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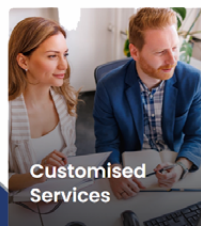
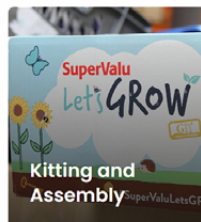
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SHARING CULTURE TRUMPS FEAR

Our thanks to Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement (KTCM) for providing our colourful front cover photos. The pride evident in these images is an antidote to the hate and violence internationally, and sometimes here, towards minorities.

It may be a good time to really listen to Travellers. They have a different culture to settled people, they're willing to share it, and education trumps fear.

The front cover shows Travellers in Co. Kilkenny. In neighbouring Co. Wexford community workers in another Traveller project told Kathy Masterson that culture workshops they run for state agency employees make a real difference. These workshops, also provided in schools, awaken settled people to what life is like for Travellers and how the culture is different. Both projects receive support through the HSE's South East Traveller Health Unit which - encouragingly - clearly understands the value of cultural education.

If the State properly supported Travellers it would surely have better odds of working well with other minorities. For example, accommodation issues facing Travellers have been at crisis levels for decades, but

on a positive note CENA (page 24) has a solution. As part of its campaign for change CENA also wants to join the Community Development Programme.

KTCM is already part of that programme and attended a showcase event for 27 community groups in Athlone recently where presentation after presentation hit the mark. It was like a masterclass in community development.

This publication has a strong affinity with such projects, being based in Moyross and having grown out of the first national Community Development Programme which at its height supported 180 projects.

Today there are more communities, poverty has accelerated for many, and correspondingly there is increasing demand for these programmes.

On a related note, for politicians reading this, there is advice (pages 12-13) from the Irish Local Development Network for those vying to be in the next government.

It is a decade since local authorities were given a statutory responsibility for supporting

community development. We report on Public Participation Networks marking the anniversary (see opposite page) and we have an update from a recent stakeholders' event, again held in Athlone. All local authorities now employ teams of community development workers.

Speaking of local authorities, congratulations to Waterford city on its recent twinning (page 28) with Ramallah city in the West Bank. Every expression of solidarity in the face of the slaughter and genocide by Israel and its supporters of Palestinians is to be applauded.

Finally, I suggest you read the second submission by our Secret Community Development Worker. The Diary of Horace McDermott is in jeopardy if this column proves popular!

Merry Xmas and here is wishing that 2025 will be a more peaceful year in your community and across the world.

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: See page 2.

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200 gather to celebrate 10th anniversary of Public Participation Networks

The sixth national Public Participation Networks (PPNs) conference was held in Limerick recently on the 10th anniversary of their establishment. Almost 21,000 community groups are members of PPNs across the country and membership is open to all volunteer-led and not-for-profit groups.

Vincent Lyons, Galway County PPN, said, "There's no doubt about it, we've come an awful long way in the ten years. I think as a result of the PPNs, groups are better informed and they can use funding opportunities better because there's more widespread delivery of information."

In the future, he wanted to see PPN representatives have a more meaningful role on strategic policy committees of local authorities.

Addressing 200 attendees via a pre-recorded video message, Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, Charities and Integration, Joe O'Brien, sent a message of support and encouragement to all. He also spoke about increased funding for PPNs he secured in Budget 2025:

"From January each



• *Attendees from Co. Leitrim at the Public Participation Network conference held in Limerick in October (l-to-r): Mary McGirl, Leitrim PPN; Bernie Donoghue, Leitrim Development Company (LDC); Mary Quinn, Leitrim County Council (LCC); Paddy Beirne, LDC; Cllr Paddy O'Rourke, chair, LCC; Mary McKeon and Patrick McGreevy, both from Leitrim PPN; Suzanne Duffy and Elaine McKeon, both from LCC; and Michael Bruen, LDC.*

PPN will receive just over €100,000 in core funding from my Department, more than double the original allocation of €50,000 each in 2015 and an increase of almost 20% on 2024."

Opening the conference, Bairbre NicAongusa, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Rural and Community Development, spoke about the enormous contribution PPNs have made.

She said, "Collaboration is a core characteristic of PPNs, a value that is particularly needed in a time when bad actors would divide communities and stifle discussion. PPNs remind us that a healthy democracy thrives on robust debate and strong opinions aired in good faith with the honest

intention of making things better for all."

The two-day conference was hosted by Limerick PPN, in conjunction with Limerick County Council, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the National PPN Advisory Group.

It was attended by a wide range of PPN stakeholders, including volunteer representatives from PPNs across the country, local authority officials, and elected representatives.

Aileen Eglington, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown PPN, feels privileged to have been involved as the PPN developed: "I'm a volunteer at heart in the community as well as a business person. I think that the direction of the

PPN can only expand."

Fiona Broadbery, Carlow PPN administrator, said, "The core benefit of joining a PPN is representation of the community on boards and committees within the local authority. We are also an information hub for all the communities, passing on information from different departments on funding available to increase capacity of the community groups."

Patrick Fitzgerald, Limerick PPN, said, "It's amazing to see the progress over ten years from it being a conception to being implemented and people being elected and getting to have a voice."

PPNs operate in all 31 local authority areas.

More on PPNs: page 18.

Plan for migration, advise local development companies

Migration policy must develop to match needs says the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) which makes the following recommendations to the new government:

1. Ensure that vulnerable migrant groups, e.g., asylum seekers and refugees, are treated humanely and that they receive the targeted supports they need.

2. Restructure the ad-hoc funding for migrant supports. Since Russia expanded its war on Ukraine extra funding (through the SICAP programme) was allocated to Local Development Companies but only on an annual/biannual basis.

3. Develop clear and structured pathways to mitigate the barriers to employment that migrants face when they come to Ireland.

4. Support migrants, but also the communities in which they settle, ensuring that migration does not compound the socio-economic marginalisation of already disadvantaged communities.

5. Publish a National Strategy to Counter Disinformation, as recommended by the Future of Media Commission Report 2022. The need for Ireland - and Irish communities - to respond to the challenge of growing migrant numbers in a way that is reasoned, compassionate, and cohesive is at odds with the profoundly divisive impact of disinformation.

For more on the ILDN's views see pages 12-14.

ERASMUS+

Youth workers take a 'humour journey' in Dublin

An Erasmus+ training programme with a difference was held in Dublin in November.

It attracted 32 participants ranging in age from 19-60 from eight countries.

The 'Humour is Serious Business' Training Programme ran for six days and it brought youth workers on what organisers called "a humour journey". The training aimed to upskill workers in using humour as an effective tool for engaging young people.

The training was co-facilitated by Fergal Barr, a youth worker and



• *Participants in Dublin take part in the humour for youth work training programme.*

author from Derry, and Maedhbh Ni Dhónaill, director of Ógras Béarla, an Irish Language youth organisation. (An Ógras club can be established anywhere in the country where there is a group of young people interested in being involved in an Irish language youth club).

Fergal has long campaigned for humour to be incorporated into syllabuses for third-level courses in youthwork and community development.

He said, "There is an increasing awareness of how humour can be used as a pro-active and deliberate methodology in

youth work and not just as a natural consequence of and response to specific situations."

The EU-backed training, which is administered by Leargas, involved youth workers from Ireland, Spain, Hungary, Malta, Italy, Portugal, Croatia and Romania. 'Humour is Serious Business' was previously held as far back as 2011; no doubt it will run again.

For more information on the course: trainings.salto-youth.net/12746

For more information on Ógras youth clubs visit: ogras.ie



• *An example of integration: As part of Fingal Inclusion Week last November, the African Advocacy Network Ireland held a community event about volunteering and participation in political life and wellbeing.*

Traveller community work in Wexford

Agencies would be at a loss without Traveller culture training workshops

BY KATHY MASTERSON



Traveller culture awareness workshops in Co. Wexford are improving the ability of employees in state agencies to deliver services for the Traveller population. The workshops have also been held in primary schools, increasing awareness among the general school population and instilling pride among Traveller children in particular. Such workshops also take place in other counties; we focused on one county to see the difference they make.

Laura Myles is a community worker with the North Wexford Traveller Community Health Programme, and she told Changing Ireland about their work. Recently they ran a workshop in St. Senan's Primary School in Enniscorthy which has a big Traveller population.

"Some of the Traveller kids were in the classes we went into. Two little lads in particular put up their hands before we left and they said: 'We're Travellers' and they got talking about their wagons and horses. They were so quiet up until we were just about to leave, but it was like they had a sense of pride. They were proud that we were there," said Laura.

A teapot and a kitchen tablecloth called the Traveller Wheel of Culture are often at the centre of their workshops. The tablecloth was designed by the Traveller women.

"It's very visual and it's good for kids in school," said Laura. It shows aspects of family, religion, the tradition of travelling, music, weddings, rosary beads, creativity, horses, the Traveller language Gammon, and 'the Patron' (an annual blessing of graves)..

There are two projects in Wexford because the county has a high Traveller population.

Laura and her colleagues are employed by Wexford Local Development with funding from the HSE's South East Traveller



• Members of the team delivering cultural awareness workshops in Wexford. The wheel of culture tablecloth is used during workshops along with a big, strong, worn metal teapot that has been witness to many gatherings around the table.

Health Unit (SETHU). There are nine Traveller women employed as community health workers in Wexford and in 2011 they developed their first cultural awareness toolkit for delivering training to service providers.

Last year, SETHU and associated Traveller projects developed an updated cultural awareness package for face-to-face delivery to HSE staff, the guards, teachers and all the service providers that members of the Traveller community use. The training is delivered by the Traveller Community Health Projects across south-eastern counties.

FEARFUL TO HAPPY

Traveller community health worker Elizabeth Berry, who is a Traveller, said the workshops give the settled community a better understanding of Traveller culture and traditions.

"A couple of years back in Gorey we had a coffee morning. And a lot of the women that use the centre were used to us, but (that morning) there were one or two new faces. And one of the women said when she

came in she was kind of frightened. She said growing up as a child that her parents told her 'Don't mix' (with Travellers) so she always had that fear as a child.

"As the morning went and we explained the culture and what was important to us, she was the happiest woman ever going out. She said that she missed out on so much as a child and that kind of took away all her fear. So that was a person that never knew nothing about Travellers, that was told never to go there, have nothing to do with them. So it gives the settled people a better understanding of our culture and our beliefs. It helps with discrimination as well," Elizabeth said.

What kind of things do they teach in the workshops? Elizabeth's colleague and fellow Traveller Bridget Connors explained:

"Nomadism and travelling around like they did years ago, making cans. It's about making the younger Travellers that haven't done that aware of where they came from. A lot of them are living in houses now, so we teach about the culture of horses. And religion, going to mass, and that they believe in speaking to a priest if

they got sick or anything."

Elizabeth added: "If there was anyone sick in the Travelling community, where the settled people would go to counselling, we believe in going to a nun or priest and asking them to pray for us to make the situation better. The settled probably have that as well, their beliefs and holiness, but we prefer going to a priest or a nun or a healer, than to talk it out with a person."

NOMADISM

Regarding the traditional nomadism of the Travelling community, Elizabeth said: "A lot of the travelling has been taken away from us. Most Travellers now are in houses, they're mostly settled. The younger people getting married are still in caravans in the gardens of the parents' houses. But as soon as June comes, they do go travelling for maybe five or six weeks. They're trying to keep that tradition going. At the end of August, they're straight back into their houses. The five or six weeks of the summer is very important to keep the tradition going."

STAYING IN SCHOOL

Bridget added: "We're trying to get the younger children to stay in school. They are way behind the settled kids, a lot of them are leaving school early. There's a lot of literacy problems."

According to Laura, the workshops "are really helpful for that". She added: "Primary school is fine for most children, not just Traveller children. They've the one teacher, they've the same break times.

They go from that into secondary school, and you've got nine teachers, different times, different rules. Some Travellers, as well as settled kids, struggle with that. So there is early school leaving.

"We trying to encourage the youngsters to stay in school for as long as they possibly can. We talk to the school liaison officer and parents, make sure that they're aware of the supports in the school. Or if the school is having problems we might be able to help."

She continued: "The cultural awareness training (for workplaces) has much more structure to it. But it's amazing really, Travellers are an ethnic minority group, and that was recognised by the Irish government back in 2017. And we talk about that

(Continued from previous page)

at our cultural awareness training, and you will be surprised the number of people that don't know that. These are working adults in services like the HSE who didn't even know that that was recognised.

"The delivery of these workshops and the cultural awareness training, it's bringing pride in the culture. Individuals shouldn't be ashamed or forced to be ashamed of their culture.

"Racism and discrimination (including institutional racism) are part of the cultural awareness training. That's important. Some people who come to the training say they never had any idea that Travellers would face discrimination on a daily basis," she said.

TRAVELLER WOMEN DELIVER THE TRAINING

Laura does not deliver the training. She said:

"It is the Traveller women, because it is their culture so they talk about the culture and they deliver that aspect of it. But sometimes it can be challenging for them as well, because sometimes people's concept of Travellers can be what they see in the media.

"Delivering cultural awareness training is just one part of our work. We have all the other work to do. We do a lot of outreach work and we run Traveller women's groups."

HEALTH CARE PROJECTS

Currently, the North Wexford Traveller Community Health Programme is a part-time programme, running for three days a week. Laura believes the project would greatly benefit from additional funding to expand the number of hours the community health workers can operate.

She concluded: "There should be a team of Traveller women in every county that solely deliver Traveller cultural awareness training. Most counties have a primary health care project, and most counties would have some form of delivery of Traveller cultural awareness, but that's very much dependent on the hours. It's dictated by funding."

More info, including contact details: wld.ie/traveller-community-health-programme/

Community pride in the Marble City



• Scenes from Traveller Pride Week organised (in collaboration with Kilkenny LEADER Partnership) by Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement, one of ten projects in the new national Community Development Programme.



• Willie Carthy, Philip Carthy, John Carthy and Becky Carthy.



• Michael O'Reilly with his two sons Tony and Tommy Lee (the young boy). The two men on the right are from Meath Travellers Workshop and they brought the living history pieces to the Pride Festival.

Inishowen communities drawn to positivity from environmental campaigner Éanna Ní Lamhna

BY KATIE BARR

Speaking in Inishowen recently, environmentalist, author, and RTE presenter Éanna Ní Lamhna called on people in communities across Ireland to take a stand and make small changes in their daily lives to try and combat climate change.

Speaking to a packed Colgan Hall in Carndonagh Co. Donegal, Éanna said people's attitudes are changing.

"I think it is the first year people are realising climate change is happening here in Ireland," she said.

During the 90-minute talk, organised by the Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP) in collaboration with ChangeMakers Donegal, Éanna commended Inishowen people for turning out in great numbers to reflect on the importance of nature and the environment. She praised community led organisations including IDP for bringing her to Inishowen and fostering community engagement in environmental issues.

"It is great when you get a community that's going to work together," she added.

The author of 'The Great Irish Biodiversity Book' (just published) Éanna called on people to take small actions to make life more sustainable.

"Don't buy fruit such as strawberries when they are out of season.. that means they have to travel hundreds of miles to get here. If we don't buy these food supermarkets won't stock them," she said.

"Don't use bleach on your toilet – there are other cleaners available which are not harmful to the environment and your septic tank. Get a compost or brown bin from the council to avoid food going to landfill. Consider how we use the land we have; Ireland has lost 50% of its biodiversity since the 70s because of the way we have changed land use. Plant trees.

"If you can afford it use solar power where possible, grow wildflower meadows, avoid plastic bottles and do not use weed killer," she added.

On day two of her trip to Inishowen, Éanna travelled with members of IDP to Barrack Hill Town Park in Buncrana and Wild Inishowen's Sharagore Wetland Trail in Desertegney. At both sites, Éanna, who was the president of the National Tree Council, planted trees, met with community and environmental groups and explored the area, whilst also chatting with and meeting local volunteers and



• Éanna Ní Lamhna; Rachel Grant, IDP; Myra McAuliffe, Changemakers; Denise McCool, IDP; and Donna Marie Doherty from Highland Radio.



• Éanna Ní Lamhna helped to plant trees at Barrack Hill and on Sharagore Wetland Trail during her visit to Co. Donegal.

"When there is so much negativity out there at the minute it was great to hear someone speak so positively about what we can do to make a difference," said Carmel Doherty.

school children.

She was impressed by both natural sites, saying that they were a credit to the people of Inishowen and all their volunteers.

In Barrack Hill, committee member and volunteer Carmel Doherty said Éanna's 'Wild Talk' in the Colgan Hall was 'an utter absolute joy'.

"When there is so much negativity out there at the minute it was great to hear someone speak so positively about what we can do to make a

difference," said Carmel.

"Your down-to-earth attitude, passion and positivity about what we must do sent us all home uplifted.

"To us, this park is the jewel of Inishowen – it is a phenomenal achievement. We have planted around 500 or 600 trees in the last five years, and we are the only Green Flag Park in Donegal – something we are immensely proud of," added Carmel.

Colm Grant of the Wild Inishowen Club showed off the voluntary work they have started at Sharagore and Éanna spent time exploring the trail.

"It was great to have someone like Éanna with us at Sharagore," said Colm. "She had such enthusiasm for the work that we do and encouraged us to keep going. She gave us great advice how we can progress the project and it was great to show her the work that is going on in Inishowen."

IDP team leader Denise McCool said the event and follow on meetings with local environmental and community groups were a response to needs identified by ECO Inishowen.

"Communities and groups across Inishowen are actively addressing biodiversity loss and environmental challenges," said Denise. "They are increasingly aware of the local and global links and work on initiatives such as Fairtrade, local biodiversity

action plans, stopping pesticide use, recycling, and nature-based solutions."

"While we recognise the scale of challenges and the need for government action regarding climate change and mitigation, communities continue to play their part to be the change and take action. The opportunity to come together for events like this and stay positive in the work is important," added Denise.

Following Éanna's visit, Myra McAuliffe, project co-ordinator with ChangeMakers Donegal, who co-organised her visit, called on businesses and social enterprises in Donegal to further support and buoy the great work that local voluntary groups are doing by becoming more environmentally friendly in everything they do.

She invited social enterprises and businesses in Donegal to sign up for the free ChangeMakers sustainability programme.

"This will help them save money, attract customers, set themselves apart from competitors, and most importantly, ensure a safe, healthy and successful future for our local community and the planet as a whole".

More info: changemakers.ie/sp

399 community centres get refurb grants

BY KATHY MASTERSON

Government funding up to a maximum of €25,000 per applicant was announced in November to refurbish and enhance 399 community centres countrywide.

Making the announcement alongside Minister Heather Humphreys, Taoiseach Simon Harris said, "These are small grants which will make a big difference. The funding will support local groups to improve kitchen and toilet facilities, replace old windows and doors, upgrade the heating system and improve disability access."

He congratulated the committees and volunteers involved in ensuring that "community centres are at the heart of our local communities".

An examination of the list of successful applications for capital grants under the Community Centres Investment Fund (CCIF) shows that 58 relate to kitchens, 52 concern solar panel installations and 39 are to improve accessibility (eg installing disabled toilets, ramps).

Examples of successful projects funded under the announcement are:

- **Ballinameela Community Centre, Co. Waterford** - €23,052 for boiler upgrade, lighting and internal painting
- **Trim Family Resource Centre, Co. Meath** - €20,360 for accessibility improvements, window replacements and facility enhancements.
- **Ballinakill Community Hall, Co. Galway** - €13,968 - to provide a disability toilet to improve accessibility.
- **St Marys GAA Club, Leixlip, Co. Kildare** -



• Oileán Árann Mhór Community Centre, Co. Donegal - pictured above - was approved for a capital grant of €10,673 to fund a replacement door and kitchen appliances. PHOTO: A.Meagher.

€23,500 to upgrade the stage and hall to increase the functionality of the centre for the community.

Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys said, "The community centre is open to everybody. It is at the heart of every community in Ireland, rural and urban."

She said the ambition behind the CCIF, established in 2022, was to develop a fund to support our local community centres "in the same way that the Sports Capital Programme supports upgrade and improvement works at our local sports facilities."

Sports clubs, often doubling nowadays as community centres, could also apply to this fund. For instance, 24 GAA clubs were approved for

funding in this latest CCIF round, mostly for ramps, measures to improve accessibility, energy efficiency measures and modern toilets.

The grants announced in November amount to a total of over €7.6m and are for Category 1 projects for minor works. Category 2 funding for larger works with grant aid up to €100,000 will be announced, said the Department of Rural and Community Development, "in the coming months".

Overall, since the Community Centres Investment Fund (CCIF) was established, total funding of over €82 million has been approved for almost 1,300 projects across the country.

Additional funding for Volunteer Centres

In Budget 2025 the Government decided on a 12% increase in core funding for the 29 Volunteer Centres across the State.

Additional funding of €730,000 is also to be provided to Volunteer Centres to support further implementation of the National Volunteering Strategy.

Volunteer Centres drive and enable

volunteering in their local areas. Their primary function is to match individuals and groups interested in volunteering with appropriate volunteering opportunities. They also offer advice and practical supports, including training and Garda vetting.

Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, Integration and

Charities, Joe O'Brien said: "The Government's investment in Volunteer Centres is some of the best value for money we can get. Volunteer Centres encourage and support volunteering locally by supporting and guiding individuals who wish to give their time freely, matching skills with need."

"I launched Ireland's first national

volunteering policy in 2020 and I have heavily invested in our volunteering infrastructure since, to ensure that we have a Volunteer Centre in every county in Ireland. In 2020 Ireland had 22 Volunteer Centres, now we have 29 and those centres are going from strength to strength. Our volunteering infrastructure is admired across Europe."

Applications open for Rural Regeneration and Development Fund - closing date March 14

The Department of Rural and Community Development has issued a call for 'Category 2' applications to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

Category 2 RRDF projects are intended to provide funding to allow for development work, such as initial planning, design and technical works, that bring projects to a level of readiness for large-scale capital works.

Funding of up to €1m per project

will be made available, said the Department, "to support landmark regeneration projects that will transform rural Ireland".

According to Department guidelines, RRDF project proposals should also deliver on the objectives of Our Rural Future and the Town Centre First Policy.

Under this call for proposals, particular attention will be given to applications with the potential to increase economic activity and

support the creation of employment, help to revitalise rural towns and villages, drive greater footfall and address vacancy and dereliction.

Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys said: "This funding call represents a further funding opportunity for our rural areas and I am seeking proposals for large-scale, ambitious projects which require development support to enable them to become ready to compete for full capital

funding under Category 1 of the RRDF."

Applications to the fund must be led by a state-funded body, such as local authorities, local development companies, state agencies, or commercial State bodies.

Collaboration between parties, including with local communities, is strongly encouraged.

The closing date for the receipt of proposals is March 14, 2025.

More info: gov.ie/

7 TOP TIPS FOR CASE-STUDY FILMS

BY THADY KAVANAGH*

When I start planning a case study film with a group I encourage them to focus on two key aims: (a) Make sure we are showing the change that is happening as a result of the work being done, and (b) We must hear about that change from the people who are doing the work on the ground.

This approach helps build trust and authenticity into the film.

1. Define Your Story's Purpose

Start by clarifying the goal of your case study. What impact do you want? Is the film to inspire, inform, or advocate? Having a clear purpose will guide every part of production.

2. Showcase Real Voices.

Use interviews with real people involved in the project, including beneficiaries, to give an authentic perspective. Their stories and emotions are what make the case study relatable and impactful.

3. Plan the Narrative Flow.

Outline the storyline in three parts: the challenge, the solution, and the impact. This structure helps viewers follow the journey and understand the significance of the work being done.

4. Keep it Concise

Attention spans are short, so aim for a length of 3–5 minutes. Focus on key points and impactful moments to convey your message without overwhelming viewers with too much information. This can be edited down to 90 seconds for use on social media as well.

5. Prioritise Natural Conversations.

People who are not used to being on camera may feel nervous. Encourage natural conversation rather than memorising scripts. Authenticity will help them connect better with the audience. Ask people to look at the person asking the question instead of the camera. This helps put them at ease.

6. Use Visuals that Relate.

Shoot video of the local environment and activities that relate to your story. Match with the narrative. Make sure your film footage supports the message and enhances viewer understanding. Photos and smartphone footage taken by participants can really help tell the story especially when showing change happen. Every time you are out ask the question - 'Does this visually show the change we are making?'



* Still from a case-study film about Dublin City Community Co-operative.

7. End with a Call to Action.

Conclude by inviting viewers to take a specific action, whether it's to learn more, get involved, or share the film. A compelling call to action helps translate the film's emotional impact into tangible results. You hopefully have emotionally engaged the viewer and it is a great opportunity now to ask them to engage with your project.

By following these steps, you'll create a case study film that's impactful, relatable, and memorable.

More info: If you have questions, you can email Thady: work@thadykavanagh.com

* Thady Kavanagh is a Galway-based video producer who specialises in producing case study films for organisations that want to share the how, why and impact of their work. He has produced several SICAP case studies as well as creating video content for Rehab Ireland, The Wheel and St. Vincent de Paul.



Podcasting support for community sector

Near FM has officially launched a professional podcasting service for groups in the community sector. It has been providing the service since 2016 and has won awards, but is only now getting around to publicising it.

Many more community groups might take an interest in podcasting knowing that someone else is looking after the technical aspects, knowing that basic training is available and that the price is right.

That is what Near FM are offering and Changing Ireland is trying it out; we have engaged them on the technical side to help put out podcast interviews we conduct ourselves.

"We promise better than commercial rates," said station manager Ciaran Murray.

"Ideally, people talk to us before they begin recording. If an organisation is clear on what it wants, we can have podcasts ready in a few weeks.

"Our studios are in Dublin however we might be able to arrange a more local recording, using our

network of community radio stations around the country," he said.

To date Near FM has worked with local and national organisations including The Wheel, The Irish Foster Care Association, the Prevention and Early Intervention Network, Tallaght Drugs and Alcohol Taskforce, Aoibhneas and AONTAS.

They produce an ongoing series of podcasts titled 'Stories From Foster Care' with The Irish Foster Care Association.

"People who have been through fostering tell their story," said Ciaran. "They reflect on that time they were in foster care, and how important it was for them, and how the experience was for them."

"All podcasts are hosted on Nearcast and populated on all major podcast platforms including Spotify and Apple," said Ciaran.

For instance, Sadie Harpur, author of *The Hidden World of a Foster-Girl*, told about her experience undergoing multiple moves in care, her relationships with her twin sister



* Near FM's George Mulcahy and Ciaran Murray testing audio for a podcast series.

Kizzy and her birth- and foster-families, and who brought stability to her life. You can listen to it here: nearcast.ie/stories-from-foster-care-sadie-harpur/

This particular podcast won the station Gold for Best Podcast at last year's Craol Community Radio Awards.

To find out more, contact Ciaran or Paul at Near FM.

E: ciaran@near.ie, paul@near.ie

T: 01-8671190.

W: nearcast.ie/

Crucial project's notable impact after challenging period

Waterford Area Partnership supported 83 local community groups and thousands of individuals last year

**BY KATHY MASTERSON
& ALLEN MEAGHER**

Waterford Area Partnership's annual impact report for 2023, published in September, shows it is again fully involved in wide-ranging activities to develop the capacity of community groups and people across city and county.

In early 2021 the not-for-profit was close to collapse. It was sanctioned by the Charities Regulator and its CEO resigned. An interim board was established, a new CEO was hired and the company recovered, much to the relief of people in Waterford.

At the impact report launch for 2023, held in September of this year, WAP chairperson Eoin Ronayne commented:

"In recent years the Board of WAP has worked closely with the CEO, senior management and staff to guide the organisation through challenging times, building relationships with key partners and stakeholders while planning to strengthen and resource our organisation for the years ahead.

"During 2023 we launched our Strategic Plan 2024–2028, our promise to the citizens of Waterford that we will continue to provide and expand our services.

"A particularly positive development in 2023 was the renewal of our contract to deliver the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). We also saw the integration of the Atelier Roma Project into WAP and the opening of its new centre in Ivory Park. It was also our first full year operating the Local Area Employment Service (LAES) in co-operation with Waterford Leader Partnership and South Tipperary Development Company.

"While the publication of this 2023 Report reflects the commitment of the current voluntary board, in place since 2021, to restructure and expand WAP, in truth, it marks the culmination of the extraordinary level of hard work by our committed and professional staff who believe in the importance of our work. I salute the entire team led by our CEO Liam Quinn," he said.

He expressed gratitude "to all our external suppliers and support services and also to Michael Walsh (recently retired) CEO Waterford City & County Council and the various government departments we work so closely with".

Like other local development companies, Waterford Area Partnership delivers a range of social inclusion programmes through



• Waterford Mayor Cllr Jason Murphy with staff from Waterford Area Partnership, board members Jim Finn, Eadaoin Carrick and Eoin Ronayne (chair), and Waterford City and County Council staff and CEO Sean McKeown, at the launch in September of the company's impact report.

co-funding from local and national government and the EU. Its work in the city and county in 2023 included:

- 83 local community groups were supported to improve their capacity and services.
- 3,127 people were supported to improve their quality of life through training, employment, work placement, education, enterprise and wellbeing opportunities.
- 629 families and children engaged in education and wellbeing supports.
- 400 Ukrainian refugees and International Protection Applicants attended Fáilte Isteach volunteer-led English classes weekly.
- 317 individuals availed of lifelong learning supports.
- 129 disabled people received education, employability and wellbeing supports.
- 112 migrants were supported by the Integration and Employment of Migrants programme.
- 7,548 food parcels supporting 30,192 people were delivered.

WAP partners with state agencies and groups in the community and voluntary sector to deliver on its mission to: "Work in collaboration with others to empower communities and individuals by implementing person-centred programmes and activities that support social inclusion and equality."

For example, in 2023, WAP facilitated a number of programmes aimed at encouraging integration, including a week-long project in partnership with Dunhill Multi-Education Centre that brought together 46 Ukrainian refugees and local community members for a range of wellbeing activities.

Download the report here: wap.ie



• Waterford Area Partnership chairperson Eoin Ronayne speaking at the launch.



• Waterford Mayor Cllr Jason Murphy, with Waterford Area Partnership CEO Liam Quinn.

Responding with empathy

Speaking at the launch of their annual impact report Waterford Area Partnership CEO Liam Quinn noted: "The numbers of international protection applicants continue to grow at a time when opposition to their arrival provides additional challenges to our staff working with communities to respond with empathy and compassion to the needs of those fleeing persecution."

He said that one of the year's highlights was The People's Transition Project in collaboration

with the Think Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) which was focused on the communities of Lisduggan and Larchville. [This featured in our summer edition - Ed]

"The aim of this community-led project is to ensure that its residents experience a 'Just Transition' as we move to a greener future for all. The report on the project prioritises a greener, healthier and more economically sustainable future for its residents," said Mr Quinn.

Atelier Roma Project's impact

In 2023 the Atelier Roma Project moved to Waterford Area Partnership management. Atelier staff provided one-to-one and group training, and educational and personal development supports through weekly programmes - all to enhance progression to employment. As a result, 28 men and 29 women were supported into employment.

The men mostly found work in construction, retail, security and farming, while the women

progressed into employment in retail, farm work, cleaning and clerical posts.

In all, 32 participants completed training in safe pass, barista and woodwork and 40 women participated in courses including jewellery-making and dressmaking. Participants from Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Ireland took part in programmes, courses and advocacy clinics run by the project.

Ideas for Programme for Government

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES STRESS 10 POINTS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) is the representative body for Local Development Companies (LDCs) and in September it outlined ten recommendations which - if social inclusion is to be a priority - all political parties and the new government should embrace.

1 - VALUE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Make an overarching commitment to value the practice of community development and the principles of collectivity, subsidiarity, inclusiveness, and empowerment.

2 - RECOGNISE THAT THE COMMUNITY SECTOR DELIVERS

Recognise the vital role that the community and voluntary sector, and in particular the local development sector, plays. It delivers key services and enables the government to uphold its commitments to a society that is just, inclusive, and fair.

3 - COMMUNITY-BASED CLIMATE PROGRAMMES

It calls for commitment to initiating a new community-based climate programme, founded on the principle of a Just Transition. It should have a dual focus on grassroots animation and engaging marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Putting "Boots on the ground" - personnel to build grassroots capacity through mentoring, technical assistance and other kinds of early-stage developmental support - rather than grant-giving, should be the main intent of this programme.

4 - RURAL VISION

Work to advance the objectives of the EU's long-term vision for rural areas at both national and European level. (See opposite page).

5 - INVEST IN YOUTH TO STEM URBAN INEQUALITY

Approach urban inequality in a targeted, strategic, and holistic way.

The ILDN points out that inequality is most pronounced in densely populated urban areas, and that disadvantaged urban communities are disproportionately impacted by problems linked to crime, drugs, homelessness, unemployment and dereliction. It calls for ramping up co-ordinated investment in housing, services, and youth diversion supports.

6 - SUPPORT PEOPLE ON LOW INCOME

The ILDN wants more support for those in low-paid work, including: (a) Measures to continue narrowing the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage; (b) Linking medical card eligibility to a person's earnings, rather than only to the number of years since a person was employed.



• **BACK:** Jennifer Moroney Ward, CEO of PAUL Partnership; Eamonn O'Reilly, CEO, North East and West Kerry Development; Paul Rogers, CEO, Northside Partnership; Carol Baumann, CEO, the ILDN; Una Lowry, CEO, Dublin South City Partnership; Caroline Lydon, CEO, Laois Partnership; and Linda Sice Brogan, CEO, Galway City Partnership. **FRONT:** John Feerick, CEO, Sligo LEADER Partnership; Martina Earley, CEO of Roscommon LEADER Partnership; Frank Murtagh, CEO, Westmeath Community Development; and Thomas Fitzpatrick, chair, South West Mayo Development. **PHOTOS:** A.M.

7 - REACH OUT TO LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

Provide employment supports for people who are distant from the labour market.

The supports should be person-centred and sensitised to the multiplicity of needs that people often have. As a first step, the one-year limit which applies to Tús placements should be removed.

8 - PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES NEED ACCESS TO WORK

Expand employment services for people with disabilities, ensuring that the design of those services is underpinned by the principles of agency, dignity, and holistic wellbeing.

9 - EARLY YEARS CARE AND EDUCATION

Strengthen parenting and childcare supports for disadvantaged and low-income households. This should include a review of core funding rates for providers in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector.

There needs to be a long-term plan for improving pay and conditions in the sector, and an exploration of the viability of a publicly funded system for early childhood education and care.

10 - PLAN FOR INWARD MIGRATION

The government needs to recognise that: (i) inward migration is likely to become more prevalent in the years and decades ahead, particularly as climate change accelerates, (ii) the provision of asylum is one of our international

responsibilities, and (iii) migration is a necessity for the effective functioning of our economy and society. (For more see page 5).

- By Allen Meagher



• Senator Micheál Carrigy (who has now been elected a TD) chatting with (l-to-r) Michelle Mullally and Carol Baumann of the ILDN during Local Development Week.



• Carol Baumann, CEO of the ILDN, and Thomas Fitzpatrick, chair, South West Mayo Development, chatting with Minister of State Dara Calleary from Ballina during Local Development Week.

These measures would boost rural development

- says Irish Local Development Network

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) is calling for accelerated investment in rural connectivity with a particular focus on transport in areas that are chronically underserved. It also urges the next government to reduce bureaucracy to boost rural development.

LESS BUREAUCRACY AND MORE FUNDS

It calls for a reduction in LEADER bureaucracy and simplifying the process for community groups wishing to apply. This is needed to ensure that LEADER funding is genuinely accessible to all community groups - as per the programme's underlying aims and principles - and not just to large or well-established community groups.

It wants more funding for LEADER which is the primary instrument for community-led local development. It wants the next government to allocate at least 10 per cent of Ireland's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to LEADER in the next programming period, with Ireland's exchequer top-up to equal or exceed this amount.

EXPAND RURAL SOCIAL SCHEME

The ILDN also highlights the importance of the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) to small-scale farmers and fishers, and to the rural communities that benefit from the services that are delivered through the Scheme. It says that top-up payments for RSS participants should increase to €50 per week, and the age limit - which prohibits participation beyond a person's 66th birthday - should be removed.

LEADER EXAMPLE - MEATH RIVER RESCUE



• When a drowning occurs, bodies are usually recovered thanks in no small part to voluntary search, rescue and recovery groups. Meath River Rescue is one such group and it has benefitted from LEADER funding. The group - entirely volunteer run - was established in Navan in 1996 and it provides a service in Meath and adjacent counties. The project operates out of a facility in Navan that was part funded by LEADER during the 2007-2013 programme. It successfully applied a second time to LEADER for funding to replace essential equipment that had become degraded with wear and tear over time. It received help with the paperwork involved in submitting its requests for LEADER funding from Meath Partnership, one of 49 local development companies that provide countrywide coverage. See our original story about Meath River Rescue at: changingireland.ie

Sligo LEADER Partnership celebrates 30 years



• Declan Bree, chair of Sligo County Council, John Feerick CEO of Sligo LEADER Partnership, Michael Quigley who was the organisation's first CEO, and Amanda McCloat, current chairperson. Michael received a special recognition award at the event.

BY KATHY MASTERSON

Sligo LEADER Partnership (SLP) held a community showcase in early October with hundreds of attendees gathering at the Clayton Hotel, Sligo, to celebrate 30 years in operation.

Over 40 exhibitors representing Sligo LEADER programmes, local agencies, and community groups showcased their initiatives, reinforcing the theme of the day - collaboration.

The event highlighted the achievements of Sligo LEADER over the decades and a special presentation was made to Michael Quigley, one of the founders and a former CEO of SLP.

Michael said: "Sligo LEADER was established based on the needs of the community in Sligo. LEADER was a great programme and other programmes followed on the back of its success in social inclusion and employment support."

Twenty years of the Rural Social Scheme was also acknowledged, with the programme celebrated for its crucial role in supporting local farmers and rural communities, and its continuing impact on community life across the county.

John Feerick, CEO of SLP, said the event "captured the spirit of what Sligo LEADER stands for - community, collaboration, and progress. It's an honour to celebrate these milestones with the people who make our work possible".

"Sligo LEADER Partnership is always about providing the necessary supports in our communities. We always put the individual needs of our clients first and we aim to enhance the lives of the people of Sligo with all of the programmes that we administer," he said.

INCLUSION

Sligo LEADER Partnership was founded in 1994 to support rural communities and disadvantaged

areas in Sligo.

It currently operates the following programmes: LEADER, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, the Community Employment Scheme, Tús, the Rural Social Scheme, Sligo/Leitrim Local Area Employment Service, Rural Recreation, WorkAbility programme, Day Centres for the Elderly and integration supports.

With more than 50 staff, and close to 300 people on employment schemes, the organisation is to the fore in providing community supports in Sligo town and county.

"We have a great team of people who work closely with our communities, and this is something we value very highly," said the new chair of SLP, Dr Amanda McCloat.

"One of the unique things about Sligo LEADER Partnership is how we can leverage different programmes off one another, and we refer to this as the wraparound supports," she added.



• Megan Gayda was among those attending the 30th anniversary celebrations. Sligo LEADER Partnership provided her photographic business with support through two national initiatives - the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

ILDN calls for restoring community funds cut after banking crash

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

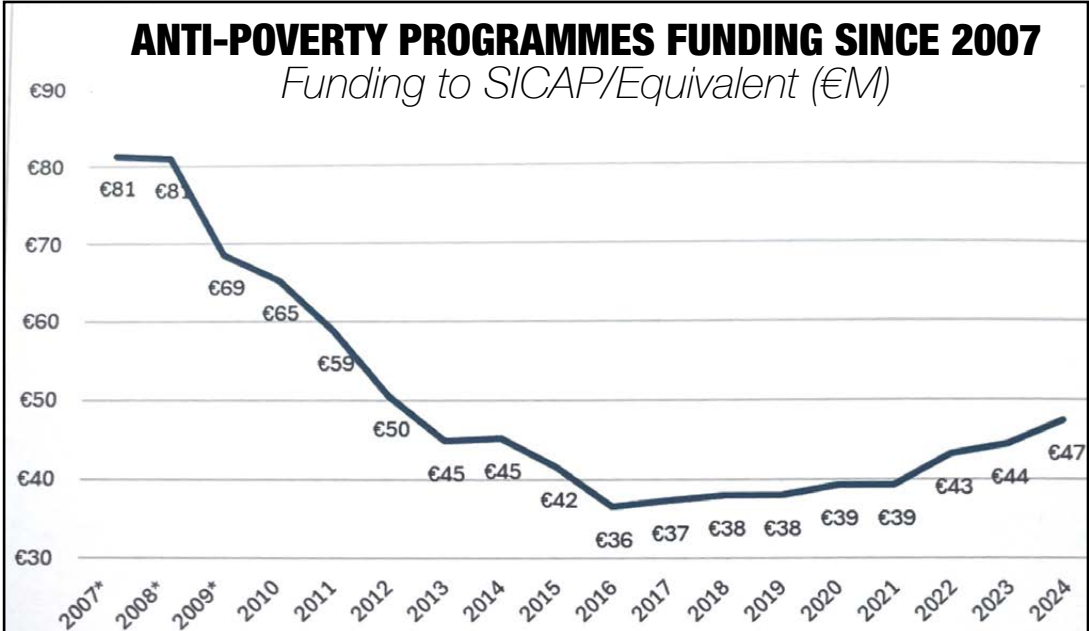
The Irish Local Development Network calls for the new programme for government to embody equality, inclusiveness, and effective partnership between the State, the local development sector, and the broader community and voluntary (C&V) Sector.

With regards to the C&V and local development sectors it wants the next government to:

(A) Establish a sustainable funding model for local development companies that is built on adequate, multi-annual funding, that facilitates long-range planning and capacity-building, and that ensures that a space for autonomous community development is preserved.

(B) Fully reverse the cuts in funding for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), which is Ireland's flagship programme for combatting poverty and social exclusion at a local level, which took effect during the years of economic austerity. See Appendix 1 for an overview of SICAP cuts.

(C) Review the methods through which Government commissions the services of the local development and C&V sectors (principally competitive tendering) and the impact of these commissioning models on the sustainability of the sector and the quality of outcomes.



(D) Commit to developing a successor to the Strategy for the Community and Voluntary Sector 2019-2024, and to resourcing that strategy to deliver on commitments.

(E) Commit to making Ireland's social economy, and its support structure for social enterprises, the most innovative, vibrant, and robust in Europe.

Notes on above figures:

- Figures for 2007-2009 refer to the Community Development Programme and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (combined).
- These programmes were amalgamated into the Local Community Development Programme (which operated between 2010 and April 2015).
- This programme evolved into the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) that has operated since 2015.

SIPTU COMMUNITY

Ringfenced funding for salary increases in early years education and childcare welcomed

SIPTU has welcomed €45 million extra in Budget 2025 to raise pay for workers in the early years education and childcare sector.

Avril Green, an early years educator and union leader said: "This marks progress in our fight for better pay and recognition. Low wages push passionate educators away. We're moving in the right direction."

SIPTU's head of strategic organising, Darragh O'Connor, said: "Thanks to our activists and members, the government now sees low pay as a big issue in Early Years. Minister O'Gorman has boosted pay investment. This is to be commended. Now, we urge Early

Years employers to negotiate a new pay deal without delay."

Minister Roderic O'Gorman confirmed the increase in his Budget 2025 speech on October 2, saying: "This would be the third successive pay increase for the sector, and hopefully sets out a clear pathway for further increases."

SIPTU members have highlighted for years how low pay was creating a staffing crisis in the early years education and childcare sector. Managers and staff have struggled financially and services are under continual pressure with children, parents and communities losing out.

Early Childhood Ireland wants pay

parity with primary school teachers for early years professionals. Its policy director Frances Byrne said, "Despite thousands of students participating in degree-level Early Years courses each year, we hear too many stories of graduates pursuing careers elsewhere because their prospects of working in Early Years and School Age Care settings are still quite poor."

She noted that while some political parties proposed to reduce fees for parents this is unfeasible without a stable workforce. An independent review estimates that up to 20,000 additional staff will be needed by 2028.



• SIPTU campaigners, young and old, including (back, right) union official Darragh O'Connor.

PODCAST: Changing Ireland Together

Jim Lillis - Hurler, hillwalker, volunteer and Coolock changemaker

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

After serving for over 20 years as a voluntary board member and chairperson of Speedpak Group in Coolock, Dublin, Jim Lillis stepped down in August. We met him in Speedpak's HQ, where staff were busy packing boxes and making rosettes, to interview him for our *Changing Ireland Together Podcast*. This is also the place where Changing Ireland is packed for distribution.

Originally from Co. Clare, Jim's days of hurling, squash and hillwalking have stood to him as he's fit and sprightly at 80.

"I hurled at minor level in Clare, playing for St Flannan's. Later I became an international hurler, because I worked with Aer Lingus and when we went abroad we played anybody who could muster a team.

"I played squash competitively and later joined a hillwalking group. I've been with them for over 30 years and we've walked all over Ireland, the UK and in the Alps."

CLARE TO JAPAN

Jim partly sought a job with Aer Lingus so he could travel, however he worked mainly in head office. After doing a degree by night he got a job with Ireland's new Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and got to travel the world.

Japan is the most exotic country he has visited, he said: "Once you get out of Tokyo and into the countryside it's very different to Ireland. Lots of very steep hills, lots of timber homes. The have temples and very different rituals. And the civility of the people in general I was very impressed with.

"As a life experience travelling is very important. Exposing yourself to other cultures is uplifting and enlightening."

POVERTY IN TALLAGHT

Poverty was prevalent across Ireland when Jim got his first job in the early 1960s and throughout his star-studded career, he was always drawn to volunteering.

"When you come from the West of Ireland you've seen poverty. You couldn't avoid it in the 1960s. After I moved to Dublin, one day a friend of mine had to bring some help out to Tallaght to a new place called Jobstown and he said 'Will you come along?'. So I did and when we arrived there Jobstown was only



• Jim Lillis in the Speedpak Group's premises in Coolock. The industrial units were provided by the IDA with whom Jim worked for eight years. PHOTO: A. Meagher.

in its embryonic stages. It was very raw. There was a burnt out truck up at the top of the road and we called into a lady's house to give the household Vincent de Paul help.

"When she opened the door she thanked us, but said 'We need mattresses'. What had happened was that some family became homeless, they needed someplace to go and they came to her and there was already two homeless families living in her house. You were confronted with real poverty. And the only people helping them other than the Vincent de Paul were three nuns who were living in a house in the same area. That opened my eyes and it's always stuck with me."

SHOCKING BAD HAND OF CARDS

For 21 years Jim served as the chairperson of Speedpak and he never saw it coming.

"I was a new board member and at the second meeting I was sitting there sort of day-dreaming. The next minute the chairman announced that he was retiring at that meeting and that he was nominating Jim Lillis to take over. That's how people get bounced into it. I have been chairperson since then," he said.

He was in place before new regulations were introduced and today there are limits on how long

What does Speedpak Group do?

The Speedpak Group has two commercial businesses: a contract packing and e-fulfilment services (speedpak.ie) and a manufacturing business (shamrockrosettes.com) that produces rosettes to order across Ireland and the EU.

It operates as a social enterprise and was set up in three decades ago when long-term unemployment in Coolock and surrounding areas in north Dublin was exceptionally high. The initiative was driven by Northside Partnership and the business community, with state agency support, to give people work experience, industry training and paid employment. Speedpak began trading in 1995 and has taken on many hundreds of people since on Community Employment (CE) Schemes.

One of the company's challenges is to get the balance right between its focus on the profitable commercial arm and its training, mentoring and educational services. Today it employs 15 core staff and up to 60 people annually on CE and Tús programmes.

Former chairperson Jim Lillis explains: "The commercial business pays a huge amount of

the cost of running the operation. It has to be profitable. Side by side you have the vocational element. So you need a board that's capable of making commercial decisions in relation to property, machinery, health and safety, marketing and so on. We've got to have a sales team, a production team, finance control.

"One of the commercial businesses is contract packing, but we have moved on to also become an e-fulfilment house for online shopping.

"If somebody orders something online that company has to have the product in a warehouse. And it has to have an IT system that connects the three entities - the buyer, the company that has the core business and the store which is us. So we see orders coming in and we know what the delivery requirements are. We put the orders together and call a logistics transport company to deliver them.

"The rosettes we produce are first class quality ribbons and we supply all of the major shows in the country," he added.

We've seen the rosettes being produced - for more see page 17.

(Continued on next page)

FEBRUARY

ALL IRELAND COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL AWARDS

Now in its 19th year, the All Ireland Community and Council Awards will take place in the Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork, on February 22nd. These awards recognise and celebrate community and councils working together.

W: lamaawards.ie/

AFRI'S FÉILE BRIDE CONFERENCE

The annual Féile Bride Conference takes place in mid-February in the Solas Bhríde Centre, Kildare town. It is organised by Action From Ireland (Afri) and a date will shortly be announced for the 2025 conference.

W: afri.ie/

MARCH

FIRST CUT! YOUTH FILM FESTIVAL

This festival provides young filmmakers between the ages of 12 and 24 with a platform for screening their short films.

It presents films in all genres by individual filmmakers, schools and youth groups as well as offering workshops and talks by film industry professionals.

March 3-8th, 2025.

W: firstcutfilmfestival.com/

AONTAS STAR AWARDS 2025

The AONTAS STAR Awards which will take place on March 7 in Croke Park are the culmination of the annual AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. The Awards recognise inspiring adult, community and further education initiatives across Ireland.

The 19th iteration of the awards has five categories:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Learner Voice
- Social Inclusion
- Global Citizenship Education
- Third-level Access.

W: aontas.com/events/aontas-star-awards-2025

PODCAST (cont'd)

(Continued from previous page)

a board member can serve. Jim had good reason however for sticking around (listen to the podcast).

"The big thing for people like me coming from a middle class background and a secure job and I've worked all my life, I haven't been unemployed for a single day - and you come into an environment like Darndale where there are great people who have been dealt a shocking bad hand of cards. And they have to make do with this and they have ambition, but they're stuck.

"When you come to the board meetings and you see that you're making a difference, that there are awards coming to the company, that people coming through here are getting jobs, it makes it all worthwhile."

COLLECTIVE PRIDE

Asked what he and the company would be most proud of collectively, he pointed to a wall of awards.

This year Speedpak won the Environmental, Social and Governance Social Impact Award for Small and Medium Enterprises from *Business & Finance* magazine.

"We have also won national awards from Diagio, from Ulster Bank and from others," added Jim.

JOINING A BOARD 20 YEARS AGO V. NOW

He said there is "an enormous difference" between joining a board in 2002 compared to today. He has seen increasing expectations placed on volunteers, a raft of new regulations, the setting up of the Charity Regulator, and new challenges in adhering to a governance code.

"This has all made it very difficult for spontaneous charities to be set up. Now you have to build a structure, you have to have responsibility for all your actions," he said.

RISKS OF VOLUNTEERING

There is more pressure on voluntary board members nowadays and Jim was horrified by an example of volunteers being abused by the system recently - as shown on RTE:

"Revenue sent them a bill for over €100,000 that they were tax liable for personally. It took four years to resolve. From the start, someone senior in the Charity Regulator's office should have spoken to some senior person in Revenue. This does great damage to our sector.

"We're very lucky in Speedpak that we have great people on the board who have specialist skills. There is trust in each other. We abide by the regulations. We have adopted



• Speedpak staff Paul Blake and Edward Stokes, Jim Lillis before he retired from Speedpak's board after two decades, and John P. Murphy, CEO.



• Staff hard at work in Speedpak, Coolock. PHOTOS: A.M.

the governance code and we fulfill all the regulations, but it takes an enormous amount of time. Here it took nearly two years to get through all of the processes. It would put most people off (especially if you're starting up)."

MAGIC WAND AND VOLUNTEERING

Jim would like to see volunteering, community development and social enterprise promoted like never before, given as strong a push as the IDA gave to enterprise and employment. If he had a magic wand he would set up a national entity to promote the good in the community and voluntary sector.

"A huge amount of people give their time to rugby clubs and GAA clubs. That's volunteering and some of those entities are almost replacing social institutions in their community, they are great outlets. I would like a big promotional campaign of role models. I'd like to see a programme to promote volunteering and social enterprise in Ireland where it is recognised as being of great value. That would be highly beneficial, because otherwise there's a risk that there's a great loss of a moral compass in Irish society," he said.

PHILANTHROPY

"A positive development in recent years is that nowadays there is more awareness of CSR - corporate social responsibility. American companies

brought it here; It's almost part of the American culture that you owe something back to society without making a big deal out of it," said Jim.

"Some companies sail close to the wind because they just rename their marketing budget 'corporate social responsibility'. Then you have other companies who are really great and they look for no publicity. We have some here who have helped us, with no publicity. They find people, they find expertise, they'll finance projects for you. They see it as part of the responsibility of the company to reach out. It's a very good attitude," he concluded.

HEROES

Outside of family he named two people he hugely admires.

"I highly respect Michael Killeen who was the first chief executive of the IDA. In the 1950s over 400,000 people immigrated and the IDA was set up to create industry and jobs. Great credit is due to him.

"Pádraig Harrington would be my second hero. There's always a smile on his face and he has three Masters behind him."

FUNNY

Finally, you might ask - what is someone with such a positive attitude reading at the moment?

"I'm reading 'This is Happiness' by a guy called Niall Williams which is based in West Clare, part of my homeland. It's set in the 1950s and it's very funny book," concluded Jim.

Coolock's famous rosettes



• John P. Murphy CEO of Speedpak Group holds a Business & Finance social impact award which the company won this year.



• Rosettes are produced to order for corporate and school events, family and social occasions including school sports days, prize-giving ceremonies, hen parties, weddings, birthday parties, first holy communion and confirmation.



• The team at Shamrock Rosettes made up a special order to present to Changing Ireland featuring the Limerick and Cork colours.

Shamrock Rosettes has a social impact in Coolock

Shamrock Rosettes supply customised rosettes, badges, sashes and accessories to agricultural shows and equestrian events. In recent years the company began exporting and now has customers in Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Switzerland and Finland. As a consequence it is now a client of Enterprise Ireland.

Shamrock Rosettes is part of the

Speedpak Group which also provides contract packing and e-fulfillment services. Its work has a social impact in providing work for long-term unemployed people in communities that experience social and economic challenges. All profits are reinvested into the organisation's social mission.

More info: shamrockrosettes.com/



Michelle came in to "lend a hand" 25 years ago

Shamrock Rosettes supports about 60 people annually and has been in business since the 1990s.

Michelle Stone from Artane is the team leader, but she never imagined working for a non-profit enterprise.

"I came in to help a friend of mine for three weeks and I'm here now nearly 25 years. I didn't intend working here, but once I was in I loved it.

"We do rosettes for horse shows, cattle shows, dog shows, sometimes even weddings.

"For the people working here it's a Community Employment Scheme. It gets them back to work. We give them experience and train them how to make rosettes.

She said some people went on to get "really good jobs" while others benefit from the training and their confidence improves.

"A lot would have been lone parents and many of them get back to work. They usually do four hours a day. It gives them a different outlook, they're not stuck at home. A lot of



• Michelle Stone, manager of Shamrock Rosettes, speaking to Changing Ireland.

them come in with low confidence and walk out full of confidence," she said.

Michelle will ensure you are

looked after if you need rosettes!

You can put in an order here:

shamrockrosettes.com

Shane from Ashbourne says part-time work is good

Shane takes two buses to get from Ashbourne to Coolock for 9am and is always at work on time. He operates a hand-operated cutting machine as part of the rosettes team.

"The work is good," he told Changing Ireland. "I work three mornings, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday."

He is "very happy" working in Speedpak and part-time suits him.

On Thursdays, Shane goes to Trim and onto Blanchardstown.

"I walk around Trim first and then go bowling. On Fridays, I go to Prosper Day Service on Seatown Road in Swords," he said.

Shane is also a member of Remember Us in Balbriggan, joining them four times a week. "It is a special needs club. We do football sessions, dancing, art and boxing. We play basketball and pool in the club. It is really good," he said.



• Shane at work on a cutting machine.

Communities and local authorities



• Vinnie O'Shea, national co-ordinator of Healthy Ireland-Local Government.



• Denis Fitzpatrick, Cork City LCDC member and chairperson of a local residents group.



• Margaret McConnell, Sligo LCDC speaking.



• Margo Hayes, Tipperary LCDC speaking.

So much happening in local authority/community space

In 2014 then local government and communities minister Phil Hogan oversaw the transfer to local authority jurisdiction of certain State responsibilities towards communities. Ten years on there is so much happening in the local authority/community space that it is hard to keep up. In October the Department of Rural and Community Development held a national informational event in Athlone to update key stakeholders.

Among the speakers were Vinnie O'Shea from Healthy Ireland – Local Government and Sheila Deegan who spoke about Creative Ireland's impact.

Kieran Moylan from the Department of Rural and Community Development explained how a full examination of the current guidelines for Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) will be conducted.

His colleague Edel Healy spoke about integration work through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and progress on the Community Connections Project announced in July that will

see up to 30 new community workers hired in part to address at local level mis- and dis-information.

Doreen McDonagh from the Local Government Management Agency also gave an update relating to integration, talking about her work with the newly-established Local Authority Integration Teams across the country.

Speakers from LCDCs in Sligo and Tipperary outlined innovative and contrasting implementation methods for achieving their aims.

An update was also provided on work being done by the Centre for Effective Services to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs).

Meanwhile, Gráinne Berrill, the director of the new National Office of Community Safety provided an overview of the nationwide roll out of community safety partnerships.

The presentations from the event in Athlone are now available on the Department's website, always a good place to find out what is happening: gov.ie



• Sheila Deegan, Assistant Principal, Dept of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media with responsibility for Creative Ireland.



• Kieran Moylan, Principal Officer, DRCD, with responsibility for libraries development and the community policy.

Update on roadmap to develop Public Participation Networks

In 2022 an independent review of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) - conducted by Mazars for the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) - was published. Following publication a working group was set up and an implementation roadmap was drafted. That roadmap was published this summer; it is available on the government's website (gov.ie) and it contains 38 actions.

Speaking in Athlone, on October 9, Jake Ryan from DRCD gave an update on the roadmap's implementation. He pointed out it was 10 years since legislation was adopted to set up PPNs and the roadmap sought to identify opportunities for strengthening the networks.

The roadmap's priority areas are:

- Governance and Accountability.
- Communications and Engagement.
- Coordination and Participation.
- Training, delivery and supports.
- Staffing and skills.
- Others such as funding and resources.

This coming year the focus will be on three actions. They are: firstly, to look at clarifying roles and responsibilities within PPNs;



• Jake Ryan, DRCD, speaking in Athlone.

secondly, to produce a plain English guide to PPNs; thirdly, to scope out the possibility of establishing a national co-ordination structure for PPNs and to see what it might look like.

"We're not talking about a representative body for all PPNs. What we are talking about is a central body that can provide support to PPNs for shared issues," said Jake.

The roadmap will be implemented over several years.

For more on PPNs see page 5.



• Shane Tiernan, Chief Executive, Roscommon County Council.



• PJ King, DRCD-spoke about an upcoming local and national campaign to raise awareness about Local Community Development Committees.

Extra staff for local authorities to help them apply for rural and community grants

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Extra staff are being hired by local authorities – some have already been recruited – to help with funding applications to the Department of Rural and Community Development. Since the Department was established in 2017 there has been substantial growth in rural capital funding, so much so that it became a challenge for aspiring applicants. The solution – Capital Delivery Teams.

“We knew there were a lot of challenges,” said Elaine Jennings, speaking at a recent national networking meeting for people involved in Local Community Development Committees. Elaine is a member of a special team set up within the Department and led by principal officer Paul Geraghty to find a solution.

“One of the challenges was the fact that we have been increasing the amount of funding available for capital projects since the Department was founded. It has approximately tripled, and more money means more projects, which means more administration, which means more need for staff,” she said.

The problem was highlighted in a report from the County and City Management Association which clearly demonstrated the need for more staffing.

For local authorities time is of the essence, yet recruitment takes longer as Ireland is at near full employment and all the while construction costs are rising, making it harder to plan. Also, not all funding applications are successful, yet labour costs must be covered (which is of course also the case for community groups applying for the larger funds).

“The Capital Delivery Teams is our response to the need that was



• Staff from the Department of Rural and Community Development at the networking event for people involved in Local Community Development Committees: Emma Deignan, Paul Geraghty, Principal Officer, Mary Hurley, Secretary General, and Elaine Jennings. PHOTOS: A. Meagher.

expressed,” said Elaine.

The departmental group that designed the funding scheme for local authority staff made the case for five-year funding, the maximum available.

As Elaine said, “This is established funding, it’s for long-term staff who are dedicated to DRCD-funded projects. So the staff are there at all times and they will become experts in our schemes.

“We offered up to €260,000 per year to each of the 28 non-city local authorities. It is tailored to each local authority’s needs. Essentially we told each local authority - here’s the pot of money available, you

tell us what your needs are. In some local authorities what they lack is technical staff and in some local authorities it is more on the community side that the gaps were identified,” she said.

Every local authority that was eligible has applied and recruitment has begun in many places.

It is hoped the new teams will improve timelines in the delivery of community projects.

Asked could community groups get similar support, a department official suggested that community groups make use of the new staffing resources within local authorities to help them with applications.



• Darragh McCabe, DCEDIY, gave updates on an evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of Children and Young People’s Services Committees.



• Doreen McDonagh from the Local Government Management Agency was among the speakers.



• Edel Healy, DRCD, gave an update on the Community Connections Project which will see up to 30 new community workers hired shortly.

Campaign to raise awareness about work by Local Community Development Committees

A campaign will be launched soon to increase public awareness about an independent committee system that has operated from 2014 across the country at local authority level and which aims to support the development of communities.

“There’s a lot of work going on behind the scenes that we need to get out there,” said PJ King from the Department of Rural and Community Development. As far back as 2019, a review found there was a general lack of awareness in relation to what LCDCs do, how they connects with the citizens, the good work that they do, and why they do it.

He told attendees at an event in Athlone on October 9 for those already involved in Local Community

Development Committees (LCDCs) that the campaign would be both local and national. It may start before the end of this year – otherwise in early 2025.

It will highlight the role and function of LCDCs whose committee memberships are made up of local authority, statutory agency, community and community sector representatives. They are responsible for bringing a more co-ordinated approach to development, matching resources to the greatest needs.

Since they were first established they have become much more active in the community space.

Regarding the awareness campaign, PJ said that, as a first step they put together a working group comprising of key stakeholders chaired by the Department.



• Gráinne Berrill, director of the National Office of Community Safety.

NATIONAL SHOWCASE

Empowering Communities: Start small, dream big!

A Showcase Day in Athlone in September for 27 projects connected to the Empowering Communities Programme (ECP) and the Community Development Programme (CDP) opened with a Changing Ireland video

made possible by collaboration with projects around the country.

Thanks to all who sent in video clips and hundreds of photos. We were overwhelmed with choice!

While CDP workers had met once

before in person, the showcase event was the first time ECP project workers had met. The photographs on this page feature events and activities from eight of the 17 ECP projects.

Dublin's Inner City



• Seniors enjoying chair yoga at an Empowering Communities event organised in northside Dublin's inner city.

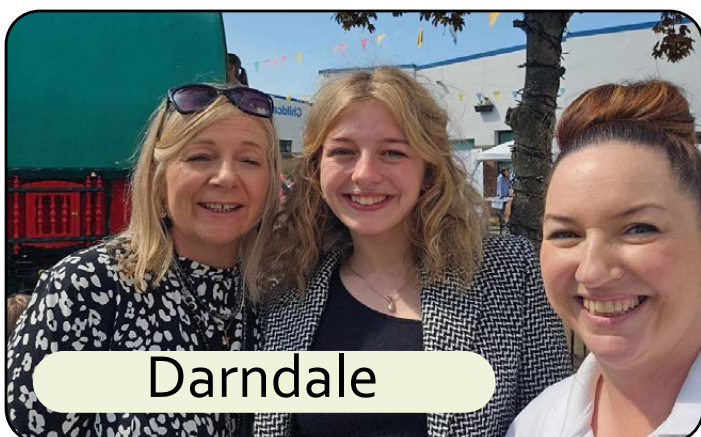


• Over 300 people turned out to fish on the Abbey River in Limerick city as part of a King's Island Empowering Communities event.

Arranmore



• Fair day for dancing at the Rose of Arranmore Festival 2024 - organised by Active Arranmore.



Darndale

• The sun shone for a community fair held in Darndale through the local Empowering Communities project. Pictured: Residents Colette Darling from 'Women of Worth', Maria Williams who launched the event and (Cllr) Dearbhail Butler, ECP Team Leader with Northside Partnership.



Dalton Park, Mullingar

• Children of Dalton Park helping out on a litter pick organised by the local Empowering Communities project.



Cherry Orchard

• Empowering Communities worker on a litter pick-up in Cherry Orchard, Dublin.



Knocknaheeny

• Chair of Cork City Partnership Cllr Kenneth Collins and community worker Yvonne Quilligan at a fun day in Knocknaheeny, Cork.



Bunclody

• Children at a sports day organised by Empowering Communities in Bunclody which is supported by Wexford Local Development.

Impact of autonomous projects engaged in community development is striking

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

The Empowering Communities Programme (ECP) aims to enhance community access to key services, and empower local communities to craft their own response to area based poverty, social exclusion and the resulting consequences.

The ECP is delivered within 17 small areas in the following local authority areas:

- Dublin City (5 areas).
- South Dublin (2 areas).
- Limerick City and County.
- Westmeath.
- Kildare.
- Longford.
- Galway County.
- Cork City.
- Mayo.
- Roscommon.
- Wexford.
- Donegal.

The work is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and relevant Local Community Development Committees.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Community Development Programme supports community-led interventions that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality and promote human rights.

The programme launched in 2021 with these seven approved projects:

- Clare Traveller CDP.
- Cultúr Migrant CDP.
- Donegal Intercultural Platform.
- Independent Living Movement Ireland's Voice project.
- Inner City Organisations Network.
- Kilkenny Community Traveller Movement.
- Longford Roma and New Communities CDP.

In 2023, the programme was expanded to include three more projects:

- Amal Women's Association.
- AMACH! LGBT+.
- Limerick Traveller Network.

A national project team oversees the programme. The team is made up of representatives from the Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal and Community Work Ireland.

- Residents taking action in 27 hard-pressed communities are experiencing pride, joy, connection and confidence



• Community development is putting pride into communities across the country. For example, over 300 people turned out for the King's Island Fishing Day organised by local fishermen and Limerick's empowering communities project.

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

A highly anticipated gathering of community development workers doing remarkable work with communities across the country took place in Athlone on September 23. Over 100 attendees, most of whom had not met before, came together to showcase their work from places as varied as an island in Donegal and a housing estate in Kildare.

Throughout the day, they gave testimonies and presented videos showing people in communities that are often stigmatised because of crime and poverty, or marginalised by discrimination, or distanced from the centres of power. They were seen enjoying teddy-bear picnics, doing litter pick-ups, fishing, doing chair yoga, taking part in fairs, planting vegetables and organising sports events and fun days.

These were activities chosen within the communities by the people themselves.

The projects are all community-based and community-led and autonomous (apart from funding) and speaker after speaker demonstrated how going door-to-door, connecting people, and getting people involved, builds pride. They said pride drives change.

A group of women from Arranmore began walking and talking like never before, including a 70-year-old lady who surprised all by walking 300 kilometres in 100 days, said Padraig Fingleton, CEO of Donegal Local Development.

People from across Arranmore turned out for a comedy night that got them talking about the menopause. After breaking that taboo

Michelle Hannon explained how the project on King's Island is restoring pride in a much stigmatised community.

people were far more open to talking about other matters. Their confidence to lead grew.

"They were doing things they had not done before," said Padraig, paying tribute to Fiona Ní Ghloinn, the co-ordinator of the empowering communities project called Active Arranmore.

Meanwhile, on a very different island 360km to the south and inland, a menopausal group emerged through another empowering communities project. Michelle Hannon from the PAUL Partnership in Limerick explained how their project on the city's King's Island is restoring pride in a much stigmatised community. The area's statistics show the highest levels of poverty and unemployment in the country and low educational attainment - compounded by criminality.

"As we see from Pobal's deprivation map, we have many communities in Limerick that are experiencing poverty. While many

areas across the country have increased in affluence, these areas have in some cases got worse. Over one-fifth of the population in Limerick City is living in disadvantage. However, even in Limerick City, King's Island is an outlier," said Michelle.

When it came to empowering the community, through an impressive calendar of community-led activities, "the words that come to mind for us are participation, opportunity and partnership", said Michelle. "It has been about changing the narrative of that community, which for years has just been so negative."

King's Island recently made headlines for starting a food-growing and biodiversity project that has hives with 800,000 bees, and for organising fishing competitions that brought hundreds of people to the area.

The project's co-ordinator Mary Hughes described how a women's group that came together is officially called the Crafty Monday Group, but among themselves they call it the Menopausal Group.

Members of the group are glad to connect after much upheaval in the community. Generally, people on King's Island felt abandoned by the State and let down by regeneration. Talking about the women's group, one of nine groups established locally with project support, Mary said:

"Some of the women had been relocated through regeneration. One woman, having lived in the very first house that was knocked down in St.

(Continued on next page)

NATIONAL SHOWCASE

(Continued from previous page)

Mary's Park some years ago, now comes back on a weekly basis. She had lost connection to the people that she'd grown up with, the people that she'd raised her children with, and she comes back on Mondays now to link in and reconnect with the people that she knew and trusted and to relive that community spirit again."

The group has gelled so well that recently the women headed off independently on holidays together to Benidorm in Spain.

On an official journey, women supported by Dublin's Inner City Organisation Network (ICON) recently travelled to Brussels. ICON is one of 10 projects now funded through the Community Development Programme.

ICON project co-ordinator Sian Muldowney, said, "Participation at international level has emerged for some of the projects as a really good step to tap into community influence, whether we reach out more to European projects, or make connections within the UN."



• Sian Muldowney from ICON speaking at the showcase event.

Closer to home, residents from five housing estates in the Athy West Urban Area in Co. Kildare took a trip to Waterford to see the murals and street art for inspiration.

Patrick Monaghan and Jason Leigh work with the 1,011 residents in these estates in Athy and they appreciate being supported to work at hyper-local level.

The evolution of the project over 18 months shows how starting small leads to bigger things. For example, 40 residents from the five estates graduated with a level five award in Community Addiction Studies in November.

"That is some achievement, especially for people who had maybe negative memories of classroom education. And it all started with a litter pick," said Patrick.

In another community, in Cork city, trust was built by overcoming an intractable problem - clearing rats from a derelict area, literally with shovels - and then the project began to move forward.

Geraldine Nolan from Northside Partnership in Dublin, said she recalls her manager saying about

The 27 projects being showcased consisted of 10 from the Community Development Programme and 17 from the Empowering Communities Programme.

the Empowering Communities Programme: "This is different".

Their approach with two staff and four people working on a Community Employment Scheme involves slow, steady engagement with the community, focusing on listening and meeting people where they are at.

Throughout the presentations it was fabulous for all to hear of each other's work through stories and statistics.

The 27 projects being showcased consisted of 10 projects from the new Community Development Programme, set up in March 2021, and 17, also funded by government, through the Empowering Communities Programme, launched in June 2022.

After the presentations, Bairbre NicAongusa, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Rural and Community Development, expressed her team's appreciation, saying the event highlighted the value of community development, showed the passion of the community development workers and showed how they had made a big impact in a short space of time.

"I thank you all for your work, for your communities' work, because it is really valued and it's very much valued by the Department and we're here to support you in every way that we can," she added.

Also at the event, Joe O'Brien, Minister for Rural and Community Development, said: "True community development must always be about allowing communities to decide what is best for them, and both these programmes will ensure the voices of the people are central to decision making."

He was also very impressed with what he saw and heard.

New projects sincerely hope they will not "disappear off" as some residents predict



• Above photos from top to bottom feature people involved in AMACH! LGBT+ in Galway city, Clare Traveller Community Development Project, and Dublin's Inner City Organisations Network.

Long-term funding is always a concern. As community worker Patrick Monaghan from Athy said, it is hard to plan strategically without being sure about future funding. Nonetheless, his Empowering Communities project is working on a three-year plan.

Speaking about their experience, Geraldine Nolan from Northside Partnership in Dublin said, "It's so important for this project to continue well into the future, to be able to keep the trust."

"We've all worked hard to build that trust. Local people did say a few times, 'You're just going to come in for a little while and then you'll disappear off'. We really hope for longevity, for sustainability, so that we're able to help people achieve their potential through Empowering Communities," she added.

Thankfully, their funding is secure for the immediate future and both programmes have expanded since being launched.

Over the past 18 months, the Empowering Communities Programme has expanded to three more local authority areas.

In October, Joe O'Brien, Minister for Rural and Community Development, said in relation to Budget 2025 that he had "secured an additional €1 million for a further expansion of the Empowering Communities Programme, which will see more community workers being deployed in some of the most disadvantaged communities across the country".

Furthermore, in a statement on November 3, Minister O'Brien announced a two-year extension to the Community Development Programme for the original seven projects. The grant aid will be €125,000 per project, per annum, for the duration of the extension.

In May 2023, three additional projects had been admitted to the programme with support assured for three years.

There will be no shortage of demand for such projects. Over 120 groups applied to the Community Development Programme when it was first advertised.

On page 24 we outline the case made by one hopeful project.

NATIONAL SHOWCASE

**Empowering Communities Programme and Community Development Programme
- one day Showcase Event held in Athlone on September 23.**



• *Padraig Fingleton, CEO, Donegal Local Development Company; Brenda Cahill, CEO, Cork City Partnership; and Balume Dube, Donegal Intercultural Platform.*



• *Staff from the Department of Rural and Community Development smiling after a successful showcase event in Athlone.*



• *Deirdre Kelly, Principal Officer, and Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Assistant Secretary, DRCD.*



• *Participants networking over coffee.*



• *Owen Binchy from Liffey Partnership and Sian Muldowney from ICON chatting at the showcase.*



• *Community workers with Amach LGBT+ in Galway - Sarah Corsini and Tiernan Arnep Egan.*



• *Angel Marroquin of Cultúr Migrants Centre; Brian Hora of Meath County Council; Karen Hughes, ECP worker with Dublin City Community Co-op; and Sarah McManus, ECP worker with Dublin North-West Area Partnership.*



• *Michelle Hannon, social inclusion programmes manager with PAUL Partnership and Juan Carlos Azzopardi, Pobal.*



• *Attendees at the Showcase event in Athlone for projects supported by the Community Development Programme and Empowering Communities Programme with Minister of State Joe O'Brien and officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development. Photos: A. Meagher.*

PHOTOS BY CHANGING IRELAND

Traveller-led accommodation project wants to join the Community Development Programme

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Brian Dillon from approved housing body CENA (pronounced 'keena', a Cant word meaning home) said the organisation's work in Traveller accommodation and community development has reached a pinchpoint.

Local authorities are impressed by their work and funding is available to build accommodation, but the critical community development work needs funding.

"It's not possible to fix things through accommodation alone," said Brian. "The easiest bit in the world for us is to build homes, it's actually easier than we thought it would be. The most difficult challenge is in building community. We are doing it, but without funding."

Their work on the ground involves meeting neighbours in settled communities, addressing concerns, building capacity, connecting people and giving Travellers in new accommodation a voice.

During the general election, CENA supporters sought to get the message across that their approach provides an alternative that was not there before. They also want the next Programme for Government to allow for groups such as CENA to apply to join the Community Development Programme.

CENA operates in 18 counties, owns properties in about eight counties and has built in two,



• Brian Dillon, project co-ordinator with CENA, pictured speaking at the launch last year of Clare Traveller CDP's annual report.



• Breda Casey who works for CENA pictured at home in Boher, Co. Limerick. We previously featured this accommodation site as one of CENA's early success stories. **PHOTOS: A. Meagher.**



focusing on Traveller-led design and management. Brian emphasises that CENA's work goes beyond housing, involving community relations, connecting people to services, and building capacity. However, secure funding for their community development work is critical for their housing solutions to succeed.

"Even now, local authority by local authority, we're making the case that there are benefits for everybody in getting this right, not just for Travellers, for settled communities as well," said Brian.

However, their funding does not cover the community development work which is critical to any housing scheme's success.

"We get calls, 20 calls maybe every hour, from Travellers right across the whole country. Yeah, you know, we're talking about an accommodation crisis," he said.

Brian is on the whole optimistic about future funding for CENA's community development work due to their uniquely successful approach to addressing traveller accommodation

issues. The new Community Development Programme would provide an ideal source of funding and support.

CENA's unique approach is gradually winning support. It recently negotiated a two-year service level agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning. The funding is for CENA to continue building alliances with local authorities and other approved housing bodies for the delivery of appropriate and sustainable Traveller accommodation.

From sketch to site



• **THE PLAN:** An architect's drawing of one of the five new homes. The plan envisages 3 three-bed, 1 four-bed and 1 two-bed dwelling.



• **NEAR TO COMPLETION:** The culturally appropriate Traveller group housing scheme is being built on a three-quarter acre site in Ragoon, Galway. It is being delivered for around €1.6 million by Galway City Council and Cena, the Traveller Housing Association.

The Secret Community Development Worker

People at Meetings - Part One

The Secret Community Development Worker has taken a David Attenborough-like eye to the different species that populate meetings.

THE FACILITATOR

The one who is in permanent facilitator mode. You are just in the door surveying the tea and coffee stand, looking at the bland biscuits provided and wondering where all the fun has gone. Before austerity and bureaucracy, you think, we had all types of biscuits, what happened? Maybe it's not about the biscuits and they are just a metaphor for my life you think ...no it's the biscuits. The facilitator is over at the table saying, "Come on guys, so we are being tasked to...

They are overly positive about inane opinions. Like Graham Norton in the caravan in that episode of Father Ted, they are releasing the kind of energy which is infectious and not in a good way, but in a *I feel faint, ill, mildly assaulted and need to lie down* kind of way.

When the end is in sight and we are out the gap, you give a not too subtle look at your phone and the door and stop short of miming the act of wanting to leave, but they are itching to talk about reflection.

They ask you what was the one thing that you took from the meeting, which in your case is so rude you can't say it so you say, "It made me think more about like how we all need to work together and how poverty is like really bad ...blah de blah."

THE CEO/MANAGER

If the meeting is about anything specific - i.e. actual social issues and not KPIs, frameworks, what Pobal are talking about, golf or the local masonic lodge, they will be all at sea. This they will get through by making broad general



statements such as "We work for the community, we are on the ground, we are honest brokers, we need more collaboration, water is wet ...

and with gravitas, and when they do this they can make time itself and other peoples brains slow down, it's very impressive.

THE PERFORMATIVE ONE

The focus here is admirable and is as follows: They say stuff, to be seen to be saying stuff. They watch the wind and agree with stuff that is wind assisted (no laws broken here).

They mention stuff that their organisation has done at every turn, because even if it is not relevant to the conversation or on the agenda, they are indulged (see facilitator above). They also say obvious things, but slowly

THE NETWORKER

The networker is smiley and happy and full of hugs as they whiz around chatting to people, contacting them on LinkedIn while still getting their details. They will sit beside you and say: "Do you know Larry?"

You reply: "Eh ya" (Fleck, which one is Larry?)

Them: "You know Larry's wife's brother-in-law's brother, ah you do now. Well didn't he climb Kilimanjaro with a fridge on his back and she was inside it."

"Eh, wow."

FILM NOIR

Film noir is a grizzled veteran who's been there, done that and seen it all. They remember when Pobal was young, they were young and they had dreams. They knew SICAP* when she went by other names and every time they hear of a new idea like "Let's develop a community development framework" they reach behind their ear for a cigarette, put their feet on the desk and wait for a troublesome dame (of no fixed gender) to walk through the door and mess up their day.

THE BUREAUCRAT

The bureaucrat approaches meetings like a mission from which they hope to emerge unscathed from interaction with guerrilla forces. It is not that they don't want anything to happen as such, but they don't want anything to happen that might cause ripples that they will have to explain up the line or get agreement or permission for. Basically they want to come back not just unwounded but with a clean uniform on which they hopefully will one day have more stripes.

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

To suggest ideas or make a submission to The Secret Community Development Worker email the editor in confidence and we will pass it on.

UN DAYS - JAN, FEB, MARCH 2025

4 Jan - World Braille Day
24 Jan - International Day of Education
27 Jan - International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

4 Feb - International Day of Human Fraternity
6 Feb - International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation
11 Feb - International Day of Women and Girls in Science
13 Feb - World Radio Day
20 Feb - World Day of Social Justice
21 Feb - International Mother Language Day



1 Mar - Zero Discrimination Day
3 Mar - World Wildlife Day
8 Mar - International Women's Day
20 Mar - International Day of Happiness
21 Mar - International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

21 Mar - World Down Syndrome Day
21 Mar - International Day of Forests
22 Mar - World Water Day
23 Mar - World Meteorological Day
24 Mar - World Tuberculosis Day
24 Mar - International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims
25 Mar - International Day of Remembrance of Slavery Victims and the Slave Trade
25 Mar - International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members

WINNERS

Molly Ryan presented with Changing Ireland-TUS top student in Community Development award for 2024!

We were delighted to present the Changing Ireland award for Overall Excellence (highest result) in the BA in Community Development at Technological University of the Shannon (Limerick) last week.

The award was presented by editor Allen Meagher to Molly Ryan from Croom. Molly did her work placement with South Tipperary Development Company and, on finishing her exams, she was snapped up by an eager employer. Molly now works as a project worker with the Probation and Linkage in Limerick Scheme. We hope to feature the project's work in supporting families at a later date.

Our hearty congratulations to Molly and to all involved in the graduation ceremonies at the Department of Applied Social Sciences in TUS. Staff at the awards ceremony included Cathy Jones and Shane O'Sullivan, former Changing Ireland chair and current chair respectively.



• Academics from the Department of Applied Social Studies in TUS-Mid-West with graduates who won special awards.



• Editor Allen Meagher presents top student Molly Ryan with her award.

904 competed for titles with Cork cleaning up

This year, 904 towns, up from 886 entries last year, competed for TidyTowns awards and Ballincollig in Co. Cork was named Ireland's Tidiest Town and Ireland's Tidiest Large Urban Centre. Also in Cork, Ballyphehane, took home the top award worth €2,000 for involving young people in clean-ups. (Balbriggan, Cahir and Ballinrobe were runners-up in that category.)

Other big national winners include:

- Westport, Co. Mayo, Ireland's Tidiest Large Town for the 12th time in 22 years.
- Blackrock, Co. Louth, Ireland's Tidiest Small Town.
- Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath, Ireland's Tidiest Village.
- Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, was awarded the Town Centre First National Award.

Over 600 TidyTowns volunteers were present at the SuperValu TidyTowns awards ceremony at Croke Park in Dublin on November 1 with the event live-streamed to many more online.

Presenting the awards Minister Heather Humphreys said: "This is a great achievement and a special

moment of immense pride for Ballincollig and indeed the wider county of Cork.

"Having first entered the competition in the 1960s, Ballincollig today continues to showcase all that is good about innovation, sustainability, community spirit and volunteerism. This is at the core of what the competition is all about."

The Minister continued: "As in previous years, the standard of competition was exceptional this year in all categories, with 904 entries received overall from the almost 1000 active groups nationwide."

She paid tribute to TidyTowns volunteers across the country: "You are truly an inspiration, and the embodiment of everything that is good in our communities."

Minister Humphreys also announced a special allocation of €1.5 million shared between TidyTowns groups to support their continued efforts to make their towns and villages better places to live, work and visit.

Since 2017, the Department has provided almost €11 million in funding to support the activities of these groups.

Full details on all this year's winners are available at: tidytowns.ie/



• Ballincollig TidyTowns members in action and (top) celebrating their win of the top national award for 2024.



Financial inclusion training aims to reach vulnerable people - Northside Partnership develop 'Financial Capabilities for All' train-the-trainer toolkit

Northside Partnership has launched a toolkit for community workers and others interested in delivering training to people who are vulnerable to making mistakes with their money. That is arguably all of us, but some people are more vulnerable than others.

This author could have done with being put on a course in financial skills when young and in fact the toolkit is designed for use with people aged 16+ and there are hopes it will be adopted by the Department of Education.

Northside Partnership has excelled in providing financial guidance locally, working especially with people with intellectual disabilities (as featured in our summer edition).

Now they hope to offer training nationally so that fewer people are duped online, or mismanage their income or are misunderstood by banks. In fact, there are 14 topics covered in the workbook 'Financial Capabilities for All'.

The toolkit was produced in collaboration with St. Michael's House with support from international financial services company J.P. Morgan. It is available to those who sign up for training which can be delivered anywhere in the country. Northside Partnership was reluctant to reveal the per-person training cost for a half-day workshop, all toolkit resources, plus a follow-up meeting with the trainers. Paul Rogers, CEO of Northside Partnership, emphasised however that they are "open to partnering with other organisations across the country to support access to the programme in a cost effective way".

He said that financial exclusion in society was plain to see daily in their line of work. For instance, sometimes people wishing to join the Tús programme cannot do so because they have no bank account.

"For them the first step is their financial capabilities - opening a bank account, having access to a smart phone, being able to manage their money electronically and so on.

"There are many participants in CE schemes in our area and across the country who are wholly dependent on social welfare payments. Many people on social welfare have no financial resilience, they have no capacity for saving, because things are so tight. So, a programme like this would be superb in supporting people that have least access to, or are experiencing income inequality, or are really struggling in terms of their day-to-day income," he said.

There are fewer ATMs and bank



• Nesson Vaughan, chairperson (since retired) of Northside Partnership, staff members Angela Shafer and Cathy Reinhardt, Maeve Mulryan of St. Michael's House, and Paul Rogers, CEO, Northside Partnership. PHOTO: A.M.

branches and gaining access to cash can be difficult nowadays. Yet access to cash is critical for many people.

As Paul said, "The majority of people now make cashless transactions and 40% of people now are just using a phone (to pay). But there is an awareness in government of the importance of cash and maintaining cash in this society," he said, hoping it continues.

SCALING UP

Children are aware of money from around four years of age, as Angela Shafer of Northside Partnership pointed out.

"We all remember Henry Hippo from Ulster Bank when we were at school. And Bank of Ireland is doing a lot in the financial literacy space, which is great - but with the caveat that these are private companies who are looking to build lifelong customers as well.

"There is definitely space for the Department of Education, the Department of Finance, to take ownership of financial education as part of personal development, as part of life skills education. We've seen it can be done through this resource" she said.

She said that the toolkit and training programme could be "a real game changer" for organisations working to support people to live independently.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Maeve Mulryan of St. Michael's House said it's "very difficult" for people with intellectual disabilities:

"There's a lot of next-of-kin responsibility. They need an adult present with them, which is why we would encourage families to engage and support them as their child turns 18. We found situations where if parents pass away or if siblings move away the person is kind of fending for themselves. There is a lot to get in with paperwork, with ID, people might not have a passport,

or a proof of ID. There are a lot of issues out there. Also, because so much has moved online, it can be very hard to get a sit-down meeting with somebody (in banking) to pare it back to the essentials of what they need. It's stress," she said.

The new toolkit has a lot to offer in supporting people countrywide.

To enquire about training, contact Northside Partnership.
T: 01-848 5630. E: info@nspartnership.ie

- By Allen Meagher

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TOOLKIT AND TRAINING

- The toolkit covers 14 essential topics, including "Where Does My Money Come From?", "Everyday Banking," "Digital Ways to Pay," "Managing Spending," and "Staying Safe Online".
- It is designed to cater to a wide range of learning styles and needs. Developed over two years through collaboration with individuals from day services, the resources reflect real-world challenges people face while offering practical solutions and skill-building exercises.
- The 70-page toolkit includes exercises, skills assessment sheets and advice to guide trainers supporting people at risk of financial exclusion, including people with intellectual disabilities. The programme is also suitable for working with teenagers to give them financial tools to navigate adult life.

WATERFORD-RAMALLAH TWINNING

The Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland Dr. Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid was welcomed to Waterford on October 31 by Mayor (Cllr) Jason Murphy for the official signing of the Waterford-Ramallah Twinning agreement.

The Mayor said, "We are here to celebrate a new connection between Waterford and Ramallah, to formalise a friendship that will bridge two distinct cultures and foster collaboration, understanding, and shared prosperity. In a world where division too often overshadows connection, our cities today are planting seeds of friendship, of peace, and of solidarity."

Ambassador Abdalmajid urged those in attendance to "keep talking about Palestine."

The Mayor of Ramallah, Issa Kassis, joined the event via an online link.



DUBLIN NEIGHBOURHOOD AWARDS

Broadstone Basin Residents Association received €4,500 as the overall winner of this year's 'Dublin City Neighbourhood Awards' in October. The Association was commended by the judges for planting many colourful flowers and plants in tight spaces. The awards recognised the many hours of voluntary work put in by people across Dublin city to improve their communities.

DLR COMMUNITY GARDENS

Members of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Community Gardens Ireland (CGI) gathered at Airfield Estate last month to officially launch the second ever National Allotments and Community Gardens Week. Over 50 gardening enthusiasts from all over Ireland attended.

CORK LIBRARY REFURBISHMENT

A Part 8 planning application for the refurbishment and extension of Mayfield Library was approved at the October monthly meeting of Cork City Council. The plan is to develop an attractive new community and educational hub to the northside of Cork city.

The current library, located on Old Youghal Road, shares its building with St Joseph's Community Centre. The proposals for the refurbishment include the internal reconfiguration of the building and the construction of a shared entrance to both the Library and the Community Centre.

The building fabric will be upgraded to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.



MEATH TRAINING TRAINERS ABOUT GROWING FOOD

Meath County Council's Climate Action Section is training people to pass on knowledge to community groups so they can grow their own food. It used a community garden created by Navan Men's Shed in Claremont Stadium to run a train-the-trainer event in in October. Attendees were given demonstrations on how to prepare seed beds.

The training marked the beginning of a series of events to train community mentors to grow food and pass this knowledge on to the community groups they work with.

At the end of the event, attendees were provided with composting caddy bins and a Grow It Yourself Garden Kit.



CLIMATE ACTION IN CARLOW

Carlow County Council hosted its first ever Climate Action Week from October 14 - 20 to highlight the many positive climate actions already underway in Co. Carlow.

The negative environmental impact of fast fashion was also highlighted, with Carlow residents urged to consider how their need for the latest trend has a detrimental impact on our climate.

LONGFORD HUBS WORK

Longford Works which offers modern comfortable workspaces for professionals and entrepreneurs at locations across Co. Longford was recently launched by Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Peter Burke.

Longford Works received funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

AGE FRIENDLY COUNTY CORK

The Mayor of Co Cork, Cllr Joe Carroll has launched the Cork County Age Friendly Strategy 2024 – 2028, which aims to provide a structure for interagency cooperation which is essential to improve the quality of life for older people in the county.

An Age Friendly County is a place where more older people can stay living in their own homes and communities, lead healthy and active lives, go where they want to and be valued contributors to their communities.

The strategy was prepared by the Cork County Age Friendly Alliance and the Older Person's Council.

