



European
Commission



Diversity Journal

*Stories about the EU and
equality and inclusion in
Ireland*



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Foreword



As Minister of State for European Affairs, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to this Diversity Journal.

As we approach the 50th Anniversary of our membership of the European Union, this Journal comes at a special moment in Ireland's European journey. In these stories, we see clearly how Ireland's vitality and ever evolving identity remains inextricably linked to our place in the EU over the last five decades.

Since joining the EU in 1973, Ireland has benefitted enormously through social and economic transformation. Today, our citizens can continue to live and work freely in any EU Member State, and students in Irish institutions can access Erasmus+ and the opportunities it offers to study in the EU. Ireland is home to citizens from across EU countries, who contribute to our dynamic and diverse workforce.

The EU also continues to bolster the vibrant civil society we see on our island today. Our EU membership has supported the Northern Ireland Peace Process through investment in cross-border programmes, such as the PEACE PLUS programme. Since 1995, the programmes have committed approximately €2.26 billion worth of funding to Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland.

Irish people have also played a crucial role in building the EU. We have a strong record of working right at the centre of European affairs, and of high-level representation in the EU institutions. Today, hundreds of Irish people work across the EU institutions in a variety of fields. It has been a priority of mine to promote EU careers to our young people and continue this tradition through the Irish Government's A Career for EU strategy which launched earlier this year.

Supporting communities to promote diversity remains crucial as we begin to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. I am pleased that the Department of Foreign Affairs is providing support to Irish organisations to tap into funding under the Next Generation EU recovery package through our three-year Access Europe programme. As well as providing support for external organisations, the Department of Foreign Affairs is fully committed to ensuring that our staff and workplace are representative and reflective of the people and society we serve.

This Journal illustrates how Irish communities, civil society groups and the European Union are working closely together to build an Ireland that embraces and celebrates its rich cultural diversity.

I would like to thank Barbara Nolan, the Head of the European Commission Representation in Ireland, and all of those whose vital work has been captured here in this Journal. A diverse, inclusive and equal Ireland, at the heart of the EU, is one we can be proud of.

Go raibh maith agat.

Thomas Byrne TD

Minister of State for European Affairs

Introduction

Irish society has been transformed in recent decades. The country has become more diverse, inclusive and equal.

This has contributed to the richness and creativity that has helped the country flourish.

Ireland's membership of the European Union, and the EU's commitment to tackling discrimination and promoting equality, have been important factors in this change.

European legislation on equality has had a major impact on Ireland. It is hard to believe that it was only in 1973, when Ireland joined the EU, that the ban on the employment of married women in the public sector was lifted. In the workplace, EU laws have ensured that men and women are entitled to equal pay for doing the same job. They have also provided legal guarantees on fair treatment and entitlements to maternity and paternity leave.

The EU has recently appointed its first-ever Anti-Racism Coordinator and adopted the EU Anti-Racism Plan 2020-2025 to step up action against racism and hate. It has also launched many initiatives to combat discrimination against women, LGBTIQ people, and the Roma. The EU and Ireland are working to improve the social and economic situation of people with disabilities, building on the Charter of Fundamental Rights and through strong commitments on accessibility, transport and equal treatment. Tackling hate speech online and off, is also a priority for the EU and Ireland.

Ireland also became the first country in the world to introduce same-sex marriage through a national referendum. In 2021, Ireland strengthened its gender pay gap legislation, ensuring greater transparency around equal pay. Ireland now stands 7th in the EU's Gender Equality Index.

With so many different nationalities and cultures shaping our society, now is an opportune time to reflect on how Ireland and the EU have worked together to support diversity, equality and inclusion.

In this 'Diversity Journal' we hear the stories of how individuals, communities, organisations, and local and national authorities have worked with the EU to promote diversity and inclusion, generating positive change and impressive results. Equality and inclusion are common threads across EU policies and are vital to create a prosperous and social Europe. We are stronger together as diverse societies when we are all valued and included.

There is still a long road to travel but to quote the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, "I will not rest when it comes to building a Union of equality."

Barbara Nolan

Head of the European Commission
Representation in Ireland



Running in solidarity



When Graham Clifford, broadcaster and journalist developed a love for running in his 30s, he had a eureka moment to use running as a way to bring together Irish people and those living in Direct Provision centres. And so, Sanctuary Runners was born in 2018.

“To really help people and build sustainable communities, the predominant motivator must be solidarity,” says Graham, National Coordinator of the Sanctuary Runners. *“Almost everyone can run. Running creates raw, special moments and is an incredibly liberating symbol of the journey through life.”*

As of June 2021, there are over 4,000 Sanctuary Runners across Ireland in 29 different locations, with about a quarter of those being asylum seekers or refugees.

“The mission statement of the Sanctuary Runners is: ‘To enable Irish people to run alongside, and in solidarity with, asylum seekers and refugees’ and it has undoubtedly educated and empowered those in the host community to better understand asylum seekers and refugees living locally.

“When you pull that blue Sanctuary Runner top over your head, labels – be that refugee, citizen, asylum seeker, resident – disappear and you are just you. We don’t judge, we treat each other with respect.”

Busie Mhlophe, from Zimbabwe and now living in Cork, says, *“Ever since I joined the Sanctuary Runners, I got to understand the meaning of solidarity, friendship and respect from the people in the Sanctuary Runners and from those in the community. It gave me a lot of confidence and acceptance with myself for who I am.”*

In 2019, the Sanctuary Runners were shortlisted for the EU #BeInclusive Sport Awards by the European Commission and Graham says this was a *“superb feeling”*.

“I travelled to the awards, which were in Brussels, with a fellow Sanctuary Runner – Yolanda, from Zimbabwe. She had been an asylum seeker in Ireland when she started running with us. Just weeks before the awards were held, she had received her right to remain in Ireland, and for the first time in years, was free to travel out of the country and return again. So, her first trip overseas was to the EU Sports Awards as a resident of Ireland.

“The awards brought us greater recognition at home. The support of the EU for solidarity-through-sport projects is incredibly important.

“These awards can act as an example to others thinking of setting up an initiative to help bring people together and build more cohesive societies across, and beyond, Europe.”

A more inclusive society

Involve is the main provider of youth work services to young Travellers, and young people from marginalised backgrounds, in Ireland.

The organisation manages and supports seven youth projects in Galway, Mayo, Donegal and Meath, engaging with over 1,500 young people aged between 10 and 25 every week. One such project in Meath has participated in Erasmus+, an EU-funded programme that offers the chance to study, train, volunteer or get work experience in another European country.

“Erasmus+ saw some young Irish people obtain their first Irish passport, go on a plane, leave their country and for some, leave their families for the first time,” says Kay McCabe, Senior Project Worker at Involve Youth Project in Meath.

Erasmus+ is managed in Ireland by Léargas. Kay says this support is vital in helping to tackle social exclusion in the travelling community and marginalised communities, *“It’s vital because we are still the only Traveller youth project taking on youth exchanges and European Solidarity Corps programme opportunities. Without the support, we never would have taken the Erasmus+ plunge.”*

Kay says through the exchanges, young people explored what it meant to be a young person in Europe, but also what the label of Irish Traveller meant to them.

“We have seen the eyes of ‘tough’ 16-year-old Traveller boys light up while on a bus, driving through the cities in Spain, or the delight at trying to surf in Portugal.”

One of Involve’s staff, who is a member of the travelling community, was also part of a group of youth workers who worked in conjunction with National Youth Council of Ireland, and several other European partners, on a toolkit called ‘Outside In’. Kay says, *“This helps combat hate speech on all levels. Being from an ethnic minority group, it was very important to have our staff member’s voice heard on this issue.”*

“Another young person, who was from a high-deprivation area, lost her father to suicide. She says that being supported by Involve has helped her get through one of the hardest times in her life. She is now going into her second year of college to become a youth worker.”

Kay says the project was all about mental health for young Travellers and the importance of coping skills and seeking help. *“Our group also devised their own mental health campaign for young Travellers called ‘No Shame’.”*

“Erasmus+ will open the minds and possibilities to the travelling community, by the wider community seeing what positive things young Travellers are capable of. It will make our society more inclusive.”



Empowering women

“In 2017, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) Innovation Hubs set out to increase participation of female entrepreneurs with the launch of EMPOWER,” says Maria Staunton, Innovation Hub Manager at GMIT and Coordinator of the EMPOWER Programme. *“Bringing more female entrepreneurs into the economy will help improve economic growth and is particularly needed in the rural West and North-West of Ireland.”*

There are two elements to the EMPOWER programme – EMPOWER Start (for early-stage ideas), a 12-week programme focused on market research and setting up your business (the 2020 EMPOWER Start group pictured). The second element is the one-year EMPOWER Growth for female founders looking to scale up and grow.

Maria says labour force participation rates for women in Ireland remain low by international standards despite more career opportunities. This EMPOWER programme aims to help redress that imbalance.

“There is a structure focused on the supports required for each business, be that market research, sales, marketing, social media etc. The women I have worked with have shown determination to get their business up and running.”

“Whilst I have observed high levels of ambition, some lack confidence. They face challenges with work-life balance, something which shouldn’t be overlooked by policymakers.”



Gillian Berry from Westport, a qualified clinical nurse specialist, was a participant in the inaugural EMPOWER Start programme in 2017. She also founded PerCen Technologies in 2019 in response to challenges that she felt were not addressed in healthcare.

“The EMPOWER programme was my first step in the entrepreneurial process,” says Gillian. *“It provided me with an understanding of the journey and gave me real-world learning from others who had started their own business. It gave me the courage to step forward and work on my innovation.”*

Other successful participants include Lorraine Corcoran from Cosmetic Creations who participated in the EMPOWER Growth programme. They have expanded into Cork and even responded to Covid-19 with Airmedica Products sanitisers. Some women went on to participate in Enterprise Ireland’s New Frontiers programme focused on high growth businesses, including Sarah McGuire (The Reading Academy) and Yvonne Comer (Rugby Smarts).

EMPOWER is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. Maria says this support has been vital.

Maria adds, *“EMPOWER has become a big brand and is growing considerably with lots of new jobs being created. These women are paving the way for future entrepreneurs as they teach their children all about entrepreneurship too.”*

Calling out hate

The European Centre for the Study of Hate was established at the University of Limerick in 2020 and set out to understand the hate that excludes and divides, and to provide the tools to respond to hate effectively.

“An open, inclusive, and safe society for all is a core aim of this European project,”

says Dr Jennifer Schweppe, Co-Director of the

Centre. *“This vision*

is under threat from the growing influence of those who wish to exclude minorities from society because of who they are or what they represent. Where

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Led by its co-directors,

Dr Amanda Haynes and Dr Jennifer

Schweppe, the work of the European-

Centre for the Study of Hate is organised

by five themes: European Understand-

ings of Hate; Growing Up in an Inclusive

Europe; Criminalising Hate; Populism,

Politics, and Exclusion; Margins and

Marginality.

The Call it Hate project was a ten country

European project funded by the Europe-

an Commission Rights Equality and Cit-

izenship Programme. Dr Haynes and Dr

Schweppe were the Irish investigators

to this project, who worked alongside

civil society partners, the Transgender

Equality Network of Ireland. This project

sought to understand levels of

transphobia, biphobia, and homopho-

bia across Europe. Based on this research,

the co-Directors ran an award-winning

campaign in Ireland in 2019, 'Call it

Out', which asked people to 'call out' ho-

mophobia, biphobia and transphobia

when they encounter them.

“The absence of hate crime legislation in

Ireland made the funding and production

of this research important and timely.”

“This project could not have run without

funding from the European Commission,”

says Jennifer. *“Challenging and exposing*

hate and exploring means by which di-

versity can be promoted and celebrated is

research that has the capacity to inform

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A sense of belonging

Established in 2011 by John Evoy, the Irish Men's Shed Association has been at the forefront of providing a sense of community for men of all ages, from a range of backgrounds, in our cities and towns and across rural Ireland.

"We have over 450 sheds across Ireland, providing a space where men who are often deemed 'hard to reach' and are at risk of isolation can learn new skills, make new friends, or just pop in for tea and a chat," says Enda Egan, CEO of the Irish Men's Shed Association. *"At least 12,000 men across Ireland visited a shed every week pre-Covid. Since Covid, the Association has maintained communication with members both online and via telephone."*

Enda says the project has been life-changing for many people who have experienced life setbacks, *"One of our members, David 'Daithi' Cusack lost three fingers on his dominant hand in a horrific industrial accident in 1996. In the years that followed, Daithi says his sense of independence slipped away, and his weight increased rapidly, culminating in a heart attack in 2014."*

"Thankfully, Daithi survived, and in doing so, vowed to bounce back with a renewed passion for life. He set up Tullyallen Men's Shed in Co Louth which now has 18 members who help Daithi through his toughest days, as he does for them. Daithi says the recent death of his brothers would have been more difficult without his fellow 'shedders', and he can't wait to return to the shed with them."



In 2018, the Irish Men's Sheds Association won the European Citizen's Prize, which is awarded by the European Parliament in recognition of exceptional achievements by Europeans. *"This was a momentous recognition of all the work our shedders have done for Ireland over the last decade, and was a clear indication that the Irish Men's Sheds Association's work to support those shedders must continue to be funded and supported in turn."*

"From building new benches for their local park, to holding fundraisers for their surrounding parishes, every single action by our members across Ireland contributed to our success in winning the award. This served as great proof of how social inclusion can lead to the betterment of our communities."

"The sheds are primarily about drawing together men from all types of backgrounds, and the award really reflects how great results can be achieved when such a variety of minds are pooled together."

Supporting youth mental health through creativity

Run by Garry McCarthy, The Kabin Studio in Cork is an inclusive community learning, arts and performance hub that engages young people from all



backgrounds, abilities and cultures in an integrated programme of workshops.

“These workshops aim to develop their confidence, identity, skills, employability and creativity through music, rap and hip hop, art, drama, writing, digital media, coding and horticulture,” explains Garry.



As part of The Kabin Studio, It's Ok Cork was developed. The project was born out of founding member, Dzana Bukvic's desire to educate young people about mental health. *“We realised the importance of having a safe space where young people felt like they were being listened to and where they could go for guidance,”* says Dzana.

Lívia Mendes, who is a volunteer with The Kabin Studio can advocate for the It's Ok Cork initiative, as it helped her to feel welcomed in Cork, when she moved from Brazil in 2019. *“When I arrived in Cork, I knew nobody here. The disconnect from other people made me very isolated and apprehensive.*

“By chance, I met Dzana, and she immediately included me in the group. Being able to be a volunteer not only helped me to create a support network, but it also allowed me to get back in touch with activities that were familiar to me in my home country, such as facilitating art workshops.”

It's Ok Cork is funded by the EU Solidarity Corps and Léargas. Lívia says, *“Many of the volunteers and young people participating in the project are, for example, immigrants or young people living in disadvantaged areas.*

“The support that EU Solidarity Corps and Léargas offers us is essential to cover the cost of courses, workshops, materials and the improvement of our meeting point, the Kabin Studio. The idea is to offer more inclusive activities and spaces in which young people feel comfortable meeting and can invite more people from the community.”

During the pandemic, It's Ok Cork coordinated an online drama workshop, as well as yoga classes in the park with the volunteers when restrictions were lifted.

“We put a lot of effort into strengthening our online outreach, especially through Instagram.

“The online experience turned out to be very promising. Moving forward, we will continue with online activities, so that we can also reach people that live further away, as well as strengthen the activities in person.”

Accessible art for all

Created in 2015 as a grassroots initiative to regenerate derelict, run-down parts of Waterford City, The Walls Project (TWP) is best known for the delivery of the annual event, Waterford Walls International Street Art Festival. This festival uses artistic expression to enrich and improve the social and economic fabric of the greater community.

“Despite challenges from Covid-19, The Walls Project successfully delivered its sixth and seventh Waterford Walls Festivals in 2020 and 2021,” says Kerri Haberin, an arts management professional and administrator at Waterford Walls Street Art Festival. *“It brings vibrancy and life to the city’s walls and also helps instil pride in the city itself.”*

Central to the vision of this project is the transformative power of urban art – how it enlivens spaces and inspires people. The festival’s mission is to connect communities through the festival street art. Kerri says it has had a positive impact on the communities in Waterford.

“Each year, we expand to include different locations. We have had stories of how having a wall in their area painted has helped people take pride in their place of living. They want to keep the place looking well by painting their own walls. It also inspires people to speak about the art and come out with cups of tea and have a chat!”



The 2021 festival focused on gender balance, and also helped emerging artists pair up with established

artists in their mentorship programme to gain more experience and grow their skillset.



The Walls Project also launched the Murals for Communities project which creates mural artworks with community involvement. They combined with international artists and local community groups including Vita Community Hub, Aiséirí Addiction Treatment Centre, and Killure Bridge Nursing Home for their ‘Open The Door’ project in 2020. They designed three walls to spread the message of inclusion and freedom including a Special Olympics victory window, and messages of solidarity during Covid-19.

The Waterford Walls project received €90,000 from Creative Europe for their ‘Murals for Communities’ project and provided support and funding for them to work with

Europe-based artists. This has allowed them to expand the network and work with other projects.

“We work with a lot of Europe-based artists and the EU provides support in terms of travel, funding, and networking. This support has helped bring different communities and nationalities together in Waterford in a really creative and welcoming atmosphere. Street art is a truly democratic art form, making art accessible to all.”

A community space for independent living

The Sligo Centre for Independent Living was set up in 1996 by a group of individuals with disabilities. Their aim is to promote maximum independence for all with physical disabilities, and to support their inclusion and empowerment within their communities. But over the years, the Centre noticed that many of its members were finding it very difficult to integrate into their community despite a desire to do so.

“This can increase marginalisation and isolation,” says Daniel Bennett, researcher with Irish Rural Link, working on the National Rural Network Project.

“The Centre established a community hub to address this issue by creating a space for all members of the community to meet and engage. This community hub is the first of its kind in Ireland, called Number 45 and is based in Sligo town.”

Daniel is responsible for content related to the LEADER programme on behalf of the National Rural Network (a membership network for farmers, rural communities, and others interested in rural development). The LEADER programme helps rural communities across the EU to engage and direct the local development of their area. Through funding for the capital works, with €62,838 coming directly from EU LEADER support, the community hub was created and opened its doors in 2019.

Daniel says, *“This project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of its guests by increasing opportunities for physical and social interactions. The building is fully accessible and has spaces and resources which allow people to engage in different activities. These include games, arts and crafts (pictured right), drama, music, and a small outside space for horticultural projects.”*

All workspaces at Number 45 are designed with wheelchair users in mind so they can use the space equally.

Activities at the hub are structured so that everyone can participate.

“The project is the epitome of the LEADER theme of social inclusion,” says Daniel. *“The aim of this hub is to break down barriers between different sectors of the community and make it a place for all. It has created a space to connect all members of the community including the bereaved, the lonely, those with disabilities, able people, older people, young people and for those who feel they have no labels at all, to meet each other and engage.”*

Maria Mulligan, CEO of the Sligo Centre for Independent Living, adds, *“This project is about seeing community members as resourceful and worthwhile individuals who can contribute to the overall fabric of their community in a wide variety of different ways. We wanted to create a space that allows every user to feel comfortable and know they belong.”*



Creating a diverse workplace

Since it was launched in 2012, 64 organisations have signed Diversity Charter Ireland, demonstrating their commitment to addressing diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace in a framework that is tailored to the Irish context.



*Diversity
Charter
Ireland*

“Other EU countries already had a Diversity Charter, so I felt there was an opportunity to have one in Ireland too,” says Maria Hegarty, Founder and Managing Director of Equality Strategies Ltd, and one of the founders of Diversity Charter Ireland. *“Companies sign to commit to effective diversity management, preventing discrimination and promoting equality.”*

The original signatories include An Post, Dell, Dublin Bus, Dublin City University, ESB, Equality Strategies, Ibec, Permanent TSB, Rehab, Sodexo, and Telefonica. Additional companies subsequently joined the Diversity Charter, including Bus Éireann, Google, Ikea and Novartis.

They join a community of over 12,000 organisations in 26 Diversity Charters across the EU, covering at least 16 million employees. This activity is supported by the European Commission through the EU Platform of Diversity Charters.

Equality Strategies was one of the 11 founding organisations and manages Diversity Charter Ireland. *“We have been supporting the growth of Diversity Charter Ireland, the expansion of the EU Platform of Diversity Charters and we have worked with the European Commission to elevate diversity, equality, and inclusion in the workplace agenda.”*

Since 2019, Diversity Charter Ireland has been one of the three lead partners in the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme Diversity@Work project, with 10 national Diversity Charters from Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Spain.

“Through this project, we have worked to develop practical, user-friendly tools for national Diversity Charters to roll out to their signatories including an unconscious bias blended learning course with videos, quizzes and exercises that can be delivered in conjunction with face-to-face training sessions.”

“From gaining an enhanced reputation, enhanced innovation due to diverse ideas, increased creativity, better functioning of teams, and attracting the best employees to work with the organisation, there are so many benefits to promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace.”

Helping families and communities in need

“The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) aims to help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion by addressing their most basic needs, i.e, food and basic materials for personal use,” says Des Henry, who leads the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Policy Unit, managing the implementation of FEAD in Ireland.

For the period 2014-2020, FEAD Ireland received €22.8m in EU funding, with an additional €4m provided by the Irish Government.

“FEAD supports activities that provide aid to the most deprived in our society, from homeless people to children in low-income or low work intensity households, through the national Food and Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme,” says Des. *“For example, the Irish Red Cross has been allocated €800,000 in direct funding from the FEAD programme to assist new migrants to Ireland with hygiene kits.”*

FEAD is also supporting vulnerable families in Ireland with the ‘School Stationery Kits’ initiative.

“This helps disadvantaged families in meeting costs associated with children returning to school,” says Des. *“It ensures that children have the necessary supplies required and reduces the stigma poorer children may face.”*

Up to 2020, over 120,000 school stationery kits at a cost of over €3m have been distributed to children of FEAD food beneficiaries and also to children who reside in Direct Provision, Emergency Orientation and Reception Centres, and those in homeless emergency accommodation. A further 45,000 kits are being distributed in 2021. Charitable organisations help reach those most in need. For example, COPE Galway, a local charity, has distributed over 700 school kits (pictured) to families in Galway who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Packie Kelly, of Teach Na nDaoine Family Resource Centre in Monaghan, which provided the school kits to approximately 10 other organisations, says, *“We receive calls from families who live on the breadline every week and would never be able to afford a school bag, never mind school supplies. We have been told stories of children showing off the stuff they received in their school kit. These children now see themselves as equal.”*

The current FEAD programme is coming to a close at the end of this year, but Des says, *“In 2022, FEAD will form part of a new European Social Fund Plus programming period, which aims to build a more social and inclusive Europe.”*

“The European Child Guarantee, which promotes equal opportunities for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and EU Next Generation Programme are key priorities, that will help shape the focus of the FEAD School Stationery Kits initiative for the future.”



Giving young people a second chance

"It is a privilege for me to share the journey with all the young people I work with," says Shane Mulvey, youth worker with the Clare Youth Service.

The Clare Youth Service has operated the Ennis Garda Youth Diversion Project for the past 22 years. These projects are state-wide, and the aim is to engage young people between the ages of 12 and 17 who are involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in antisocial or criminal behaviour and support them to make positive lifestyle choices.



"I take personal satisfaction when a young person actively engages in the project. I do my best to empower each young person to be the best version of themselves."

One of the young people who went through the process was Peter Molloy when he was 16. Peter (pictured left) was getting into physical arguments but being on the programme created many opportunities for him.

Shane says, *"Peter was supported to access education through Youthreach. And he even learned to fish! He also earned his driver's licence through the programme we ran called UPS Road Code. This provides him with the opportunity to travel for a course or employment."*

An important milestone in Peter's life since the programme was the arrival of his two baby girls. Due to the programme, he is able to earn an income. Peter says the project kept his *"head screwed on"*. Getting into Youthreach was vital to be able to earn an income, and staying out of trouble *"helped to get me on the road with a family on the go"*.

Shane says, *"Peter is in great form. He is currently waiting to get a safe pass to be able to work on a construction site. He is back playing soccer with his local club and is still fishing!"*

These projects are made possible by the European Social Fund which promotes employment and social inclusion. Shane says that having this funding afforded Clare Youth Service the opportunity to give young people a chance to achieve success and employment.

Shane says, *"Without this support, our projects could not have grown to five full-time workers servicing Co Clare. By funding our project, the European Social Fund has made a significant contribution to social inclusion in the town."*

Recovering the mind

“It is absolutely vital to bring attention to mental health and allow people to take control of their own wellbeing,” says Cathy Mc Closkey, Project Manager of the Innovation Recovery Project.

This EU-funded cross border project was launched in 2018 by the Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) Health and Social Care Partnership to establish a mental health recovery network between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It provides a wide range of free, local educational courses which promote mental health wellbeing and recovery.

The courses are written and delivered by people with their own experience of mental health needs, alongside those with professional experience and knowledge.

“14 of the 24 staff currently working on the Innovation Recovery Project have lived experience of mental health needs which makes a huge difference. The aim of the courses is to help participants tap into their own resilience and resourcefulness.”



The project is delivered in 3 cross-border hubs covering 12 counties in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This cross-border approach has helped staff widen access and participation by extending courses to outlying and rural areas.

“Young people, in particular, have fewer opportunities to avail of services in the border regions. Poor health status has a strong correlation to social and economic deprivation. Some of the highest levels of deprivation are located in the border regions of counties Derry, Fermanagh and Donegal.”

In June 2021, the Innovation Recovery project team launched the new online Recovery College, the first of its kind in Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will bring digital-enabled mental health services to a wider audience.

Lead Peer Educator with the Innovation Recovery Project, Margaret Dooley says, *“I have lived experience of anxiety and depression. I have a background in training and felt this was the perfect opportunity to provide support. I have attended online courses myself since the Covid-19 lockdown began and have found that sense of belonging, and that I’m not on my own, so comforting - this is what we hope to share with others.”*

Innovation Recovery is supported by the European Union’s INTERREG VA Programme and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Cathy adds, *“The €7.6m funding helps to empower and enable people to take greater control over their own mental and emotional wellbeing by providing education as a route to recovery.”*

“The impact of the project has been significant, with approximately 4,000 people benefiting from attending mental health and wellbeing programmes. The programme aims to help break some of the stigma and silence that prevents people from getting support when they desperately need it.”

The challenge to dream big

“Gaisce – The President’s Award is a nationally recognised self-development programme for young people in Ireland and has been in existence for the past 35 years,”

says Sanaz He-dayati, Project Manager for the Wavelength project at Gaisce.



“Gaisce, meaning ‘great achievement’, is continually striving to ensure that every young person, no matter their life circumstances, has the opportunity to achieve the nationally recognised award.”

One example of this work is the Wavelength project, set up in 2019. *“The Wavelength Project is part of Gaisce’s integration and diversity work. It aims to expand the Gaisce Award programme to young people under 26 who are asylum seekers or have refugee status, and give them an opportunity to achieve a Gaisce Award.”*

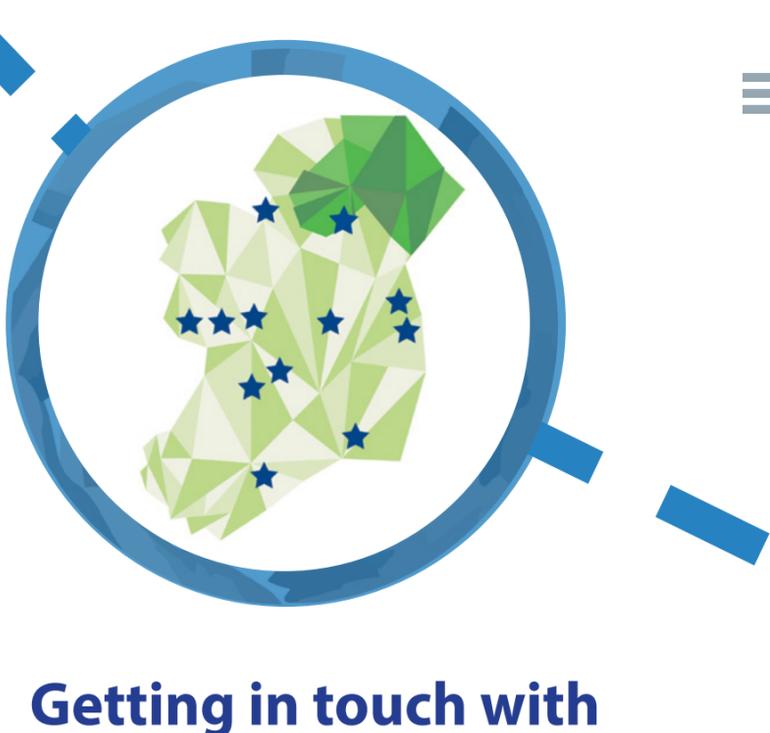
Wavelength has received funding from the European Union’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to support young people aged 14-17. *“This support has made it possible to expand the Gaisce programme to meet the needs of many young people in Ireland who are seeking asylum or have refugee status. We were able to cover registration fees for all Wavelength participants and support them to access various challenge areas, so that there were no barriers to their participation.”*

To achieve each award level (Bronze, Silver and Gold), each participant must commit to a certain number of weeks of challenges, related to personal skills, physical recreation and community involvement.

A recurring theme Wavelength participants often mention is that the Gaisce Awards have helped them make new friends, supporting their integration and sense of community in Ireland.

One Wavelength participant said, *“My Gaisce journey has given me the opportunity to meet new people, learn new skills and become more involved in my community. Without it, I would not have experienced as much. Gaisce has helped me to make a lot of friends through football and volunteering. Gaisce is more than just an award for me, it has been a life-changing experience”.*

Throughout the pandemic, Wavelength staff worked hard to keep young people engaged in their Gaisce Awards in spite of the physical constraints and restrictions. They did this by running bespoke online events. *“Young people were incredible,”* says Sanaz. *“They rose above-and-beyond to endeavour their own awards, adjusting their activities with every lockdown and restriction that came their way. They were truly inspirational in the most difficult of circumstances.”*



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