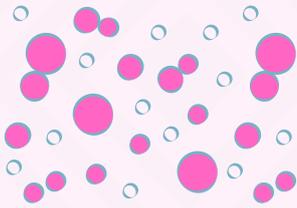
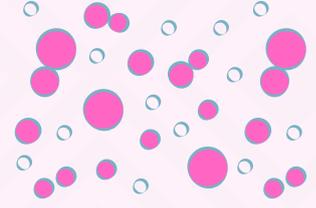


Laois Public Participation Network Newsletter



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Mick Dowling Memorial Fund



Laos Public Participation Network In honour of the late Mick Dowling were honoured earlier this year to announce the Mick Dowling Memorial Fund.

Three groups (one from each Municipal District) will be awarded €1,000 each.

**Application Forms can be downloaded at:
<https://www.laoisppn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Mick-Dowling-Memorial-Fund-Application-Form.docx>**

**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, We have Extended the
Deadline for Receipt of Applications
until**

Monday 31st August 2020 @ 5:00pm

**For further information email ppn@laoiscoco.ie
or call 057-8665661.**

***Terms and Conditions Apply**

Almost 17,000 people respond to GOVT call for Community Volunteers during COVID-19 crisis

Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, and Mr Sean Canney TD, Minister of State for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development, have welcomed the fantastic support of volunteers from local communities in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the call for volunteers to support the community response to COVID-19 went out in March, 16,957 people have registered to volunteer through the I-VOL App.

Volunteers are directly linked by their local Volunteer Centres to local organisations responding to COVID-19, conducting a wide range of very important work - from delivering food and medicines to older people who are self-isolating, to those volunteering in COVID test centres. There are also countless volunteers on the ground, helping out family, friends and neighbours.

Minister Ring said:

" I would like to express my deep appreciation for the invaluable work being carried out by volunteers during the COVID-19 emergency. The response to the COVID-19 crisis shows once again what a fantastic resource we have in our volunteers. We need to build on this momentum for the future development of volunteering.

" As a country we have always depended greatly on the great cohort of volunteers that give so generously of their time and energy, year in year out. Unfortunately, many of our volunteers are older people who have been confined to their homes as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

" Back in March as the crisis was emerging we called on people to help meet the significant needs at community level and the response has been magnificent."

Minister Canney added:

" Volunteers make a vital contribution to Irish society, developing communities as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable places where people want to live. This volunteering spirit has been so clearly visible in local communities across the country throughout the COVID-19 crisis."



The Department of Rural and Community Development provides supports to Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Information Services and other Volunteer Organisations around the country. Volunteer Centres have seen a continuous rise in the numbers of volunteers since the crisis began, with people of all ages stepping up to ensure that vital supports and services continue during this time.

Minister Ring said:

" I am very happy to be in a position to provide the necessary supports to underpin this important work through my Department's collaboration with Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres. Together, we will ensure that the work of these volunteers results in a permanent legacy for the benefit of our communities."

During the crisis, the Department has introduced a number of additional measures to provide extra support, including additional funding of €500,000 to volunteer centres to support the COVID-19 volunteer efforts, a COVID-19 Communication Pack for Communities, a collection of seven leaflets offering practical advice and information on topics ranging from sensible volunteering to vulnerable persons to the prevention of fraud and theft; a €2.5 million COVID-19 Emergency Fund for local authorities to administer to community groups partaking in the " Community Call" as well as €40 million support package of supports for Community and Voluntary Organisations, Charities and Social Enterprises.

The Department is also currently drafting a National Strategy on volunteering, which includes a National Advisory Group on Volunteering, a collaborative stakeholder engagement group chaired by Minister Canney.

As Chair of the National Advisory Group, Minister Canney noted:

"The National Volunteer Strategy will provide a road map for the future promotion and development of volunteering in our communities. The finalised strategy will take both the positive experiences of volunteering and those lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis in recognising, supporting and promoting the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. Hopefully many people have the urge to volunteer now and see the benefits of volunteering not only to their communities but to themselves."

Minister Ring concluded:

" The response to the COVID-19 crisis shows once again what a fantastic resource we have in our volunteers. We need to build on this momentum for the future development of volunteering. I urge people who are in a position to help out to contact their local volunteer centre. It's really important to remember that volunteering should be done in a safe way so that neither volunteers not those in need are put at risk."



OPEN



Laois Libraries is delighted to work in partnership with Yarnbombing Mountmellick to promote "The Maypole Project". .

What is it? Simply put, it's a Covid 19 diary or time capsule.

The Maypole over the years heralded the arrival of Spring, well this year Spring brought something very different which has changed the world we live in. We have the opportunity now to chronicle this coronavirus experience and create a social study for posterity. These first hand experiences will be an invaluable resource for future research and will provide a snapshot in time for anyone looking back at this incredible period.

With this in mind we want you, your children, parents, colleagues and friends here in Laois and our diaspora abroad to write down your experiences of this time. You can record your reflections, your apprehensions, your musings, your anxieties, missing your school friends- whatever! It could take the form of a note to those people you miss, a letter to the library, a photograph, a description of the things you have done during lock-down- anything at all that reflects this time as you see it. Please include your name, address (optional) and age so the demographic will be clear. (Please indicate if you'd like your identity removed.)

You can still post your written pieces in the letterbox in the door of Mountmellick Arts Centre, drop them through the letter box of your local library, post your piece to your library or email it to us at ahyland@laoiscoco.ie or library@laoiscoco.ie with covid diary in the subject line.

The collection will be held in the Local Studies Section of the Library and in time will be part of our digital library collection. You don't need to be a member of the library to participate.

There is a template of ideas for children/adults to use to document their experiences at <https://www.ntdc.ie/.../2020-COVID-19-Time-Capsule-For-Adults...> also available on Yarnbombing Mountmellick's Facebook page. You can print it off, or recreate the pages in your own style.

Remember to spread the word, we can't create this collection without you!!



"i bpáirt leis an bpobail"



Minister Ring announces €15 million for economic recovery in rural towns and villages

Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, today (Wednesday 27th May) announced details of a €15 million allocation for the Town & Village Renewal Scheme for 2020.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is one element of a €30 million package of integrated supports that the Minister is launching this week as part of his Department's Rural Development Investment Programme which is funded under Project Ireland 2040. The other elements of the package are the CLAR Programme which was launched on Monday last, and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme which will be announced later in the week.

The Town & Village Renewal Scheme provides funding for projects that support our rural towns and villages to be more attractive and sustainable. This year's scheme will, in particular, support projects that aid the economic and social recovery of towns and villages in response to COVID-19.

Announcing the funding, Minister Ring said:

" I am pleased to announce the launch of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2020 with funding of €15 million. This builds on and compliments the funding I announced under the CLAR Programme earlier this week. The impact of the Town and Village Scheme can be seen in every corner of Ireland, with over 800 projects approved for funding of almost €68 million since 2016.

"Towns and Villages are at the heart of economic activity in rural areas and they are also key hubs of social interaction. As the COVID-19 restrictions are eased in line with the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, our rural towns and villages will have an important role to play in supporting economic activity and in providing safe spaces for people to meet. This year's Town and Village Renewal Scheme has therefore been developed to help our towns and villages to bounce back from the impact of COVID-19.

The Minister continued:

" As has been the case previously, the scheme will provide funding of up to €200,000 for a broad range of strategic proposals to support our towns and villages. This year, these strategic interventions will place particular emphasis on the economic and social recovery of our towns and villages. This might include public realm projects to make our towns and villages more accessible in the context of COVID-19 public health requirements, or supports for projects with a direct economic component such as enterprise hubs or remote working solutions.

" In addition, I am introducing a new Standalone Measure under the scheme that will provide accelerated support for towns and villages to adapt to public health requirements such as social distancing in the short term, and to encourage increased footfall in our towns and villages as we re-open society and business."

On the new accelerated Measure, Minister Ring said:

" This new measure will include a simplified application and approval process to enable smaller projects which are part of a response to the COVID-19 to be approved and delivered quickly. The measure will provide funding of up to €25,000 per project, increasing to €40,000 for higher impact projects.

" While the measures will be delivered through Local Authorities, I will expect the project proposals to be developed in conjunction with local business and community groups in each town and village. The type of initiatives which could be supported include projects which temporarily repurpose or pedestrianise public areas to facilitate street trading; the development of an online platform to promote all of the retailers in a particular town or village; small scale events to attract people back into town centres in a safe way; or minor public realm works that make our towns safer and more attractive.

" This is just an indicative list, and I have left this measure as open and flexible as possible so that we can fund good ideas that emerge locally. Every town and village is different and I anticipate that the solutions that are developed by each town and village will reflect those differences."

The Minister concluded:

" The Town & Village Renewal Scheme has been very successful in making our towns and villages more attractive places in which to live and work, and in stimulating economic activity. I am confident that it will continue to play an important role in the times ahead as we rethink how we live, work and socialise in our rural towns and villages.

Along with the other elements of my Department's Rural Development Investment Programme, the Town & Village Renewal Scheme represents a real opportunity to invest further in the sustainability of our rural communities. I have increased the funding rate that will apply to projects approved under the scheme this year, from 80% to a maximum of 90%. This should ensure that the requirement on businesses, communities and Local Authorities to source match funding is kept to a minimum."

Full details of the 2020 Towns & Village Scheme are available at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/>

Closing Date for the Town & Village Renewal Scheme was Monday 29th June 2020.



MLM CHO
Psychosocial
Response

Virtual Drop-In Clinic

HSE Psychology Service

Are you an adult experiencing stress, worry or anxiety about the impact of COVID19 on you or your loved ones?

It's ok to ask for help!



EMAIL:

mlmpsychosocial@hse.ie

The virtual drop in clinic will offer you a call back from a HSE Psychologist to advise you on how to cope during this difficult time.

Please note that all information received is confidential.



An Initiative Of The
Midlands Louth Meath
CHO Psychosocial
Management Team

**Mental Wellbeing
Matters**



Create Reading Group on Socially Engaged Collaborative Art



Create is happy to invite artists and other interested socially engaged practitioners based in Ireland to become members of our virtual Reading Group. The Reading Group is co-ordinated by Create's Cultural Diversity Researcher Evgeny Shtorn, and will have its first meeting on the 9th June, from 1 to 2pm.

The group will meet twice a month to read and discuss articles, films and online exhibitions related to different aspects of collaborative, socially engaged arts practice and other relevant social issues. This Reading Group has developed from the 2018 and 2019 Summer Schools on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice, an Arts Council Artist in the Community Scheme initiative, devised and offered by Create and Counterparts Arts. Summer School Alumni and other participants are invited to become part of our meetings not only as attendees but also as discussants, or moderators. Participants are welcome to propose materials that will inform the discussions. We would like to touch on a number of different nonetheless interconnected topics such as cultural diversity, social citizenship, identities, the role of art and artists in the society, practices of resilience, meaningful collaborations, ethics, and aesthetics in collaborative arts.



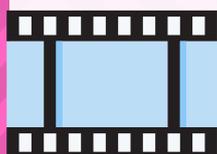
Please visit our website:

● www.create-ireland.ie/Create-discussion-group-on-socially-engaged-collaborative-art/

to read full details and how to join.



<https://twitter.com/CreateIreland/status/1265556911279280135>



create national development
agency for collaborative arts



€10 million Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme will support tourism and community wellbeing in post-COVID recovery

Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural & Community Development, today (29th May, 2020) announced funding of €10 million under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2020.

The funding is one element of a €30 million package of co-ordinated and complimentary supports launched by the Minister this week as part of his Department's Rural Development Investment Programme which is funded under Project Ireland 2040. The other elements of the package announced by the Minister this week were the €15 million Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the €5 million CLAR Programme, Each scheme will play its role in the social and economic recovery of rural communities over the coming months, following the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme provides funding for the development of new and existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in rural areas. The Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development in partnership with Failte Ireland.

In launching the 2020 scheme today, Minister Ring said:

" The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme has been crucial to the development of the recreation facilities enjoyed by growing numbers of locals and tourists in rural areas in recent years. These facilities are now more important than ever in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

"The COVID situation has given people a renewed appreciation of the benefit of the outdoors to their wellbeing. More than ever, they value the outdoor recreation infrastructure in their local areas.

" We know that more people have been taking part in outdoor recreational activities since the COVID-19 restrictions became a part of our daily lives. An additional 500,000 regular recreational walkers took to the pavements, walks and trails during March and April 2020 compared to 12 months earlier. The same period also saw significant numbers of new runners and cyclists.

"The walking trails, cycleways, mountain access routes and other facilities that the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme supports provide vital opportunities for people in rural areas to enjoy the outdoors in a safe environment."

The Minister continued:

" These recreational facilities also have an important economic function. Funding for local greenways, blueways and walking trails will support activity, tourism and the many thousands of local jobs which the sector provides.

"The natural resources available to us here in Ireland continue to offer great potential for activity tourism. Walking and cycling are amongst the main activities undertaken by both domestic and overseas tourists and this trend is set to increase as the economy recovers.

" I am delighted that Failte Ireland has joined with my department again this year to financially support the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. I have also increased the funding rate that will apply to projects approved under the scheme this year, from 80% to a maximum of 90%. This should ensure that the requirement on communities and other applicants to source match funding is kept to a minimum."

Orla Carroll, Director of Product Development at Failte Ireland noted:

" This scheme will lead to new and improved facilities for outdoor recreation and tourism activity across the country that will be enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. New walking and cycling trails and blueways will be key to helping the tourism industry throughout Ireland start to recover from the current COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has seen many more people actively engage in outdoor recreation and our consumer research shows that this is expected to continue and grow further into the future.

"The scheme will help to provide more recreational assets across rural Ireland for locals and visitors to enjoy active nature experiences. It will support better visitor management which will help address congestion and over-crowding at some of the most popular recreation locations."

In conclusion, Minister Ring added:

" Outdoor recreation will continue to play an important role in supporting the physical, mental and economic wellbeing of rural communities over the coming years. My Department is committed to supporting the sector to maximise its potential and to ensure that it plays an important part in the social and economic recovery from COVID-19.

" I also gave a new mandate to Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) last year to advise on the development of the outdoor recreation sector and to promote the sustainable and responsible use of the outdoors."

**Further details on the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme are available at :
<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/fdOc9f-outdoor-recreation-infrastructure-scheme/>**



Launching Laois Made



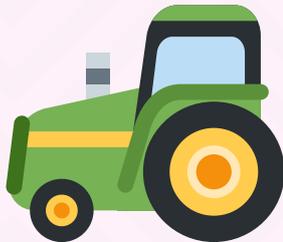
The launch of Laois Made

<https://laoismade.ie>

aims to showcase cars, tractors, motorcycles and boats made with pride and skill in County Laois.



The new Laois Made website is within the wider Ireland Made website family which aims to showcase light engineering skills throughout Ireland.



Not only are we showcasing the shed-build projects of hobbyists, we are also promoting the positive mental health aspects of getting off the sofa and into the shed.

SHOW us YOUR SHED

Competition running on Facebook fb.me/IrlMade

JUNE 2020



Create and Sirius Arts Centre Artists Residency Award Open Call



Create and Sirius Arts Centre invite Expressions of Interest from collaborative artists with a minority ethnic background, and more broadly from a migrant background, for a residency award at Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh, Co.Cork.

The residency takes place across both Sirius Arts Centre and The Guesthouse Project in Cork city and provides opportunities for research, exchange, networking, and learning, with additional curatorial advice from Sirius Arts Centre. The residency runs for four weeks, between 2nd and 27th September 2020. Expressions of Interest should be submitted by the 20th July 2020.

The residency is funded through the Arts Council of Ireland's Artist in the Community Scheme, which is managed by Create, and is offered through a partnership between Create and Sirius Arts Centre. It aims to support artists from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds to develop their collaborative and socially engaged arts practice. Artists must be based in the Republic of Ireland, to be eligible for this opportunity.



**Please see Create's website
<https://create-ireland.ie/create-and-sirius-arts-centre-artist-residency-award-open-call/>
for further information on the application process.**



Minister Stanton launches 2020 Communities Integration Fund

Applications are now open to community groups nationwide who wish to apply for grant funding under the Department of Justice and Equality Communities Integration Fund.

Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration & Integration, David Stanton TD, announced funding of €500,000 for community integration projects to be carried out in 2020.

The Communities Integration Fund will provide grant funding for local community projects that support the integration of migrants. Applications can now be made online to the Funds Administration Unit at the Department of Justice and Equality.

Launching this year's call for applications, Minister Stanton said,

"What happens at the local level is critical to successful integration, and I believe strongly in the power of communities when it comes to bringing about lasting change.

" In 2017, I launched the first Communities Integration Fund, which supports local initiatives by migrant and non-migrant groups to promote inclusion and most importantly, allow people to get to know each other. 124 organisations received funding in 2019 and projects are being funded which explicitly intended to challenge racism at grass roots level.

" The call for applications for this fund is now live, and I would encourage groups around the country who are working to promote inclusion in their locality to contact the Department and make an application."

The application period runs from 9am, Friday 19th June until 1pm, Thursday 16th July, 2020.

Applications must be submitted electronically and Community Groups can access a guidance document and complete an online application form at :

<https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/CIF2020>





Hope for Laois

Hope for Laois is a voluntary group, setup by local volunteers to assist vulnerable families, the elderly and individuals in Laois during the pandemic.

Speaking with Dan Bergin, Laois PPN Resource Worker on Friday from their hub in Portlaoise, Laois PPN Secretariat Member and one of the organisers of Hope for Laois, Bolaji Adeyanju explained " The Hope for Laois Group had grown to offer supports to 130 families. We offered supports to the vulnerable in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Portarlinton, Clonaslee, Mountrath, Kilcavan, Abbeyleix and Rathdowney."

Hope for Laois wish to thank the following groups:

- Laois County Council,
- Laois Civil Defense,
- Laois PPN,
- Laois Partnership,
- Redeemed Christian Church of God, Portlaoise (RCCG)
- Kildare Farm Foods - Liam Breen
- Muslim Community
- Saymama Cuisine and Events
- Taste of Asia, Portlaoise
- Laois Bible Church
- Lamhe Falte





Hope for Laois

- **Members of the Laois African Support Group**
- **The African Community**
- **Irish Access Mat**
- **Food Cloud**
- **P.A.T.H.**
- **SuperValu Parkside**
- **Clelands**



With the further easing of COVID-19 restrictions, **Hope for Laois wound down operations on Friday 26th June 2020.**

In closing, Bolaji said " I wish to thank all the volunteers from all walks of life. They were amazing for the support that they have given. Without them, **Hope for Laois would not have been possible."**



GOVT invests additional €200,000 in eBooks and eAudiobooks in response to increased demand for online public library service

Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development has announced a further investment of €200,000 to support the provision of additional eBooks and eAudiobooks in order to meet the significant increase in demand for access to the public library online service during the COVID-19 crisis. This is in addition to the already allocated €200,000 which was invested at the beginning of the crisis.

The Minister also announced a fund of €20,000 to support the provision of an EasyReader collection of books for emerging adult readers and people with literacy needs.

The funding will be directed through the Local Government Management Agency.

Announcing the funding, Minister Ring said:

" Since the public libraries closed on March 12th, the levels of usage of our online library services has soared and is at unprecedented levels. Feedback from users continues to be extremely positive and to help boost the online resources, I am delighted to increase my Department's contribution to online resources from €200,000 to €400,000.

" This is the second investment of €200,000 and since the first investment in late March nearly 21,000 new members have registered on Borrowbox, the service which allows access to the eBooks and eAudiobooks. This is nearly three times as many people as registered for the service during the first two months of the year so it shows how important and popular the service is. I would encourage everyone to join the library. It is free to do so and you can join via the Libraries Ireland website.

" Since the closure of public libraries on 12th March there has been an average of 504 new members registering daily for the Borrowbox service which provides eBooks and eAudiobooks to library members, compared to the daily average of 138 that registered previously in 2020. This is a 264% increase and usage of the online services is now at unprecedented levels. The average number of daily eBook loans prior to March 12th was 1,106 but since then it is more than double that figure with a daily average of 2,502.

Continued on Page 18

Minister Ring added:

" I am also delighted to support adult literacy by providing funding for the provision of a collection of EasyReaders which are an accessible format of books designed for emerging adult readers and people with literacy needs. The EasyReader format is easy to understand because it uses simple jargon-free language and shorter sentences. This initiative has been developed in collaboration with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and is being rolled out as part of our national Right To Read Programme.

Minister Ring added:

" I am also delighted to see that a number of local authorities are introducing a book delivery service to those cocooning. This is a very welcome addition and I would like to commend the local authorities who have reacted to this need and developed this highly valued outreach service."

" Library staff are continuing to innovate online with STEAM Workshops, Virtual Coding Workshops, Virtual Book Clubs and online Storytimes. Another impressive initiative has been the delivery of the Spring into Storytime reading programme which would normally be held in libraries nationwide. As this was not possible this year due to the restrictions it is been delivered entirely online instead and the numbers have been outstanding with 302,787 views of the 476 Storytime videos to date, compared to total attendances of 20,500 in the library branches during last year's entire programme."

Libraries are part of Phase Two of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business when they will commence a 'contact and collect' service in selected branches.

Community Enhancement Programme 2020

Michael Ring TD, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, has recently announced details of the 2020 Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) and highlighted the potential benefit of the Programme for local communities.

The CEP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and will provide €58,297 of grant funding for capital works towards enhancing the facilities available to communities in County Laois. 30% will be reserved for grants of €1,000 or less. The programme has a focus on supporting groups in disadvantaged areas.

Typical enhancements under the Programme include the renovation of community centres and community amenities, improvements to town parks and common areas and spaces, and the purchase of equipment for community usage. The Programme has also supported energy efficient upgrades, development of community gardens, provision of defibrillators, CCTV and sports and I.T. equipment.

The CEP is being administered by Laois Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

Application Forms can be downloaded at:

<https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Application-Form-2020.pdf>

Guideline Forms can be downloaded at:

<https://laois.ie/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Application-Guidelines-2020.pdf>

The closing date for receipt of applications is the 14th August 2020 at 4.00pm. Please ensure that all documentation required to complete the application is included, otherwise this may render your application invalid.



START - online suicide prevention training programme

As our Country starts to emerge from the dark days of COVID-19 and transition into the light, back to normality, it is important to remember there are members of our communities experiencing dark times.

Laois PPN in partnership with the HSE offered an easy to do programme which aims to give awareness and confidence in how to recognise and then speak to someone who may be in need of support.

The START programme is done online and can be done at any time. It takes approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete and was FREE to PPN member groups.

There was a large interest from a variety of PPN Member Groups across Laois who availed of this training.



Letter from President Michael D. Higgins

Through the Community Champion of Laois and PPN Secretariat Member Paddy Buggy, Uachtarán na hÉireann, President Michael D. Higgins has sent a letter thanking Voluntary Groups and Individuals in Laois for the help and supports that they have offered to the vulnerable during COVID-19 in our communities.



**Paddy Buggy,
Community Champion &
Laois PPN Secretariat
Member**



**President Michael D.
Higgins,
Uachtarán na hÉireann**


UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

Mr. Paddy Buggy
Mountmellick Development Association
Irishtown
Mountmellick
Co. Laois

22 Bealtaine, 2020

Paddy, a chara

Mar Uachtarán na hÉireann, as the President of Ireland, I would like to thank you most sincerely for the hard work, solidarity and active citizenship that you have demonstrated for the duration of this pandemic, which has been such a challenge for the whole country. Through you, I would also like to commend and thank all of those who have been working together with you to ensure that those residents of County Laois who are vulnerable to COVID19 have been in a position receive support and encouragement at this time of crisis.

You have been part of such a great combined effort across Ireland. For over two months, community groups and individuals have been out in numbers supporting people in their local areas, in what has been such an uplifting demonstration of their commitment to their communities. Under the umbrella of *COVID-19 Community Outreach*, an inspired initiative of Irish Rural Link and The Wheel, community and voluntary organisations across the country have been working in unison to ensure that their energies are directed to where they are most required and that the needs of the most vulnerable are addressed.

For so many, having necessary supplies such as groceries, medicines and other essential items delivered to their door has been a lifeline. As important as these vital deliveries have been, what has also been provided has been a reassurance that help is at hand. Knowing that someone will call, that someone is looking out for them, that they will see a friendly face has meant so much to those who are alone or who are isolated at this time.

Some of the volunteers are giving of their time for the first time. Many have long been making valuable contributions in the communities and it is their networks and contacts that have been so valuable in the past months. None of you seek recognition but I believe that now, more than ever, you deserve it, for you represent the best of the Irish response to this crisis.

2

The ethos of volunteering and actively engaging with fellow citizens is the lifeblood of our society. Active citizenship is surely a most durable insurance against any sense of helplessness or indifference, which might prevent us from reaching out to our neighbours who are in need. The actions of thousands of people like you over these past several weeks have shown that this sense of solidarity is still very strong across Ireland.

You, and all who have been working with you in *COVID 19 Community Outreach* over the past weeks and months have answered the call of your communities. You have made an enormous difference and are continuing to perform a vital service as we slowly emerge from the dark of the pandemic and into the light of a better, shared future.

Molaim sibh agus gabhaim buíochas libh.

Beir beannacht


Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann,
President of Ireland

Contact Us

The Laois Public Participation Network Office is currently closed to the public but the team are still working hard behind the scenes.

You can contact Dan or Ailish



by E-mail:

ppn@laoiscoco.ie



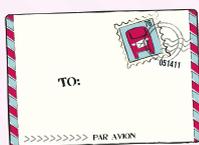
by Phone:

086 035 2107 - Dan



by Post:

Laois Public Participation Network



**JFL Avenue,
Lyster Square,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois**



Follow us on:

