



Annual Report

2020

Chairperson's Address

Welcome to our 2020 Annual Report.

I would like to begin by thanking the organisation's Board of Directors, management team and staff for your commitment, hard work and sheer determination in continuing to support one another and our young people in what has been a most difficult time over the past year. Life has not been easy for anyone since the pandemic struck, and I am very aware that all of our staff and volunteers have had to deal with Covid-19 in their personal lives as well as work. Some of us have suffered the death of family members, friends and neighbours. Many have been juggling childcare, home schooling and/or caring for a vulnerable family member with increased work pressures. Throughout the year they have absorbed every challenge the virus has presented and I must acknowledge the tremendous effort made by each and every member of staff to ensure that our services to young people persevered.

As always, I wish also to thank our funders whom have been most understanding and supportive throughout the year and without whom our work would not be possible. In particular I would like to thank The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth, Department of Justice, Department of Social Protection, Longford Westmeath ETB, and Laois Offaly ETB. I would also like to express my gratitude to Youth Work Ireland for their steadfast support and dedication to Youth Work Ireland Midlands.

As I reflect on 2020, I realise that the year has not been all bad. The work of the organisation has evolved as staff stepped up and retrained in the use of digital platforms to engage with young people, families and colleagues over the course of the various lockdowns and restrictions. I am hopeful that these new skills and resources will help us to build on our existing services beyond Covid-19. We launched our Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 which sets out an ambitious roadmap for the organisation over the next four years. Our SPY Projects in Athlone, Mullingar & Tullamore, transitioned into the new UBU Your Place Your Space scheme, a daunting task at any time but doubly difficult during periods of lockdown and ongoing restrictions.

One achievement from the year worth giving a mention is the 2020 ESB Creative Techfest Award presented to Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg for their '*Bury Drugs Not Your Dreams*' project. Other highlights include our Youth Information Service partnering with other Youth Information Service's from around the country and SpunOut.ie to roll out youth information to young people nationally. Our EYE Project and Yoyo Youth Cafe released their Music Jam Originals album in the Summer and it was a massive success featuring on regional radio stations and being shared across social media. Our AMETS became ITEC accredited in 2020 which allows the service to deliver an accredited, internationally recognised courses in Beauty, Make-up Artistry and Nail Technology.

Further achievements of the organisation are featured throughout this report and it is through our achievements that we highlight our belief in the young people of the Midlands and our commitment to delivering quality youth programs and activities across the region.

Thank you once again to our staff and volunteers for the extraordinary work you do that enables us to continue to meet the needs of the growing numbers of young people within our Service.



Padraig McGrath
Chairperson

CEO Address

2020 started with the ambition of another busy and productive year, much in line with previous years, however, the universe had a different idea. In January we started to hear about this new virus that was having an impact across the world but at that stage Ireland wasn't impacted and we were carrying on as normal, I was even planning a trip to Italy, which I carried on looking forward to until come early March all that changed, there was talk of rising cases of infection, countries across Europe and Asia closing its economies and urging people to stay indoors and on March 12th 2020 (the day I was due to travel to Italy) the hammer dropped on our Island, all non-essential business to close, all youth work organisations, schools, colleges and universities to close, all non-essential workers to work from home if possible, non-essential international travel halted, and a whole new vocabulary became our 'new normal' – Remote Working and Digital Youth Work in particular, terms in Youth Work that are largely unheard of, many questions were asked by the team; how can we continue to deliver effective youth work programmes remotely when contact and relationships are such a key ethos of the work? how can we keep young people engaged when they and we can't leave our homes? But startlingly quickly our amazing Youth Workers and indeed Youth Work Organisations across the county adapted, we updated, we upskilled, suddenly Zoom and Google Hangout, MS Teams and Kahoot were our go to mode of delivery for meetings, programmes, quizzes, competitions and more.

Across all our partner organisations both inside and outside youth work things had to adapt very quickly, we knew we had some very vulnerable young people and families who desperately needed contact and couldn't be forgotten in the face of Covid 19. Already established networks and collaborations became even more important, an acknowledgement of who were best placed to respond to the ever increasing demands on services for help and support became evident and Youth Work Ireland Midlands' amazing team of dedicated Youth Workers and Volunteers were at the forefront of that response across the region.

As CEO I was very conscious of the potential for heightened anxieties and stress for the team just by the fact of not being able to see and respond to the young people in their projects face to face, how to be able to continue to be a consistent presence in their community and their daily life. The challenge faced by working from home, many with the added pressure of suddenly homeschooling young children or trying to motivate and encourage older teens to keep up with their studies while also working full time from the kitchen table or the spare room. Regular contact and up to date, accurate information in a timely fashion became essential, as each escalation in restrictions were imposed we responded, as each restriction was eased we responded, young people were engaged and active during this entire time, some with a little help in the digital arena with projects in a position to purchase IT equipment to distribute to young people and families in need, some with a little help with food hamper drops and extra surprises at special times, especially Birthdays, Easter, Halloween and Christmas.

I want to take this opportunity to thank sincerely the entire team in Youth Work Ireland Midlands, the Board of Trustees who provide unwavering guidance and support and who are as passionate about working with young people as the staff and volunteers in the Service.

To our amazing Youth Workers, Assistant Youth Workers, Tutors, Admin and Volunteers, during 2020 you stepped up like champions, I am immensely proud of your response during every up and down of the last year. You have proven that the commitment you show every single day in your work within your communities and projects helped to ease the pain, distress and fear of the young people, their families and our wider network of volunteers, that know and rely on you as a huge part of their support structure, even if they, and maybe you, didn't realise it until now. That dedication and commitment to getting things done, to responding quickly and decisively to problems that arise is something that no-one will ever take for granted again.

I am very aware that the decisions made by the Board over the years in building the Management Team around me as CEO have greatly impacted my ability to do my job but also on the organisation's ability to meet its obligations in terms of our staff and volunteers, funders, good governance, compliance and accountability. To Martha who is a rock of sense and, a lot of the time, patience, your professionalism and competence is outstanding, I can always rely on you and I thank you for your steadfast dedication to our work, to the hours you will never be compensated for and your friendship over the last number of years. To Kevin who often drowns in paperwork but always emerges cheerful and efficient, thank you for your commitment and support with Martha in delivering the highest standard of work, your work ethic is exceptional. To our newest member of the Management Team, Tracey, your competence, efficiency and ambition for the organisation and the development and support of the Staff Team is inspirational, problems are just opportunities to be taken advantage of and your vision has further opened my eyes to the endless possibilities for our Staff, Volunteers and Young People.

Given all the challenges we faced in 2020 I have been blown away and again, am extremely proud of the organisation we are as we continually strive to improve, build and strengthen our

offer and the opportunities we can provide to the exceptional young people we cross paths with every day.

Finally, last but by no means least a heartfelt thank you to our National Organisation, Youth Work Ireland and its Member Youth Service for your ongoing guidance and support, to our funders within Government, our supportive intermediaries in the Longford Westmeath and Laois Offaly ETB's, the respective CYPSC's, Roscommon, Westmeath & Offaly County Councils, School Completion Programmes, An Garda Síochána & Court Service, the JLO's, Probation Services, Local Development Companies, Leargas, HSE, Tusla, Schools, FRC's & local communities who support us in our work and who we acknowledge as a collective asset to ensure we are as effective and efficient in meeting the needs of our communities as possible.

Geraldine Lacey, CEO

Finance & Administration

For every low there has to be a high - most of the time anyway

Quoting Newton's law – "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction"

I rarely get a chance to say thank you so I'm starting off with a special thanks to Ger for keeping the ship steady in the past year, to Kevin for being meticulous at everything he does, to the F&GP members Annette, Jackie, Jim and Padraig, to the board of Trustees all 11 of you for your continued support and collective wisdom, to Philip and David in O'Farrell & Co for their help and guidance during the year with the accounts and audit, and to Tracey for patiently bringing my IT skills up to speed. A sincere thank you to everyone else that did anything I asked them in 2020 even though you had other important things to do. Keep up the good work.

Finally last but not least thank you to all the Finance Officers & administration staff in other Youth Services, Funds admin unit, Laois/Offaly & Longford/ Westmeath ETBs, Youth Work Ireland, local County Councils, Court Offices, Youth Officers, Youth Affairs Unit and HSE/TUSLA.

When Ger asked me to put a one/two pager together on the "highs & lows" of 2020 from a finance point of view, I wasn't sure if I had anything to say that hasn't been already touched on before and to be honest there isn't anything new in my following reflection on 2020 but there are a few facts that might be of interest.

2020 has been a blessing and a curse in equal measure, but has not been the worst year I have endured and if there is any wisdom that comes with age it is, "that this too will pass".

It can be safely said that 2020 and COVID 19 will be synonymous forever more as will the jargon that has become part of working life since that original "2 week lockdown" way back

in March. The work landscape has radically changed for those of us currently working and more importantly for all you young people who follow us into the workforce.

It is my hope for 2021 and beyond in the post COVID world that we no longer take anyone, anything or anywhere for granted, no matter how small the little things matter.

Work related Highs & Lows

Highs	Lows
Continued funding during 2020 and into 2021 allowed us maintain service delivery	Threat of funding cuts to future budgets to pay for COVID 19 supports
Emergency funding available on Government schemes in response to COVID 19	Extra work in applying and reporting on these funding opportunities
IT equipment & Capital Grants almost €25k secured in 2020	IT equipment shortage resulting in higher costs
School Meals budget of almost €20K 2019/2020	Projects could have spent €20k more
New staff recruited	Staff lay-offs
Reached our target number of 6 board and 6 finance meetings held in 2020	Internet challenges and no meeting in person
70% attendance at board & finance meetings	No face to face meetings

In 2020 we said goodbye to the government department names DCYA, DEASP, IYJS, funding streams SPY/TYFS and swapped them for DCEDIY, DSP, DOJ and UBU. Apart from the obvious name changes with all of these came added workload generated by the ever increasing reporting requirement.

External Audits & Monitoring

In 2020 we had 5 external audits, 3 of which were on-site visits and 2 were desk audits. We also had regular spot checks on expenditure for SPY/TYFS/YIC/UBU budgets during 2020. The audits were as follows:

- Department of Social Protection – Financial monitoring visit on CE scheme on site in August 2020
- Department of Social Protection – Programme and Training monitoring visit on CE Scheme on site in August 2020
- Department of Justice/ESF Audit Authority – Finance desk audit on ALF project in September/October 2020
- Laois/Offaly ETB - Youth Capital Grants 2018/2019 for Tullamore Youth Project on site in July 2020
- Laois/Offaly ETB - SPY/TYFS 2019/2020 for Tullamore Youth Project desk audit in October 2020

The outcomes for all 5 audits were positive with confirmation that we had demonstrated our compliance with all appropriate financial policies and procedures in place.

Day to day accounts and payroll 2020

The mini triumphs that give me job satisfaction on a daily and weekly basis many would roll their eyes at but when the payroll uploads to Revenue and to the bank for payment that still makes my day. I am immensely proud of the fact that in 2020 the accounts team was responsible for processing payroll of €1.2m gross pay across 102 employees – full/part-time, CE participants, Work to Learn participants and tutors on payroll varying from 1 to 52 weeks of employment. We were responsible for processing over 2400 transactions for our accounts, recording receipts from funders and payments to suppliers across the Midlands.

Personal Highs & Lows

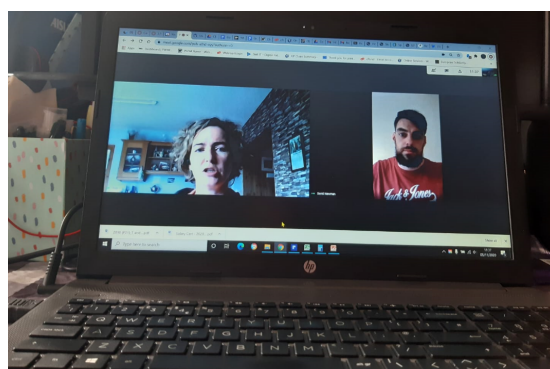
Highs	Lows
More family time	Missed work colleagues
No daily commute	Zoom Meetings
More Tea	Less nice coffee
New IT Skills	More time spent on-line
Longer phone calls	Poor phone signal
Opportunity to get out for a walk within my 5km	No motivation to go for a walk within my 5km
Attended more virtual meetings	More time spent on-line
Family table quizzes and bingo on line	Missed real family gatherings
Negative COVID tests	COVID testing

Martha Murphy

Human Resources & Organisation Developments

A new baby came to the Midlands family in January, Eileen McArdle welcomed baby Michelle – huge congratulations to Eileen and her family.

We also welcomed new staff throughout 2020 – *Aileen Costello* joined us in Tullamore Youth Project, *Mary Mulvany* joined us on the CE Team as Assistant CE Supervisor, *David Newman* joined us in Mullingar Youth Project, *Faustina Monaghan* took up the post of part time Rural Clubs Worker, and *Carrie Lynch* was in post as the LGBT support worker with Athlone Youth Project. Staff induction happened online, and as we move through the year, we hope that new staff get to meet their regional counterparts in person.



Development of LGBT Supports in projects across the region, giving us opportunities to enhance our service to our young people and their communities in both Offaly and Westmeath.

We said our sad farewells to staff who moved on, to *Stephanie Stenson*, who had worked as both Youth Worker and Assistant CE Supervisor, *Niamh Hogg* who was a Youth Worker with Mullingar Youth Project and *Sarah White*, Youth Worker with Tullamore Youth Project.. We wish them all the best and continued health and luck in their future endeavours. Because of Covid restrictions, parties weren't feasible, but the kettle will be on and cake at the ready when we can all meet again.

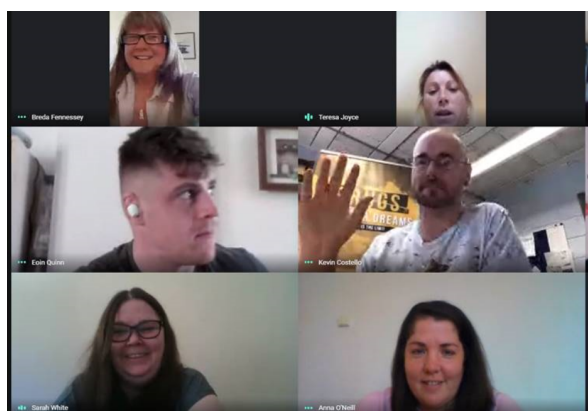
Digital Youth Work became another string in the bows of our amazing staff, who all took on journeys of learning across Social Media, Apps, Technology and new Digital platforms such as Flipgrid, Digital Badges, Google Workplace and Facebook Workplace.

Achievements included ITEC Accreditation in AMETS, ESB Creative Techfest – Roscommon Comhairle na nOg winners, our Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024 launched in June and our 2019 AGM was held virtually for the first time.



Mental Health & Wellbeing programmes: *How U Doin?* A personalised contact programme that ensures young people have regular, one to one access to their Youth Worker to discuss how they are coping with Covid-19 restrictions, impact on family, wellbeing, relationships etc.

Providing reassurance and a friendly, non-judgemental point of contact that is dedicated to their wellbeing.



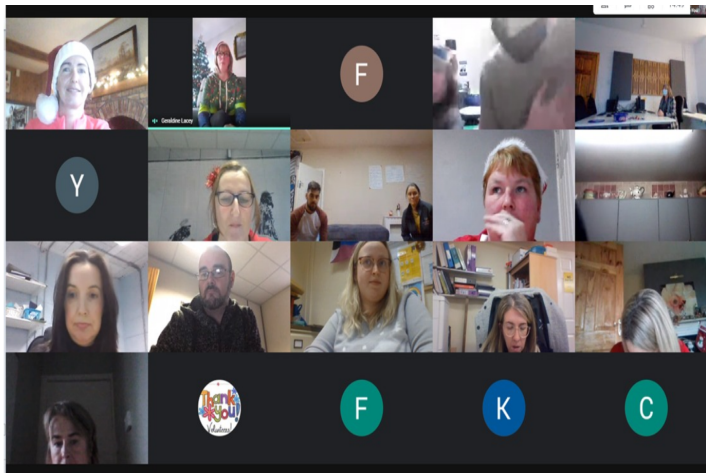
Digital Wellbeing programme - Acquisition of a whole toolkit of physical health maintenance skills and of emotional resilience skills, for life.

A Covid Response for Pathway to reopening was launched in May with a full staff training

event and response plan for reopening safely. All staff, volunteers and community partners worked together to realise a great summer programme across the region despite Covid.



CPD for staff included Train the Trainer QQI 6, and some staff taking on 3rd level Masters programmes in Maynooth University and Trinity.



Our Christmas Staff Event while online, was a great way to wrap up such a varied year- with a bit of fun and laughter on an online game of Jeopardy. There were even prizes so the competition was fierce!

ALF Project

As with the rest of the world 2020 was a year like no other for the young people and the youth workers of the ALF Project. The year started off with a great start with young people taking part in a wide range of programmes through Youth Groups and Individual Work including the design and decoration of a new gaming room in Woodlands Grove Youth Centre, STEM programmes and a Gym Challenge Programme. Young people on the Get Back Programme completed Level 4 modules in Communications, Information Technology and Health Related Fitness and stated Work Experience and Career Planning.

When Covid-19 Restrictions came into place in March, youth workers and young people had to stay at home which had an impact on the planned interventions to be carried out by the ALF Project. During this time, Digital Youth Work was used to try to engage the young people in the activities and the programmes of the ALF Project in order to try to meet the outcomes outlined in the Annual Plan. Some of the interventions used were group video chats, texts, competitions, daily challenges, quizzes, competitions and regular social media posts.

Some of the ways in which outcomes which were met during this time included

- Sharing of information on Social Media about online parenting programmes, Covid-19 restrictions and how other services were operating during this time.
- Facilitating the Get Back Programme (QQI Level 4) online
- Setting up digital youth groups. Young people had the opportunity to take part in Digital activities and interact with other young people and youth workers through group conversations.
- Sharing of information on Social Media re activities eg Couch to 5k, Fishing etc
- Interagency work
- Involving young people in planning activities

However, this work brought challenges to Youth Justice Workers during this time. One of the biggest challenges was young people not having access to the technology and resources to participate in Digital Youth Work. Funding was secured from Longford Westmeath CYPSC to purchase laptops so that young people could continue to participate in Digital Youth Work and Online learning.

Everyone was so happy in June, when the ALF Project returned to face to face youth work. Young people now had the opportunity to participate in both Outdoor and Centre Based activities. Bicycles were one of the best resources used in youth work during this time with young people cycling on the Greenway, cycling to activities and of course Youth Workers carrying out Outreach Youth work on our bikes. Even though the Summer Programme was not the same as other years, activities such as fishing, Outdoor Challenges and Pitch and Putt were equally as enjoyable.

In October 2020 when Level 5 restrictions were imposed, interventions included Digital Youth Work, Outreach Youth Work, Face to Face Youth Work and Remote Youth Work. Some of the methodologies ensured that young people could engage in ALF Project programmes and activities while remaining at home. Cooking, Baking and Creative Arts were very popular with the young people during this time.



Athlone Youth Project

As always January 2020 started off with a great buzz. Motivation was high and plans for activities and programmes were being developed and shared. Young people reengaged for the New Year very well and youth participation was as it always is at a time of planning in a great place.

However the turn came in March 2020 with the arrival of Covid 19. Athlone Youth Project as did all other projects and services found



itself in unknown territory. Initially there was fear, anxiety and a sense of chaos amongst staff and young people but in quite a quick period of time we managed to move, change and adapt our practice in order to continue to engage with young people in Athlone.

Zoom, Messenger, Facebook, Snapchat, Microsoft teams and Whats App were all platforms that became our everyday. Youth groups resumed, one to one support was at an all-time high, team meetings and planning meetings continued online and we continued through lockdown and from our own homes to bring youth services to young people.

As a result of this global pandemic the needs of the young people changed. There was a real focus on health and well being at this time and this was reflected in the Healthy Lifestyles programme, the Well Being at Home Programme and the physical and mental health challenges and competitions that young people participated in. Resources were delivered to young people's homes to allow them to engage in youth work activity remotely and funding was secured to supply IT resources to young people where necessary.

Summer Programme brought us back to face to face youth work and cycling, hikes, walks,



outdoor games, sports days, visits to the local water park, fishing, treasure hunts, orienteering, community development work were all part of our activity plan. A blended programme was the buzz term and young people also took part in Kahoot Quizzes and Zoom quizzes, regional digital competitions, Among Us, Scribb'lo, online Ludo and the old reliable virtual bingo.

Gaisce also adapted and young people continued to participate in the Gaisce at Home Programme. The Get Back

Programme ran both remotely and Face to Face in 2020 and young people progressed through the modules. The UBU Your Place Your Space Programme was introduced in July and with that too came more changes.

Amidst all the madness of 2020 youth work continued. Young people remained connected. 2020 in Athlone Youth Project is definitely one we will all remember.



Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg 2020



Numbers Participating

30 young people aged 12-17 years, male and female, with 25 regular attendees.

Activity in 2020

On March 13th 2020, Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg were supposed to be accepting an invitation to attend an Athlone Town FC game, followed by a celebratory dinner in a local restaurant, however, 2020 had other plans. At a days' notice, along with everyone else in Ireland and most of Europe, Covid-19 forced us to cease all activities, work and plan. Within days work with Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg continued with regular online meetings using Zoom and Whats App. WCNN met at least every 2/3 weeks to continue their work plan, create a plan A,B and C for their AGM 2020 and just to check in as a large group. This was tough at times, but this group showed their dedication, resilience, commitment and went with the flow. Things became a little better as young people returned to school in September 2020 and again showed how fantastic they are by balancing school, Comhairle and social activities.

Once again Comhairle enjoyed the physical meetings happening at this time, in very small numbers, >8 young people per meeting, following strict social distancing protocols and wearing face coverings indoors.

Activity Highlights

Bat Walk and information session – Bat Conservation Ireland. Young people met with a Bat specialist and interviewed her, while participating on a bat walk to observe and record bat activity in County Westmeath. They also video recorded this information to share with young people across Westmeath

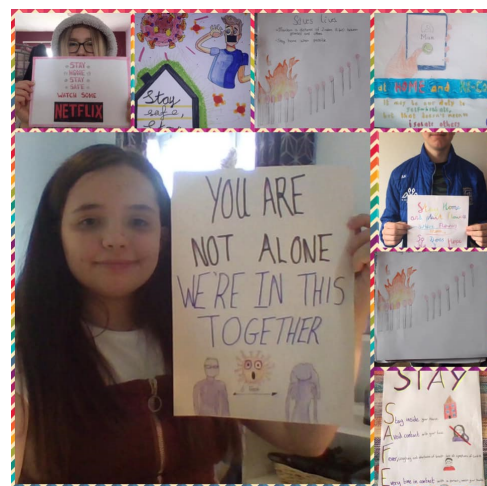


Bee Information Session - Young people met with a Master Keeper from BeeKeepers Ireland. He brought a pseudo hive and educated the young people on the Irish bee, why they are so important, how to protect them, and the way of the bee keeper. They also video recorded this information to share with young people

across Westmeath

Men's Shed bat box making workshop. Young people met with 4 men's sheds from rural and urban Westmeath settings, who created prototypes of bat boxes. They held a workshop and showed the young people how to create a bat box from the pieces of wood they created. They discussed the advantages of having a bat box on their property to protect and encourage bats to be hosted in our gardens. The aim of this workshop is to train the young people to create the bat box, they will be recorded doing this and this will be shared with young people across Westmeath as well as the tools and materials for them to create their very own bat box.

Presentations – young people created a presentation to highlight and showcase the work carried out by WCNN during 2020 to share with young people at their AGM. They talk about the challenges of Covid, the benefits of Comhairle and really reach out to young people to get involved in Comhairle for what they are hoping is a better 2021.



AGM 2020

Comhairle created 3 plans for their AGM, their normal high energy AGM for 300 young people in the Bloomfield House Hotel, 2, a socially distanced physical AGM with less than 100 young people, and 3 and online AGM, the latter was the only option available to them by November 2020, but as disappointed with the outcome of what they could host as they were, the online AGM was a massive success and a great source of learning for them.

Over 180 young people attended from all 13 schools across Westmeath, it was a great mix of informational workshops, fun quizzes and interactive activities. The evaluations were super, and although the young people are not hoping for a repeat in 2021, they learned a lot from hosting such a massive event online (as did their coordinator) and will be ready in the future for any issue that arises.

Athlone Youth Information Service

2020 was a year of highs and lows. Starting normally with internet awareness being a priority in January and February, as always, to teach young people about being safe online after they receive all of their electrical goods off Santy. The numbers of schools and groups engaging with youth information was fantastic, and bookings for information sessions were booking out fast, even up to May 2020.

Then March hit, and our worlds came to a standstill. Within days of learning how severe the Covid-19 situation was, and how young people, particularly the Leaving Cert and Junior Cert classes of 2020, were going to be affected by not being able to attend school or youth clubs/groups, YICHAT was born.

All of the Youth Information Centres across Ireland have always enjoyed a great working relationship with Spunout.ie, and when Covid hit, this partnership was kick started into launching an online, live chat service for young people. Between 4pm and 8pm, Monday to Friday, young people can access a youth information officer live online through a messaging service on Spunout.ie's website. This was in the works already to be launched in 2021, but with hard work from all involved, training was provided, systems and promotions were set up, and by April, young people could "talk" to us in real time.

This proved to be hugely successful, particularly for CAO, SUSI and exam pressure topics. It was also a great way for young people to talk to an adult about the stress, fear and unknown of Covid 19. The queries from young people ranged massively from exams, to housing, employment, social welfare payments, and the odd request for NETFLIX recommendations.

For Athlone YIC, this was the most positive and progressive professional outcome of the pandemic. This service will continue to grow, and will be a source of support to young people long after Covid. All through 2020, when there was specific events, such as leaving cert results, accepting college places, repaying of PUP (Pandemic unemployment payment) etc, you could see the value of the service as traffic on the chat system increased and we had to create extra working hours and provide extra staff for busy times to support young people during these times.

EOLAS DON ÓGRA



YOUTH
INFORMATION



The most fun part of 2020, was all of the new skills that staff got to learn and then utilize, and a number of new and exciting partnerships and programmes were developed. In November Athlone YIC was invited to take part in a Podcast recording in relation to mental health. We participated in the recording of “Westmeath Talks” podcasts with Anthony O Prey (HEALTH PROMOTION OFFICER: MENTAL HEALTH HSE) Malacky Flanagan (Principal, CBS, Mullingar) and YIC’s Edweena Farrell. The theme of this broadcast was “Raising boys” and after a few weeks had 337 downloads, it was a new way to provide information in a conversational style setting.

2020 was the toughest year from everyone personally, professionally, physically, mentally and for sure emotionally, but we survived and in most cases, we thrived. We hope 2021 will bring back normality and stability for our young people.

Mullingar Youth Project

2020 has been a different year at Mullingar Youth Project it has been both challenging and diverse, but we are very proud of our young people, volunteers and staff at how quick everyone was able to adapt to working under the guidance and moving restriction levels which was necessary due to the impact of COVID 19. This also gave us the opportunity to try new outdoor activities locally while also embedding our new UBU Your Place Your Space Project from July 2020. Mullingar Youth Project worked with 300+ young people across the greater Mullingar areas during 2020, and as the new normal became about moving between digital forums, detached youth work, smaller groups and outdoor activities, relationships were strengthened and new adventures happened, young people and staff learned together how to use digital forums, negotiate online schooling apps, cook on zoom and enjoy simple local outdoor activities. The many projects completed in 2020 ensured creativity blossomed, young people were empowered, safe and supported through this time.



Highlights

2020, had many highlights for all in Mullingar Youth Project despite COVID 19, our year and our plans started as normal and while we had to adapt our plans, we are amazed looking back at what was achieved.

Our Building Skills group were one of the first to return to small group, face to face activity and quickly set about constructing outdoor areas and a lean-to in our main center in Grange. The group of young men aged 15 to 22 years planned and developed their project from start to finish with their tutor and are very proud of how their work provided many other young people with an area they could use to reengage and attend activities. The satisfaction of

creating ideas and transforming them into a physical achievement was apparent on the group of young men once the project was complete.



Kayaking and watersports at the local harbor was one way MYP used the local areas for summer 2020, While at the start the young people were apprehensive about participating in the kayaking and watersports their attitude quickly changed to one of delight and enjoyment. The young people quickly realized how enjoyable watersports and kayaking can be.

The smiles and laughter while out on the water was a true reflection of the enjoyment of the young people. The trust built between the instructors and young people will help alleviate the fear of trying out new activities in the future.

A number of outdoor arts & crafts workshops were facilitated with groups over the summer; young people explored their artistic side and expressed themselves through creative design. The group engaged well and learned new techniques through the use of various materials.



With the travel restrictions posing new challenges to MYP it also allowed for new opportunities. It was a chance to explore the local areas and what they can offer when working with young people and how creative and adaptive the staff can become in the face of new challenges. The young people were able to explore the nature of the green way and discover hidden gems that the local area has to offer. The young people also got the chance to try their hand at fishing, cycling and long walks which provided many opportunities for fun and to bring the groups closer together. The football teams hard work and commitment paid off as they won the division one combined football league. This was a true reflection of team work and dedication from the group. A new team was also set up for the U16 following the success of the senior team. The set up of an U16 team provided the young people of the community to develop team bonding skills, the ability to stick to a schedule and a positive outlet.



With Christmas on the horizon, it was an opportunity for the young people to give back to their local community, with that the idea of a social distanced Santa was created. The young people together with the staff of the project worked together and used the gazebo that had been constructed and transformed it in Santa's grotto. The Christmas spirit and team work emulated the finishing touches of socially distanced Santa's grotto and the sheer joy of the local community who benefitted.

Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg 2020



Comhairle na nÓg Induction Training

Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg kicked the year off with Comhairle na nÓg Induction / Junior Youth Leadership Training in Hannon's Hotel, Roscommon Town. The training content included members' hopes & fears, the role of a Comhairle member, leadership skills, listening skills, teamwork, programme planning, committee skills and Gaisce introduction. This training was co-facilitated by young people, who were past members, that continued their participation in RCNN as youth leaders.

ESB Creative Techfest Awards 2020

RCNN won Best Design award for their 'Bury Drugs Not Your Dreams' booklet launch video at ESB Creative Techfest Awards 2020

GAISCE



One young person achieved their Silver Gaisce Award through Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg.

Consultations and Collaborations

- In February, three young people attended a consultation on parenting support. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) alongside the Parenting Support Policy Unit hosted this consultation with young people to ensure that their views are considered.
- Irish Second-Level Students' Union & National Parents Council collaboration return to school survey.
- DCYA and Spunout's 'How's Your Head? - Young Voices During Covid-19' survey.

- Survey on the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive's topic of Climate-Conscious Transport Solutions.
- Survey on the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan.
- Formed a focus group to evaluate Alex's Adventure's newly developed cannabis lesson for SPHE junior cycle.
- Worked with the Irish Second Level Students' Union on their new drug resource entitled 'Glán: Young Choice, Future Issues' which is currently in its second draft.
- Collaborated with Roscommon Children and Young Person's Services Committee on a new mental health services poster.

CYPSC Presentation

Three young people presented to the Roscommon Children and Young People Services Committee in Roscommon's County Buildings in November. The presentation included all RCNN's projects and activities during the previous year and the committees' 2020 work plan followed by a questions & answers session.



Comhairle Members Networking Event

This year's networking event was implemented online in three phases. RCNN members took part in a survey, quiz, digital mural competition and three 'Comhairle Talks' events with special guest speakers Professor John Sweeney, Climatologist & Meteorologist, Jack Kavanagh, Pharmacist & Motivational Speaker and Katy Anchell, Counselling Psychologist.

Equinox

The resilience of young people from Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg (RCNN) and all Youth Work Ireland Midlands youth projects in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic has been incredible.

To tackle this year's mental health topic, RCNN worked on an art project with visual artist Patsy Preston. Patsy cut marine ply into sections to form the piece and members filled it with pictures of native flowers and plants drawn/traced on and painted. The



piece is based around the balance of mental health, nature, and the ecosystem.

When restrictions were eased, RCNN members went on a social distance nature walk with the artist in Lough Key Forest Park for inspiration from nature & the woodland and to boost mental health & morale within the Comhairle during Covid-19. The committee spent two days in Rathcroghan Visitor Centre working on the project with the artist.





AGM 2020

RCNN recruited Slí Nua Careers to facilitate our first online AGM. Fifty-eight young people from six secondary schools in Roscommon attended this year's event. The AGM was opened by Cllr. Laurence Fallon on behalf of Roscommon County Council and featured guest speaker Frankie Feighan T.D., Minister for Minister for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy. Attendees participated in a workshop from Alex's Adventure on substance misuse, presentation from Jigsaw Roscommon.

National Showcase

12 members attended this year's event to showcase their work for the last two years. The event featured MC Doireann O'Garrihy. An Taoiseach, Minister Roderic O'Gorman, Chris Hadfield, Niall Horan, Denise Chaila and Picture This were amongst the contributors at the Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase 2020.

Committees

- RCNN members sat on youth-led committees, working on issues affecting young people.
- Europe – Four RCNN members were accepted as Leargas Eurodesk Ambassadors, delivering youth information, and advising young people on mobility opportunities.
- Ireland – One RCNN member sits on the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive working on the national topic of Climate-Conscious Transport Solutions. One young person sat on the DCYA Youth Forum, developing a new LGBTI+ Strategy for the government.
- Locally, RCNN members have positions on Youth Work Ireland Midlands Youth Forum, and adult committees in County Roscommon, including the Joint Policing Committee, Climate Action Sub-Committee, Galway Roscommon Education Training Board Youth & Arts Committee and Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee.

Volunteer Led Youth Clubs

As every year, 2020 began with a great start as we continued to support a network of 16 affiliated Youth Clubs and Special Interest Groups in Westmeath, Offaly and Roscommon. There were a total of 212 Adult Volunteers impacting over 1500 young people in rural communities on a weekly basis. Then in March, things changed drastically due to the current world situation. As most of the group's venues are community spaces, they had nowhere to meet so therefore had to close like most voluntary and community groups across Ireland. As the year progressed and with lots of uncertainty, the majority of groups went online with activities through zoom, google meets etc. which in itself was challenging! In autumn 2020 we offered "Digital skills, tools, tips and games", which was a 1 hour workshop for all our volunteers. A special thank you to our Service Manager, Tracey Moore, who kindly offered to facilitate the session. In September 2020, Faustina Monaghan joined the Youth Work Ireland Midlands Rural Team on a part-time basis and we thank Faustina for all her hard work since she came on board. We maintained a high level of support to all our clubs and were amazed at their resilience in the current climate and the great work and commitment they gave to their young people.

We held our annual Halloween Costume Competition, which showed great imagination and stage worthy costumes. We also had our annual Christmas Card Competition, where the budding artists in our clubs got to display their talent in great colour, they did amazing, creative work. We received entries from across the three Counties for both competitions and every year the standard gets higher and the judging gets harder.



Athlone Youth Darts Academy

Had a flying start to 2020 having their wings slightly clipped in March, when they had to close, but they were not deterred and reopened their club on Zoom. The Club prepared for their annual Christmas Competition and it was a great success. Group 1 winner went to Kyle Greene who defeated Michael Smyth in the Final. As winner, Kyle was appointed the new Captain of the Westmeath Youth Team. Runner up Michael took the highest check out of 135 and he also hit the highest score of the year in the JDC Routine hitting a massive 1220. Group 2 winner of the Green Zone Competition was Sean Tiernan who overcame John Morris in the Final. Most improved player of the Year went to James Morris.

On a sad note, the club would like to share their deepest condolences to the family of one of our sponsors 'Chinaman' Alan Burke, (sponsor in picture above) on behalf of the Westmeath Youth Darts Team and Athlone Youth Darts Academy. Alan passed away in late 2020. Our thoughts are with his family and he will always be remembered for his generosity and interest in the young people. May he rest in peace.



(Photo was taken pre-covid 19)

A huge big thank you to Seamie Tynan who is the backbone of this club. Also a big thank you to Mark Dolan (who is Seamie's right hand man) for all his help. Well done to Dylan Berry who won a new set of darts for his consistent scoring, thanks to Connor Smyth who donated them. Well done to all our boys who really seemed to enjoy their day, keep up the great darting!!!

Emerald Lakes TTC Group

Emerald Lakes TTC Group have been working hard during the Pandemic in 2020 ending the year on a high and taking Youth Work outdoors. Similar to most groups, Emerald Lakes has been severely impacted in 2020, but this has not stopped the group from being extremely active in the communities of Rochfortbridge, Mullingar and surrounds. The excitement has been building locally with their exciting new project called 'The Voyage' getting underway. Dave Treacy of Killucan and his team arrived into Rochfortbridge with TV cameras and drones to commence outdoor filming of Kevin Lyster's epic production, assisted by Philip Hynes and Marilyn Loran. This new and very creative Cinematic and Theatrical Irish Dance Production is set to take to the state at the Arts Centre in Mullingar late 2021.



'The Voyage' which has been created, written & directed by Kevin Lyster is set to wow audiences like his previous show at the Arts Centre "Forgotten Children" in 1916 which was created by Kevin for the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising. The group have already commenced rehearsals for this new epic Irish Dance Drama, music, song and powerful Irish Dance show. The production is based on the Great Famine from c1847 and promises to bring a powerful and emotional story to the stage and they recreated The Voyage and the Journey to America. The group are filming for the project which will interact with the show with filming taking place at multiple locations in Westmeath including Rochforbridge and Lough Derravaragh. The sheer scale of this production will give the community a sense of what this group are about. The release of the breathtaking Trailer on Social Media has gained tens of thousands of views such is the magnitude of this exciting show.



Ballymore Youth Club

Ballymore Youth Club was in operation up to March 2020 and were busy and in full swing printing t-shirts with very individual artwork. Great fun was had using their new equipment - streaming for rhythmic dancing and throw ball catchers. Club members were making great use of their chill out zone with the new boom box for playing music and their funky luminous speaker – all of this hopefully resuming when the club can meet again. Easter 2020 the young people donated their Easter eggs to the Nursing home in Ballymahon. The residents and staff were delighted and a wonderful gesture from the Club. Currently, they have a new source of fun for outdoor activities with the fabulous playground that was opened in 2020 on the grounds of Ballymore Community Centre which is where they hold weekly meetings with lots of planning for future activities.



CoderDojo Mullingar

As with all other organisations, the pandemic caught them unawares. Remember, in mid-March 2020, everyone thought that the closures of schools and offices (the word ‘lockdown’ wasn’t part of our everyday vocabulary way back then) would last for maybe 2 or 3 weeks, then, everything would be back to normal. So they didn’t have a plan for what to do in the event of not being able to access their usual facilities for an extended period. The weeks rolled on and it became apparent that ‘normal’ wasn’t coming back, so they decided to move things online – of all the organisations for young people, they should be better able than most to do that, right? The reality was slightly bumpier than they imagined; their Zoom account wasn’t as fancy as they had been led to believe, and none of them really had any more experience with delivering content online than anyone else had at the time. As usual, however, they didn’t let little things (like not knowing what they were doing) stop them – it’s the secret of their longevity! They did make some concessions to the format in that, at the time, everyone was finding it more tiring to attend online meetings than an ‘in -person’ one, so they reduced the length of the session to one hour. They decided to try using Google Meet while their Zoom account was being sorted out and they’ve stuck with it as it doesn’t have the 40-minute limit, and assuming you already have the Chrome browser installed, it doesn’t need any other software. All they had to do was set up the meeting and post the link. The



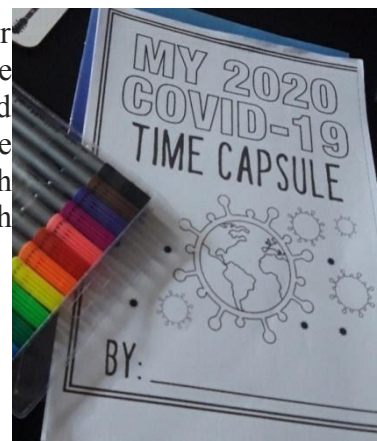
Club's other major concession was that in normal times, they'd be able to walk around the room and interact with members individually, so that someone working on Scratch could be sitting beside someone building a website, or experimenting with robotics. Online, in a group, everyone more or less has to be working on the same thing – it was much harder to divide their focus, and all conversations are group chats. So they decided to start a new 'beginners' group, with everyone working on Scratch.

The first thing they noticed was that the numbers attending were very low. That hasn't changed and they still are not 100% sure why that would be. It is possible that some of the older or more experienced members felt that it wasn't challenging enough for them, and it's also true that some people wouldn't have a suitable computer or internet connection in their homes. Normally they would have PCs available for those who don't have one and most of the things they do don't require an active internet connection – in fact, it's often a distraction in their normal sessions. However, the small cohort who have stuck with it are possibly the most 'in-tune' with the spirit of CoderDojo that they have ever worked with. They are more willing to share what they are doing with the group and to make suggestions to help improve each other's code and learn from each other. There have been other benefits, too – it's easier for them to see exactly what everyone is doing (including the mistakes!) when they can share the screen with them and the smaller numbers mean that everyone (including volunteers) gets to know each other better, and they really hope they come back to the group and carry on in the same vein whenever they are allowed to return to in-person sessions. They have all got much more comfortable with the technology and they can laugh about it when the inevitable glitches happen. In recent weeks they have tried to start a separate-but-concurrent session that would cover Web Development, as an introduction to more 'normal' coding; as yet they haven't had any takers but are hoping that it will encourage some of the older members to return. As usual, if they had more volunteers they could run a more diverse range of activities but we are sure they are not the only group that has this problem! Overall, if they can stick with it for another while, we think they will come out of this pandemic stronger than we started.

St Mary's Youth and Community Centre, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

2020, well we think we can agree it was a challenging time for all. Thankfully, they could engage with their members, continue their programmes and support work online. All their leaders had to upskill in the IT department and were thrilled to join in on the workshops ran by Youth Work Ireland Midlands. All youth services were figuring it out and together they supported each other in supporting their members.

They recognized a sense of isolation especially for the elderly and the younger members of the community and locality. They offered to participate in the community effort by having their leaders making masks and assisting those who may have needed it. The senior members wrote and submitted a poem called "Creation in Isolation" for the Offaly Arts Office. This was an interesting piece of work around their own reflections of Covid 19. It gave them a safe space to express their feelings, frustrations, and concerns during a global pandemic as their usual coping methods had been restricted.





The club members have become masters of “Among Us”, and they patiently taught the Leaders how to play. Some leaders were better than others! It was wonderful for the leaders to learn new skills from the members. Every day is a day for learning, no one person knows everything, they all have strengths and weaknesses - when they work together they can achieve greatness. They were reminded of the importance of team work and learning to embrace the pause through Yoga with Justyna, mindfulness, empowerment and looking after your wellbeing with their junior members.



They were delighted to attempt a variety of treats to bake and creative projects to take on such as bird feeders and dreamcatchers. Encouraged by the fine weather, plenty of solo expeditions into the wilderness of back gardens, canal and forest walks were enhanced by many a scavenger hunt. They held Bingo with the members for fun and they are becoming a “DAB” hand at it. They enjoyed the Bingo evenings hosted by Youth Work Ireland Midlands and even some of our members got to call check!

Thankfully the summer rolled on and they were delighted to have Senior and Junior Summer camps with strict safety measures adhered to, this didn’t dampen their spirits and they had a wonderful time. They engaged with local amenities including kayaking on the canal, trips to the park and their sports day in the rugby club. Mairead ran the art project where they upcycled tyres to add to their colourful outside space. They travelled to Galway and Waterford to cap off fun filled weeks. They held a Positive Mindset through Drama summer camp and this was relished by their Senior Glee group, creating characters, scripts and situations whereby the members developed their emotional literacy, awareness around Positive Mental Health and the importance of healthy expression. Some of the members were interviewed on their involvement and this will be part of a larger piece ran by Laois Offaly ETB and Creative Ireland. This was exciting and inspired them to explore film-editing, and they are working on a short film with great help from Offaly Arts Office. Club members are involved in a youth forum and have attended a number of meetings through Zoom.



This past year has taught them to view life through the filter of empathy, all is not as it seems on social media. This pause has been a positive for many people, reconnecting with family, shift in priorities, less pressure and a return to the simpler things in life. There is value to simplicity, an authenticity, as we learn to focus on what's important, self-love, family, friends and our community. A very special thank you to the management, staff, volunteers and young people who took part over the past challenging year. More good times ahead I'm sure.

So here's to our future, whatever its holds
 Together as one, we are green white and gold
 And here in the faithful, like the phoenix we rise
 From the ashes of Covid, we rebuild, reconnect and we'll thrive.

(Creation in Isolation, St Mary's Youth and Community Centre)



Volunteer Led Youth Clubs Network

for further information or if you would like to set up a club contact:

Eileen at emcardle@youthworkmidlands.org or Faustina at fmonaghan@youthworkmidlands.org

Athlone Youth Darts Academy	Ballymore Youth Club	Ballymore Community Coders	Clara Youth Club
Coder Dojo Mullingar	Coder Dungeon Clonmellon	Edenderry Youth Café & Youth Club	Emerald Lakes Dance & Theatrical Community Group Rochfortbridge
Jordan Juniors Castlejordan	Kinnegad Youth Club	Link Club, Mullingar	Moore Youth Club
Mullingar Charity Variety Group	St. Ciaran's Youth Club, Clonmacnois	St. Mary's Youth Centre and P2B Youth Café, Tullamore	YoYo Youth Café & Youth Club, Mullingar

Here4U

Hear4U is a one to one listening service offered to young people. The service is confidential and offered to any young person that may be going through a tough time and has issues affecting their everyday lives. It is a safe non-judgmental place to talk openly to explore issues with the aim to gain coping tools/skills. It also supports the young person to identify and avail of services that may be of benefit to them. Supporting the young person to identify outside supports can empower them to access such supports at a time of need.



Operating from Regional Office, the Here4U service is community based and also supports young people in 4 Secondary Schools in Offaly and Westmeath.

Student Council & Peer Mentor Programmes

The Peer Mentor and Student Council Programmes are completed in partnership with Rural Youth Clubs and Youth Information. Each year several schools participate in the programme which was developed to complement the long running SOS Transition Programme (Stepping over to Secondary). The main outcome of this programme is that young people entering Secondary School for the first time will have an older mentor to support and guide them. 5th and 6th Year Students apply to become Mentors and Student Council Representatives, an interview process selects the strongest candidates and a Leadership Skills & Effective Communication Training programme follows. 30 young people across 4 Secondary Schools in the region received training to participate in Student Councils and to become Peer Mentors.

Tullamore Youth Project

TYP provides a targeted youth service to young people residing in

the areas of Eiscir Riada, Puttaghan, Tara Crescent, Kilbrook and Arden View. In March 2020, as the country entered into its first 'national lockdown' due to COVID 19, we were challenged to tailor the way we engage young people in programmes and interventions. TYP project staff in consultation with young people,

their families and relevant professionals, commenced training and planning to begin engaging young people via online platforms only. During this time, it was observed that there was an increase in engagement from certain target groups and an absence of some groups who usually attend.



Challenges experienced by young people engaging in online work included; lack of technology/WIFI, lack of private spaces at home to engage and low levels of interest in online work. Benefits of online engagement included, a continuation of support and engagement, a safe space for young people to continue to meet peers and project staff, engagement in activity outside of school work and support managing COVID 19 related stress and concerns. Some of the programmes we delivered online during 2020 included the following; Online games evenings, Bingo, Film Review, Fly Tying, STEAM, Arts and Crafts, Cookery, Gaming groups and bespoke programmes during school breaks such as dance classes. Weekly LGBT workshops and support groups were facilitated alongside regular support with education training/ careers facilitated via 1:1 and small groups online. Throughout 2020, project staff provided activity packs, care packs, activity sheets and prizes for competitions via house drops and post, while providing direct support to young people/families who required additional support/ referral pathways due to crisis situations.

TYP planned programmes in line with government guidelines surrounding outdoor gatherings and the reintroduction of small scaled indoor work. With these changes the project was provided the opportunity to re-engage young people who were identified most in need of



programme delivery in a variety of programmes and activities outdoors. ‘Equine Assisted Personal Development Programme’ was delivered to two groups during this time; ‘Traveller men’s group’ and ‘Senior life skills’ group. This programme was facilitated safely utilising Annaharvey Equestrian centre and maintaining all safety protocols in line with COVID 19 guidelines. Summer programmes took place for all groups with a variety of activities taking place such as; arts and crafts, outdoor games, scavenger hunts, tie dye, pavement art, photography, nature walks, fishing and bingo. Young people adapted well to outdoor work and enjoyed engagement in

activities utilising

community green areas and local open spaces such as the ‘greenway’ canal walk, the town park and Charleville Castle.



As we moved back indoors, we were provided the opportunity to reengage small groups of young people in specific programmes such as driver theory, fly tying, career directions and Music Generation 6 week programme. This ‘window’ between Sept- Dec provided the space for young people who had disengaged from the project due to the closure of the building in March, to re-engage in programmes, some of which remained engaged online when the country returned to level 5 lockdown at the end of the year.

During 2020 TYP was awarded funding to support the development of the LGBTI youth service. This funding provided much needed resources and hours for an LGBTI specific youth worker to focus on expanding the reach of the service. Since this, the LGBTI service at TYP has expanded with several young people engaging weekly from all across Offaly. Partnership work with ‘Outcomers LGBTI support service’ supports the work we do with LGBTI groups. Regular workshops are facilitated for the YP offering support or guidance for any issues they may have, while providing a safe space to meet with peers, allies and trained supportive adults.



While challenging, this year has provided the opportunity for project staff at TYP to re-evaluate how we work, upskill and become more creative with regards to the programmes we deliver and methods of engagement. It was observed during 2020 that young people respond very well to a blended approach of youth work and prompting us to identify the elements of our new way of working that will remain in place post Covid. Online and outdoor work carry several

benefits' and is now the first choice of engagement for some of our youth participants, while for others, their youth space is pivotal to their engagement, so we continue to look forward and strive towards the safe delivery of a youth service that is inclusive and supportive to all needs and preferences.

EYE Project

Food parcel deliveries for our young people's families in need



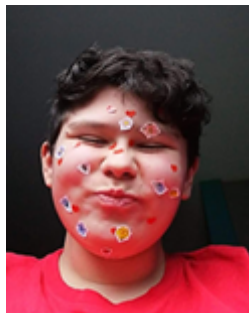
Food parcels bought, packed and delivered to 35 of the most at-risk families we work with in a joint Community Call effort with EYE and MYP.

BAM! Body and Mind

QQI/Exercise/Mindfulness Programme. Online fitness sessions focusing on achieving a healthy body as well as mindfulness and goal setting to

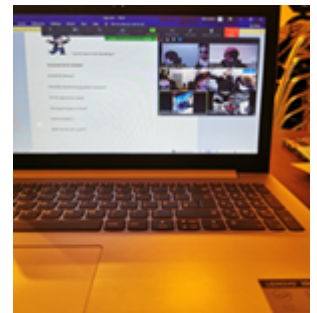
help young people form positive routines.

Songwriting Session where musicians, youth workers and young people all gathered in Pre-Covid 2020. Their creative collaborative minds got to work and produced amazing songs which then resulted in a production of the Music Jam originals album later this year.



Online Clubs

Online & limited numbers of face-to-face clubs were a massive attraction in 2020. Mullingar EYE & YoYo Café combined with MYP continued to keep the social interaction going with young people. Young people joined us from home in cooking competitions, quizzes, games and challenges, yoga & meditation.



Music Jam Originals: 20 young people wrote and recorded original songs to make our 1st Music Jam Originals Album in summer 2020, this Album was a massive success and songs were streamed all over social media platforms as well as the midlands radio were some of the young people got to share their experience through a radio interview.



YOYO POP is one of our joint initiatives with Mullingar EYE & YoYo Youth Café. Aimed at Young People who had successfully progressed through EYE's development programmes. This experiential vocational training & life planning programme had an 80% progression rate with graduates moving onto employment and crucially retaining their jobs.

Recreational Activities



When face to face youth work returned, we cycled, cooked, made music, had BBQ's, we got into lots of sports, fishing, & created a pop up café in an old horse trailer and made the most out of the great outdoors.



COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

2020 commenced as usual with plans for an active year for young people and community employment participants alike. Training and development was ongoing and all staff were actively engaged in the usual hype of youth work across the region.

While it is not unusual to adapt to department protocols, Covid19 stopped us all in our tracks and we paused – but only for a minute! DEASP's efforts to continue support to sponsors like Youth Work Ireland Midlands was mirrored in the support we put in place to hold participant welfare and development throughout a very inconsistent year. Our fantastic participants showed great resilience and adaptability, matching our own pivots to youth work delivery across a range of online platforms and new programmes.

We also welcomed a new Assistant CE Supervisor to the team, Mary Mulvany joined us in October and quickly became a valuable support and team member to us all.

Our Community Employment Scheme continued to thrive with many new skill sets and achievements despite lockdown and restrictions on our work. The Youth Work training continued with online delivery showing that learning still took place and nearly 30 QQI awards were achieved across the CE Team. Many participants broadened their learning in areas of Special Needs assisting, Health Care and LGBTI themes.

The CE Progression to Employment Programme also went online supporting participants in CV development, Interview coaching and gaining employment.

Our Community Employment Scheme placed 32 participants across roles in Youth work, Administration and Caretaking of premises within the organisation. We had successful progression for 4 participants to full time employment – despite Covid challenges.

International Programmes

The year commenced with great intentions of exploring new learning pathways on training courses and youth exchanges to Greece and Italy. With Covid's early intervention putting a halt to any European visits, we were lucky enough to complete a study visit to the Netherlands in February to fortify partnerships with our Dutch network for European Solidarity Corps.

As restrictions eased from September, we supported 3 Irish young people to participate in volunteering projects in Croatia, Italy and Greece. All projects took place successfully in line with each country's Covid protocols.



Frances Hayden – Croatia



Ashleigh Craig - Italy

European Project work was paused from March until October but continuous training and attendance at EU updates is ongoing.

FUSION Project

FUSION, like all youth work projects, had an unexpected year in 2020. In early 2020 the project had been chosen by District Court Judge Catherine Staines for financial support for young people to participate in the Tall Ships Programme, we had commenced working with a group of young people who had expressed an interest in learning to sail. 6 young people were chosen. The Coordinator of the Tall Ships Programme felt that 2 participants on each sail would suffice to enable the young people to build positive relationships with their peers and staff on board. Each young person had to complete a short application as to why they wanted

to complete the Tall Ship voyages. Judge Staines agreed to fund the 6 young people with a nominal amount being contributed by the participants.

How quick our excitement and hopes were dashed as two weeks later just as we were to visit Dublin and view the boats Covid 19 hit and we all had to revert to a new way of working. What was hoped to be two weeks resulted in a long 3 month lockdown.

FUSION adapted by working online and remotely. Staff now had to host weekly meetings through phone calls and learn what Zoom and Google hangouts were all about. Staff checked in with young people through Gaisce Sa Bhaile, setting little tasks

every week for the young people to get them out and active and keep them engaged. Working remotely or online wasn't all success as the assumption that young people all had smartphones and internet access proved not to be the case. A lot of the young people were not as privileged as thought. However from connections with School Completion a laptop was sourced for one youth who lived in a foster placement to assist him complete his Iscoil with assistance from staff and gain his full accreditation.



FUSION also delivered food packs and care packs with the School Completion support worker and it was a great opportunity, socially distanced, to meet the young people and see how lockdown was treating them.

FUSION returned to face to face work with young people socially distanced and with a purpose built canopy outside allowing more outdoor work to be achieved. Young people returned on a one to one educational setting while group work was reduced to 5. The young people struggled at first with the wearing of face masks and appropriate hygiene but adapted well and weather permitting we used the chance to get out and use the town park and Charleville.

We assisted young people reengage in school and encouraged third years to continue engaging to ensure they didn't miss out on their Junior Certificate. There was a lot of anxiety around Covid and the Hear4U Programme was very popular along with the Suspension Intervention Programme. Utilising the new outdoor space, home tuition was also facilitated for social inclusion for young people. FUSION was also able to facilitate a Nail Art Programme for our girls and they loved learning how to apply and decorate nails.

For Christmas FUSION held little Christmas parties with food from Supermacs and a gift of a hoodie to reward the young people for their achievements in a hard year. A hard and challenging year for all but thankfully all survived.

Acorn Midlands Education & Training Service (AMETS)

The Education Programme went from strength to strength even through the lockdown. Our tutors and learners quickly adapted to the online system and all of our courses were able to continue.

We received an equipment grant from LOETB to enable us to purchase Laptops to loan to those learners who had no access to one. AMETS became ITEC accredited in 2020 and we are looking forward to the role out of may ITEC courses in 2021 including Beauty, Make-up Artistry and Nail Technology



Edenderry Youth Café

We had a great start to 2020 with our Youth Action Group nominated for a Garda Youth Award, programmes and clubs were going great with trips planned etc. Then like all other clubs we were online – although this was a struggle to begin we came through with and adapted our way of working. With quizzes, baking, games and all sorts our clubs continued and our young people took part each week.



Teach na nOg

Our clubs ran a Come Dine with Me Programme learning a different recipe each week and then sitting as a group and sharing the meal. We also started a darts club which was a huge success with the boys.

During lockdown our building got renovated with new windows, doors and heating system. Our annual Candle Light Ceremony still went ahead although it was different without the people of the community being able to attend. Our young people thought it was more important than ever to light a candle for each house in the community to signify the Hope that 2021 will bring



The Acorn Project

The staff and the young people of the project worked well in 2020 to ensure that the work that is normally carried out continued, although a little different. With the help of a grant from LOETB we were able to purchase laptops for our young people to ensure that the connection remained with them. The young people continued with their Personal Development and their QQI modules during lockdown.

Acknowledgements



Offaly County Council
Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí

WESTMEATH
COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA h-IARMHÍ



Comhairle Contae
Ros Comáin
Roscommon
County Council



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice



European Union
European
Social Fund



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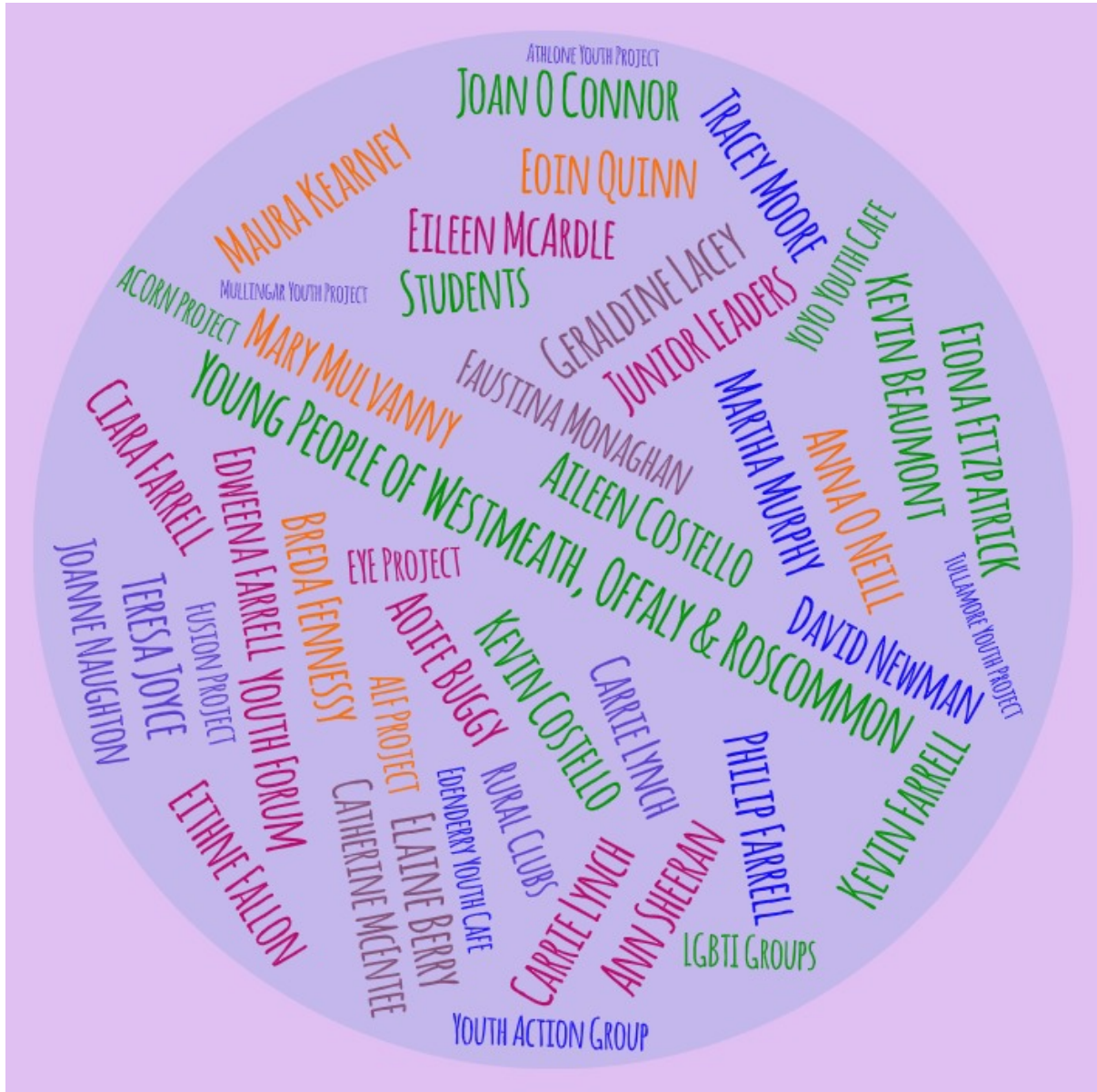
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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



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