway to work,’ said the worker. The fella in the doorway said, ‘Sorry! I didn’t know. I apologise for that.’ And he got up and walked away and slept somewhere else.

“Some of them are sleeping in cardboard boxes, they’ve no quilts. Some have no nothing over them, just lying there with nothing. I know every one of them. There’s one is Polish and the rest are Irish.

“There is a hostel out the Limerick Road and they should take them in there. And not having them lying out rough, with no money and no food, and having to go down to the convent of the Holy Family and they get dinner there.

“I’d like that to improve a lot. I don’t want them getting double-pneumonia outside,” he said.

Brian said, “People are going to Clare County Council because people are not being housed.

“My nephew – anytime he goes to the council for the last couple of years – they say to him ‘We’ll get back to you’. Three times they said that to him and never got back to him. They’re not doing any good for him. They say there is too much burning of houses, breaking windows and fighting. The council is not giving housing for Travellers, or for anybody,” he said.

Tom says access to toilet facilities is also an issue for more people than is recognised. He said: “When you’re living in a caravan, where do you go to the toilet? It’s not good going down the field. The ones living in caravans feel bad about it. It’s not fair for them. There should be public toilets nearby. Even portaloos.”

We look forward to our visitors returning - the date's already set.

Brothers of Charity

The Brothers of Charity aims “to shape communities where people we support are seen as equal citizens”.

The charity, founded in 1807, is funded by the HSE and is a religious voluntary organisation providing important services across the country to people with an intellectual disability and their families.

Services include education, day and residential, respite and family support, as well as support services for individuals who live independently.

It is a large organisation. In its west region alone (Galway and Roscommon) it supports over 1,900 children and adults, and employs 1,750 staff working in 350 locations.

Individuals using BOC's services identify what is of interest and of importance to them.

Brian's hockey games quest



• Brian McDonagh (seated centre) is on a quest to play as much hockey as possible. Visiting Moyross, he met Laura O'Neill (standing) of Limerick Sports Partnership who made some connections for him. If you have a further idea, contact the editor and we can connect you with Brian and his team. Also pictured - on left - Tom McDonagh; and, on right with a yellow ball - Ben Panter from the Brothers of Charity.

Photos by A. Meagher.

An Icelandic solution to an Irish problem

BY KATHY MASTERSON



During the 1990s, Iceland had some of the highest figures for substance use among young people in Europe.

A 1995 study by the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) showed that adolescents in Iceland and other Nordic countries were more likely to become drunk than other European teenagers.

While other countries may have rolled out the usual ineffective information campaigns featuring those unintentionally hilarious videos that we all remember from our youth, Iceland chose a different path.

Our neighbours to the north developed the groundbreaking Icelandic Model for Primary Prevention of Substance Use, which has since been implemented in 30 other countries, including Ireland.

The Icelandic model is based on the collaboration of various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, local development companies, and youth groups.

In 2018, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon jointly became the first region in Ireland to implement the model, now known as the Planet Youth programme. Planet Youth programmes are also now being implemented in Cavan and Monaghan, and Fingal in North Dublin.

Emmet Major, of the West Regional Drugs Task Force in Galway told Changing Ireland:

"The Icelandic prevention model was developed over a number of years by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis. You survey the children in their schools at 15 to 16 years old every two years using the Planet Youth questionnaire,



• There are lessons from Iceland that would benefit Ireland's youth.

"It's very hard to convince the political class to spend money where you're not going to see outcomes for probably 10 to 15 years."

which is a thorough, investigative, very extensive examination of the lives of young people at that age.

"The purpose is to find out what what's going well, what are the risk and protective factors in their lives that we can improve on. What's going wrong? But it's not for those kids, it's for the children that are coming behind.

"You take the data, and you try and apply interventions in four big areas. One is what's going on in their home. Another is their school experience. The other one is leisure time. And the final one is the peer area, can you bring any influence to bear or change or improve what's happening in the peer group?"

In Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, all 81 secondary

schools and 10 Youthreach centres in the region participate, representing about 10% of secondary schools in the country.

The survey features questions on teenagers' substance use, physical health, mental health, physical activity, family and school experience, internet use, bullying and many other categories.

There are 92 primary questions and numerous sub-questions in the current Planet Youth questionnaire used in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, with a total of 1,972 variables; all of which can be examined and cross-tabulated.

The model revolves around the idea that by strengthening the supportive role of parents and schools and the network of opportunities around teenagers, the

problems associated with adolescent substance use can be reduced or prevented before they arise.

"It's very much a community development type of approach. We're always trying to be inclusive, get everybody involved. Really it's about all the parents, the community - how can we all be invested in improving outcomes," added Emmet.

Meanwhile, in Iceland, in 2007, 20 years after the model was first introduced, the figures began to speak for themselves.

The proportion of 10th graders who reported becoming drunk during the last month fell from 42% in 1998 to 20% in 2007. The percentage of 10th graders who reported smoking cigarettes daily was 23% in 1998, this dropped to 10% in 2007. (No newer figures were available).

In Ireland, it's too soon yet to begin measuring the impact of the programme. According to Emmet: "It's a 10-year piece of work before you really start seeing stuff. And the whole undertaking, I think it's probably a 20-year piece of work."

However, the long-game aspect of the programme raises challenges in relation to funding.

"It's very hard to convince the political class to spend money where you're not going to see outcomes for probably 10 to 15 years. Because (they think) 'I'm not going to be around to see that'.

"There's no mention in most national strategies of prevention. How do we get a national buy in to say 'actually, the strategies are wrong, it needs to change to include far more of a focus on prevention'?"

Currently, the programme is funded by the West Regional Drugs Task Force, the local authorities in the three counties, and various grants from sources like the Dormant Funds and National Lottery.

Emmet says that the landscape in relation to funding is "a challenge".

He remarked: "The elephant in the room of all of this is that we don't value youth work (in Ireland), well the government certainly doesn't seem to. It's the first thing that funding gets cut for, and it's an awful space to work in, because you never know if you've got a job from one year to the next. All the cuts in the recession, youth work was just

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savaged - what sort of message does that send?"

The information gathered in the survey has already been put to good use by community and voluntary organisations.

Imelda Gormally, community development worker with Galway City Partnership, explained: "Every partnership in the country this year has to put in a tender for their SICAP programmes. So every partnership in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon will be using Planet Youth data to inform and help us stream our tender and our annual plans for the appropriate actions around young people and families.

"To have that evidence is so important for us. It's up to date, it's a huge level of information that I don't think we've ever got in one place ever before.

"Within Galway City Partnership there's a youth advocacy programme, they've been really interested in the data coming through. For some organisations, it's kind of: 'Are we on the right track here? Do we need to rethink and regroup and replan the way we work?'"

"We run an afterschool programme in Ballybane, but we had no real activity-based work. It's a homework club with some activities. We've changed the way we do those and diversified the activities to make sure that every child who attends gets an opportunity to be physically active at some stage in the day. Some of the data that came through showed us a very limited range of opportunities for some young people."



Planet Youth data will also be included in the region's Local and Economic Community Plans, and youth officers in the Education and Training Boards in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon draw upon the information when applying for funding through the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme.

It is also used to provide information for parents in the form of a booklet for the parents of



students commencing their first year in secondary school, and another for the parents of children in junior infants.

"The idea is that they're getting good information, this is what the teens are saying, and you really need to be thinking about this now. It's stuff like bedtimes, family time, communication, sports and hobbies and there's guidance on all of that," said Emmet.

Participating schools are also provided with individualised reports, comparing their data with other schools in the region.

Following an analysis of the data from the third survey in 2022, researchers began to observe a number of trends emerging.

"There are really interesting trends that we can just begin to see now. A really concerning thing that we're going to be doing a lot of work on is that parental tolerance, or what the kids perceive to be parental tolerance for drunkenness, is on the slide.

"One of the key issues we picked out of the second survey was that lack of sleep is a huge issue for the young people that's not being talked about nearly enough. We can begin to see the cross-tabulation between sleep and mental health, school engagement - every aspect of their lives is impacted by lack of sleep," revealed Emmet.

Fundamentally, where Planet Youth differs from a lot of other youth initiatives is that rather than specifically targeting a vulnerable group, it aims to improve outcomes for all children.

Emmet likens it to "a rising tide that lifts all boats".

He concluded: "Everybody's all about themselves, largely speaking. And if we work together a lot more in a lot of these types of spaces as they seem to have done in Iceland, it's a much better approach. Whether it'll ever work here, it's still a bit up in the air to be honest, but it won't be for lack of trying."

Key findings from Planet Youth's survey



• Vapes are marketed, like cigarettes in the past, at a young audience.

These are the findings from Planet Youth's survey undertaken among 15-16-year-olds in Galway City last year.

- 6% are daily smokers. 94% are not.
- **16% vape daily.**
- 16% have tried cannabis.
- **19% have had a sexually explicit image shared online without their permission.**
- 16% reported being drunk by the age of 14.
- **26% were drunk in the last month.**
- 11% get alcohol from a parent.
- **18% do their drinking in a friend's home.**
- Perceived parental disapproval of drunkenness has decreased to 67% from 76.8% in 2018.
- **32% reported self-harm once or more.**
- 57% are not getting the recommended amount of sleep.
- **65% of boys and 40% of girls reported their mental health as good or very good.**
- 89% said it is easy or very easy to receive caring and warmth from their parents/carers.

"The elephant in the room of all of this is that we don't value youth work (in Ireland), well the government certainly doesn't seem to."

ALL-ISLAND VOLUNTEERING

Visitors cry with relief and joy meeting Ireland Reaching Out's volunteers

BY KATHY MASTERSON

A Cork man had a woman in tears recently, yet it was a joyful occasion, one of many facilitated by local volunteers who welcome people of Irish ancestry through Ireland Reaching Out (aka Ireland XO).

The community-based, not-for-profit organisation provides three services, all without charge, and, this year, they aim to double the number of people availing of their meet and greet service.

Presidents Joe Biden and Barack Obama are just two high-profile figures who have travelled to the Emerald Isle to walk the lands of their ancestors. However, every year there are many more who come to trace their roots, and even to meet distant cousins.

A large number of these visitors are assisted by Ireland Reaching Out's network of 220 local volunteers. The organisation was established 14 years ago with the goal of establishing links between the Irish diaspora and their places of origin. Its meet and greet service is unique.

THREE FREE SERVICES

Programme coordinator Denise O'Leary explained: "We offer three services for free. We have message boards where anyone of Irish heritage can go and ask a question. Our volunteers will search the records for them and they'll help them with their family tree.

"The second thing is anyone of Irish heritage, if they're visiting Ireland, can register their trip on the website. And they can reach out to local representatives living in the town or village their ancestors lived in.*

"The third thing we offer is a free ancestry repository where anyone can add their ancestor's story, and that's free to search by anyone in the world. Most ancestry repositories are behind a paywall, so that's quite important for some people that it's free.

"We also have a newsletter. We work with a huge team of academics, historians, librarians, genealogists, and we send out newsletters twice a week," she added.



• Volunteer Kieran Jordan with Canadian visitor Tara at the grave of her ancestor John O'Regan in Co Cork. INSET: Kieran (left) with members of the Nugent family at Lismore, Co. Waterford.

REBUILDING AFTER COVID

The meet and greet programme is becoming well known. The year before the pandemic lockdowns, the volunteers welcomed 600 visitors to Ireland.

"During Covid we did no meet and greets for two full years. So we're just building it back up. Last year we welcomed 100 visitors. This year we're hoping to double that again," revealed Denise.

She continued: "There's nothing like meeting a local person. It's so important to them. It's all done by volunteers, there's no money changing hands.

"This is all done on the back of local volunteers actually wanting to say: 'Look, your ancestors did live here, you're part of this community, just like we are'. It's really nice.

"Their Irishness is of huge importance to them. But it's not recognised. So meeting with a local, and a local seeing them as a local, that is hugely powerful for them. And our volunteers often introduce them to family members."

able to walk in the same place their ancestors were. Last week, the woman I met was in tears. We went out to Inch where her father was from, and it really meant a lot to her," Kieran recalled.

TO VOLUNTEER

Ireland Reaching Out regularly takes on new volunteers: to meet and greet people, to serve as family history advisors, and/or to serve as digital content contributors. Some people volunteer for all three roles. All receive a volunteer handbook and online training and have the support of the volunteer co-ordinator.

Ireland Reaching Out has structured its programme so it is organised and managed at a local level, by locals and descendants from an area, and every parish in Ireland has a dedicated page on its website. Check out 'Parish Toolkit'

on the website. Most volunteers give between one and three hours per week.

The organisation's own history is interesting. Ireland Reaching Out was founded by tech entrepreneur Mike Feerick. It began as a pilot in south-east Galway with support from Galway Rural Development, among others, and it soon made its presence felt, winning recognition at the Pride of Place Awards and Local Authorities Members Awards.

In advance of President Joe Biden's recent, partly genealogical visit to this country, Mike tweeted about "the local knowledge" of volunteers with Ireland Reaching Out, describing them as "a national asset".

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

*It is simple and straightforward for visitors to make an enquiry about setting up a meet and greet via this link: <https://www.irelandxo.com/meet-and-greet>

Ireland Reaching Out previously received funding from the The Heritage Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Today it is self-funded, relying on income from Google AdSense and voluntary donations from those who avail of its free services.

PEOPLE IN TEARS

Kieran Jordan, a Fermoy, Co. Cork-based meet and greet volunteer with Ireland Reaching Out, told Changing Ireland about his role: "I had been doing family research myself for about 30 years or so, and I'd learned a lot about the different sources. I retired in the last couple of years, so I have a bit more time, and I like to help out and to meet people.

"There are two types of people who use the meet and greet service: some want to just walk the ground that their ancestors walked on, and others want to find out a bit more about their ancestry, and I can do both of those. I don't mind knocking on doors and asking people if there's a certain family around the area.

"People are very pleased to be



Two-year musical journey across Europe had "profound affect" on Donegal teens

- 150+ students
- 76 jam sessions
- 40 online jams
- 11 songs written
- 6 bands formed
- 3 exchange trips
- Goals exceeded



• The entire Buncrana cohort along with Scoil Mhuire's Katrina McGonigle, Crana College's Laura Keogh and IDP's Tracey McRory

BY KATIE BARR

Over 150 students from eight schools made new friends locally and internationally and become musical wizards thanks to an Erasmus+ programme led by Inishowen Development Partnership.

The project exceeded its goals and was "an apex experience" in the lives of the students, according to one facilitator. The final report is overwhelmingly positive.

Over two years up to May 30 of this year, 76 jam sessions took place, 11 tunes and songs were written, six bands were formed, and three international exchange visits took place involving teenagers from Ireland, Poland and Holland. 40 virtual jam sessions were also held, as Covid showed everyone how to link up musically online.

In the project's first year, transition year students from secondary schools in Moville and Carndonagh, County Donegal, took part.

Throughout the project's second school year, students from Scoil Mhuire and Crana College, both in Buncrana, rehearsed with musical facilitator Seamus Devenney. Their hard work paid off with a stunning performance in The Glassworks in Derry in March.

(You can watch videos of StagePass performances on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/stagepasseu/>)

Young people attending the nearby schools in Buncrana didn't actually know each other much better than the students they met from Holland and Poland.

"We go to school minutes apart, but we didn't know each other or speak to each other. Now we are all so close."

Scoil Mhuire student Kayla and Crana College student Jade both said they loved meeting people from the other schools.

"We go to school minutes apart, but we didn't know each other or speak to each other. Now we are all so close," said Kayla.

"The students worked so well together and Seamus really brought out the best in them," said Katrina McGonigle, programme co-ordinator at Scoil Mhuire. She said it was "fantastic".

"We are appreciative to IDP for giving us this opportunity," she added.

Musical facilitator Seamus Devenney from Carndonagh, Co. Donegal, said, "It has been an amazing experience and the concept of this project is reaching far beyond its original goal.

"It will continue to have a profound effect on these young people's future – it is an apex moment in their development into adulthood and will help shape the adults they will become in the future," he added.

IDP's StagePass co-ordinator Tracey McRory said IDP were delighted to again have the opportunity of collaborating with European partners. However, it was the students and the music they made

that delighted her the most.

"They were up every day for rehearsals, no complaining, they are amazing ambassadors for their schools and their communities. Seeing their smiling faces and music in their hearts every day was just amazing," she said.

"StagePass is a lot of work and even though it is ending for now, the future of creativity and music in Inishowen is safe in the hands of our schoolkids," said McRory.

STAGEPASS

StagePass aimed "to develop their core competencies and skills through the medium of music and in line with entrepreneurship education and performing arts".

The exchanges involved visits to Gdynia in Poland, Leeuwarden in Holland and Derry.

W: <https://stagepassmusic.eu/about-stagepass/>

ERASMUS+

The StagePass project was funded under ERASMUS+ through Key Action 2 which supports strategic partnerships in the field of education, training and youth.

According to Erasmus+, projects funded under 'Key Action 2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the

Exchange of Good Practices' should result in the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels.

W: <https://www.iky.gr/en/erasmus-plus-ka2eng>

N.I. STUDENTS CAN AGAIN ACCESS ERASMUS+

Since September, students in Northern Ireland can once again access Erasmus+ programmes.

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, in July announced €2m to support Erasmus+.

Post Brexit, the loss of access to the EU's Erasmus+ education programme was highlighted by civic society organisations as a major concern for students and staff of higher education institutions in Northern Ireland.

Minister Harris said, "During my many engagements in Northern Ireland, the loss of access to Erasmus+ Programme was constantly being raised." The Irish government committed to maintaining access. "This funding fulfils that commitment," he said.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

NEW PLAN NAMES SKIBBEREEN 'PATHFINDER' TOWN

Cork County Council has received funding for the development of a regeneration plan for Skibbereen in West Cork. It has also been identified as a 'pathfinder' town as part of the national Town Centre First Policy initiative.

The policy represents a joint strategy by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage: to tackle vacancy and dereliction, drive future development and breathe new life into town centres.

Cork County Council will develop the regeneration plan for Skibbereen in consultation with the town's residents and business owners as well as with the wider community who visit the town regularly.

The first step is a local survey to identify initiatives and projects that could support Skib's regeneration.



FREE SPORTS EQUIPMENT

Eight of Sport Ireland's Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) are working with their local authorities to bring BoxUp, a free equipment sharing initiative, to parks and communities across Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

BoxUp, a Swiss company, provides solar-powered lockers containing free sports equipment that can be accessed by the public via an app.

More info: corksports.ie/latest-news/boxup-comes-to-ireland/

CIVIC DUBLIN

Dublin City Council, in partnership with the National Transport Authority, published its new draft Dublin City Centre Transport Plan in September to a wave of publicity.

The imaginative planning will make public spaces more civic-focused and prioritise public transport. The plan is available on the council's website and the public has until December 1 to submit their observations.

NAVAN FOLK SHARE BIKES, E-BIKES & CARGO BIKES

Navan Bike Share Scheme has been launched. It was introduced by a global company called Tier Mobility in partnership with Meath County Council.

The new service features push bikes, e-bikes and e-cargo bikes. The scheme is Tier Mobility's third location launch in Ireland, after Limerick and Fingal.

Cyclists use an app to choose their bike or e-bike and, soon, e-cargo bikes will come onstream. Tier's pushbikes cost €2 per hour and e-bikes €3 per hour.

Mayor of Navan Cllr Edward Fennessy said the project will be "marvellous" for attracting extra tourists into the county and will help residents "as they move around the town doing their daily activities".



ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF INCLUSION IN DÚN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council held its annual Festival of Inclusion from September 28 to October 8.

Festival events included "a Human Library – where real people become books", a Mincéirí Traveller Cabaret performance, climate talks, choir singing, autism awareness and anti-racism training workshops.

The festival celebrated social inclusion initiatives and encouraged all to actively participate and engage in the community.

'Belonging/Muintearas' was the overall festival theme this year, and the local authority had invited all individuals, community and voluntary groups, organisations, charities, clubs and associations to organise an event to promote 'Belonging' in their community.

The local authority provided small grants to assist groups with the costs of running events during the festival.



DUBLIN INNER CITY'S DIAMOND PARK REOPENS

Dublin City Council has reopened Diamond Park following extensive regeneration works by its Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services team.

Speaking at the reopening, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Daithí de Róiste said "just having trees, birdsong and the changing colours of the seasons gives everyone a lift."

Diamond Park is located on the corner of Sean McDermott Street and Gardiner Street Lower.

OUT THE DOOR IN MONAGHAN

Play packs were distributed in August to children in estates around County Monaghan as part of a pilot project to encourage children to get out and play more. The play packs include hula hoops, skipping ropes, tennis balls, bats, pavement chalk, colouring kits and sketch pads.

They were delivered by Monaghan County Council, in collaboration with the National Childhood Network and PlayBoard NI, and funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

IRELAND'S NEWEST LIBRARY OPENS IN PORTLAOISE

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, visited Co Laois in July to launch the new 'The Library is the Place' national library network strategy.

The Minister also officially opened Ireland's newest library facility, in Portlaoise, which received an investment of almost €7.5 million. The building on Main Street will form a significant element of the Cultural Quarter development in Portlaoise's historic core.

Portlaoise Library was Ireland's First Library of Sanctuary, meaning it is committed to creating a culture of welcome and inclusion, especially for people in need of international protection and all newcomers to the area.

