



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our staff and Board of Directors who contributed to producing this Annual Report



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Westmeath Community Development CLG



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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

2021 WCD Chairpersons Report

Welcome readers to the Westmeath Community Development Annual Report for 2021.

As this is my final report as Chairperson, I will take the opportunity to reflect on the early days of WCD. The company was set up in the early nineties with the task of applying for, delivery and establishment of the LEADER program. A few years after (our successful bid for LEADER, in 1995) we were offered the social inclusion program by ADM, the forerunner of POBAL, their mantra at that time was local solutions for local problems. We have come a long way since then taking on many new programs, particularly those concerned with disadvantaged and socially excluded communities, and trying to continually build our capacity to deal with old and new issues, challenges and opportunities that arise in the modern and changing society that constitutes County Westmeath. We are proud to have worked with and supported individuals and community groups in the county over the years.

Our work in 2021 continued to be shaped by the Covid 19 pandemic, impacting on services with continued remote working

and other challenges.

Notwithstanding the pandemics impact, 2021 was a busy and productive year for WCD. As outlined in the various reports during the year programmes and projects were all impacted one way or another but staff were able to adapt services so that most of our programmes continued to operate during the various lockdowns.

As is the life of a Local Development Company, we had our ups and downs in 2021 – LEADER 2014-2020 budgets were fully allocated and transitional programme came into place, whilst at the end of 2021 we lost our Job Club, after 20 years of delivering services. In 2021 we said good bye to Board members Jim Sheridan and Julia Dalton, and we thank them for their contributions to the organisation. We welcomed Sintija Sheerin and Seamus McNamee to our Board in the last 12 months and I wish you both the best for your time on the Board of WCD.

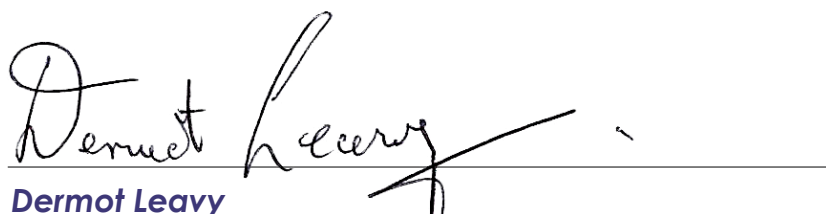
We are grateful for all the support of our various funders down the years. As a company we have worked collaboratively with many partners including Government departments and agencies, Westmeath County Council; County Childcare; community and voluntary organisations local and national networks the 49 LDCs in Ireland all of which help to make our

vision a reality. On a personal level I would like to thank our fellow members and management of the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) for their friendship and support. Continuing on the personal level I wish to thank our current CEO Frank Murtagh and his predecessor Joe Potter for their outstanding contributions and support to me. I appreciate and thank our management team and all the staff of WCD present and past.

Finally thank you to my fellow Directors for their continued valuable contribution and commitment. During my tenure in WCD I have been so fortunate to get to know so many great people. It is a pleasure and privilege for me to have served as chairman but an extra bonus was to have Liam Cahill a great treasurer and friend over many years and as Liam steps down I thank him sincerely for his dedication and work over many years. I wish the incoming Chair Pat Boyce, and Treasurer Seamus McNamee every success in their roles.

To all those people who have given so much to WCD a million thanks. We remember all our staff and directors particularly those who are no longer with us, May they rest in peace and happiness. to Pat and Seamus in their new roles.

Thank you all



Dermot Leavy
Chairperson Westmeath Community Development

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

2021 saw Westmeath Community Development continue to play a prominent economic and societal role in the county.

Our role in 2020 and 2021 as the key support agency as part of the Community Response Forum for individuals and households impacted by the pandemic was very prominent in the first half of the year and continued when required as the year wore on. Our Befriending Service continues to be an important service for our older clients, and 2021 saw our repair side of Care and Repair begin again, and hopefully 2022 will see the home visiting service back in operation.

Our core programmes, LEADER and SICAP continued uninterrupted during 2021 with all of the LEADER budget for Westmeath allocated to over 100 projects with no underspend. The new programme commenced in April of 2021 and we expect that this budget will all be allocated. Looking to the next programme we are concerned over the proposed changes to the budgets that have been included in Irelands CAP submission and how this will impact on the next LEADER programme.

SICAP has been given an extension until 2023 and that is welcomed. With our performance over the last number of years we can feel confident that we will be asked to deliver SICAP in the future. 2021 saw the tender for the Regional Employment Service launched and the loss of our Job Club and the transfer of long standing staff .

Our Rethink Ireland (SIFI) programme, that works side by side with SICAP continued apace with further funding begin secured for the project in 2022. Our various work placement programmes, CE, Tús, RSS and JI, and training programmes, LTI had good years, especially as restrictions began to ease. Changes to RSS eligibility, lobbied for by ILDN are very welcome and having a forum for discussing matters with the Dept directly is important in shaping schemes and how they impact on the ground.

The new National Childcare Scheme came into play in September and its impact on our childcare services was immediate with numbers down and one centre closed. The changes that have since being brought into place in the NCS is very welcome and latest figures for us would indicate our services long term viability, even

if the current year proves to be loss making.

2021 saw major changes to our Community Mothers programme, moving from a volunteer to a paid model in line with the National Strategy. Funding for this has come from SICAP as we have been unable to secure additional funding as yet from TUSLA.

Our Volunteer Centre continues to play an important role and has been to the forefront in supporting Ukrainian refugees that have been settled in Westmeath, and 2022 will be a major year for the VC and all in WCD with the Fleadh in August.

The Food and Health project continued to be impacted by the pandemic with a reliance on remote training for most of 2021, but that is now getting going again with in person courses ongoing and planned.

2021 finally saw our Board and various Board Substructures get to meet in person and I thank you sincerely for your ongoing support and commitment. Finally, to the team in WCD, I thank you for all for your good work this year and we look forward to continuing to work together for the betterment of our communities this year.



Frank Murtagh

Chief Executive Officer, Westmeath Community Development

COMPANY OVERVIEW

Westmeath Community Development (WCD) is the local development company Westmeath, and one of 49 Local Development Companies in Ireland and a member of the Irish Local Development Network. We administer a range of programmes and support services to individuals and community groups, to improve the quality of life through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.

We are the delivery agent for the LEADER and SICAP in Westmeath as well as delivering employment activation schemes such as Tús, Rural Social Scheme, Community Employment, and Jobs Club. We manage Childcare, Healthcare, Education & Training and Volunteer programmes across the county.

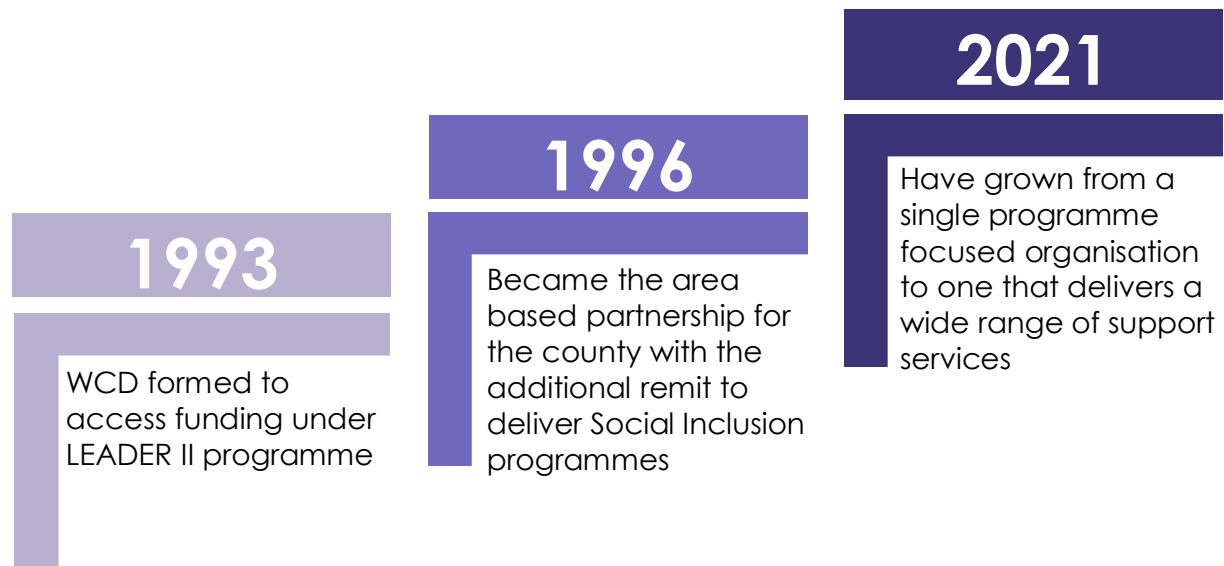
Our headquarters are located in the Enterprise & Innovation centre, Mullingar, with an office in Athlone and our horticultural training centre in Belvedere House & Gardens.

Providing support services to individuals and community groups within our county that improves the quality of lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labor market supports

Our core activities



OUR HISTORY



HOW WE WORK

Achieving our vision is not possible without the support of all our partners and collaborators. We use innovative partnership approaches to progress a social inclusion agenda and design programmes that address the needs of our service users.



SICAP GOAL 1: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SICAP is the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, funded by Westmeath Local Community Development Committee, through the Department of Community and Rural Development. The objective of the programme is to reduce poverty, while promoting social inclusion and equality in Ireland through supporting communities and individuals. A community development approach to engagement and collaboration underpins SICAP Goal 1.

Supporting Communities This goal specifically supports communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of Local Community Groups [LCG] thus creating more sustainable communities.

Response to Challenges caused by Covid-19 During Lockdown in 2021 we continued to focus on providing one-to-one supports to the volunteers we could contact by phone email etc. and responding to needs as we became aware of them. We maintained contact with groups by phone, email WhatsApp, Facebook – whatever was available to both staff and members of LCGs or networks. We exceeded our target of 63 groups by successfully supporting 76 groups. Goal 1 adopted online approaches to some training delivery, meetings with LCGs and network meetings. LCGs and SEs were supported to avail of new Covid-response oriented funding streams such as Covid Emergency Fund and Covid Stability Fund. Once the lockdown was lifted, WCD staff were able to recommence meeting with groups in accordance with Covid 19 guidelines. Meetings in safe environments such as Cafés, hotels and in some cases using outdoor Green areas, enabled community support plans to be completed, and in a majority of cases implemented.

Action 1: Development work in Disadvantaged Rural Areas 17 residents' groups in disadvantaged Rural areas were supported to identify their current needs, compile annual action plans and access SICAP funding. Ongoing support was given to LCGs through 2021 to enable them to work effectively in their communities.

Action 2: Empowering Communities: Training Due to COVID restrictions format of training delivery was changed where necessary – some training took place online with other training in person.

- Three Committee skills training workshops were delivered in Nov 2021, 16 people participated including 5 from SICAP groups. **(Hotel and Community Venue)**
- One Funding workshop took place in Mullingar in November 2021. **(Hotel Venue)**
- Zoom Training was provided to 8 reps – **(Online and one to one support)**
- Minute Taking Training was delivered via zoom - 11 group reps attended
- Media Skills Training was provided to 8 reps, representing 3 groups **(Hotel Venue)**
- **New** Conflict Workshop devised with support from SICAP was provided in Mullingar, 6 reps attended representing 4 groups, 2 of which were SICAP. **(Hotel Venue)**
- Numerous funding opportunities were available throughout 2021. 15 disadvantaged SICAP LCGs availed of the SICAP grants for Disadvantaged Rural Areas under Action 1 in 2021 **(€1,500 allocated each)**.
- **37** LCGs + **24** older people's groups were supported to lever **€72,436** with successful applications for non-SICAP grants. Most of this funding came through Westmeath County Council and the Dept of Rural and Community Development.

Action 3: Athlone and Mullingar Rapid 13

Local community groups were supported from disadvantaged urban areas including members of the Travelling community.

Mullingar and Athlone RAPID programmes continued to function in 2021 with Community Forum and AIT meetings held via Zoom or, when restrictions allowed, in large community facilities or hotel venues.

2021 saw the resumption of the RAPID Tour and production of the RAPID newsletter in Athlone.

In Mullingar a sub-committee was formed to progress a Leader funding application for new community facilities in Dalton Park.

Action 4: Enhancing Collaboration

- 22 LCGs from actions 1, 2 and 3 were supported to make submissions to the Municipal District via the PPN process.
 - The Community Development Youth Working Group (CDYWG) met 4 times remotely
 - The Disability Working Group (DWG) met 6 times remotely, agreed a workplan and implemented 18 of 20 actions
 - Groups were encouraged and supported to contribute to WPPN plenary and linkage groups.
 - Traveller Interagency Group met 3 times via zoom and supported the roll out of the vaccine
- Staff linked with various other groups and agencies during the year working in partnership

As the **Jerusalem** dance was sweeping the country on social media the Goal 1 Co-ordinator established an in-house planning team with staff across various WCD programmes. The aim was to encourage reps from local groups to join staff in learning the dance as a social inclusion initiative. Meetings were held over MS Teams and group reps interested in getting involved were asked to learn the dance and send in their video clips no longer than 3 minutes. The project was highly successful and included participation from a range of interest groups such as Travellers, people with intellectual disabilities, new communities, young people and reps from disadvantaged areas. A Project video was compiled of all the entries and launched on St Patrick's Day. The video was posted on YouTube which has had **1783** views to date <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=my7Z8V7U2DM>. This project was carried out as part of the Keep well campaign.

The Disability and Older Persons Information event was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic. In 2021 a Virtual event for the DWG incorporating a mix of live and pre-recorded content was organized and held via Zoom and made available afterwards on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DILTWQFLhII>. This change of Format of the Disability and Older Persons information event to the Zoom platform was a major innovation which challenged the team but was ultimately successful. There were 16 segments, most of which had to be pre-recorded to ensure a smooth running of the event on the day. The event was 2 hours long and 35 people attended, although 71 had registered. The segments included a mixture of information, real life stories, singing, mindfulness, comedy.

Make Way Day is a national campaign, led by the Disability Federation of Ireland, which aims to highlight obstructions on footpaths which impact on people with a Disability. The SICAP Goal 1 team in co-operation with WCC Community Section were instrumental in organising publicity, recruiting and supporting LCGs to participate and assisting people to carry out the disability route audits in 5 locations throughout the county.

St Stephens Green Trust a programme of activities for children and Young people in Direct provision co-funded by SICAP and the **St Stephen's Green Trust** (SSGT) Connecting Communities Programme was implemented in 2021. Activities supported included Soccer Club memberships, swimming lessons etc. This partnership with SSGT is now in its seventh year. All the funded activities enabled children to join with sports and fitness groups in the broader community. This allowed them to experience some level of normality in their lives and provided a break from the institutionalised lifestyle of Direct Provision

Action 6: Older Persons Action

- Befriending service continued in 2021 as part of the keep well campaign and was further developed with the appointment of SWEETS as a Befriending Partner, 143 people engaged
- Care and Repair service continued once it was safe to re-visit homes, 68 jobs completed.
- 24 grant applications completed for older people's groups.
- 1000 care packs distributed to older people at Christmas.
- 120 tablets were distributed to older persons in Westmeath with 3 rounds of computer training held in 4 locations Moate, Mullingar, Coole and Killucan. Training and equipment allowed many to join the Live Long & Prosper Programme via zoom with a further 2 attending zoom based minute taking training. Assistance was given to groups wishing to make PPN submissions over the phone.
- There were 4 zoom-based meetings for the Age Friendly Service Providers Forum and related groups attended and many other virtual events such as Live Well, biodiversity gardening course in November, and a seasonal singalong in the Library at Christmas allowing connectivity at a time when the Covid pandemic was getting worse with the omicron variant spreading fast.



Traveller Project



Traveller Pride



Caroline Nevin - WCD Care Pack Project



Traveller Tinsmith from Navan

SICAP outdoor meetings "On the Green"



Market Hill, Ballymore - 1st Meeting Outdoor



Meeting in Community Garden Dalton Park



Ashdale/Woodland Grove - Athlone RAPID

SICAP Goal 1 Group Projects



Linda-Jo Goal 1 Co-ordinator



Willow Park- River AI Clean-Up Project



Battery Heights - Athlone RAPID Tour



Village Close Project



Poly Tunnel Project Castlepollard



Ashcroft Park Playground Project



Castlegrove Fencing



Bun Daire Bulbs for Bees Project



Tower View Roundabout replanting



Ave Marie Summer Planting



Ashcroft Park Clean Up

ENTERPRISE, TRAINING, & EMPLOYMENT

The pandemic continued to impact on how WCD operated and delivered our enterprise, education and employment services in 2021. Barriers such as lockdowns, job uncertainty for our clients, limited job opportunities and travel restrictions prevented a return to traditional face to face client engagement, training and progression into the workforce. WCD responded by strengthening our online remote service delivery. All staff engaged in remote communications through Zoom and MS Teams to the introduction of new communication strategies that saw an increase in our client engagement during 2021 - clients now had time to take our calls and respond to emails which facilitated WCD in identifying client's current and immediate needs and offering alternative training opportunities and methods. We offered clients laptops and tablets to take part in courses delivered through a blended learning approach. In addition WCD reached out to all training providers engaging with WCD and encouraged them to create both blended and online training courses with many creating learner platforms and approaches that allowed WCD to monitor and engage with both the learner and the training provider whilst assessing the progress of each client as they took part in the course.

As much of the training was via online learning approaches it was essential to also provide weekly training and learning support services, so each client that registered for a course was provided with:

- study skills training

- assignment writing classes

- computer IT classes

- and had a mentor assigned to them for the duration of the course that offered them weekly encouragement, support and motivation to complete their training.

WCD prioritised clients in receipt of the PUP. The pandemic offered clients an opportunity to reassess their career, job and training goals. Our employment officers spent extensive time working with clients individually offering them support to identify and upskill for jobs in new industries. In addition to this we set up WhatsApp and Zoom client job related groups that focused on their collective needs regarding job opportunities and training supports, this form of information sharing also supported our clients make connections with other job seekers and share their knowledge, experience and networks.

Our employability courses were delivered online, in person, on a one to one and group basis. With all clients receiving help to realise their potential, assess their skills, talents and work experience and how to transfer their employability skill set to alternative industries of growth. The Strategy we adopted in 2020 to become an online remote service provider was now in full swing with training delivered online, in person when lockdowns were lifted, on a one to one and group basis. In addition to our traditional employability training and supports there was once again a focus on offering wellbeing and mentoring in 2021 which has now become an integral part of our services that will continue into the future. Our new approach along with the willingness of our clients to be flexible and adopt new methods of engagement has proved very rewarding and successful.

Progression Outputs for 2021

SICAP Programme:

- Worked with over 800 clients in 2021
- 314 participated in training and education with WCD
- 144 people secured jobs
- 56 people set up their own business and entered self-employment

RETHINK Ireland Programme 'Here Comes the Girls'

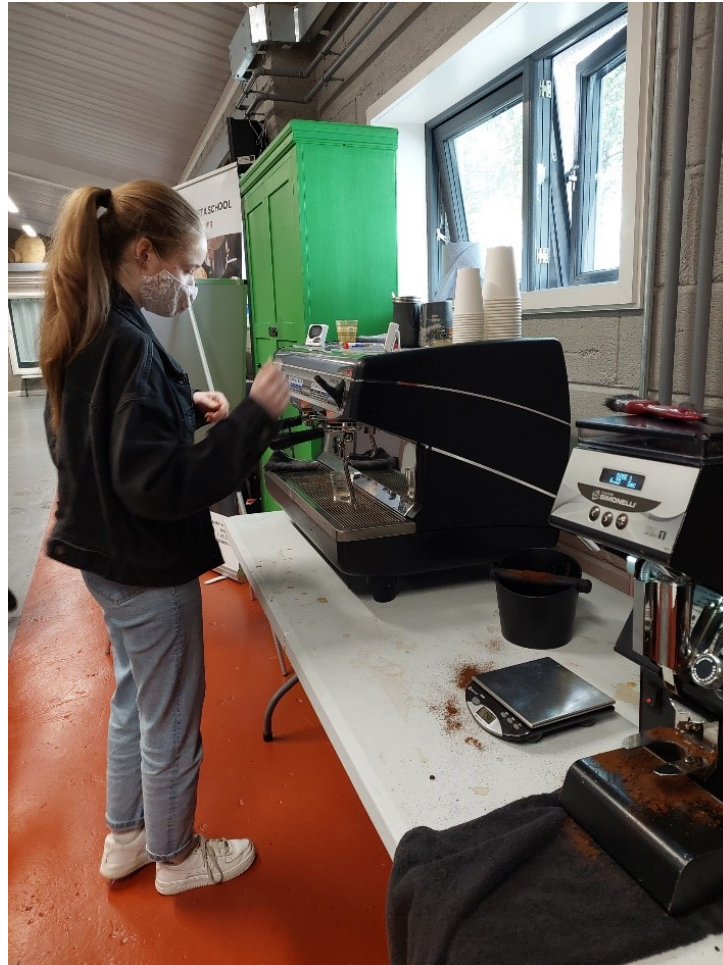
- Worked with 300 females in 2021
- 127 participated in training and or educational courses
- 55 progressed to employment securing jobs in healthcare and hospitality primarily

Working with Young People – Young People also received a targeted approach with courses in the hospitality and retail industries being created to help early school leavers, NEETS and new entrants to the workplace receiving training in Barista, food preparation, customer service, waitron skills, bar skills and direct links to employers in need of their talents. This programme was delivered in partnership and collaboration with Youth Work Ireland Midlands.

Employer Engagement

WCD recognised the struggles employers from the hospitality industry were experiencing with many of their past employees choosing to stay on the PUP or not willing to return to an industry that could not guarantee them consistent employment. WCD created a hospitality course and timed the delivery of this to coincide with the reopening of the hospitality industry. A database of over 100 restaurants, cafes, bars and hotels in the Mullingar and north Westmeath area was created with WCD promoting the course and the youth that were taking part in it, offering them the opportunity to recruit directly from the clients that engaged on this course. This approach was very rewarding for both the youth engaging on the course and local employers with a total of 15 completing the course and 12 securing employment locally.

WCD continued to collaborate with the Employer Engagement Unit of DSP and with our extensive database of employers from the healthcare, retail and hospitality industries. We reached out to all employers offering our client referral supports and informing them of the database of job ready skilled clients we had in training relevant to their industry, with many walking straight into an organised interview and job.



Youth Hospitality Course – Barista Skills

Similarly our ongoing engagement with Center Parcs increased for a period of months to weekly Teams meetings with them and other organisations to help them promote and fill their vacancies. Part of this consultation allowed us to make suggestions to Center Parcs regarding initiatives they could take to further encourage people apply for their roles. WCD suggested the provision of a bus from Mullingar and Athlone for staff and offered to deliver Lifeguarding Courses, as transport was a major barrier to quality job opportunities with Center Parcs. This idea had already been floated internally in Center Parcs, in 2021 they set up a free bus route from Athlone and Longford which is now providing people with transport to and from work.

A feature of the lifeguarding course was that Center Parcs interviewed all applicants for the course prior to them participating and offered them a job upon successful completion of the course. WCD delivered two lifeguard courses which resulted in 10 of our clients securing work with Center Parcs.

ENTERPRISE, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT



Lifeguard Course

Our objectives were to ensure clients secured quality sustainable employment with reputable employers from the Midlands whilst promoting WCD as a resource that can help employers with their recruitment needs, aiming to strengthen our employer engagement in the county.



Youth Hospitality Course

Training and Education

Over 600 clients engaged in on or more of our labour market training courses. This training was delivered through a blended learning approach with all training providers ready to switch to online methods of delivery should a lockdown reoccur. In line with our training approach WCD delivered training, upskilling and education in industries of growth and in line with identified client's needs. This approach has proved very successful over the past number of years and considers employer's needs, industry and legislative requirements, along with bespoke modules designed for specific employers.

ENTERPRISE, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT




New Center Parcs Employee

Healthcare, hospitality and retail were the dominant industries WCD catered for during 2021, below demonstrates the variety and quality of the accredited training, knowledge and skills over 600 clients gained with over 88 modules offered in the year.

Marketing Course
Care Skills and Childcare Modules
First Aid Responder
Manufacturing Operations Course
MAPA, HH & PPE Course
Online Healthcare Course
Rock N' Bowl Course
Safe Pass Course
Special Needs Assistant Course
Trainee Entrepreneur Programme
Youth Hospitality Course
Manual Handling Course
Business Boost Course
Construction Course
Center Parcs Lifeguarding Course

Grants

WCD offer clients funding towards external accredited labour marketing training courses delivered by private training providers or state education institutions. This funding helps people not only with the costs of the course but ensures they can avail of our employability supports such as CV creation, job application support, mock interview preparation, referrals and recommendations to local employers. A total of 59 clients received individual grants in 2021, all courses were either QQI accredited or industry accredited.



Child Therapy
Train the Trainer
Community Development Diploma
Early Childhood Education
Special Needs Assistant
Medical Terminology Administration
HR Management
Business Management
CPC
Nutrition Course
Interior Design
Green Cert
Payroll
Nursing Studies

RURAL SOCIAL SCHEME

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) is funded from the Department of Social Protection. Westmeath Community Development administers the scheme for County Westmeath.

Objective of programme

The objective of the RSS is to provide income support for farmers who are in receipt of long term social welfare payments. They in turn carry out services that benefit rural communities. Participants on the scheme are placed with local community groups such as sports clubs, tidy towns groups, community centres and childcare groups.

Brief description of what type of activity under each programme

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was introduced by the Department of Social Protection in 2004 as the Department recognized that there were many participants on various employment schemes who were underemployed rather than unemployed. As a result of this, farmers who could prove that they were actively farming i.e. - in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment and that they were completing the BPS application every year, could join the Rural Social Scheme. If the participants' father, mother, brother or sister are actively farming, then they can use their BPS application to qualify for the scheme. The type of work carried out by RSS participants is in one of these areas;

- Maintaining and enhancing walking routes and bog roads.
- Village and countryside enhancement projects as part of the Tidy Towns e.g. Streamstown Tidy Towns.
- Energy conservation work for older people and those at risk of poverty.
- Social care and care of older people, including Community Childcare facilities.

Environmental maintenance work - maintenance and care-taking of community and sporting facilities such as Street Parish Park, Castledaly Community Centre, Moate GAA club and Athlone GAA club.

- Projects relating to not-for-profit cultural and heritage centres e.g. charity shop
- WCD were allocated 33 places at the commencement of the scheme but this increased to 42 in 2018.

Impact of Covid

The Covid pandemic has had a big effect on the Rural Social Scheme. Many of the sponsor groups had to close down their facilities so we had to change the tasks that the participants were working at to fill their time on the scheme. WCD have a number of participants who work with older people's groups, facilitating gatherings on a weekly basis. The members of the group get their dinner at these weekly gatherings. During the Covid crises, the RSS participants delivered the dinners directly to their homes. Some other RSS participants carried out shopping and basic maintenance for vulnerable people in their areas. All participants helped maintain their sponsor groups facilities for the duration of the lockdown.

Case Study

Name: Lough Lene Gaels park, Collinstown, Co. Westmeath

Measure: Maintenance and care taking of sporting facilities and community project.

Summary: Lough Lene Gaels club currently have five Rural social scheme participants that work in various roles including the maintenance and organising of the very busy sporting grounds, the general upkeep and cleaning of the clubhouse and the facilitation of the "PLACE" community group.

"The Rural Social Scheme has been very good to us here in Lough Lene Gaels. For several years now, the Scheme has provided us with genuinely good people who take pride in the work they do. The benefits to the club are obvious when you visit the Club grounds and I hope your people enjoy and get some benefit from working here"
Joe Potter, Secretary of Lough Lene Gaels club.

Community group facilitated by RSS participant in Lough Lene Gaels Club

Teresa Doyle, one of the RSS participants facilitates the PLACE group at the Lough Lene Gaels park. This group was formed three years ago as part of the Lough Lene Gaels Healthy club Initiative.

There are fourteen members in the group. Between them they came up with the name 'PLACE', which stands for and represents what it is we strive to do - Positive, Learning, Art, Culture, and Exercise.

Teresa explains we were meeting every Wednesday morning, partaking in an arts and craft programme, enjoying a mid-morning cup of tea, and finishing with a walk around the pitch.

In March 2020 covid turned the table on us, and staying home became the order of the day as a lockdown was ordered. The park gates were locked, and like the whole country almost everywhere was shutdown.

From that week, and all throughout 2021, what helped keep us together and in contact as a group was our 'WhatsApp' group chat. Most members had this app on their phone, and throughout lockdown it was 'hopping'. There was so much support for and to each other given through this group chat and it was wonderful. I asked for one rule to be adhered to, which was to keep the messaging times between the hours of 9am and 10pm, unless of course there was an emergency, which thankfully didn't occur.

The connection we maintained through the use of WhatsApp was invaluable. The sharing of recipes, gardening tips, photographs, advice on how to bake or make - it was a wonderful way to communicate. Plenty of jokes and funny memes were also shared and this helped keep members upbeat and positive on the dark days, when the news on Covid was bleak and the case numbers were rising.

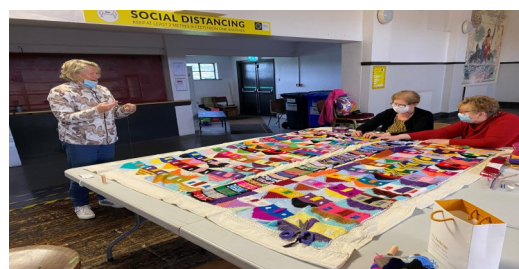
Through the WhatsApp group chat also came a great idea for a craft project we could all take part in from our homes. A photograph of a beautiful knitted quilt was sent in by group member Philomena, as she asked the question "would we be able to do something similar?". Another member, Bernadette, who is a talented and skilled knitter, knitted a few sample squares and wrote down her pattern. This was sent to everyone, and off we set. We shared knitting needles, dropped wool to the local shop, and shared information on where to buy more. Throughout 2020, we were all knitting our squares for our 'Staying at Home Quilt'.

Throughout most of 2021 then, we walked weekly and having the walking track at lough Lene Gaels park enabled this. During the times that we were allowed meet up inside we met at Collinstown hall which was a fine local indoor space, we joined everyone's knitted squares together, and laid out the finished quilt. The quilt was completed in December 2021 and we are now working on securing a date to officially launch and exhibit it with Collinstown Farmer's Market Committee and the Hall committee.

As a group we have physically regrouped with the walking track getting great use from us. However, we are still a bit apprehensive about meeting for indoor workshops, the past few weeks we've had our cuppa and chat 'Plein Air' and we are now planning 2022's projects.



In front: Teresa Doyle, RSS Participant with the PLACE Group out for a walk in Fore as part of their weekly exercise regime.



Tessa, Mary and Bernadette busy stitching

"The Stay At Home Quilt"



"The Stay At Home Quilt"

HORTICULTURE PROGRAMME

Funder

The Horticulture FETAC Level 5 programme is funded by the LWETB and provides a 1 year course in Belvedere House and Gardens. It is funded as a Local Training Initiative. WCD have been running the programme since 2009.

Objective of programme

The Horticulture FETAC Level 5 programme caters for students aged between 16 and 35 years of age.

Participants receive a training allowance from the LWETB whilst on the programme. The project is staffed by LTI

Coordinator John Smyth and job- sharing Assistant Coordinators, Valerie Beck and Aoife Joyce, supported by an RSS and Tús participant. The Coordinators provide almost all the tutor hours of the programme.

Brief description of what type of activity under the Horticulture Programme

The entry to the programme includes those experiencing barriers accessing the labour market, mainstream training or education programme.

The Course offers a unique educational/ practical environment in the beautiful surroundings of Belvedere gardens for students to learn. The Level 5 in Horticulture is based on completing the following modules- Garden Design, Work Practice, Team Working, Plant Protection, Plant Science, Soil Science and Growing Media, Plant identification and Use, Plant Propagation, Fruit and Vegetable production.

Horticulture Course 2020/2021

The new course begun on 23rd November 2020 and finished in December 2021. Recruitment is carried out through the DEASP case officers and the LWETB. Some of the students are graduates of the ETB's level 4 course in Marlinstown. It was a challenge to get the course up and running with the priority given to making sure that the participants were IT ready for remote training. The first modules of the course were delivered online with a return to classroom work as the restrictions were lifted. A lot of capital investment has been carried out on the project. This includes considerable investment in IT resources that allows the tutors to communicate effectively with the students. There is a requirement that a high percentage of the participants are under 35. This year 4 of the 13 participants are under 35.

The staff of the horticultural project were assisted by 1 Tús project participant who will assist them both in the office and the practical garden work. The course delivery is as successful as ever despite the Covid limitations.

Ministerial recognition

In February, the ETB nominated the Belvedere Horticulture project to represent it in a meeting with Minister Simon Harris, who has responsibility for higher education. The one hour zoom session involved the minister interviewing John Smith and Valerie Beck, tutors on the course, two students and Frank Murtagh, WCD CEO. The discussion was mainly about working remotely during Covid and the future of the project. The Minister was invited to visit the projects when the Covid crisis has abated.

Case Study/Testimonials

I have had an interest in gardening and nature and wanted to know the science behind it.

I had no idea this course existed! I couldn't recommend it more; the team are so knowledgeable and helpful having worked at such a broad range of disciplines. I found this very inspiring.

It was difficult completing so many modules but the mixture of outdoor practical work at Belvederes Walled Garden inspired us all.

Over the last year, I learned how to propagate and develop sophisticated plants and designs. All the practical knowledge we learned over Winter and Spring became real and understandable. I have made some great friends and wish the staff all the best and thank them for getting me through COVID 19.

Marcel Palm

While I've always known that Belvedere is a wonderful place to visit, I now know that it was also an excellent place to learn.

The combination of well-structured modules delivered by experienced and enthusiastic tutors makes this course, in my opinion, one of the best courses in the Midlands.

My only wish is that I could stay longer and advance further into level 6 and 7 courses on the premises, with the same tutors.

Natasha Kelly

WESTMEATH TRAVELLER PROJECT

Westmeath Traveller Project: is funded by the HSE and there are currently 6 Travellers employed two full time positions and 4 part time positions. Westmeath Traveller Project was set up to improve the Health status of Travellers and provide support to Traveller families regarding Health Promotion, Accommodation issues, Education and Community Development Westmeath Traveller Project staff have had a busy year supporting families in Westmeath with many issues. This year continued to be a challenging time as all our work had to be done over the phone which was very different as we could not meet in our usual face to face manner which was very productive calling to

people home and seeing first-hand the issues. We liaised with agencies such as Westmeath County Council, HSE, Social Welfare, Tusla, Department of Education to support families and address issues. Westmeath Traveller Project have 176 Families consented to the Project. In 2021 the families received the following supports and information...

Outreach work carried out included:

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>No of Families</u>	<u>Referrals made</u>	
Mental Health	176	Accommodation	10
Child Safety Awareness	145	Health issues	80
Cholesterol	176	Social Welfare	6
Smoking	176	Tús	1
Cancer Awareness	176		
Traveller Pride event	140		
Asthma	176		
Meningitis	176		
Diabetes	176		
MABs	176		
Information on NUIG Course	160		
Counselling service	176		
Safety during Covid 19	176		
Vaccination clinics in Westmeath	176		

Training/ information events attended by staff included: Information day on NUIG Course Understanding Conflict Presentation, RAPID, Media skills and funding applications.

The Traveller project staff represented Travellers on the following structures, which ensured that the voice of the Traveller was included: TAG, PPN.

Newsletter: A Newsletter was Designed to advertise all services available this newsletter also contains up to-date information on Covid 19 restrictions and information on Vaccinations. The Newsletter is delivered Quarterly to all consented families.

Traveller Pride Event - October : The Annual Traveller Pride event took place in Grange on October the 1st. The event had been held later in the year because of Covid Restrictions and the bad weather prevented the usual high numbers in attendance. There was 70 Travellers who attended the Event plus representation from SICAP, Westmeath ETB, WCD. and the HSE.

NUIG Diploma: All consented families have been given information with regards to NUIG Diploma course for Travellers in Westmeath. Staff have worked with families to promote this learning opportunity. Interviews were carried out and 4 clients were successful in securing places. These clients will have continued support from Westmeath Traveller Project. The pre-programme will commence on the 8th of February 2022 following on from this the Diploma programme will commence in September 2022.

Accommodation: 106 Families supported with
Housing /Homeless/Evictions

Transfers

Housing assisting payment (HAP)

Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

Completion of Housing, RAS and HAP applications

Redevelopment of Blackberry

Supporting residents and liaising with WCC with Meetings for Blackberry lane

Redevelopment of Blackberry Lane- Progress to date: There has been some progress with redevelopment of Blackberry lane. There has been a lot of consultation with families in Blackberry lane and Westmeath County Council with regards to plans for the redevelopment. There have been 2 meetings with heads of families and WCC with regards to issues and changes made to draft plans. This consultation is ongoing.

Understanding Conflict Workshop: Staff delivered a workshop in the Annebrook Hotel Mullingar. This was the first time that this was delivered and it was a great success.

Supports during Covid 19 2021 has been a very stressful time for everyone because of Covid 19 and the restrictions and lockdowns that came as a result. Supported by Jimmy Todd HSE, and Linda-Jo Quinn, the SICAP Community Development Co-ordinator. Westmeath Traveller Project have been on hand to support families through this pandemic. Some staff were working on an “on call duty service” over the weekends to support the HSE and Traveller families in Westmeath. The isolation that families have felt from restrictions and lockdowns that resulted from the high number of Coronavirus cases and the loss of loved ones from the virus has resulted in a lot of people suffering from high stress levels and Mental Health issues. Westmeath Traveller Project have been on hand to deliver the following services to the 176 families that have consented to our Project.

- Organising tests for Families re. Covid 19.
- Food essentials organised for Families in isolation During Covid 19. This work was carried out in partnership with Youth Work Ireland Midlands.
- Masks and sanitisers delivered to Families.
- Home testing organised for families who had no transfer.
- 400+ Travellers received Vaccinations at pop up clinics organised by the Traveller Project and HSE.
- 106 Supported with Accommodation issues
- Education supports
- Newsletters delivered regarding all services available to Families

Travellers linked into Counselling Services

Care Packs : Care Packs were put together and distributed to all 176 Traveller Families who are consented to the Project.



Picture above is Mary Bridget Nevin winner of Art Competition for under 16. Next Picture is are Linda Jo Quinn SICAP Community Development Coordinator, Bridget Nevin CHW and Nuala O'Brien of Longford/ Westmeath ETB.



Pictured above is Caroline Nevin CDHW and Christine Joyce Coordinator of the Primary Health Care Project preparing care packs for Families in Westmeath.

Community Employment

Community Employment (CE) designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and in receipt of a Social Welfare payment to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs within local communities. Part of the ethos of CE is for participants to partake in training to upskill in order to be better equipped for job seeking after CE placements. After the placement, participants are supported to seek permanent part-time and full-time jobs elsewhere based on the experience and new skills they have gained while on a CE scheme.

The Community Employment Programme is funded by the Department of Social Protection

Here at WCD our CE scheme is based between Mullingar and Athlone and we are currently approved for 40 places, 17 of which are dedicated to the Trainee Entrepreneurship Programme.

The remaining places are based in a variety of roles including:

Childcare Workers

Community Development Support

Reception & Information Officers

Administration Roles

Maintenance/Caretaking

Catering Assistant.

In 2021, 58 people benefited from CE. All of them gaining valuable experience within the organisation, its sub sponsors and on the Trainee Entrepreneurship Programme

Of these 58, 5 Participants left to take up full time employment during 2021 and 27 participated in the Trainee Entrepreneurship Programme

Training undertaken by participants in 2021 included Childcare level 6, SNA levels 5, Adult Literacy, Business and tourism, Business Administration, Clean Pass and Languages

Covid effects

2021 was yet another trying year for everyone; we continued a hybrid working system working from home where necessary. Most of our sub sponsors were able to organise staff to work from home also so we had little disruption in service.

The Trainee Entrepreneurship Programme was also run through a hybrid of in person and on-line classes and worked well.

Lockdowns changed the face of training in many areas with many providers providing training online. Not all participants were able to avail of this, mainly those with limited or no IT skills.

Participant Case Study

As a CE participant I would like to say I really enjoy it, I was out of work for over a year and could not find employment after I left college with a Degree. It was disheartening to say the least but then I got a letter to interview for TUS, so I jumped at the chance (thank you Frank) and I started working with citizens information (they were hosting me). After the year on TUS was complete, I took a 2-year CE position with citizens information and I'm still here on year 4. Geraldine and Edel were my co-ordinators for the duration of my CE scheme, they are very accommodating, polite and professional (thank you ladies). On CE the hours are 19.5 per week, I cover three days in citizens information Athlone, and I love my job. I've also had the chance to take up some contract work within citizens information along with the CE scheme. I didn't have any experience working in an office, so I was training on the job, and I also train others for reception.

My experience overall? Loved it, I am so grateful to have experienced TUS & CE. Since the first lockdown my CE had been rolled over a few times (very happy as the job hunt was unsuccessful). My CE scheme had been rolled over because there was not much employment and nobody had signed up for CE, lucky for me!

- Patricia Joyce

Funder

The Tús programme is funded by the Department of Social Protection. Westmeath Community Development administers the scheme for County Westmeath.

Objective

The Tús initiative is a community work placement scheme providing short-term working opportunities for unemployed people. All participants receive 12-month contracts. The work opportunities are to benefit the community and are provided by community and voluntary organisations in both urban and rural areas.

Unemployed people who are eligible to participate in the scheme are selected by the Department of Social Protection.

Brief description of the type of activities that are undertaken by the Tús programme

All the work carried out by participants in the Tús scheme will be community-based. The types of project eligible for the scheme may include:

- Environmental services (for example, conservation and maintenance of national walkways) e.g. Mullingar, Athlone and Moate tidy towns
- Caring services (for example, childcare, care of older people) e.g. Dalton Park Community crèche.
- General community services (for example, newsletters or information provision for communities) e.g. Athlone CIC
- Heritage and cultural services (for example, local heritage project)

Para-educational services (for example, community playgroups) e.g. Kinnegad playground.

Allocation of places

The places on the scheme are allocated to community and voluntary organisations involved in the delivery of local services in urban and rural areas. The allocation is based on the numbers of eligible unemployed people in each local area. There are 80 participants based in the greater Mullingar area and 40 in Athlone. Over 75% are placed in urban settings.

Participants

To be eligible to participate in the Tús scheme you must:

- Have been continuously unemployed for at least 12 months and "signing on" on a full-time basis; and
- Have been receiving a jobseeker's payment (Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance) from the Department of Social Protection for at least 12 months; and
- Be currently receiving Jobseeker's Allowance.

Unemployed people who are eligible for the scheme are identified and contacted by their social welfare local office or Intreo centre and offered the opportunity to participate in the scheme. If they agree to participate in the Tús scheme they will be referred to Westmeath Community Development where they will be recruited for a suitable placement when it becomes available. As there are only limited places available on the scheme, not all eligible unemployed people will be contacted.

Other work

Participants on Tús can take up other part-time employment provided it does not interfere with the work and times of the Tús work placement. If participants are offered full-time alternative work they may terminate their work placement contract. Every year WCD have a number of participants who suspend their time on Tús for seasonal work.

Outcomes

There were 260 people referred to Tús in 2021. There was no obligation for any Tús participants to leave the scheme in 2021 because of a change in the rules by the DEASP, due to Covid. WCD currently have 120 places and 5 supervisors. Every participant receives induction training with 10 participants availing of extra training either through the Tús training budget or are helped to apply for other DEASP training funding by their supervisors. There was a lower uptake of training in 2021 due to a lack of training and very few job opportunities. A total of 10 participants progressed to employment. All participants on Tús are encouraged to avail of all the different employment supports available through WCD and this has led to excellent progression to employment.

Coronavirus changes

The Tús scheme had many disruptions in 2021 due to Covid. Participants were furloughed from January until May. When participants started/returned to work they agreed to abide by the government return to work protocols. We sent out these protocols to the sponsor groups with instructions at the end of the last lockdown.

We risk assessed each placement and provided induction training to all participants on returning to work. Many of the placements are with groups such as tidy towns, graveyard committees, residents associations and sporting clubs which are by their nature easier to recommence because of natural social distancing. We have changed participants' rotas so that they can work shorter hours thereby allowing them to have their breaks at home.

Case Study

Athlone Community Radio and Tús scheme by Irena Cvetkovic, Manager.

Athlone Community Radio (ACR) has been part of the Tús initiative since 2012. We have nothing but a positive experience with the scheme and its' staff members who were appointed to us.

Training:

The staff on the Tús scheme are provided with internal training and they were also sent to the training organised by different groups like Wheel or CRAOL (CRAOL is umbrella organisation for all community radios).

Staff members on the Tús scheme left a big mark on our everyday broadcasting and production. Even after they finish with Tús scheme, many of them are staying with ACR as volunteers or move to CE scheme.

The desirable outcome of this scheme to provide employment, happened to Kyle McCallan who after spending with us on Tús scheme as part of a technical team, was employed soon after by Athlone Community Radio.

COVID Impact:

Four of our Tús scheme participants were started either a few weeks before Covid or during the Covid. Most of them we managed to train and work remotely like Frank Sammon who become almost irreplaceable part of the staff, taking care of our website and designing our posters for fundraising and our radio schedule. Eunan Keys showed enormous dedication coming three times per week all the time during the Covid to do research for our current affairs programme Athlone Today.

We did have once in a fortnight staff meeting on Zoom that brought all staff members sense of team work and way of socialising and being introduced to other staff members during the Covid time.

Tús placement by Frank Sammon, participant.

In June 2020, I received a letter from Westmeath Community Development with an offer to apply for the Tús programme. I accepted this and was chosen for an interview. At this interview I met Michael Toohey who would oversee my time on the Tús programme. At the interview, a number of job placement opportunities were discussed with Athlone Community Radio being one that I felt would suit me and my skill set. It was a professional, friendly and welcoming interview, where I learned everything I needed to know about Tús and Westmeath Community Development and what my job placement would entail.

I was interviewed by the manager of Athlone Community Radio, Irena Cvetkovic. I showed Irena my work portfolio and she was very complimentary and enthusiastic about what I could bring to the station. I was not interviewed in a number of years so I was nervous but it was a very friendly and easy experience.

Irena told me she wanted me to join the station as a graphic designer and to update and maintain the website and that she would be in contact with Tús.

Michael Toohey then met me and assigned the work placement contracts with my start date being the 31st August 2020

Working with Athlone Community Radio has been an excellent opportunity. The staff are all friendly and welcoming and any training that I have needed has been provided. I have learned new skills in website maintenance. I have been able to put my history of art and graphic design to use in creating posters, advertisements, social media posts, advertisements, social media posts, schedules, show promotion and cd cover designs. I have also created a series of Christmas Cards that the station can sell to help in fundraisers and to promote the station

My experience with Tús has been a very positive one and a great opportunity to get back into the workplace and gain new skills while using my own experience.

Michael Toohey has been excellent throughout and very friendly and professional. Having been out of employment, I was nervous about starting the process but he has made it a very comfortable and easy experience and I knew I had support if any issues may arise. Any information I need or any things that I may be unsure of, he is easy to contact and explains everything thoroughly and he is always available to speak if I need to ask any questions. He has made it a very comfortable and rewarding process. My time with Tús and Athlone Community Radio has been an excellent experience. I have learned new skills and have gained confidence in re-joining the workplace. My initial end of employment date was 27/08/21 but has been extended to June 2022 which has made the difficult time of Covid much easier to handle as I know that I am employed and can work comfortably from home. My future plans are to continue a career in Graphic Design and Art. It is something that I have drifted away from over the years due to personal circumstance but I have gained a new motivation to continue working in the field thanks to Tús and Athlone Community Radio.

Manager Irena Cvetkovic has mentioned the possibility of remaining on as part of the CE scheme as she would like for me to remain as a staff member. This is currently something that I am interested in and hopefully will still be an option when my time with Tús has concluded.



RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Leader 2014-2022 Programme

LEADER is a community led approach to local development which supports locally identified initiatives that seek to address locally identified needs and challenges. The Programme includes a number of themes and sub themes that reflect the overarching needs of rural Ireland which include **Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation, Social Inclusion and the Rural Environment**.

Project Approvals and payments in 2020

Project Approvals and payments in 2021 under the LEADER 2014-2020

The final completion date for the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 was extended to March 2021 by DRCD. One additional project to the value of €27,010.80 was approved for funding. A total of **€1,629,804.23** was made to project promoters in 2021.

LEADER Transitional Programme & EURI 2021-2022

The Transitional LEADER Programme is a two-year programme which will bridge the gap between the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme and the new LEADER Programme. A total budget of €2,181,697 has been allocated to County Westmeath under the Transitional Programme and the European Union Recovery Instrument (EURI) (part of the EU National Recovery and Resiliency fund). This will be used to support the recovery of rural communities and private enterprises from the effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 below outlines the breakdown of allocation for the Programme budget.



Table 1 – LEADER Transitional & EURI Budget Allocations;

Programme	Project budget (75%)	Administration/ Animation (25%)	Total
LEADER Transitional	1,132,804	377,601	1,510,405
EURI	503,469	167,823	671,292
Total	1,636,273	545,424	2,181,697

Aim of the Programme:

The aim of the Programme is to allow locally-led rural development projects to continue to be delivered using the current LEADER model until the new EU LEADER programme commences in 2023. The themes and sub-themes for the Transitional Programme under which projects will be delivered are in line with those set out in the Westmeath Local Development Strategy for the 2014-2020 Programme.

Priorities for the Transitional Programme

The Transitional LEADER Programme seeks to address the challenges facing rural Ireland in the coming period and to complement the forthcoming Rural Development Policy which will place an emphasis on job creation, remote working and maximising the potential of broadband in rural communities.

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

The following actions have been set out for the Transitional Programme:

1. Support to rural businesses seeking to reach new markets, expand, innovate and/or diversify in response to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and/or Brexit, with a particular emphasis on providing support to businesses in the food sector.
2. Community based projects that seek to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Support and capacity building for communities that have not previously received assistance under LEADER or other rural programmes, using the Transitional Programme to engage with new applicants to develop and enhance collaboration within communities.
4. Support for new and innovative projects in the area of climate change, environmental protection and the green economy.
5. Maximising the potential of broadband and the digital economy in communities, including through skills development and building awareness and usage of available remote working facilities.

Projects that develop the concept of the Smart Village initiative or Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) which could serve as proof-of-concept for more substantial in the context of the next EU-funded LEADER Programme.

Priorities for EURI Funding:

EURI Funding is being provided to support local communities and enterprises with an opportunity to respond to the emerging challenges, through rural development grant aid, to support measures that encourage employment and job creation while also providing resources for communities and community groups to respond, recover and adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. EURI Funding can be utilised to support the following areas:

1. Supports to rural businesses seeking to reach new markets, expand, innovate or diversify in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Community based projects that seek to address emerging challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting greater social inclusion.
3. Support for new and innovative projects in the areas of climate change, environmental protection and the green, bio and circular economy within the LAG area.

Maximising the potential of broadband and the digital economy in communities, including through skills development and building awareness and usage of available remote working facilities.

Animation of the Transitional Programme

In 2021, LEADER Staff continued to animate the Programme through working directly with communities and individuals as well as linking in with other relevant agencies to promote the Programme across all sub-themes. Specific Initiatives such as the Water Resources Training Programme and the Renewable Energy Information Session were also undertaken which aimed to generate interest amongst communities to undertake projects under the Rural Environment Theme of the Programme. The Programme was also publicised through advertisements and press releases in local press as well as through WCD's website and social media.

47 Expressions of Interest were received from communities and individuals interested in grant aid across the themes and sub-themes of the Programme. 6 projects were approved to the value of €300,038.10 under the Transitional Programme in 2021. (see Table 2 below)

Table 2: LEADER Transitional Project Approvals in 2021

Project Promoter	Project	LEADER Grant Aid €
Pearse Connell, Athlone	Hidden Heartland - Purchase of boat to undertake tours of Lough Ree & the Shannon	25,500.00
Athlone Boat Club, Athlone	Funding towards equipment and signage at the new Club House in Athlone	37,123.01
Whitehall Community Group, Whitehall, Castlepollard	Installation of new Playground in Whitehall	37,500.00
Athlone Tennis Club, Athlone	Funding towards the development of new tennis court facility	150,000.00
Westmeath Community Development	Funding to undertake a Water Resources Training Programme for communities and individuals in Westmeath	24,593.85
Mullingar Gymnastics Club, Mullingar	Funding towards the purchase of specialist equipment for persons with disabilities	25,321.24
Total		300,038.10

ATHLONE BOAT CLUB LEADER PROJECT

Athlone Boat Club

Founded in 1837 Athlone Boat Club is one of the oldest rowing clubs in Ireland. The club is steeped in tradition and has played a leading role in the sporting history of the town.

The Club caters for oarsmen and oarswomen of all ages from Junior to master's and has a proud history at National and International level. The Club has a long and successful tradition of teaching rowing to youths in the community and competing at youth, senior and master's level throughout Ireland and Europe. The Club also has a strong track record of organizing regattas each year and attracting large entries from national and international visitors.

Athlone Boat Club first approached Westmeath Community Development in 2017 with a view to seeking grant aid towards the redevelopment of their Clubhouse Facility. LEADER Staff guided the committee through the process and in 2019 Athlone Boat Club was successful in being awarded €374,524.20 from the LEADER Programme toward the redevelopment of their Clubhouse. The project involved the demolition of the existing club house and the construction of a new Club/Boat house at Grace Road, Athlone. The new building provides storage areas for boats, as well as changing and meeting rooms.

The site on the River Shannon is on a prominently visible location and the design of the new building itself provides a calm riverside presence.

The re-development will further enable the club to grow and implement their strategy to create a family-friendly community and it will allow the Club to attract more regattas to the town, therefore increasing visitor numbers to Athlone and its environs.

"Athlone Boat Club's ambitious plans to build a new Club and Boat house in the centre of Athlone on the side of the River Shannon have just been delivered on. This wonderful architect-designed building provides a calm riverside presence of a civic quality. We were privileged that LEADER came on board and had the confidence in our ability to deliver the project. They provided almost 50% of the cost via the LEADER grant programme which made the project possible. Following an initial meeting with Bernie Leavy, and a site visit by the CEO Frank Murtagh, we have dealt almost exclusively with Peter Ormond who was always on hand to help us through the LEADER application process and the various grant claims. This outstanding development will enhance rowing, lead to greater community involvement in sport and help play a part in developing one of Westmeath's greatest natural amenities".

Paul Gallen, Athlone Boat Club

Photos:





Westmeath Volunteer Centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Iarmhí

2021 continued to pose unprecedented challenges for the volunteers and the communities where we operate. Despite the restrictions, it continued to be a busy and productive year for Westmeath Volunteer Centre. Volunteers have shown tremendous dedication and commitment and made many valuable contributions supporting organisations and individuals around the county.

Westmeath Community Development continued in 2021 to promote the value of volunteering by offering a range of quality volunteering opportunities in the county, delivered through Westmeath Volunteer Centre. (WVC). WVC is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and are affiliated with Volunteer Ireland

<https://www.volunteer.ie/>

WVC provided quality volunteer placement service to the non-profit and community & voluntary sector in the county. We also offered support and guidance to individuals and Organisations (VIOs) in County Westmeath to reach their individual and collective goals while making a significant contribution to their local community and society.

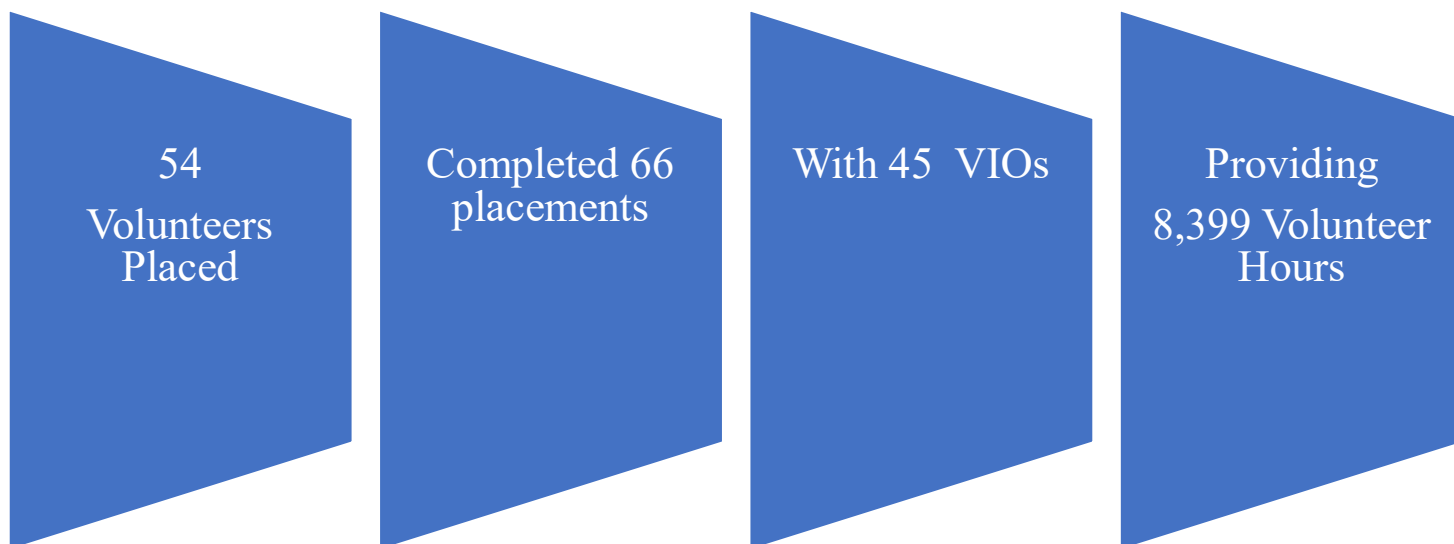
Mission:

“To promote the value of volunteering and increase the range and quality of volunteering in County Westmeath”

Volunteer Centre Services and Impact:

- Referral Service for Volunteers to non-profit groups that need volunteers
- Support Volunteers to access quality roles that suits their needs and skills
- Provide a follow up service to volunteers to assist their progression through the process
- Supporting organisations to develop best practice guidelines when working with volunteers
- Assisting organisations to create roles that helps build their capacity and attract volunteers
- Provide training to organisations that will best assist them to attract, manage and retain volunteers
- Facilitate productive links between organisations
- Provide Garda Vetting Service and Garda Vetting training

Metrics:



Feedback from volunteers and Organisations:

An Organisation Story

"To successfully deliver our service we rely on the goodwill and active support of an enthusiastic team of volunteers. One of the most enthusiastic of these who has been involved in Gateway since 2017 is David Nesengani. David is originally from South Africa and has lived in Athlone Accommodation Centre for the past 4 years while his asylum application is being processed. The first interaction we had with David was as part of a community garden that Athlone Community Taskforce were involved in in the Lissywollen direct provision site. This was a very successful cross community project which David led. David then became a volunteer and great advocate of Gateway Youth Project. Amongst other programmes David has assisted with our Afterschool Hub, Alternative Suspension Programme (working with young people in danger of school expulsion), Healthy Living (supported by Athlone Drug Awareness Group) and our Army Training Programme in cooperation with the Defence Forces"

Gateway Project

A Volunteer Story

"I feel privileged to be a volunteer in my chosen area, chatting to and getting to know people I otherwise would not meet. Within volunteering, it has made me realise how many layers there are to our society, how dependent each layer is on the other to function and how important each person's role is.

Volunteering is such an important aspect of so many organizations, they could not operate without the good will and commitment of others there to support individual causes. It certainly has opened my eyes to all the great and good that can be enjoyed by being involved".

Betty

Thanks To A Volunteer

"We are a social club that caters for teenagers and adults with additional needs. We are 100% volunteer led and driven. Our committee consists of 5 committee members and a volunteer base of 21 people. Our group is also managed by a member team of 5 people with additional needs.

Our Volunteer Hanin, referred to us from Westmeath Volunteer Centre, shows up every morning we have something on and is so very good with the clients. Without her, we would not be able to accommodate everyone as we are all volunteer based and without them, we cannot run classes".

Imaginative Creative Therapies.

COMMUNITY MOTHERS

Community Mothers programme in Longford/Westmeath is a community home visiting programme home visiting programme which puts parents first, empowering them through trusted relationships with a Home Visitor. It provides information and support and it builds friendships and connectivity in local communities. The programme is for families that have at least one child aged under 5 years. The programme is funded by TUSLA.

2021 was a hugely significant year for the programme, not only because of the impacts of Covid 19 but it was the year when our service delivery moved from volunteer led (with 20 volunteers) to employing three community mothers from August 2021. This was only made possible with the help of additional funding from SICAP funding to employ the Westmeath based Community Mothers.

From the start of 2021 'visits' took place via video call, phone calls, WhatsApp, zoom, and garden visits. In June, we resumed home visits using strict guidelines.

Outcomes Community Mother Programme 2021

Total Number of Home Visits in 2021* No of video calls/phone calls Jan-April (400) No of garden visits/video calls/phone calls in May (103) No of home visits June & July (208) Home Visits from August-Dec (204)	915
No of referrals to Home visiting service	42 families 54 children
Total number of families that received a home visit during 2020	62 families
Total number of children who received a service in 2021	124
Baby massage Classes on Zoom (Jan-June & Sept) Baby massage face to Face (October-November)	70 parents & 70 babies 39 parents & 39 babies
Baby Café – Face to face group (August to Dec)	47 parents (Mullingar) 39 parents (Athlone)
Total number of children attending groups	159

Feedback from Families Home Visits

The visits are great as they were in my own home with the option of a walk or going for coffee. They are there to listen to my needs and talk it through and give their experiences of what other mothers go through in order to assist. They are regular reliable and friendly and show you what other supports are out there. 1st time parent



I got support around baby development, taking care of the baby, moral support especially as I have no friends/family here. It meant a lot for me as I didn't feel alone and abandoned. It's an excellent support for families who are struggling in their own way. 1st time parent



Feedback in relation 'Home Visits' during lock down periods during 2021

I especially liked the check ins from my community mother during lockdown. It meant staying social during the tough times of Lockdown.

It was wonderful to know some one cared and was looking out for me and my kids

Coming out of lockdown was hard I lost my confidence my community mother boosted me to go out again.

CHILDCARE SERVICES

WCD Childcare Services operates from 7 Childcare and After-school centres, 6 in Athlone and 1 in Mullingar. Our After-school Service is funded through the National Childcare Investment Programme, under the National Childcare Scheme, from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Supports such as school meals is funded by the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection and Westmeath County Childcare Committee.

Our Childcare services operate from the start of the school year until July, and includes full day camps at Halloween, Easter and during the month of July when the schools are closed. Services are available 4 hours a day from Monday to Friday during the school year, and includes a homemade hot snack, homework supports, art and cultural activities, sports, and games.

2021 has had its challenges! Thankfully we were in a position to offer our services to parents again, full time, after the curtailment of services in 2020/21 school year. We reopened and were fully operational from September 2021, albeit at smaller numbers that we would have had pre-pandemic. We could operate and increase our figures based on School Age Childcare Ration of 1 Childcare Worker to 12 children, with 90 children attending services in the 2020/2021 Childcare year, increasing further in September 2021.

One fallout from the pandemic is that some of our vulnerable children at risk of poverty are no longer entitled to Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). This scheme has since been replaced by the National Childcare Scheme with different qualifying criteria, and parents that are not in employment or training do not qualify for childcare hours during school term.

This was most keenly felt in our Monksland service which we had to close during 2021, but plan to reopen in September 2022.



St Pauls , Mid-term Camp



Brawny Afterschool enjoying musical chairs.



Brawny Afterschool Children, enjoying Gymnastics Outdoors



Our little ladies practicing their make up skills

With support from schools and Home school Liaison officers, in other centres we could provide some level of care to children with schools paying part fees to help parents with the costs, and it is hoped that the changes being brought in to the National Childcare Scheme from September 2022 will address this issue.

It was great to be able to get our camps going again, a highlight for Children and staff, with fun filled days and day trips. The children always look forward to activity filled day with their peers, lots of fun was had!

WESTMEATH CARE & REPAIR AND BEFRIENDING

Westmeath Care and Repair Service Westmeath Care and Repair Service Westmeath is operated through Westmeath Community Development under the umbrella of Age Action. The programme aims to support older people to remain living in their homes as long as possible. It is not a funded programme and is supported through SICAP as part of our role in the Westmeath Age Friendly Strategy, with a small amount of funding received annually from Mullingar Credit Union. The service has three elements;

- providing volunteer support to carry out small repair works;
- providing volunteers for home visits;
- Befriending calls service. Repair Service Small household jobs, from fitting a light bulb to fitting carbon monoxide alarms, shelving; painting; installing security locks; light gardening chores; mowing lawns; and general home maintenance work.

In 2021, due to the impact of Covid 19 Care and Repair and trusted trades jobs figures were limited to essential work only, however figures were still up from 60 in the previous year to 95 for older people in Westmeath, work carried out were fitting handrails, shower seats and grab rails along with some outside gardening work. This figure also includes 20 referrals to Ann Moran Age friendly co-ordinator with Westmeath County Council to carry out healthy home audits.

Home Visits Carried out by volunteers this is a service for isolated older people in our community. Older people would normally receive a weekly home visit from our volunteers. In 2021, home visits all but ceased, again a casualty of Covid 19, however our eldest client a lady in her 106th year continued to receive visits as our volunteers were part of her bubble, she sadly passed away after Christmas but managed to live her life in her own home to the end.

Befriending Service. This is where an older person receives a daily or regular phone call. WCD have delivered the Befriending Service for many years but no-one could have foreseen what an invaluable service this would evolve into during the Covid crisis. Having the service already in place, promoted widely through the Community Response Forum established by Westmeath County Council in 2020 we were able to continue this valuable service to our many clients throughout the second year of the pandemic. Up to 136 clients were receiving 95 calls per week of approx. 15 mins duration we estimate that up to 5000 calls were made during 2021. The service is a critical and very valuable service to older people who continued to have very little social contact with others in 2021.

- 24 grant applications completed for older people's groups.
- 1000 care packs distributed to older people at Christmas, the symbolism of the gesture was equal to the content in many cases, the feedback was very positive with people feeling included and important at this lonely time, when Omicron was at its peak in Ireland. One gentleman stated that it was the first Christmas present he had ever received and was moved to tears.
- 120 tablets were distributed to older persons in Westmeath with 3 rounds of computer training held in 4 locations Moate, Mullingar, Coole and Killucan. Training and equipment allowed many to join the Live Long & Prosper Programme via zoom with a further 2 attending zoom based minute taking training. Assistance was given to groups wishing to make PPN submissions over the phone.
- There were 4 zoom-based meetings for the Age Friendly Service Providers Forum and related groups attended and many other virtual events such as Live Well, biodiversity gardening course in November, and a seasonal singalong in the Library at Christmas allowing connectivity at a time when the Covid pandemic was getting worse with the omicron variant spreading fast.
- A number of active retirement groups planted bulbs for bees to encourage pollination, when they were distributed by WCD.

- 3 groups participated in the Make Way Day, walking a route and taking pictures of the obstacles in their way.
- 4 older persons groups made submissions to WPPN to Municipal Districts
- In July 2021 Anne Campbell Community Support worker for Older Persons retired from WCD after over two decades with the company, her position has been taken over by Martha McMahon.



Food & Health

The food and health programme is aimed at supporting people who are interested in eating a healthier diet. All our courses are designed to be user friendly and deliver the message of healthy eating in a practical fun way. The main goal is to help improve people's access to good quality information that can be on healthy eating that can be applied to everyday lifestyle choices. This is a joint initiative between WCD and HSE Midlands area in the Westmeath Longford area. The programme has a number of different courses available.

Health Food Made Easy (HFME)

6-week course, where individuals gain hands-on experience of preparing and cooking healthy dishes that are affordable. Learning about the food pyramid, balanced diets and shopping tips is central to this course.

Able to Cook for Health (A2C4H)

6 Session course aimed at individuals with an intellectual disability. Each session has a practical cookery element with all participants encouraged to get involved in both preparation and cooking of simple healthy dishes.



Cool Dude Food Programme (CDFP)

5 Session course targeting younger people between 8 and 14 years to introduce them to healthy eating through fun and practical activities. This course is popular as a school activity.

Community Hearth Health (CHH)

This is designed for groups that have already completed healthy food made easy course and focuses on nutrition, stress management and physical activity.

Food and Health was severely disrupted by the pandemic again in 2021. During the year we completed 5 Cool Dude courses, 5 Healthy Food Made Easy courses and 2 Able to Cook for Health. From April to June we ran a programme Live Longer & Prosper through the Healthy Ireland Fund, this was a virtual programme with three groups of 20 older people taking part in each programme. Our food & Health tutor delivered cookery demonstrations via zoom for these groups.

GOVERNANCE & FINANCIAL REVIEW 2021

GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE

Good governance is the cornerstone of a successful and sustainable organisation. At WCD, we strive to meet the best governance standards driven by the principles of transparency, openness and accountability. We are committed to adopting the [Principles of the Charities Governance Code](#) and are currently working towards compliance in 2021.

Board of Directors / Trustees of Westmeath Community Development in 2021

Name	Position
Dermot Leavy	Director/Chairperson
Liam Cahill	Director/Treasurer (IBEC)
Pat Boyce	Director (ICTU)
Marion Garry	Director (PPN)
Seamus Browne	Director (PPN)
Paddy Corcoran	Director (PPN)
Geraldine Lacey	Director (PPN)
Helen Donnelly	Director (PPN)
Augustina Adagun	Director (PPN)
Emily Wallace	Director (Environmental Pillar)
Augustina Adagun	Director (PPN)
Julia Dalton	Director (Retired 18/12/2021)
John Mangan	Director (PPN)
Jim Sheridan	Director (ICTU) (Retired 29/09/2021)
Paul Heduan	Director (PPN)
Sinita Sheridan	Director (SIPTU) Appointed in 29/09/2021
Michelle Smith	Company Secretary

Our Board of Directors met 8 times in 2021 with a 72% attendance rate. AGM was hosted on 5th May 2021. The Board appoints a number of sub-committees to oversee the organisations compliance and operational obligations. Membership of the sub-committees is drawn from the board. Sub-committees include:

- Human Resource subcommittee
- Finance/Audit subcommittee
- Community Development subcommittee
- Enterprise & Employment subcommittee
- Disability Working Group

WCD is a company limited by guarantee with Charitable status. We are fully compliant with annual reporting requirements to the Charities Regulator. Our Charity Regulator profile can be found on www.charitiesregulator.ie.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule of Income and Expenditure for the financial year ended 31st December 2021

<u>Schedule of Income</u>	€
Department of Rural and Community Development	
Volunteer Centre & Dormant Accounts Social Innovation	109,695
Pobal – National Childcare Investment Programme	97,542
Longford Westmeath Education Training Board – Horticulture	135,791
Westmeath County Council	
SICAP	864,134
LEADER 2014-2020	366,915
Resettlement	3,347
Various (Healthy Ireland, Horticulture, Disability projects)	33,169
Tulsa – Community Mothers Programme	78,912
HSE – Traveler, Food & Health projects	201,376
Department of Justice – PEIL	26,126
Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection	
RSS & Tús Programmes	126,896
Job Club	110,689
Community Employment & Jobs Initiative	699,602
School Meals & SICAP related	2,256
St Stephens Green Trust	4,200
Other Income - Admin course fees and parent's fees & EWSS	<u>344,104</u>
Total Income	3,178,728
<u>Expenditure</u>	€
Staff Costs	2,329,431
Project Specific costs	333,334
Admin and overhead costs	<u>532,444</u>
Total Expenditure	<u>3,195,209</u>
Deficit for the financial year	<u><u>((16,481))</u></u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2021

<u>Fixed Assets</u>	€	€
Tangible assets		155,277
Current Assets		
Debtors	202,692	
Cash and cash equivalents	<u>913,489</u>	
	1,116,181	
Creditors:		678,180
Amounts falling due within one year	<u>(690,128)</u>	
Net Current Assets		<u>426,053</u>
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		<u>581,330</u>
Reserves		
Income and expenditure account		<u>581,330</u>
Total Funds		<u>581,330</u>

FUNDERS

LEADER



Childcare programme



Tús Programme



Community Employment



Supported by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, which is funded by the Irish Government

Volunteer Centre



Westmeath Traveller Project



Horticulture programme



Rural Social Scheme



FUNDERS

Social Innovation Fund



Our
Social
Innovation
Fund



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



ciste na
gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant
accounts fund

Live Longer & Prosper programme



Resettlement programme/ DAF/ PEIL



European Union
Investing in your Future
European Social Fund



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality



EUROPEAN UNION
Asylum, Migration
and Integration Fund

ciste na
gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant
accounts fund



Community Mothers



Westmeath Care & Repair Service



Food & Health Programme



Community Development, Employment & Enterprise



EUROPEAN UNION
Investing in your future
European Social Fund



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020