

CHANGING IRELAND

NOT FOR PROFIT

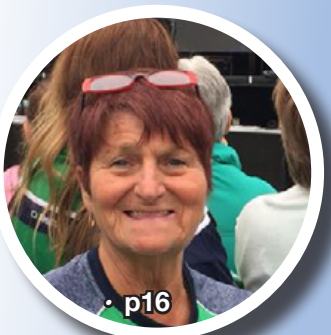
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CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

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- LGBTQ+ Pride
- Traveller Pride



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THE MAMMY OF IRISH BOXING

- Anna Moore says boxing is for everyone.



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COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF OUR DEMOCRACY

- Wheel Summit hits right note.

Knowing the real value of SPACE AND PLACE

Architects putting people and planet first!

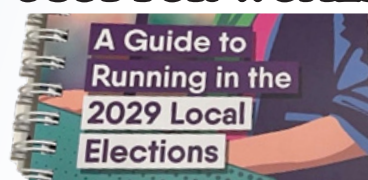


• ACT, a social enterprise led by architects, is striving to improve interaction in communities, while designing homes built with straw bales and other sustainable materials. The company is in demand across Ireland and has won a plethora of awards. #ClimateJustice

ALSO INSIDE:

- NEWS • SOCIAL FARMING • CO-OPS
- ANTI-POVERTY PLANS • LIBRARIES
- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION • THEATRE • SOCIAL ENTERPRISE • LEADER •

JUST FOR WOMEN



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CREATING BETTER OUTCOMES

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• Nutritionist Maria Chester gives a cookery demo.

FRONT COVER

• **Main photo:** Staff members with ACT - Accelerating Change Together – in their studio in Ballina, Co. Mayo. Back Row: Philip Corrigan and James McConville (co-founder). Front Row: Kevin Loftus (co-founder), Livi Mullen and Xiaolai Huang. Photo: A. Meagher.

INDEPENDENT

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

ABOUT US

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUPPORT

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Development and the Gaeltacht



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THREE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT IRELAND YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED

Let's show EU!

Ireland is hosting the EU Presidency until year's end and it's time to be proud of what we do well.

We have plenty to learn from Europe, but we're also strong in areas such as inclusion and supporting civil society.

For instance, did you know that Ireland is consistently in the top five in the EU for volunteering?

Also, while in most EU countries rural populations are decreasing, in Ireland, generally speaking, the opposite is the case. We are a positive outlier. Somebody is doing something right.

And then we have the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) a national anti-poverty grassroots initiative with EU backing*. It is delivered on the ground by Local Development Companies and has consistently achieved its annual targets year-on-year.

Architects for people

Our front cover story features not-for-profit architects who are taking Ireland by storm. Their social enterprise has won multiple awards amidst increasing calls for their services. And the father of one of the

founders - James McConville - is Maurice who used to write for this magazine before he retired from community work. That's 25 years for you folks - the wheel turns. Best wishes to Maurice if you're reading this!

Moyross and the Berlin Wall

Speaking of design and inclusion, the wall separating Moyross from TUS (university) and other facilities is 4.25 metres high in places and 2.1km long. It turns a five-minute walk to TUS into 25 minutes. This barrier has been part of residents' lives for longer now than the Berlin Wall. It is time it went.

When did the war end?

We know the war is continuing and Ukraine must be in a terrible state by now. Public support among altruistic Irish people naturally does not wane. However, the government in closing accommodation centres is behaving almost as if the war is over. While the most vulnerable will thankfully be looked after, where are the others supposed to move to amidst a housing crisis? Ukrainians themselves are not going to give out and I feel for them. In this edition, Owen Ryan speaks to one man from Ukraine who volunteered during the war, was injured multiple times and now

lives in Donegal - where he is part of a team helping people in the local area.

Solidarity with Palestine

Amidst Israel's ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people I still could not believe that their military would kidnap Dr. Margaret Connolly, the sister of Ireland's President Catherine Connolly. She and others were badly treated.

The genocide disgusts most of humanity. It is cruel to watch, yet wrong to ignore, and it is no surprise that support continues to increase for solidarity actions and boycotts.

In that context, I cannot see many community workers heading to see the Israel-Ireland game, should it go ahead.

Many people cannot fathom having anything further to do with Israel at present - in business, culture or sports.

Allen Meagher

**SICAP is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund under the EIST programme 2021 -2027.*

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: editor@changingireland.ie

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this magazine are those of the author concerned. They do not, by any means, necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the editorial team, the voluntary management board of Changing Ireland Community Media CLG, or its core-funder the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

ANTI-POVERTY PROPOSALS AT CENTRE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION FORUM

The annual Social Inclusion Forum took place in the Aviva Stadium, Dublin, on May 27. It was organised as before by the Department of Social Protection and event partners the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and Community Work Ireland (CWI).

On the day, attendees heard hard-hitting testimony from activists who had attended earlier preparatory workshops. They highlighted the devastating impact of poverty and the need for income adequacy. They also called a shift away from the subsidisation of the private sector to deliver essential public services.

Seven preparatory workshops were held this year including online, in Dublin, Inis Mór, Roscommon and Wexford.

The EAPN/CWI Pre-Forum Report, which documents issues and solutions identified in these workshops, can be downloaded from CWI's website.

Among the many points it made there were some overarching issues. One concerned language.

"The use of the word poverty has been dropped from discourse, replaced by references to social inclusion. While linked, they are not the same, and the word poverty should be re-introduced and elevated in all public documents and spaces," said the report.

Overarching issues also included for instance:

- Housing overshadows everything; solve the housing crisis and many of the problems of poverty and deprivation will be addressed.
- Vast amounts of public funding are provided for services in childcare, eldercare, accommodation of



• *Chloe Ní Mháille, Community Work Ireland, and James Casey, European Anti-Poverty Network, present their joint 'Summary of Key Proposals' to Dara Calleary, Minister for Social Protection, on May 27.*

asylum seekers, housing supports, services for disabled people, and so on, but as these are paid to private operators the costs are higher than they should be, and there are huge problems with quality of service.

- Autonomous community work should be prioritised and the resources made available to develop this in government policy and programmes, to ensure better collaboration & results.

Taoiseach launches New Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2026-2030

The Government's new Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2026-2030 was launched by Taoiseach Micheál Martin at the annual Social Inclusion Forum. The five-year strategy aims to reduce poverty, tackle inequality, and improve participation across Irish society.

The Taoiseach said, "The ambition at the heart of this Roadmap is very clear: to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2030, and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the world."

He said, "The Roadmap sets out a renewed, whole of government commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion. It reflects the reality that these challenges are complex, long term and multi-dimensional."

It builds on previous strategies, including Ireland's first National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which was launched in 1997 and subsequent social inclusion strategies.

"Over the past five years,

significant progress has been achieved in transport, education, health, childcare, disability and digital inclusion, with a strong focus on easing cost pressures on households and improving access to essential services," added the Taoiseach.

While Community Work Ireland (CWI) welcomed the new strategy, it noted that it has same anti-poverty target as the previous strategy.

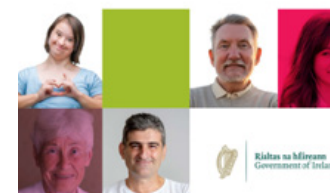
"With the previous plan ending with those in consistent poverty at more than twice that rate, the message from the SIF was clear that implementation is key, and people cannot wait," it said in a statement.

"If we are to tackle poverty a targeted approach to the most disadvantaged groups must be undertaken. We need to stop criminalising poverty and move to more direct cash payments to families through a universal care income and other measures," it said.

Download the new strategy here:
<https://bit.ly/NewRoadmap2030>



Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2026-2030



EU launches its first anti-poverty strategy

The EU Commission has set out its first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy with an ambition "to help eradicate poverty" in the EU by 2050.

It describes its strategy, which was launched on May 6, as "a comprehensive approach to prevent and protect against poverty".

"The goal is to support Europeans to find affordable places to live, work, and raise their families, without being anxious about their tomorrow," it says.

The EU has a population of approximately 451 million people and, as the document notes, one in five Europeans are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including 19 million children. Homelessness affects around one million Europeans.

The 28-page strategy is built around three central pillars.

1. Access to Quality Employment.
2. Adequate Income and Social Protection.
3. Access to Essential Services.

While the new strategy was widely welcomed, it also met with criticism.

Social Justice Ireland said the strategy represents "a landmark shift toward a more coordinated and rights-based approach to tackling poverty".

"The strategy could significantly reduce inequality and improve living standards across Europe. However, its ultimate impact will depend...on sustained political will," it said.

Dr. James Casey, the head of the Irish branch of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), said, "We welcome the introduction of the first EU anti-poverty strategy, but fundamental concerns remain to its projected effectiveness."

Download the new strategy here:
<https://bit.ly/EUAnti-PovStrategy>



MADE IN MOYROSS LIMERICK

Meet the architects who place people and planet above profit

BY OWEN RYAN & ALLEN MEAGHER

One might not automatically think of architecture as the type of profession that would spawn a social enterprise, but when you consider it a little more, there are very good reasons that it would.

Why should the buildings and facilities we live and work in not be designed for the greater good, rather than for profit? Are there not compelling reasons that these creations be designed for social benefit, rather than for the benefit of a very small number of people chasing profits?

In the west of Ireland five years ago a group of old friends, all of them architects, came together and founded Accelerating Change Together (ACT), which is that rare thing, an architecture practice operating as a social enterprise.

Fired up with an ambition to use architecture and design as tools to empower communities, their creation has grown significantly and was winner of the Best Social Enterprise award at the 2026 All Ireland Community & Council Awards.

Getting started

James McConville is one of the founders of ACT, and he remembers its beginnings.

"I worked in Spain and in Sweden for many years. Kevin (Loftus) went and worked for all the big firms, they call them 'starchitects', he was in China and the Netherlands. Tom (Lindsay) decided architecture was not for him and went off into policy, he wanted to look at how to make cities more sustainable at a policy level. When Covid happened we all caught up and reflected on our careers so far.

"We discussed Ireland's recently released Climate Action Plan and we said 'Jesus, I don't know if Ireland realises what it has signed up for'.

"We knew that it created an opportunity for an organisation like ACT to be set up, a social enterprise which is focused on regenerative design, on Green Transition design. We were playing around with how we'd frame it. We don't want to sound too lofty, but basically it is can you make design benefit people and planet?," he recalled.

The passion for architecture had



• Some - not all - of the team with Accelerating Change Together (ACT) pictured in their studio in Ballina, Co. Mayo. Philip Corrigan, Kevin Loftus (co-founder), James McConville (co-founder), Livi Mullen and Xiaolai Huang. PHOTO: A. Meagher.

"We consciously set up as a social enterprise as opposed to a limited company. We had all worked in architecture practices where profit was the only focus. ...developers I worked for would have preferred to see an Excel spreadsheet than a set of plans."

- James McConville, ACT co-founder

been dimmed in them through over exposure to corporate imperatives. However, it had certainly not been extinguished, and the manifesto for their new venture was to move away from the for-profit model.

"We consciously set up as a social enterprise as opposed to a limited company. We had all worked in architecture practices where profit was the primary focus. I worked for three years in Ireland and the developers I worked for would have preferred to see an Excel spreadsheet than a set of plans, because they don't really care what it looks like, their main aim is to maximise profit," said James.

In the last five years ACT has worked to improve the lot of numerous communities, and he said

the social enterprise status stands to ACT when it comes to getting work.

"We're in a hyper competitive market and we're being chosen by local authorities because of our socially enterprising architecture. Their mandate is to do best practice and there have been many project failures after poor community consultation processes when they're trying to deliver large development projects," said James.

Why is that?

Philip Corrigan is ACT's development manager and he appreciates the company's not-for-profit ethos.

"The word we often use is aspirational. We all know about

global warming now, it has been highlighted since the 1960s when there was the first Earth Day. But there haven't been the required actions taken at a State level, but also by businesses and companies that depend on the earth and its resources. We questioned why is that - and much of it is down to a lack of inspiration and a lack of aspiring towards what could be a more beautiful world to live in."

Rethinking development is essential for green reasons, but many people don't realise quite how important it is, he feels.

"We can do a lot of talking about design and how things could be better, but at the end of the day we need to reduce the amount of resources going into anything. Most people wouldn't know, but around 46% of waste generated in Ireland comes from the construction sector. It's very, very high. We need to rethink how we are designing and how we are building."

Sustainability projects

Of late they have been involved in sustainability focused project in Longford.

"Longford County Council had an ambition to create a circularity centre of excellence. They were looking to see could they create a place in Longford town where people



• A sensory park on the banks of the River Moy in Ballina. It was co-designed by ACT, community groups and sensory specialists - while local volunteers helped to plant and create the park.

could enter a shopping centre kind of atmosphere, with everything on offer in that shopping centre being refurbished or recycled.

"The original kind of project that we had seen that was similar was a project in Sweden called ReTuna. Operated by the local authority there it has become a very successful project, it's a fully functioning commercial shopping centre, but only for second hand goods. We've been working on a former car sales garage and how can that building be repurposed as a circularity centre of excellence," said Philip.

The team has also been working on Scotch House, a residential and mixed-use development in the heart of Ballina town – SEE RIGHT.

Social Enterprise of the Year

ACT has a shelf weighed down with awards and it especially treasures the Social Enterprise of the Year award received in February from the Local Authorities Members Association.

Philip said, "Rethink Ireland supported us over the last number of years and they've a handle on the different social enterprises and where they are in their trajectory. They nominated us. There were incredible social enterprises nominated, we didn't think we'd win it, but we were delighted to take it away."



• The Best Social Enterprise in the country! ACT was announced the winner at the LAMA awards for their work to accelerate the Green Transition.

Active in 11 counties - north, south, east & west

The practice operates across multiple counties including Mayo, Galway, Donegal, Clare, Wicklow, Longford, Carlow, Down, Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford.

For instance, in Limerick, the team are developing with social entrepreneur Jason O'Donovan a project called the Social Factory project. It is a bold vision for reimagining a former industrial building on the city's southside - the old Krups factory - as a vibrant social hub.

ACT co-founder James McConville says of the plan, "It brings together play, youth programmes, creative studios, co-working, wellbeing facilities and a

makers' market under one roof, the project is designed as a living social system where people can move, make, create and belong."

The ACT team believe the model has the potential to be replicated across post-industrial cities throughout Europe.

ACT are also busy in County Wicklow, where they are working on the Newtownmountkennedy Town Centre First Plan to address rapid growth by establishing a "forest town" vision.

• RIGHT: ACT's vision for Newtownmountkennedy.

SCOTCH HOUSE, BALLINA

Another award: ACT's designs may potentially influence every town

ACT won the Best Design Concept at the Building & Architect of the Year Awards 2026, for their proposal to return historic town-centre buildings in Ballina to residential use in a way that is community-centric and climate conscious. This was to be the first of two wins for the project in April.

Their Scotch House concept won the award for addressing what judges deem to be one of the most pressing challenges for towns across Ireland - how to increase residency and regenerate existing town centres "without sacrificing the character and fabric that define them".

The judges praised the Scotch House concept as "a confident and well considered concept with the potential to influence how towns evolve."

This was their second award for the project; a week earlier it won the Circular Economy Award at the 2026 RDS Foundation Awards.

The design includes a low energy, low carbon strategy that puts sustainability at the heart of the design, not as an add-on.

ACT's development manager Philip Corrigan said:

"During the day Ballina can be quite busy, there's plenty traffic, but not a huge number of people living right in the middle of the town. More people live out in housing estates, driving in. And here was an existing building with huge potential, right in the middle of the town. The owner had an aspiration to turn it into apartment-style housing, but in a communal sense. Aspects of the design including communal gardens show how people can be together, how they can share resources, and how can it be done sustainably.

"We are looking at how to keep as much of the existing building as possible. Our technical architect is looking at every aspect of the building as we do up our construction tender package. So, whoever takes on the job will know that there are certain aspects that need to be kept. That means we can rebuild it and reuse it with as little carbon and new materials as possible."



• ACT's design for Scotch House in Ballina, around the corner from their studio, recently won the company two national awards.



CLASS WALL - inclusion not exclusion, empathy not exploitation



• Adrian Power speaking at the road opening.

Adrian Power, chairperson of Moyross Partners group, made an impassioned speech on April 2, at the official opening of the newly constructed Moyross Link Road into County Clare. The road connects with a partially finished €84m dual-carriageway on Limerick city's northside. Mr Power and others in the community had campaigned for years for the link road – and they are not finished.

By Allen Meagher

"This is not just about a road being opened. It is about barriers being removed," said Mr Power.

While celebrating the road opening, Mr Power, speaking for the community, criticised opposition to a long-sought opening of a short avenue from Moyross to TUS university.

"Moyross is finally open," said Mr Power pointing to how for decades Moyross people were confined to living in what was described as Ireland's biggest cul-de-sac. "But now we need to be connected," he said, calling for direct access to third-level educational facilities within view of the community but walled off.

He speaks for Moyross Partners group and one of its member organisations is Moyross United F.C. which plays in Limerick's Premier League and this year celebrates its golden jubilee. Moyross United drew national attention to the social exclusion issue recently when it withdrew permission for Irish Rail to proceed with plans for a station in Moyross. Access to the club's

pitch is necessary for construction to continue. Such is the strength of feeling in the community about the matter.

"I grew up with a sense of inferiority that I still feel today because of those walls" - Adrian Power, Moyross Partners

Over the wall in Caherdavin, some councillors have chosen to side with some middle-class voters there who object – they claim traffic congestion would be an issue, but refuse to meet Moyross residents to discuss their concerns. The matter will come to a head shortly at local authority level when the results of a recent public consultation are revealed.

More empathy is needed. In his speech to a full community hall - which included John Moran, Mayor of Limerick, Cllr Paul Murphy, chairperson of Clare County Council, other public representatives and officials from

the Department of Transport – Mr Power recalled his youth:

"I grew up here in Moyross feeling I was walled in, like I was some sort of animal, and at times, I was treated as such. Roads don't just shape how we move; they shape access to opportunity, to education, to employment, and to each other."

To truly open up Moyross, the link road to the university – recommended years ago in regeneration plans and backed by OECD officials who were horrified by the wall – must be constructed. This road, called University Avenue, would also directly connect passengers to a new train station planned for Moyross – handy for students, workers and fans attending matches and concerts in nearby Thomond Park and The Gaelic Grounds.

Mr Power said:

"I grew up within the walls that surround my community, watching my friends lose their lives to drugs and violence, because they didn't have another way out, literally. I grew up with a sense of inferiority that I still feel today because of those walls.

"So this train station and

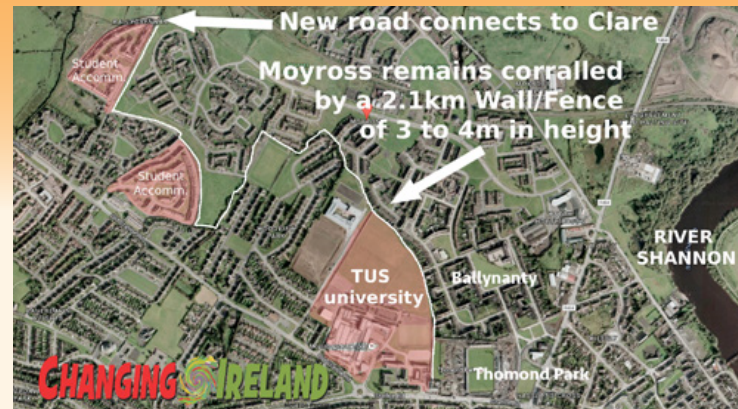
University Avenue is not just another battle for much needed infrastructure. It's a battle for our dignity, a battle to secure our children's future."

Despite opposition by a handful of councillors – all from government parties Mr Power pointed out – campaigners in Moyross hope the results of a recent public consultation, expected to favour the road, will convince others to support its construction.

For his part, Mayor of Limerick John Moran - recalling the fall of the Berlin Wall and other walls in Belfast – said: "When it comes to looking at University Avenue, I want people to think of it as a piece of the pie that regenerates the rest of the city with Moyross. I want people to think of it as not a street that closes at night, but a street that opens up opportunities."

If approved, construction – for which plans have been drawn up – would see Moyross truly connected with Limerick city in the next 3-4 years.

Read more and watch Adrian Power's full speech here: <https://bit.ly/ConnectMoyross2026>



- **52% of families in Moyross do not own a car.**
- **While a new road into County Clare is welcome, Moyross remains separated from Limerick's northside by a 2.1km long wall and fence.**
- **The ghettoising wall turns a 5-minute walk to the university next door into 25 minutes.**
- **Plans by Irish Rail to open a station are on hold after Moyross United F.C. - in support of community demands for University Avenue - withdrew permission for the station to proceed.**
- **OECD visitors in 2015 were appalled by the wall.**
- **Politicians may soon be tested when the results of a recent public consultation are revealed.**



Travellers' homes win national design award



• TOP: Bóithrín na Saoirse housing. ABOVE: Architect Mícheál de Siún speaking at the official opening which took place in November. PICS: AM.

The Bóithrín na Saoirse housing project in Galway city – which was designed in collaboration with local Travellers and built on land that was formerly a halting site - has won a top national architectural award.

The five homes, which were officially opened last year, won the Housing Category at the 'Building and Architect of the Year Awards', held in April. This is of significance to all working for social inclusion because of the collaboration involved. The project was led by Cena Culturally Appropriate Homes in collaboration with Galway City Council.

Chuffed with the award, architect Mícheál de Siún said, "Bóithrín na Saoirse represents an important step forward in housing design, establishing a precedent for culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation. The project responds directly to cultural expectations around space, home, and community - demonstrating how thoughtful design can better support identity, dignity, and everyday life."

Read more: <https://bit.ly/CENAhousing>

25 YEARS OF CHANGING IRELAND

JAMES, SON OF MAURICE MCCONVILLE - like father, like son

The last time I saw James McConville he was a teenager with a skateboard heading downtown in Rostrevor, Co. Down, during a blues and jazz festival. His admiring father Maurice and mother Geraldine said he was a whizz on the skateboard and there was no fear of him on the hills. I was their guest that evening.

Maurice worked as a community development project co-ordinator in Dundalk, having previously worked with communities in Liverpool, and he used to write very knowledgeably for Changing Ireland in our early years. He always stood up for people and asked the right questions. Time passed, Maurice retired and we drifted.

Years later, a project in Ballina, Co.

Mayo, is making a name for itself so I ask freelance reporter Owen Ryan to interview those involved. Job done, Owen emailed to say a guy called James wanted to talk to me. It took a while to figure out who he meant.

I was shocked. You do not expect to find your former colleagues' children making waves in the workplace. It means you've been at it a while!

I called to ACT's offices in Ballina, Co. Mayo, bumping into James before I got to the front entrance, just arriving by bicycle (though he still loves skateboards). We immediately rang his Dad and wished Maurice 'Happy Birthday!' because that was the day that was in it.

Then I was introduced to some of the



• Maurice and James McConville.

ACT team and I got to learn about their project. I couldn't get over that James was one of the founders. He could have made a mint in the private sector, yet here he was. Like father, like son. And happy.

While there is no award for hitting 25 years in publishing, what James had to say about the magazine his father used to write for was as good as any award.

He said, "When my dad used to write for Changing Ireland he was working in the Le Cheile CDP in Dundalk – in Cox's Demesne - and I used to go in with him a lot of the time. I actually got to see what he does and I thought it was fascinating - the idea that someone could work in a community trying to help improve it."

He noticed the contrast between his middle-class and semi-rural upbringing and the challenges "25 minutes away" facing families on lower incomes in urban housing estates.

"It opened my eyes and it stuck with me," he said.

"I used to read the magazines Changing Ireland and New Internationalist. They were scattered around the house. That was the reading I was raised on. New Internationalist made me realise there were more countries, and Changing Ireland made me realise there were more communities," he said.

"When I studied architecture, I realised we were looking up all the time, drawing things, instead of doing, designing shiny buildings such as banks, fancy restaurants or luxury housing estates."

He stepped aside from that world because he knew there were many problems that can be solved through co-designing with communities - which he is now doing daily.



• Architect James McConville and editor Allen Meagher meet after a gap of quite a few years.

By Allen Meagher

Take 5!

Ireland's presidency of the EU runs from July to December, which means that officials from the 27 EU-member countries will be attending meetings here. So let us remember what we excel at when it comes to social inclusion and supporting communities. Some government programmes in these areas also receive EU support. Take five:

1. Volunteering.
2. Grassroots anti-poverty work and community-led local development.
3. Peace, equality and equal opportunities.
4. Rural development.
5. Government support for rural and community development through a dedicated department which also supports Gaeltacht communities.

We're close to No.1 in the EU for Volunteering

By Owen Ryan

Ireland has a very high proportion of people engaged in voluntary activity, especially in the west of the country.

The country is regularly ranked alongside Denmark, Sweden, and Finland for having the highest participation rates in volunteering among EU countries.

Recent figures from the Central Statistics Office show that volunteering continues to see excellent levels of participation and interest across the country.

It found that almost 655,000 people aged 15-74 were engaged in at least one voluntary activity in 2025. That represents over 16% of the population. Here is the regional breakdown:

- Those in the West (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) were the most likely to be involved in a voluntary activity with almost one in five (19.4%) saying they volunteered.
- This was followed by the Mid-East region (18.4%) and the Midlands (17.1%).
- The Border (14.0%) region had the lowest proportion of volunteers followed by Dublin (14.1%) and the Mid-West (15.3%).

Those that reported working from home were more likely to be involved in voluntary activity.

It is estimated that an amazing 7.5 million hours were volunteered per month.

One of the arguments advanced for remote working is that it allows people time to become involved in their community, and the CSO figures appear to support that line of thinking.

About one in five of those who usually work from home (19.0%) or sometimes work from home (20.8%) said they volunteered compared to 14.6% of those who never work from home.

Almost one in ten (9.5%) of those who sometimes work from home said

they volunteered with a sporting organisation, compared to 7.2% of those who usually work from home and 6.2% of those who never work from home.

Those who occasionally worked from home were also more likely to volunteer with a political or community organisation while those that usually worked from home were more likely to volunteer in a social or charity as well as a religious or church group.

It is important to bear in mind that income level and time availability are factors that determine people's availability to volunteer.

From the census we see that self-employed people (19.1%) were more likely to volunteer in one or more activities compared to employees (16.1%).

CSO statistician Colin Hanley, said: "The estimated number of people aged 15-74 who volunteered in Q2 2025 was 654,400, or 16.1%. The largest number of volunteers were involved in a sporting organisation with 261,000 persons, or 6.4%. This was followed by political or community organisations (184,100 people) and social or charity organisations (125,900 people).

"There were more women (331,100) volunteering than men (323,300) overall. However, more men volunteered in sporting organisations while more women volunteered in all other voluntary activities."

Irish Volunteering in Numbers and Facts

- 654,400 - The number of people aged 15-74 involved in at least one voluntary activity in Q2 2025.
- 7.5 million -The amount of hours volunteered per month.
- 17.1% The percentage of people with children aged under 15 engaged in volunteerism.
- Residents of the West of Ireland are most likely to volunteer.

We're one of the few EU countries with a dedicated community-based, anti-poverty and social inclusion programme that is co-funded by the Government and the European Social Fund.

S.I.C.A.P. - the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

By Allen Meagher

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality. It does this through programme implementers, agencies and local development companies, who work with the most disadvantaged and the hardest people to reach in communities.

Notably, SICAP is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF+ Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training Programme 2021 to 2027.



• Young Traveller women, pictured here with their mentors, set up a beauty business in Bray, Co. Wicklow, with SICAP support.

The programme is aimed at:

- People living in disadvantaged communities
- People impacted by educational disadvantage
- People living in jobless households or households where the primary income source is low-paid and/or precarious
- People who are long-term unemployed
- People with a criminal history
- Refugees
- International Protection Applicants
- Disabled People/People with Disabilities
- Heads of One-parent Families
- Travellers
- Roma
- Island residents

SICAP'S GOALS

The programme has two goals and they focus on supporting communities and individuals:

Goal 1: Contribute to Building more Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities. This is done by empowering groups of individuals, local community groups, networks and social enterprises to address collective community needs.

Goal 2: Empower Disadvantaged people to Improve the Quality of Their Lives. This is done by supporting disadvantaged individuals, children and families to progress their formal education and participate in lifelong learning. It also supports people to progress into

employment/ self-employment, and to improve their soft skills and wellbeing.

SICAP is managed by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority area. It is implemented by local development companies.

The programme was launched in 2018 and the current programme, which began in 2024 will run until the end of 2028.

SICAP'S FLEXIBILITY

SICAP has proven to be a resilient programme that can respond in times of crisis. When Covid-19 struck and later when Ukrainian refugees came here fleeing war in large numbers, SICAP had the capacity and flexibility to respond. Extra funding was allocated through SICAP to support the integration of Ukrainians.



• Ukrainian refugees in Co. Kerry who were supported through SICAP by South Kerry Development Partnership.

SICAP STORIES

Last year, a promotional video campaign called #SICAPStories showcased best practice in pursuit of the programme goals to support communities and individuals. Scan the QR code or use this link to watch #SICAPstories: <https://bit.ly/3KZfrbX>



NEWS BRIEFS

WORLD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE



A sizeable Irish contingent travelled to Scotland for the World Community Development Conference which took place in Glasgow from June 30 to July 2.

The conference is a biennial global event which brings together all who are concerned with community development, its challenges, contributions, and the communities where it takes place.

The theme for this year's event was "Community Development in a Chaotic World: Challenge, Change and Collective Action".

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht - through the All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training - provided a limited number of bursaries for attendees from Ireland.

The conference was last held in this country in 2018, hosted by Maynooth University.

NEW BOOK ON DOING COMMUNITY RESEARCH BY MAURA ADSHEAD

A new book called 'Doing Community Research' by Dr. Maura Adshead was published in May, in partnership with The Wheel.

The guide to conducting community-based research in Ireland is for sale for €24.99 - with all profits going towards funding a community research programme in UL.

Designed for both academic researchers and community practitioners, it cuts through jargon to provide straightforward advice on how to build strong, effective partnerships.



Dr Adshead is the Head of Community Engagement at the University of Limerick. She is pictured here at the launch with Emma Murtagh from The Wheel.

You can order 'Doing Community Research' from Boru Press: borupress.ie

LOCAL AUTHORITY NEWS

IMPROVING CORK (NOT HURLING RELATED)



While Cork County Council adjudicates on applications for its 2026 Streetscape Enhancement Scheme, the impact of over five years of grant support can be seen by all.

The scheme supports businesses and property owners across the county to enhance the appearance of town and village centre properties.

Sizeable grants have been provided, with eligible works including painting, shopfront signage, traditional shopfront works and materials. Last year, 111 properties in 29 towns and villages were awarded grants to create more vibrant, attractive main streets. Businesses can get planning now for early 2027 applications.

DLR + GAA CLUB RUN ENERGY & EV EVENT



As part of Dublin Climate Action Week 2026, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council partnered with Naomh Ólaf GAA Club to host a Community Energy & Electric Vehicle (EV) Information Event, highlighting practical, local solutions to climate action.

The event showcased the club's impressive 83 kWp solar PV system and 108.5 kWh battery storage, installed with support from the Community Climate Action Programme 2025. It is a great example of how communities can reduce both carbon emissions and energy costs.

Residents and community members had the chance to get free, impartial advice on home energy upgrades from Codema and the DLR Energy & Climate Action Team, while also exploring the latest electric vehicle technology courtesy of Ford.

10 YEAR CELEBRATIONS

"I really believe we're only scratching the surface"

- Minister Martin Hayden

Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, came early to meet participants before opening Social Farming Ireland's 10th anniversary conference, held in the Heritage Hotel, Killenard, Co Laois, on April 24.

Well over 200 people attended and the minister was as convinced as any of them of the multiple benefits that stem from social farming.

He spoke to Changing Ireland afterwards.

"The participants come from a variety of backgrounds, with different challenges in their life, and they find such solace in being on farms and doing some of that work," he said.

He highlighted also the benefits for the farmers who host them.

He said that social farming "is meeting so many of my department's objectives, whether it's in terms of generation renewal, whether it's in terms of addressing farmers' loneliness, alternative supplemental income - and all of the time benefiting the people who come onto the farm, who benefit from being on that farm".

"And this is a celebration of what social farming has delivered for people all across the country," he said, pointing towards a full conference room.

"My job is to continue to support social farming. I'm really determined to do that through my Department, but also to be an advocate for the sector, with my other colleagues around the cabinet table."

He wanted "to open people's eyes" in various government departments, and to point out how "there are so many co-benefits here".

"We have good support here at the minute, but I really believe we're scratching the surface and we could do so much more with social farming. That's what I'll continue to work on, as well as continuing to fund it directly from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. And we can continue to highlight the great work that's done through social farming all across Ireland," he said.

Social farming in Ireland is looked at by other countries as a model.

Pointing towards a full conference room, he said: "This is a celebration of what social farming has delivered for people all across the country. Brian Smyth, Helen and all the team in Social Farming Ireland really have, with predecessors of mine in the Department of Agriculture, really driven on social farming. But we're ambitious and we want to do so much more."



• Teresa Tierney and Bianca Lima Greer, both with HSE Mental Health Services in Tipperary, and Eilis Cooney, Social Farming Ireland. PHOTOS: A. Meagher.

"We are seen as a leader across Europe in terms of what we do in social farming. We regularly get colleagues across Europe asking us for advice."

"We are seen as a leader across Europe in terms of what we do in social farming. We regularly get colleagues across Europe asking us for advice as to how we manage to achieve that. As we head into our presidency, I'll be delighted to be advocating and highlighting the great role social farming plays here in Ireland and how that can be replicated across Europe," the minister concluded.

- By Allen Meagher



• Chris Gonley, CEO, Leitrim Development Company; Mary Brennan, Social Farming Ireland (SFI) research and policy officer; Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Helen Doherty, SFI's national co-ordinator; and Brian Smyth, the founder and project manager of SFI.

"Social farming is meeting so many of my department's objectives."



No bottle of medicine is a match for social farming

- Participant speaks of impact of social farming as farming friend beside him sheds tears



• Peter Brady, participant, tells his story while Ger Walsh from the HSE listens with interest. Ger Deegan, a social farmer from Co. Westmeath and a friend of Peter Brady since he came to his farm is seated on the right.

"There's not a bottle with medication in it that is as good as going out to the farm. And that's the truth," said Peter Brady, a speaker at Social Farming Ireland's conference.

Through social farming Peter found a way to get through his mental health challenges and he shared a stage with the farmer Gerard Deegan who helped him. They have become friends and Gerard was in tears listening to Peter tell his story.

The conference centred on testimony from participants and providers telling of the good that social farming does for them. Peter's account of kindness received is best told by the man himself:

"I was deeply depressed and stuff and I'd the head down, and I hadn't really been out, and I grew up on a farm. And when I met this man here (farmer Gerard Deegan), who I love dearly, he started to talk to me and he took my anxiety away. He's like a psychiatrist. He had that way about him, he could make anyone comfortable, without talking too much.

"Sometimes I'd come back to the farm and I'd be back down in myself. When we talk, I start to laugh to myself. The relationship grew and grew out of the farm. And it's the best. There's not a bottle with medication in it that was as good as going out to that farm, and that's the truth. And before we start to talk more, I want to thank everyone and to say to keep social farming going.

"I am not an over-religious person, but I believe in the man above and the higher power. I go to mass every Sunday. And in the

parking lot of St. Paul's church, every Sunday, unless something happens, after mass he's sitting in his car waiting for me. And we chat for half an hour. We talk about things that I don't even talk to my own family about.

"One day I said, 'I'm not in the best of form, I'm not mentally right or whatever' - and like I said before, he's like a psychiatrist. Whatever he did, he brought me back into myself. I had a different walk back from mass than I did going to mass. And it was him that did it. It's hard to explain how he does it. He's just a gentle soul.

"There's not a bottle with medication in it that was as good as going out to that farm, and that's the truth."

"I grew out of that farm. I could see the way he was with all the rest of the patients who went out there.

"We'd pull into the yard and you'd see him walking across with a bucket or something. And he'd have this big smile on his face. And I'd (say to myself) 'Here goes, this is going to be the best couple of hours of my day'," he said.

Peter also thanked others who had helped him through his challenges. Turning to Ger

Walsh from the HSE, also seated beside him, he said:

"This woman here is the driving power. What she did for me over the years. I wouldn't be here today only for her. You can see the sincerity in her face. She always asks me how I'm doing. And I always have a laugh with her.

He was aware she worked beyond her hours, doing unpaid overtime.

"That's the kind of person she is. She does it out of her own heart, she goes the extra mile. I know she's not getting overtime!" said Peter.

The audience were between tears and laughter as he spoke. Others followed and made a strong impression of how valuable social farming is to participants.



• A group from Corlann - a service provider for people with intellectual disabilities, based in Cahir, Co. Tipperary - pictured at the start of a 10-week placement on Downey's Farm earlier this year.

Notable UN International Days



JULY

- 5 - International Day of Cooperatives
- 6 - World Rural Development Day
- 11 - International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica
- 11 – World Population Day
- 11 – World Horse Day
- 12 - International Day of Hope
- 12 - World Youth Skills Day
- 15 - Nelson Mandela Day
- 20 - International Moon Day
- 20 – International Day of Women and Girls of African Descent
- 25 - World Drowning Prevention Day
- 25 - International Day for Judicial Well-being
- 28 - International Day of Friendship
- 30 - World Day against Trafficking in Persons



• July 11 is World Horse Day. PHOTO: A.M.

AUGUST

- 9 - International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
- 12 - International Youth Day
- 19 - World Humanitarian Day
- 27 - World Lake Day
- 29 - International Day against Nuclear Tests
- 30 - International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

SEPTEMBER

- 5 - International Day of the World's Indigenous Women and Girls
- 7 - International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies
- 8 - International Literacy Day
- 9 - International Day to Protect Education from Attack
- 15 - International Day of Democracy
- 18 - International Equal Pay Day
- 20 - World Cleanup Day
- 21 - International Day of Peace
- 28 - International Day for Universal Access to Information
- 29 - International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste

See the full list here:
un.org/en/observances

WATERFORD FOODBANK

“What do you want me to do with that?” Feedback led to online cookery show

Waterford Food Bank has produced a series of recipe videos, available for free on YouTube, after getting feedback from recipients.

The idea is to support people in receipt of food parcels in Waterford city to produce healthy and nutritious family meals with the contents of those parcels.

Recipes range from creamy morning porridge to chicken fried rice, while an ingredients list and step-by-step guide is underneath each recipe. Maria Chester, a community nutritionist, provides an easy-to-follow commentary as she moves through a demonstration of each recipe.

“We believe that good, hearty food should be accessible to everyone. These videos will help food parcel recipients to make the most out of their Waterford Food Bank parcels,” said Liam Quinn, CEO of Buíon Phort Láirge (formerly known as Waterford Area Partnership) which manages the food bank. The videos were filmed in his home.

Some people know very little about food preparation and that’s what makes the videos valuable,



he said.

“A few people we delivered to, particularly single men, older men, they’d say - ‘A packet of pasta, pasta sauce and a bit of chicken, what do you want me to do with that?’ There was a bit of feedback from people who didn’t know how to prepare the food,” he said.

“Nutritionist Maria Chester did up menus based on the contents of a standard parcel, and we filmed those being made up (in Liam’s kitchen). There’s a QR code on the parcel and if they scan that it’ll bring them to our website where the videos are.”

They were going to put leaflets

about their wider services into food parcels, but then got the idea of QR codes “to reach out to those who might need our support but not necessarily seek it out.”

“Everyone has a phone and, once they scan it, not only will they see the videos, but they’ll see the other services and supports we provide. A lot of the clients of the food bank wouldn’t be known to us, they are living on the margins, and this might alert them to other supports they can access.”

Liam said that, unfortunately, the food bank is very busy.

“Most weeks we deliver about 150-200 food parcels around the city.”

The food is made available as part of an EU Programme, administered in Ireland by the not-for-profit Food Cloud.

At this stage, Waterford Food Bank is well established and lessons they have learned can benefit others.

“We made a lot of mistakes, but we learned a lot too, and if anyone wants to get in touch feel free to do so,” said Liam.

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

'Miasma' play brings science and drama to asylum-seekers, politicians, schoolkids and community groups

BY OWEN RYAN



A play about an ambitious doctor that attracted science funding to reach a wide audience has been performed in the most obscure of places – from a room in Leinster House to a drug rehabilitation centre and various community settings.

As playwright Colin Murphy said, “It’s a really interesting test of a play and a theatre company, to play in those different circumstances. It brings out a robustness in the story telling and acting, that is really exciting. They go from playing in front of 200 people one night to the next day getting changed in a scrappy room in an IPAS Centre. The cast are up for that,” he said.

Centre in City West, Dublin, in a room in Leinster House, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the James Joyce Centre – as well as some traditional theatres.

Ms. White has enjoyed taking the play out of conventional theatres to new audiences, playing to “people who don’t normally engage with theatre.”

“This is what Research Ireland wanted – public engagement – and, rather unusually, every group that comes to see the play is also offered a workshop. This is to deepen their engagement with the material, give them a bit of context for the world of the play, and prepare them for what they’re going to see.”

“We’ve gone to groups like the IPAS Centre and the rehabilitation centre, and when we’ve been in those venues we’ve reached out to other groups in the locality - schools, book clubs, St Vincent De Paul, any group in the locality that might be interested,” she said.

Many of the groups who have come to see it have got much more out of it than they had expected.

“At times the groups thought it wouldn’t be of interest to them, but when they came they were surprised at how they felt about it or how relevant it felt to them. There were quite a few groups that didn’t think it would be of interest, weren’t too hopeful, but they were surprised by it. Again, not needing to make a profit is very important, it opens doors in terms of bringing different groups in,” she said.

Playwright's delight

Playwright Colin Murphy said that the funding of the play was vital to bringing it out to the wider community.

“When I had the idea of the play rather than going through the usual route of a theatre company and the Arts Council, I’d heard that an organisation that used to be called Science Foundation Ireland, and is now called Research Ireland, had the Discover Programme, for public engagement. If

your play was telling a story in science it was a way to get the play funded, which is an alternative to the more obvious funding options.

“What they wanted was to reach audiences who aren’t professionally or academically involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). That’s a lot of ordinary people, but they’re particularly interested in demographics that might be in some way out of the mainstream or marginalised, or just remote from scientific debate and discussion.”

He is delighted with how it has connected with large numbers of people who don’t normally go to plays.

“We are open to invites to do it again in Ireland. The script is also available for local groups to do themselves.”

“The community groups we’re playing to are often people who may not have much exposure to science or theatre. We’re bringing both to them, which is wonderful.

“If you were doing a show that was only going to schools and community groups it would be seen in the sector as educational theatre or community theatre or development theatre. But we’re also playing in theatres, we have a first class professional cast and director, it’s produced by Verdant Productions, a top class theatre company,” he said.

‘Miasma’ completed a month-long tour in June. Two more shows are scheduled for August and the play will also be performed in London.

“We are open to invites to do it again in Ireland. The script is also available for local groups to do themselves,” said Mr. Murphy. Contact him directly at: colinmurphy@me.com

Miasma play website:

<https://projectvictour.com/miasma/>

Research Ireland Discover Programme:

<https://www.researchireland.ie/funding/discover/>



Given the title 'The Mammy of Irish boxing' by double Olympic champion Kellie Harrington, Limerick's Anna Moore feels her sport gets a bad press too often.

"I get very angry sometimes when you see someone who might have been a boxer for two years, and maybe five or six years later they are found guilty of something and the reports says 'boxer found guilty'. It wouldn't be said about anyone in rugby or athletics. Because people think we are a poorer sport, which I suppose in some ways we are, we're easier to pick on. We've had doctors, we've had barristers, we've had priests who came up through boxing. It's brilliant to discipline kids."

She is quick to cite some examples of where the sport, which offers an outlet for aggression and requires intense discipline, has helped young people.

"We had one case where a young fella was very aggressive, and his father brought him down. It took about six months but through the boxing, through hitting bags and all of these things, it took the aggression from him.

"We had another young fella, his mother was the principal of a school out the country, his Dad was very into the GAA. That guy was too quiet, he wouldn't put his hand up in class, he wouldn't fight for a ball on the pitch. They brought him in and he went about ten contests without winning one. And then all of a sudden he ended up winning Limerick and Munster. The father came in and thanked us, he said he would now put up his hand in class, he'd go for the ball. It builds confidence in kids and it takes aggression from kids as well."

Anna is an Olympian who went on to great success as a professional and she now trains some of the world's top fighters. While boxing thrives in poorer areas, she points out that it also benefits people from more comfortable backgrounds.

"It's not just disadvantaged areas, you have kids in other areas who have parents in professions and all of that, and they do the same things that people are blamed for doing in certain housing estates. Aggression and the need to get confidence doesn't all come from council estates."

Integration

Boxing is possibly the only sport that has been successful in integrating Travellers, with many of the community reaching the Olympic Games since Francie Barrett led the charge in 1996, while Andy Lee became the first Traveller world champion in 2014. Lee's protegee Paddy Donovan, also a Traveller, will fight for a world title in September.

Anna says there is no divide between Travellers and settled people in the sport.

"If you come into our club you're treated the same as everyone else, there's no difference. You do your training, get on with everyone, and if you don't want

Anna Moore By Owen Ryan The Mammy of Irish Boxing

Given the title 'The Mammy of Irish boxing' by double Olympic champion Kellie Harrington, Limerick's Anna Moore feels her sport gets a bad press too often.



• Anna Moore ringside.

that, the door is there. I've never seen Travellers treated any different than anybody else in any club or in any tournaments.

"They all mix, there's no such thing as we're Travellers and you are settled. There's nothing like that. They just all get on and that's the way it should be. There's no divide in boxing."

She has had a long association with St Francis Boxing Club in inner city Limerick, where Lee was a member as an amateur. She speaks warmly of him:

"Andy was a very disciplined boxer and no matter what he won he always thought he could have done better. A gentleman in and outside of the ring, that's all you could say about Andy, I never heard anyone to say anything about Andy other than that, because that's the kind of person he is."

Loss

Tragedy struck her club six years ago when talented 20 year old Kevin Sheehy was murdered.

It was a shattering blow to all who knew the boxer who was being tipped as a future Olympian.

"Limerick were playing in the Munster Final in the Gaelic Grounds. The week before he had won the Hull Cup and he came into the club on Wednesday and he said to my son Kenneth (his coach) that he had got a ticket for the match. Kenneth said to go and enjoy it, and his baby was to be born around the same time, and Kenneth said when the baby was born to come back to get ready for the Elites.

"He said, 'I feel very strong now Ken'. That was on the Wednesday and he was murdered on the Monday morning. It was very hard to take."

Some of the club members availed of counselling afterwards, while Anna feels that work on an extension of their facilities gave bereaved young men an important outlet.

"We were given another premises, a factory right next to us, when Andy Lee won his world title. During Covid it was all done up, they knocked walls, put in new floors, and it's second to none now. I think doing all of that took a lot of the anger and the aggression out of the situation. Kevin will never be forgotten, but there are other kids out there that need this."

Anna has been involved in the sport for decades, taking up numerous roles locally, nationally and internationally.

A Life in Boxing

It all started when her late husband got involved in coaching and she decided to give him a hand.

"I started just doing the door, making the tea, and it progressed from there on. I became a coach, a judge - national and international. Then female boxing started in 2001 and I was asked to go on the committee. I've seen the world through boxing - Katie Taylor, Kellie Harrington, kids down through the years, I've been going away with them. I was on the European Council for female boxing and the world council. I've done most things in boxing, there's very little more I can do."

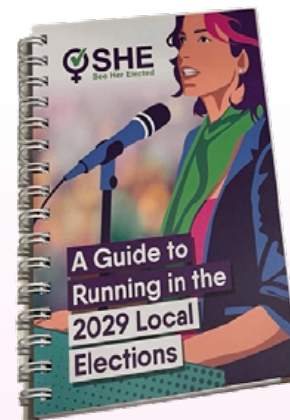
On her designation as the Mammy of Irish boxing, she says she was very touched.

"The first Olympic gold medal Kellie won, she came out after her semi-final, they were interviewing her, she said 'I want to say hello to Anna Moore, we call her one of the Mammies of Irish boxing because she's always there for us'.

"I was taken aback, it was half six in the morning and I was sitting in my dining room crying. She could have said hello to her Mam or to her partner Mandy, but it was me she thought of. Joe Duffy was on straight away, then Virgin Media.

I said to her, 'Kellie what are you after doing to me?'. She said 'You were there to wipe my tears when I lost. You were there to put me over a sink when I was vomiting and you were there when I won. You've always been there and I'm just acknowledging that.' I thought that was lovely, and since then that's what I'm called! At this stage I think I should be called the nana of Irish boxing, at least seven of the girls I used to bring away as youth boxers have their own children now!"

Plan now for 2029 elections



See Her Elected (SHE) is a feminist, community-led, rural initiative to support women in political life who value inclusivity, human rights and equality. It began in Longford under Longford Women's Link and has a presence in every county since the 2024 General Election. It is funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

SHE employs three staff to provide guidance, political education and workshops. This work is to build confidence, share knowledge and show women that their voices, experiences and perspectives belong at every decision-making table.

You can download SHE's 'Guide to Running in the 2029 Local Elections' from the website: seeherelected.ie

PREMIER COUNTY WOMEN SEEK POWER Seeking election is not the only pathway to influence decisions

Currently, just 12 of Tipperary County Council's 40 councillors are female, reflecting the gender imbalance in political representation around the country. An event held in Thurles on May 15 by the organisation See Her Elected (SHE) is part of a national campaign to improve representation.

Organised by Tipperary Public Participation Network (PPN) and See Her Elected (SHE), with support from Tipperary County Council, the event highlighted how women can influence change in their communities – not just by standing for election, but also through volunteering, advocacy and public participation.

Attendees heard from Tipperary women involved in community development, advocacy, environmentalism and public life.

As Michelle Maher, SHE manager, said, "Many women are already leading every day in their communities, through volunteering, advocacy, organising and supporting others, but they may not always recognise that as leadership.

"We need more women from all backgrounds involved in shaping the future of our communities and local government," she said.

Tipperary PPN co-ordinator, Ruth Smith, praised SHE for helping people to "learn the ropes, learn the structures, and think 'Well, do I want



• Michelle Maher, SHE programme manager, Ruth Smith, Tipperary PPN co-ordinator, Sharon Melbourne, Tipperary PPN administrator, and Megan Flynn Dixon, SHE communication & development manager. PHOTO: Joe Kenny.

to go further?' We need everybody to believe that they can be empowered enough to step up."

Pointing to SHE's Guide to Running in the 2029 Local Elections, Ruth hailed it as "a vital publication".

"Information is power and this guide oozes us taking our power if we choose to do it. Even if you're vaguely considering stepping into politics, read it," she said.

Hilary Dilworth, South Tipperary Development Company, said, "The big thing for women to think about is to lean into leadership positions, whether that's leadership with a capital L or a small l."

Cllr Pamela Quirke O'Meara (non-party), said, "We're lucky in Tipperary with the numbers of women that we have representing us, but it's important to keep those women involved, and support them, and bring more people along to enter the local politics scene. And keep the voices of women and mothers heard, so that we have representation for all women in society."

Cllr Kay Cahill Skehan (Fianna Fáil), said, "It was just wonderful to hear all the women talk, and all that they're doing, and how effective women's role is within the community".

10 GOOD REASONS TO JOIN!

Mary McKeon, co-ordinator in Co. Leitrim, reminds us of the benefits of joining your local Public Participation



• Members take part in a Grant Writing Workshop with Leitrim PPN on May 6.

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established by the government in 2014 to encourage community groups to input into policy and decision-making. They are a way for community groups to ensure that decisions made by local authorities reflect their experiences and expertise.

We were encouraged by Mary McKeon, co-ordinator of Leitrim PPN, to remind our readers of the benefits of joining. Our thanks to Mary and here goes with her list of benefits for groups and citizens in those groups:

- 1 Grow and develop through free training supports.
- 2 Influence policy making decisions relevant to your county.
- 3 Feed into consultations and make submissions at local, regional and national level.
- 4 Valuable local and regional networking opportunities.
- 5 Access to community news and information. e.g. PPN e-bulletins.
- 6 Advertise your group's activities via your PPN.
- 7 Learn of training and funding

opportunities, consultations and submissions.

8 Become part of a linkage group which is a group of member stakeholder organisations with a common interest.

9 Through linkage groups have your views heard and contribute to local policy.

10 Nominate members to sit on boards and committees.

PPNs were set up to:

- Be the main way for local authorities to consult the public on plans, strategies, policies, consultations, surveys and submissions.
- Facilitate the representation and participation of the public on local authority committees. e.g. Local Community and Development Committees.
- To provide networking opportunities and act as a hub around which information is shared.

Find the Public Participation Network for your county here: <https://bit.ly/Find-Your-PPN-Here>

SUMMARY

Wheel Summit 2026

By Allen Meagher

The value of civil society and of community development were the strongest themes to emerge at The Wheel's Summit, held on May 21, in DCU, Dublin.

The morning began with around 500 attendees hearing from five inspiring social change-makers.

The story-tellers were followed by Jerry Buttimer, Minister of State Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. It was notable that many of the earlier speakers' projects receive support through his department.

The keynote speaker was Séamus Boland, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). He talked of the importance of civil society in democracy - which was the theme of the summit.

Meanwhile, The Wheel's new CEO Pat Watt, who takes up his appointment in July, was introduced to attendees by the organisation's chairperson Inez Bailey.

The Wheel used the occasion to highlight challenges and it again called for groups to receive multi-annual funding. Staffing remains a critical challenge, largely due to uncompetitive pay.

Administrative pressures are also intensifying. Almost three-quarters (72%) of organisations reported an increase in compliance and reporting requirements over the past year.

PAST & PRESENT



• Deirdre Garvey, former Wheel CEO and now secretary general of the Irish Red Cross, Felix O'Regan, Wheel board member, Inez Bailey, chair of The Wheel, Pat Watt, incoming CEO, and Bairbre Nic Aongusa, asst. secretary at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

STAFF SNAP



• The Wheel staff members made sure everyone was looked after. Pictured above are Ames Poland, Sara Corcoran and Gert Ackermann.

Keynote speaker

Séamus Boland says civil society's strength is integral to Europe's sense of solidarity and ultimately its defence

In an era when democracy is on the wane globally, over 500 people in a theatre in DCU, Dublin, were congratulated on May 21 for their civil society roles.

"You're actually proof of the democratic system working in the country we live in," said Séamus Boland, the keynote speaker at The Wheel's Summit.

Last year, Mr. Boland was elected as President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), having worked as CEO of Irish Rural Link since 2001 until recently.

"Civil society, properly managed, properly organised, is a key part of our democracy," he said, quoting worrying recent indicators that show that the level of true democracy is down to 13 percent.

The EU last year agreed to establish a civil society platform for Europe to protect, support and empower civil society.

"That means Europe, at the highest level, has said civil society has got to be part of overall strategy policy making. In a recent meeting with the Taoiseach, I impressed upon him that now is the time - during the Irish presidency - to connect civil society in a proper formal way with government thinking," said Mr. Boland.

He wants an EU based on three pillars - opportunity, security and resilience.

"I would never be a European in a Europe that sets up a defence force while at the same time losing all the values and the freedoms and the equality and the inclusion that it supports. If it ever loses that it's just another major power, nothing else," he said.

Later, speaking to *Changing Ireland*, Mr. Boland stressed how essential it was for civil society to be represented in budgetary negotiations. He said that European defence cannot succeed by minimizing funding for social programmes like the ESF, cohesion funding, or CAP.

"I'm very interested in what Poland are doing at the moment," he said, referring to how that country is preparing for possible war or climate-related disasters.

"They're putting serious funding into local organisations to organise themselves in a way that they will be more resilient," he said.

"You can't deprive people of necessary funding and expect them to support some kind of militarised Europe. And civil society needs to be at that negotiating table, because if they're not there, you will have a Europe with a massive military base but no great belief by the citizens for funding for it," he warned.



• Séamus Boland at the Summit.

Minister Buttimer

had good news for charities



• Jerry Buttimer, Minister of State Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Inez Bailey, chairperson of The Wheel, and Dónall Geoghegan, The Wheel's Director of Policy and Advocacy. PHOTOS: Allen Meagher.

Minister of State Jerry Buttimer addressed The Wheel's Summit where he thanked all present and provided an update on departmental initiatives and policy development.

He said, "It's my privilege to be a minister in the Department, where I genuinely get energized, as I see first-hand and experience the great work that's being done. It gives me hope."

The world has "changed profoundly" since 2019, he noted, which was the year that the Department's ground-breaking policy document 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities' was launched. He said the successor to that document is now "at a very advanced stage".

He also said that work had commenced on a new national volunteering strategy.

Addressing the conference theme "Community at the heart of Democracy" he stressed how the Government values the relationship with the community and voluntary sector. The relationship was developed through "hard work, commitment and integrity" and it enables collaboration to meet challenges.

"I know you take great pride in your work. Remember that with Minister Calleary and I and our Department, you've got allies and friends," he said.

The annual National Civic Forum, now entering its fifth year, will coincide with Ireland's presidency of the European Union.

"It will have a broader European dimension and theme to it, including a reference to the European Union's civil society strategy, which was published last year," he said.

The Minister appealed to all social enterprises to take part in the social enterprise census which seeks to build on data gathered three years ago.

He said the Department would keep the Community and Voluntary Sector informed on changes coming under the Charities Act.

"I know there has been a burden placed on you under the regulations of the Charities Act. Once fully implemented the Act further strengthens our charities sector, balancing the need for greater transparency with fairness, reducing some of the input of costs on you, but also (increasing) public confidence in what we do and trust in the sector," he added.

The Minister also confirmed that the Department had approved funding for The Wheel's 2026 We Act campaign.



Five stories- Community at the heart of our Democracy

by Changing Ireland • Playlist • Public • 5 videos • No views

These five speakers spoke at The Wheel's Summit on May 21, 2026.

Play all +

Story-tellers show how change happens through community development

- from tackling hygiene poverty to supporting migrant women, disabled people and former prisoners to overcome barriers

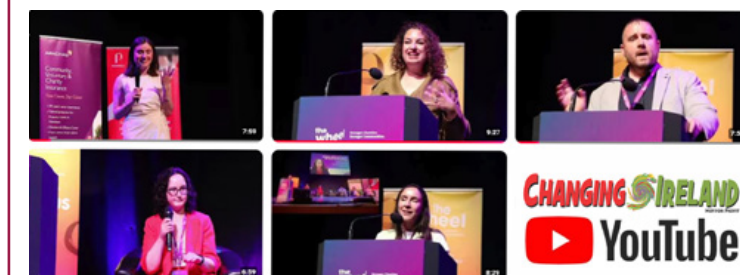


• Summit speakers: Damian Quinn of Spéire Nua, Amina Moustafa, Louth Local Development, Sorcha Killian, The Hygiene Hub, Paula Soraghan, Independent Living Movement Ireland - Sharon Hughes from The Wheel who chaired the storytelling session - and Kiren Khalid, Nasc.

Five inspiring social change-makers told their stories at the Wheel Summit. The speakers were:

- Kiren Khalid, women's support officer with Nasc,
- Sorcha Killian, co-founder of the Hygiene Hub,
- Damian Quinn, founder of Spéire Nua,
- Amina Moustafa, SICAP Projects Officer with Louth Local Development,
- and Paula Soraghan who is a community development worker with the Independent Living Movement Ireland.

You can watch and listen to all five of their speeches - scan the QR code to click through to Changing Ireland's YouTube channel: youtube.com/@changingireland/videos



CHANGING IRELAND
YouTube

By Noreen Byrne

Cambodian REFLECTIONS



• Enjoying a visit to Cork city's Quay Co-op - Richael Connolly, lecturer in UCC's Dept. of Food Business and Development, and H.E. Dr. Asikin Yoeu, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Cambodia.



• Moeurn KONG, Director of Tramkak Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, in Takeo province, Cambodia, enjoying farmwork on a co-operative enterprise in Co. Cork.

Co-operation after the Irish Civil War

During their visit, the group travelled to West Cork to see two of our oldest co-operatives. John O'Brien of Barryroe and Seamus Daly of Drinagh explained how their co-operatives were founded in the aftermath of the Irish Civil War. People who had, only years earlier, been divided by deep and bitter conflict came together to co-operate, rebuild and create shared economic structures. Can we imagine people having the skill and wisdom to be able to do this now in the current times? It certainly highlights the sophistication of past generations.

The conditions in which these co-operatives emerged make their success even more remarkable. They were self-funded by communities with very limited means. In Drinagh in particular, the land was poor and the region geographically distant from markets - conditions that offered little conventional business logic for success.

And yet, against the odds, they endured. Today, more than 100 years later, both co-operatives are thriving and remain central to the social and economic life of West Cork. They represent vital infrastructure for family farming - something that cannot be taken for granted.

Across the world, family farming is under increasing pressure. In class, our American students on the MSc in Sustainable Development, Agri-food and Co-operatives at UCC warn us

Cambodia (like Ireland) has experienced colonisation, poverty, and civil war, where people killed each other and refused to even look at or speak to one another. However, through grassroots communication at the community level and mutual support, people can bring about change and rebuild solidarity in their daily lives.

- Mr. Oeun Un, President, Vegetable Modern Agriculture Co-operative

that our Irish family farming structure cannot be taken for granted - they point to the steady disappearance of family farms in the United States, as consolidation into large corporate operations reshapes the agricultural landscape and hollows out rural communities. Similar trends are visible from France, Italy and Poland in Europe to Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia in Asia and the challenge is global.

Following the West Cork visits, we travelled to Bushy Park Community Farm, a project exploring alternative governance

models by actively involving the local community in farming. Its aim is threefold: to sustain farmers' livelihoods, develop a model to keep young people in farming and build a resilient, localised food system.

Quay Co-op is 44

We also visited the Quay Co-op in Cork city, which opened its doors in 1982 as an alternative community project led by the collective effort of feminist, lesbian and gay, environmental and other groups and individuals. The shop, bakery and bookshop downstairs continue to

be successful, however the upstairs vegetarian restaurant became a challenge, due to members becoming older and from rising costs, an issue facing many family-run restaurants.

In a spirit of innovation and solidarity, Virginia and Donal O'Gara - the vegan restaurateurs behind My Goodness Food in the English Market - stepped in to continue operating the restaurant. They were attracted by the Co-op's community, ethics and integrity and they have introduced fresh thinking - such as opening the restaurant space at nighttime for members. This collaboration helps to ensure the long-term sustainability of this important piece of social infrastructure in the city.

Elsewhere, communities have fund-raised to keep pubs open in villages facing the erasure of community spaces - for instance in Killeely, Co. Limerick and in Dromid, Co. Kerry.

The overarching lesson from this journey is clear. If we value this "infrastructure of the middle" - family farms, local restaurants, pubs, community retail - then we must actively support it, where at all possible.

We can see there are alternatives to seeing towns and rural areas hollowed out. As the founders of the co-operatives in Barryroe and Drinagh demonstrated a century ago, with imagination and collective effort, we can create models that serve both people and place. Initiatives such as community farms, co-operatives and innovations like the night-time co-op space in Cork show what is

possible when communities carve out an alternative.

Our efforts send signals beyond our locality and - as the exchange with our Cambodian visitors reminds us - this work is global. Across counties, countries and continents, people are seeking ways to resist the pressures of an economic model that prioritises profit over people and scale over sustainability. In doing so, we are demonstrating good examples to others and showing solidarity with those taking on the same challenges.

In that sense, co-operation is a quiet form of resistance. It echoes ideas explored by Paul Kingsnorth in 'Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of Humanity', where he reflects on the need to step outside dominant systems that erode community and meaning. The examples from Cork and elsewhere show that this resistance can be rooted in place, practical in nature and grounded in collective action offering real alternatives for the future.



• Grain mix from Ireland in the hands of a visiting Cambodian researcher.

• **Dr. Noreen Byrne** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Food Business and Development in UCC. She is also currently the director of UCC's **Centre for Co-operative Studies** which operates under the auspices of Cork University Business School.

• The learning exchange she writes about is part of a project called **'Empowering Agricultural Cooperatives: Bridging Cambodia and Ireland for Sustainable Development.'** The project is funded by the Government of Ireland through **Irish Aid** and the **Embassy of Ireland in Vietnam**.

• The Cambodian partner body was the **Ecosystem Services and Land Use Research Center at the Royal University of Agriculture in Cambodia**. The Irish partner was the Centre for Co-operative Studies.

Pointing to Iberia, Séamus Boland calls for more support for co-ops in Ireland

Séamus Boland was elected as President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) late last year.

Changing Ireland asked him recently for his opinion on co-operatives and social enterprises in Ireland and which EU countries we could possibly learn from.

"I would point to Portugal and Spain which have really good social enterprise cultures," he said. "The reason is that they are a lot more understanding of

the controls on social enterprise."

"We're a bit too tight on social enterprises. We almost only allow social enterprise if we're sure it's making a loss. In Portugal you have big co-operative social enterprises. So they're a good model and I would argue we need to look at that because it is one of the ways of doing social enterprise and co-operatives," he said.

Mr Boland believes that Ireland should better recognise co-operatives as a form of social enterprise.



Credit Union

"Social enterprises (here) need seed funding, they need better support from what's called our banking structures. While we're very pleased with the way credit unions have reformed a lot of their lending at the moment, we're still a long way from the kind of banking

system that lends to social enterprises and allows them to develop as businesses.

"I would love to see the government establish a commission to look at not just the regulation of social enterprise, but also to look at the financing of enterprises, which would bring in the co-operative movement. We are not quite serious enough about it in my opinion," he concluded.

- Allen Meagher

TAKE 5! PORTUGAL'S TOP CO-OPS

Here are the five largest co-operatives in Portugal:

- 1. Unilabs Portugal - (health services):** Provides services to patients and healthcare staff, with an emphasis on quality.
- 2. Unicol - (agri-foods):** Produces and distributes dairy products.
- 3. Caixa Agrícola de Torres Vedras - (financial services):** Supporting local economic

development and financial inclusion.

- 4. Seguros Co-op (insurance):** Offers mutual insurance solutions to members and is committed to social protection and risk coverage.
- 5. Caves Santa Marta - (wine production):** Has over 2,000 members and produces approx. 13 million litres of wine per annum.



Community opposition to A.I. and data centres

Feminist Communities for Climate Justice, a project supported by Community Work Ireland and the National Women's Council of Ireland, has condemned the construction of data centres and explosion in AI usage without heed for the environment, human rights or community concerns.

"Despite community opposition Ireland has become one of the data centre capitals of the world."

"The expansion of AI - and the energy-hungry data centres it relies on - has drastically increased demand for fossil fuels at a time when there is an urgent need to phase out fossil fuels," it said in a statement.

"Using ChatGPT to conduct an online search uses almost ten times the electricity that a traditional Google search does. Data centres also use significant amounts of water for cooling, and despite community opposition Ireland has become one of the data centre capitals of the world," it said.

feminist communities for climate justice



It also pointed to deepfake AI pornography, such as that produced by Elon Musk's Grok, saying that "the mental health impacts of deepfakes can be just as severe as that of real content, causing anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder".

In response, Feminist Communities for Climate Justice has begun public discussions about AI, misogyny and climate justice by asking: "How do we respond?"

More info: <https://www.feministclimatejustice.ie/>

Time for a New Deal

- says **Richard Bruton**, chair of **Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland**

Social enterprises deliver what the State wants to but cannot

Interview by Owen Ryan

Irish social enterprises can do wonderful things for the country, if only the appropriate supports from the State are allowed to flow.

That's the view of former Fine Gael cabinet minister Richard Bruton, who was named the new chair of Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) last year.

Channeling Franklin D Roosevelt, he told Changing Ireland he wants to see a 'New Deal' for a sector he feels has massive potential.

He feels that social enterprises don't get the supports that they need or that private enterprises receive, and he feels that the upcoming budget is a good time to start changing that, for everyone's benefit.

In his political career he served as Minister for Enterprise, Minister for Education and Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

That means he knows first hand how lobbying works, something he feels is an advantage in his current role.

"I did find over years in politics that people who are making budget submissions often don't quite understand the dynamic of how a budget is put together, or how policy gets framed. You have to work at it under a much longer period than just coming up with a glossy proposal saying we want x million for this very clever idea. You have to build that over time, you've to build the relationships, convince people, show your capacity to deliver.

"I do have a knowledge of how that public policy system works and how social enterprise, a sector that is slightly on the outside, might form a new partnership or new deal with the State. Ultimately the objectives are the same. The State is trying to reach people at the margins, it's trying to provide inclusivity in terms of positive aging, build mental health resilience, the sort of things that social enterprises do every day in their work. They are similar goals to the State, they are things the Government want to achieve, so there are huge opportunities for partnership."

VALUE AND SUPPORT

He wants to make the State more aware of the value of social enterprises, and to acknowledge it with a new model of funding.



• L to r: SERI board members Brendan Whelan, John Murphy, Lorraine Corcoran, Richard Bruton (chairperson), Evanne Kilmurray, John Kearns, and SERI CEO John Logue pictured last September when Bruton was appointed chair.

Local Enterprise Offices serve businesses, but not social enterprises. That should change.

"The case we would make to Government is there is a need for a new deal to realise the potential of the sector. Some of the existing approaches are too rigid or there are too many barriers in getting access to them."

At the moment they are on the back foot when compared to private enterprise and are really feeling the impact of severe inflation.

"The challenges are the same as for many other businesses. Things like rising costs, but the problem they have is that they can't pass on extra costs to people who can't pay market prices for all the services. While they're trying to earn revenue they are also trying to make sure that people who are close to the margins aren't left out because they can't afford to pay. There is a constraint on them, only a portion of their costs are covered by trading income, the rest they have to find through other routes, be it the State or donations or contributions from volunteers."

While there are many similarities between social and private enterprises, the denial of supports to those with worthy goals is one big difference.

"With the likes of Enterprise Ireland and local enterprise offices, they (social enterprises) don't fit into the programmes, but they face the very same sort of problems. That is one element. They are serving a need where, to use the economic

term, there is market failure. In simple terms the private sector won't go there because it isn't profitable enough and public services can't reach them. These are in community areas where you need community networks, to effectively deliver. The difficulty they face is that the framework for support from the State really doesn't fit well with the model of social enterprise. Social enterprises try to fix social challenges using the skills of an entrepreneur. They're trying to earn revenue, but they're also trying to maximise the social impact and they plough everything they earn back into the enterprise."

COMMON GOALS

Ultimately the State wants to achieve the very same things that social enterprises want to achieve, so there should be scope for high levels of co-operation.

"I think there is real opportunity to form a sort of a new deal that

would be a win for the State and the social enterprises and a win for our communities as a whole. When you look at some of the biggest challenges we face; be it climate or the environment or how we build positive ageing or building mental health resilience or how we mobilise people at the margins of our society; all of these things are the day to day bread and butter of social enterprises."

The State now needs to properly support the social enterprises that are doing important work all over the country, too often on a shoestring budget.

"They are extraordinarily creative people who are doing wonderful things with often very slender resources. One of the challenges is that there are often these individuals with great energy, and how can you replicate something that is driven by someone's unique talent in another area? How can you repeat the success that is built around one individual's drive and talent, even when you can see that it has huge potential to apply somewhere else. The State doesn't have a good framework for promoting or scaling these social enterprises that are making a huge contribution."

Rural communities at risk if LEADER funding diluted

- Campaigners urge MEPs to call for ring-fencing

By Allen Meagher

Community leaders are worried that rural Ireland will lose out if LEADER funding is not ring-fenced. There are fears that EU rules may be changed, placing future LEADER investment in communities in jeopardy.

Such is the level of concern that the Local Development Companies Network (LDCN) sent a delegation to Brussels in May to meet MEPs and officials and called a meeting in Dublin in June to press home the case.

"Irish rural communities could lose access to vital EU funding for jobs, services and social inclusion unless the LEADER programme is clearly ring-fenced in the European Union's next long term budget," warns the LDCN.

LEADER is delivered in Ireland through a nationwide network of Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies. It is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

The meetings in Brussels and Dublin come as negotiations begin to intensify on the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) which is due to run from 2028 to 2034.

The network said, "Without explicit ring-fencing in the next EU budget, LEADER, the EU's flagship rural community led local development programme, risks being diluted or absorbed into broader funding streams, undermining its unique bottom up approach and its proven impact in rural areas."

A Proven Model for Rural Development

LEADER has played a central role in supporting rural innovation, social inclusion, and enterprise development across Ireland for the past 35 years and the programme is internationally recognised as a best practice model for community-led rural development.

In Ireland, between 2014 and 31 March 2026, LEADER supported 6,858 projects nationally, with investment of over €286 million, particularly targeting areas where access to mainstream public services and private investment is limited.



• Brussels delegation: Shay Riordan, West Limerick Resources, Suzanne Kearney, SECAD, Máirín Ó Cuireáin, Local Development Companies Network, Eamonn O'Reilly, NEWKD, Karen Mannion, Forum Connemara, and John Feerick, Sligo LEADER Partnership.

John Feerick, CEO of Sligo LEADER Partnership, said, "LEADER works because it puts decisions in the hands of local communities. If this programme is not clearly protected in the next EU budget, rural communities will feel it first, through lost services, stalled local enterprises and fewer opportunities to build resilient local economies."

Real Impact on the Ground

In Donegal, LEADER support helped develop Wild Ireland, a major rural tourism and conservation project along the Wild Atlantic Way. The attraction now welcomes over 130,000 visitors annually, supports local jobs, restores native woodland ecosystems and strengthens the regional economy while advancing climate and biodiversity goals.

In Kilmiddy, Co Limerick, LEADER funding enabled the establishment of the Roots Community Shop & Café, restoring essential services to a village that had lost its local shop. The social enterprise sources produce locally, and provides a vital social hub, helping to combat rural isolation and support people to live and work in their community.

As Shay Riordan, CEO of West Limerick Resources, said, "These are not abstract EU policies, they are practical investments that make

rural places viable, connected and resilient."

Local Impact, European Value

The network emphasises how LEADER:

- Addresses unmet service gaps in rural areas.
- Supports social inclusion and community cohesion.
- Enables locally identified solutions that cannot be delivered through top down programmes.

While LEADER is delivered at local level, its outcomes align directly with core EU objectives.

From enterprise hubs and childcare facilities to community amenities, tourism ventures and social enterprises, LEADER funded projects play a critical role in ensuring that rural regions are not left behind in Europe's green and digital transitions.

Also campaigning

Meanwhile, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development has also sought for LEADER to be ring-fenced. It wants to see the LEADER approach upheld "as a core instrument for rural development".

NEWS BRIEFS

VISIONARY CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK IS EXPANDING

A group set up last year called The Solidarity Network is seeking to connect, coordinate and mobilise civil society activists to respond to barriers faced by civil society organisations in their work.

The network strives for a society based on shared values of radical hope, equality, ecological sustainability, solidarity, and community.

Last year, it developed a discussion document called 'Towards a Civil



Society for Transformative Change' which documented issues – both internal and external - faced by community organisations in their work for societal change. It set out a vision for how a wider civil society for transformative societal change would organise and operate.

Since then, The Solidarity Network has developed resources to underpin and enable their engagement as activists, individual organisations, and as a network.

At a gathering in Dublin in April it discussed a range of actions to grow the network and to pursue its vision.

Meetings take place in person and online and to find out more, or get involved, email Damien Peelo: damienspeelo@gmail.com

YOUTH JURIES CALL FOR EDUCATION ABOUT A.I.

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), in partnership with the Ombudsman for Children's Office and researchers in DCU, has launched a 40-page report setting out young people's views, concerns and recommendations on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies.

The recommendations emerged from Citizen Assembly-style youth discussions.

The NYCI is now calling on the Government to develop a public education campaign on AI that supports young people.

Mick Ferron, CEO, said, "Young people have been clear through this process: they do not want to be left to figure this out alone."

One of the young jurists - Nathan Geszczak, aged 16 - said, "There is sometimes an assumption that young people are 'digital natives' who automatically understand new technologies."

Nathan called for "practical education and accessible information we can trust" on AI.

The report is available to download here: [youth.ie](https://www.nyci.ie/youth-ai-report)

GOOD MEDICINE FOR
DIGITAL EXCLUSION:
FREE TABLETS

A new age-friendly tablet computer lending service was officially launched at Tuam Library in May. It makes free tablets available to adult members in Athenry, Ballinasloe, An Cheathrú Rua, Loughrea and Tuam libraries.

Delivered in partnership with Galway County Council's Age Friendly Team and Healthy Ireland, the initiative marked another step in supporting digital inclusion for older people across the county.

The tablets feature large icons, clear text and a simple layout. Each device is provided ready to use, with a step-by-step guide, and can be used for video calls, email, internet browsing, online library services and entertainment.

Library staff are trained to support borrowers, helping them learn to use the devices and build confidence during the loan period.

LITTLE LIBRARY BAG

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley, and Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Jerry Buttimer recently visited Pearse Street Library in Dublin to promote the My Little Library Bag initiative.

It supports children getting ready to start primary school in September by inviting them to visit their local library and collect a free My Little Library book bag.

Available to collect throughout the summer, the bag contains books for the children to keep, tips for parents and a special wallet for a new library card. My Little Library Bags are available in both English and Irish and are designed to help children and families with the transition to primary school.

HEALTHY IRELAND

Sligo Library held a number of 'Healthy Ireland at your Library' events across the county, as part of the Bealtaine Festival in May.

Activities included chair yoga sessions at Ballymote Community and Enniscrone branch libraries, while Sligo Central and Tubbercurry Community Libraries hosted health and wellness talks.



COMMUNITY CONNECTION PROJECT

WORKING TO COUNTER
MISINFORMATION AND
ANTI-MIGRANT HOSTILITY

BY OWEN RYAN

Tensions around migration led to the creation of the Community Connection Project in 2024, at a time when the issue had caused very visible disharmony in several parts of the country.

Catherine Lane is the project co-ordinator and she explains the form it has taken.

"Really it was designed to support communities where they have had challenges in welcoming particularly international protection applicants into communities, particularly where there has been hostility or opposition.

"The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht funded up to 26 positions to be hosted by local development companies - to listen to community



• A knowledge exchange and learning event hosted by Connect Laois last November that brought together Community Link Workers from participating LDC's.

"Everyone is susceptible to misinformation."

concerns and to try and understand the grievances that are there, try to understand where people are in terms of feeling maybe fearful or threatened, or not understanding what is going on."

She said the project originated from a government recognition that communities were "not being given time or space or often resources to be able to

welcome new people into communities".

"The community link workers would, with their colleagues, and the broader team in local development companies, go out and try to understand this issue in the community they work in, and begin to try and develop initiatives and responses to support community integration, broadly," she said.

Host communities

While the focus is broadly on what might be called host communities, that's not at the exclusion of other groups.

"They would also engage with people from a refugee and migrant background, as communities that are deeply affected by the actions that have been taken by some parts of the community. That's very visible from a minority online.

"The emphasis has been to find ways to bring together the new and the host communities on issues that they have in common, that matter to them and that they care about. To find ways to break down the barriers, where people get to know each other in a real way - such as joining a football club or doing art together.

"Community link workers use a variety of methods and offer different spaces for people to be able to connect and to meet people. Just to try and humanise people and break down the myths that are there."

Misinformation

Countering misinformation is also an important part of the work.

"One of the aims is to support people to understand the facts around the international protection system and to educate people to be more media literate.

"In Wexford for example the community link worker has delivered a very substantial number of workshops in secondary schools. The focus has been to work with students around understanding misinformation, the information they see online and trying to support people with questioning that," said Catherine.

The Community Connection worker attached to South Dublin County Partnership has focused more on capacity building - supporting youth workers, teachers and those in the community who have direct relationships and positions of trust and influence with young people."

In some areas, the workers have used local media to highlight some of the benefits of migration.

Building relationships

Catherine said it is important that the workers don't come to lecture or argue with those they encounter.

"They focus very much on trying to understand where people are at, being inquisitive about where people are getting their information, approaching people with kindness and interest. You want to maintain the relationship with people. It doesn't happen in a once-off-way, you don't just have one conversation with somebody, it's really about building the relationship."

One thing she has learned is that anyone can have their thinking stunted by misinformation, and that often those who spread it don't have nasty intentions.

"Everyone is susceptible to misinformation. The motivation from sharing it and passing it on can come from a good place. Sometimes too, people just want to get the news out, that's just human nature. Misinformation can also come from people who care about their community and are worried, although sometimes that can be misplaced or misdirected," she said.

She feels there is often a more negative perception about the attitudes of host communities than the on-the-ground reality. She has also seen that when people get a chance to connect with migrants, the results are generally rather positive.

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht funded 26 positions - to listen to community concerns and to understand the grievances that are there, to understand where people are feeling maybe fearful or threatened, or not understanding what is going on.

"While there is a lot of hostility and hate online, when people actually come together in person it is quite different. The public experience doesn't match what we hear through the national media or online, it's not what the reality is in communities.

a way that shows that they are equals with things in common.

"The contact piece is important, but it has to be done in a certain way. It has to be meaningful, not just once off. It has to be people seeing each other as equals, doing something together or having something in common, like we are both mothers or we are both on a team together," said Catherine.

She said it is hard to measure how effective the effort has been. "With projects of this nature, where it's about relational work and trust building, it's hard to put metrics on it, in terms of seeing if there is a shift in attitudes."

In an ideal world it would be a longer-term project, with certainty about its future.

"We absolutely want to continue with CCP and are looking for funding to continue at least until end of 2027," she added.

"While there is a lot of hostility and hate online, when people actually come together in person it is quite different. The public experience doesn't match what we hear through the national media or online, it's not what the reality is in communities."

NO NAME CLUBS
SEEK VOLUNTEERS



If you would like to volunteer with or set up a No Name Club in your area you are invited to attend an informational webinar about Ireland's network of alcohol-free youth clubs on Thursday, July 16 (7.30pm).

The organisation is expanding and needs more volunteers for existing and new clubs. Volunteers of all ages from 18 upwards are welcome. For every five volunteers who come forward, the club can create space for 20 additional young members.

There are currently 21 clubs across the country, catering to around 500 members. They engage 15 to 18-year-olds in fun weekly alcohol-free activities and longer-term projects - in areas the young people choose themselves.

Popular activities include discos, talent shows, quiz nights, guest talks, outdoor activities and national gatherings such as the annual Youth Awards Gala Dinner Ball. European exchange students volunteering with the clubs have said they wish they had something similar back home - a reflection of how unique the clubs are.

Read our report from last year on the success of these clubs - now in their 50th year: <https://www.changingireland.ie/no-name-clubs-are-the-envy-of-teenagers-coming-from-abroad/>

The July 16 webinar is part of a series of information sessions the No Name Club has been running this summer. Those who cannot make the date can visit nonameclub.ie for more details on how to get involved.



For more information, scan the barcode - or contact Ethan Jordan. E: ejordan@nonameclub.ie.

One man's journey from volunteering in Ukraine and being injured to volunteering in Ireland

BY OWEN RYAN

Having suffered serious injuries as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Armen Galstyan – now aged 52 - arrived in Ireland two years ago from Odessa and immersed himself in community work in Donegal.

“We have a community organisation here, the Life Development Group. We established it in 2024 as an integration programme for the Ukrainian community. Now we work with new communities - that means we work not only with Ukrainians, but with other groups also. Our goal is to involve our volunteers in local community life. We work with other community organisations when they ask us for help,” he said.

“Our voluntary activities are mostly music and sport. For example, if Inishowen needs someone to help for a music festival or something we will help. The Council or another organisation might say, for example, that they need five musicians tomorrow or next week, to play for a couple of hours - and we’re happy to provide them.

“And if the Tidy Towns group wants help, or if a charity shop needs help, or the Men’s Shed or Women’s Shed, we will help,” he adds.

Injured and separated

Back in Ukraine he was a volunteer driver delivering food, medication and supplies across the country and bringing people from particularly dangerous locations to relative safety.

Armen suffered a series of injuries during the first eighteen months of the war and like so many others left his home.

“During a year and a half I ended up with six different traumas. The doctors said, ‘You’re done with this war. Go and be reunited with your children in Dublin’. Then the immigration services said they can’t give me a place with my family, it’s women and children that are living there. They said I had to go to Donegal,” he reflects.

Rules can be cruel on families.

One of the things he brought to Ireland was his commitment to community, and from the day he arrived in Donegal he was looking to help, despite the suffering his body had been through.

“I have problems with my vision, with my hips, my back, my knees. But anyhow I can walk, I can



• Armen Galstyan volunteering in Ukraine.



• Armen Galstyan and fellow volunteers from the group they set up in Donegal called the Life Development Group – pictured here after a training workshop (in how to run committees) organised by Donegal Local Development Company.

drive a car, and I am helping families and children who need it. I’m trying to be a volunteer translator. I’m not a very good translator, and I’m not paid for it, I do it for free,” he said.

The winding down of accommodation supports for Ukrainians is providing a new challenge for thousands of people, many of whom have already been deeply traumatised as a result of Putin’s invasion.

Armen said that there is a good deal of confusion among the community around their next steps.

“Most Ukrainians are confused and they don’t know what to do first of all. They don’t know where to go. They don’t have a place to live in Ukraine anymore - many cities, towns and villages have been destroyed.

“Secondly, Russia is still attacking, it’s very easy to die. If they do have an apartment or a house they are afraid to return. Our buildings often have hundreds of apartments and if a rocket hits the middle of a building many people can die.

“Also it is a very difficult time for the Ukrainian economy. People have lost the social connections that they did have and when they return it’ll be a totally new country for them.”

Departures and struggles

He expects that many will leave, perhaps going to other Eastern European countries, while those who are fit and healthy will be able to work in Ireland and remain.

He said that right now many Ukrainians are already struggling financially, on top of the other horrors the war has visited upon their families.

“We have a family, a mother with three children - her husband was in the military, but he died two years ago. She is in an accommodation programme and she is also paying extra to the landlord in cash. She doesn’t have enough to live on, she goes to a food bank. Once a week she gets a food basket and she says that is all that allows her to survive. The landlord wants €1,000, the programme pays €600.”

In general, he feels that European governments need to adjust the emergency programmes that came into being in the early months of the war.

“I think governments in Europe know they need new programmes and we will see them in 2026 and 2027,” he said.

“I want to receive local culture. I’m a guest. I can show my culture a little, but I don’t want to change local traditions. Local life has to be the same as before us. That’s my philosophy,”

The Ukrainian community bring benefits to Ireland, providing a supply of workers while the population boost has been very welcome in many rural areas. However, as Armen said, supports around housing and language are essential. He believes that new communities need to be supported to fully understand Irish ways and culture.

“We need to teach more about Irish culture, so there is more understanding in new communities. I don’t want to bring my own culture here, I want to receive local culture. I’m a guest, I can show my culture a little, but I don’t want to change local traditions. Local life has to be the same as before us. That’s my philosophy,” he said.

GOWRAN OUTDOOR HUB

“We didn't want any child to be left behind” - Denis



BY OWEN RYAN

Inclusivity was at the heart of every decision made in developing the Outdoor Hub in Gowran, Co Kilkenny, according to Denis Hynes, who chaired the group that developed the facility.

“We said that whatever we do, we would cater for all kids and that no child would be coming up, then being left out, watching their friends play and they not able to play. The castle, the trampoline, everything we got was designed for inclusion so that everyone could play,” he says.

The Hub ultimately cost €585,000 to build and was this year shortlisted for the Best Community-Scale Enhancements award at the Local Authorities Members Association Awards.

Denis says that local people made a great effort to get behind the project and it received funding from a number of sources.

“There is a good, strong community here. Some great people came on board and worked tirelessly. We got great assistance from LEADER through Kilkenny LEADER Partnership – we received over €100,000. We also got €250,000 under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The Council put us forward for that. Kilkenny County Council also gave us an enhancement grant of €45,000,” he said.

The council also helped to ensure the project is accessible.

“We did a walkway all around it that is 330 metres long - for all ages to go running or walking on. We said we’d have to tar it, which cost a lot more, so that anyone in a wheelchair wouldn’t destroy their hands going around it. The local farmers pitched in with donations, so we’ve called it the farmer’s walk,” Denis said.

It was completed with a deficit of €28,000 to be repaid, while there are plans for further development of the site, so fundraising has continued.

“We have a good committee, we’re constantly working, constantly trying to raise money. We had a fundraiser recently that raised over three thousand. We do a Split the Pot each week and that’s bringing us in anything up to €100 a week or thereabouts,” he said.

ONLY ONE IN EUROPE

On a personal level Denis was very aware of the importance of including children with additional needs.

“I have a little granddaughter with autism. Noise and things like that can affect them. We have little areas for kids with autism – with little chime bells that make lovely sounds, so they can go in and have their bit of pleasure.

“The castle that we put in is the only one of its kind



• Denis Hynes at the Outdoor Hub, Gowran, Co. Kilkenny.



in Europe. The only one similar to it is in Australia. A child in a wheelchair can access the castle and can go around it. And for kids with autism it is built in a tube to make it safer and if they want to slide down they won’t feel as anxious. We could have just put in an everyday playground, but we didn't want any child to be left out.”

Organisations in the area that help children with special needs now regularly use the facility.

“We have Saplings just down the road, they look after kids with special needs and autism, and they love it. And Beam in Carlow access it a good bit, they also look after people with special needs. We get tours and school groups visiting. All the feedback is good and our reward is seeing everyone enjoying it, really.”

In general the usage of it has been excellent.

“You’d be amazed the amount of people who would be up there. Some days there would be 100 people. Other days there could be 20, you could go up some mornings and there could be only 10. It’s lovely if you go up and see parents playing tennis while the children are in the sand pit or on the swings or some of the other activities. It’s wonderful to see everyone is enjoying it and it is safe there,” said Denis.

ABOUT LEADER

Since its launch in 1991, LEADER has provided rural communities across the European Union with the resources to enable local partners to actively engage and direct the local development of their area, through community-led local development. In Ireland, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht is responsible for managing the LEADER Programme.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS (PPNs)

SLIGO NAMES THE BARRIERS STOPPING COMMUNITY GROUPS FROM THEIR WORK

Research launched recently by Sligo PPN and Atlantic Technological University shows that when community groups say they need more resources, they should be listened to – particularly when it comes to climate justice work.

The study “What’s stopping us?” came about after a project to support communities engage in climate action hit barriers. The researchers noted: “Everyday realities of community work are prohibiting community groups from engaging with climate action and other key priorities.” Most community groups struggle to raise funds, recruit volunteers and manage administration.

You can download the report here: <https://www.sligoppn.com/whats-stopping-us-report/>



LEARNING TO COUNTER MIS AND DISINFORMATION



Clare PPN recently held a workshop titled ‘Fact or Fiction: Community Responses to Mis and Disinformation’. It provided an intensive weekend of training for people from all walks of life interested in learning how to stop mis- and disinformation harming their communities. The training covered facilitation skills, how to have difficult conversations, how to evaluate sources of information, where to find reliable information, understanding conflict and the role that trauma can play in our communities, and how to sit with disagreement.

AI FOR OLDER ADULTS

Kerry PPN and the Older People’s Council Kerry recently organised a practical three-day course for people aged over-55 who are interested in exploring AI. It promised no jargon and just facts. The aim was to explore what AI is, how it is already impacting our lives - and how you can live what they call “a more informed life” in a world of technology. The course was delivered by Maynooth University’s Academy for Good.

NEWS

IRISH PALESTINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN LEADS PROTESTS



Weekly protests in towns and cities around Ireland continue over the genocide in Gaza and calls for boycotts grow louder.

People are encouraged to take part in these protests by voluntary organisation the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC).

In recent weeks it has also called for Ireland not to engage in sportswashing and has begun a petition to get scheduled upcoming games between Ireland and Israel called off.

The petition calls on the FAI "to be on the right side of history" by refusing to play.

It says, "In the last two years Israel has killed more than 1,000 Palestinian athletes including over 421 football players, 103 of them children. Among those murdered are national team player Suleiman al-Obeid, the 'Palestinian Pelé', killed while trying to get aid for his family."

Across Gaza, since October 2023, Israel has killed at least 72,000 people, including 20,000 children. Thousands more people are buried beneath rubble.

As the IPSC point out, "That is about one child killed every hour for two years."

"In September 2025, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory determined that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza. This conclusion corroborates documented evidence, aligns with the assessments of leading genocide scholars and human rights organisations, and reinforces the proceedings initiated by South Africa before the International Court of Justice in December 2024, to which Ireland is now a party," it says.

On hopes for an end to the genocide, it notes: "Despite there being a nominal ceasefire in place, Israel continues to block most aid, medicine and water into Gaza and to murder Palestinians."

The IPSC has for many years pushed for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel over its treatment of Palestinians.

Celebrating community, equality and diversity LGBTQ+ Pride - Africa Day - Traveller Pride -

LGBTQ+ PRIDE Athlone



• Athlone, Co. Westmeath, hosted its first Pride Parade on Saturday, June 6. It was organised by Heartlands Pride and it honoured the late Michael Woods, who had sought to organise a Pride parade for the town five years earlier, but his hopes were thwarted by Covid-19. He would pass away two years later. The Grand Marshal of the parade was Irish transgender rights and HIV/AIDS activist and television host, Rebecca Tallon de Hallivand.



AFRICA DAY

West Cork

• Dunmanway, Co. Cork, was alive with music, dance and culture on May 16 as it marked its first ever Africa Day. The event was organised by Dunmanway Family Resource Centre.

PHOTOS - courtesy of Mandy's Memory Room Photography.



TRAVELLER PRIDE Dublin



• At the Traveller Pride Awards, the Music, Arts and Culture Award went to Martin McDonagh of Balbriggan Travellers - seen here with Philomena Poole.

PHOTO: Richard Walshe from the Arts Council.



• Award-winner Michael Reilly, Longford, pictured with Maureen Reilly, Tullamore, Co. Offaly, at the Traveller Pride Awards on May 21.

PHOTO: Allen Meagher.