

# HOW IRISH COMMUNITIES STEPPED UP TO THE MARK

## STORIES OF IRISH VOLUNTEERING DURING COVID-19



Supported by the



**An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail**  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development

# Introduction

Volunteer Ireland believe that people can fulfil their potential through volunteering and that volunteering contributes to healthier and more resilient communities. Volunteering has the power to transform our world for the better and this has been evident more than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. This collection of stories provides a snapshot of the immense positive impact that the volunteers of Ireland made during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 with the support of their local Volunteer Centres, Volunteering Information Services and Volunteer Ireland.

Across Ireland, both informal and formal volunteering occurs every day with over 1 million people giving their time each year. Health, education, sport and social care all depend on the continued efforts of volunteers devoting their skills, time and energy towards those in need.

During this national crisis volunteers were central to how we as a community stepped up to the mark. On the national volunteering database I-VOL alone, over 20,000 people signed up to offer their support. The range of efforts displayed within this document are a testament to their *Meitheal*.

Behind the scenes, Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres worked hard to support volunteers and organisations throughout this time offering guidance, training and extra support.

We hope this serves as an insight into the spirit of volunteering, its beneficial impact in our communities and the possibilities for Ireland if we continue to build on this foundation.

*Nina Arwitz*

NINA ARWITZ

# Contents

<b>THE NETWORK'S RESPONSE</b>	<b>4</b>
THE COMMUNITY CALL	5
TRAINING AND RESOURCES	6
#VOLUNTEERFROMHOME	7
BUSINESS ADVICE PROGRAMME	8
CRITICAL	9
AGE ACTION HOME SAFE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME	16
ALONE	18
NETWORK CASE STUDIES	20
FINGAL RESTART FINGAL – MALAHIDE STREET AMBASSADORS	21
GALWAY COMMUNITY RESPONSE	22
LOUTH #LOUTHLANDOFLEGENDS	23
A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE – CORK	24
AN ORGANISATION'S PERSPECTIVE – VOLUNTEERING IN SOUTH DUBLIN	26
KILDARE SUPPORTING THE FRONTLINE	28
TIPPERARY VOLUNTEER INTERPRETERS	29
CLARE CLARE COMMUNITY RESPONSE	30
<b>HEALTH</b>	<b>32</b>
SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY TALLAGHT TEST CENTRE	33
DUBLIN CITY – PERSPECTIVE OF A TESTING CENTRE VOLUNTEER	35
CAVAN CIVIL DEFENCE VOLUNTEERS	38
SLIGO MENTAL HEALTH MENTORING	39
KERRY IRISH RED CROSS	40
PPE INITIATIVES	42
LONGFORD	42
WATERFORD	43
MEATH - MASKS 4 ALL IRELAND	44
TIPPERARY – PARTNERING WITH LOCAL INDUSTRY	44
WICKLOW	45
KERRY	46

<b>SOCIAL ISOLATION</b>	<b>50</b>
DONEGAL CONNECTING DISABILITY GROUPS	51
MEATH BEFRIENDING SERVICE	51
DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN ACTIVE RETIREMENT	52
CARLOW LETTERS TO NURSING HOMES	53
KILDARE OLDER VOICES	54
ROSCOMMON LETTERS OF HOPE	55
WEXFORD LETTERS FROM HOME	55
WEXFORD – DOG WALKING	56
MONAGHAN GOOD MORNING MONAGHAN	56
LEITRIM FÁILTE ISTEACH	57
DÚN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN COVID CRAFTERS	58
<b>SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE</b>	<b>60</b>
LAOIS HOPE FOR LAOIS PROJECT	61
MONAGHAN TRUAGH DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION'S COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME	62
CORK FARRANREE MEALS ON WHEELS	63
DONEGAL CHEFAID	64
TIPPERARY NENAGH RED CROSS	65
LEITRIM FOOD CLOUD	66
MONAGHAN DAILY NEWS DELIVERY	66
MEATH FOOD INITIATIVE	67
LIMERICK RESPONSE TEAMS	68
KERRY MEALS ON WHEELS	69
DÚN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN MEALS ON WHEELS	72
<b>CULTURE</b>	<b>74</b>
CLARE CARRIGORAN'S CALL FOR TALENT	75
DUBLIN CITY BOOK DELIVERY SCHEME	76
LEITRIM EDUCATIONAL DELIVERIES	77
DUBLIN CITY STREET AMBASSADOR'S PROGRAMME	78
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>80</b>

# The Network's Response

Faced with an unprecedented health crisis, Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services were tasked by the Department of Rural and Community Development to mobilise volunteers to support the community response to COVID-19.

About 84,000 people were registered on the national volunteering database, I-VOL, before the crisis. On 13 March, Volunteer Ireland sent out an email to those volunteers to ascertain if they would be willing and capable to assist in the crisis, and new volunteers were also recruited through other channels such as social media. The database quickly grew to 105,000 volunteers, with over 20,000 expressing an interest to volunteer in response to COVID-19. Those volunteers were asked to fill out a form with further information on their availability, skills and health, in order to facilitate matching them to the right role.

Across the country as the HSE and essential services worked tirelessly to respond, the voluntary community stepped up to deliver local physical and social support where it was needed. The network of Volunteer Centres, Volunteering Information Services and Volunteer Ireland aided these grassroots efforts by supporting, engaging and building capacity in communities to be able to respond to Covid-19.

## The Community Call

As part of the government response to the COVID-19 crisis, each local authority established a COVID-19 Community Call Forum. Each local forum was a collaboration between state agencies and community and voluntary groups to provide supports or services to any vulnerable person who needed them. They included a range of stakeholders such as An Garda Síochána, the HSE and the network of Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services. Volunteers were integral to the Community Call, providing many services such as:

- ❑ Shopping for food, fuel and other essential household items
- ❑ Delivery of hot meals through local Meals on Wheels services
- ❑ Transport to medical appointments
- ❑ Collection of prescribed medicines

National and local phone hotlines were rapidly established to manage requests for a range of essential supports. Many of these supports were delivered by volunteers from local organisations such as Meals on Wheels and the GAA. The need for many previously active volunteers to cocoon as a result of the restrictive public health measures meant that new volunteers were recruited with the support of local Volunteer Centres.

While local Volunteer Centres recruited volunteers for the Community Call, they also provided expert advice on best practice in volunteer management, advising on areas like training, recruitment and Garda vetting.

## Training and Resources

At the onset of COVID-19, Volunteer Ireland recognised a need to provide increased support to volunteer involving organisations, volunteer managers and the network of Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services. A suite of resources aimed at both volunteers and organisations specific to the challenges faced during the pandemic was quickly developed. Topics included volunteering safely; a guide to informal volunteering; managing volunteers in an emergency; and Garda vetting during COVID-19. These downloadable guides were complemented by a video series on organising volunteers during an emergency.

Additionally, a number of webinars were created to impart the fundamentals of volunteer management during an emergency. Weekly webinars on key topics like managing risk and moving your volunteer programme online meant that organisations could access timely support to help them manage their volunteers in the current climate. With over 850 attendees across 19 webinars, this service was highly valued by many struggling organisations. In addition, eight webinars were delivered for external partners located both domestically and internationally.

Volunteer Ireland also hosted weekly virtual coffee mornings that allowed volunteer managers to connect with their peers, share advice and make social connections missing from the new remote way of working. These coffee mornings featured guest speakers from national volunteering organisations across Europe and allowed further sharing of expertise and solidarity.

Volunteer Ireland

# FUNDAMENTALS OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

Participant Feedback 1 April - 20 July 2020

## 19 WEBINARS

The number of COVID-19 specific webinars delivered by Volunteer Ireland since April 1. Designed and developed in house and in collaboration with volunteer development organisations in Canada, Israel and New Zealand.



## 851 ATTENDEES

Volunteer Managers (paid and unpaid) from over 387 different volunteer involving organisations from Ireland and 15 different countries

## 16 VOLUNTEER MANAGERS COFFEE BREAKS

A chance for 257 Volunteer Managers to network informally and interact with fellow colleagues from Ireland and overseas. Input from Volunteer Management specialists from across Europe.



# AVERAGE RATING OF 4.7 OUT OF 5

Sources: Eventbrite & SurveyMonkey

Read more at [volunteer.ie/training](https://volunteer.ie/training)

supporting volunteering in Ireland



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



## #Volunteerfromhome

As the country entered phases of tightening restrictions, the opportunities to volunteer were reduced as people were encouraged to stay at home and limit their activity to helping friends and family. Volunteer Ireland wanted to ensure people could still help the many organisations in need, both those responding to COVID-19 and those trying to maintain existing services. At the same time, it was important for volunteers' mental health and well-being to stay active and involved.

On 15th April, the #volunteerfromhome campaign was launched<sup>1</sup>. The campaign's aim was to share the diverse ways people can volunteer from home including micro volunteering, virtual volunteering and even some physical volunteering roles. The campaign saw people respond directly to the pandemic in many ways such as making masks for vulnerable members of the community and writing letters to nursing home residents. It also gave people an opportunity to take their mind off the situation and volunteer in other ways such as helping conservation projects by counting flowers and bees in their own gardens.

As part of the campaign, a #spruceupyourstreet element was also launched encouraging people to think about how they could make small improvements in their neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> The campaign also supported organisations to move to managing their volunteer programme remotely and to think about how they could engage volunteers from home. It shared stories of volunteering and volunteer management from home along with tips and advice.



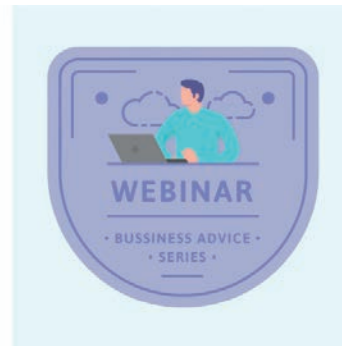
1 <https://www.volunteer.ie/volunteers/volunteer-from-home/>

2 [https://www.volunteer.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2020/05/Spruce\\_Up\\_Your\\_Street\\_v3.pdf](https://www.volunteer.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2020/05/Spruce_Up_Your_Street_v3.pdf)

# Business Advice Programme

In response to the crisis, Volunteer Ireland's corporate programme launched a new Business Advice Programme giving employee volunteers the opportunity to share their business knowledge, experience and expertise with the community and voluntary sector via their company's employee volunteer programme. The team worked with community organisations to identify their business needs and devised three ways that employee volunteers could offer their support virtually:

1. **Business Advice Call:** Advice on a business topic specific to the community organisation's current needs.
2. **Business Project Support & Development:** Support on well-defined but more in-depth and longer-term project specific to the community organisation's business needs.
3. **Business Webinars:** Covering topics of interest to a wider group of community organisations both during COVID-19 and beyond.



## CRITiCALL

The lockdown made life difficult, but it became clear that for many, it had pushed unhealthy and abusive living situations to a breaking point.

Under Operation Faoisimh/#StillHere, An Garda Síochána recorded a 25-30% increase in reports of domestic abuse during the pandemic compared to the same period in 2019. Many refuges quickly reached their full capacity, which was further compounded by reduced space with social distancing.

Staff from Dublin City Volunteer Centre and St Patrick's Cathedral began discussing opportunities in April that people could do from home, supporting the #StillHere campaign. With the additional support of Safe Ireland they developed ways for the public to help in practical ways. Thus, the CRITiCALL initiative was born.

The campaign began by asking members of the public to:

- ❑ Contribute holiday homes as temporary refuges/safe havens;
- ❑ Write letters of courage and hope to victims of abuse; and
- ❑ Donate practical supplies to help those in need.

As well as developing the roles for I-VOL, Dublin City VC also provided an administrative backbone, communicating with all participants and handling emails and phone calls from the public.

As part of the pilot, three other Dublin Volunteer Centres and Wicklow Volunteer Centre came on board to expand the reach of the appeal, while *Serve the City* joined as a community partner to manage volunteers. The *Iveagh Trust* generously provided a space for donations to be stored and sorted, while a local Community Guard served as a crucial link for safely delivering donations out to the refuges weekly. In addition, donors themselves reached out to their networks of friends and family directly to widen their range of possible donations.



[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

*CRITICALL* was launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> June to great support nationally. Dublin City VC hosted a forum for interested members of the Volunteer Ireland network on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, outlining the project and inviting other Volunteer Centres to develop their own programme, shaped around local contexts and needs.

The Louth Volunteer Centre team attended the forum and were surprised to hear that the *CRITICALL* Dublin pilot had supplied care packs to Louth-based domestic abuse support services and set about creating a *CRITICALL* initiative in Louth.

The Dublin City VC and *CRITICALL* team connected them with *Safe Ireland* and local services. Once the Louth team could see there was a real need for targeted practical supports to the two services in Louth – *Drogheda Women and Children's Refuge* and *Women's Aid Dundalk* - they set about establishing their own campaign. New partnerships were established with *Scouting Ireland Louth* troops in both Drogheda and Dundalk, who provided their dens as collection centres and members to man the centres. The Louth *CRITICALL* campaign was launched on the 8<sup>th</sup> July to a flurry of local media attention. Subsequent community partnerships led to local *Red Cross* branches supporting the campaign by providing 50 donated bedding packs to local services and offering their vehicles to transport donations to services. For Louth Volunteer Centre, *CRITICALL* showcased the benefits of being part of an independent network that fostered sharing of best practices and knowledge on the ground.

*"This [letter/drawings campaign] will be my opportunity to talk to my kids about domestic abuse in a simple way..."*

**(CRITICALL donor, June 2020)**

*"I just thought of everything I would want, if I had to run out of the house with my baby in my arms when I put together my donation..."*

**(CRITICALL donor, July 2020)**



As of early September, from the Dublin hub alone more than 1,700 hampers, 180 letters and over 500 volunteer hours had been donated. The collaboration not only generated a wealth of practical supports; but it raised grassroots awareness of domestic abuse through the actions of so many volunteers.

*CRITICAL* continues to grow nationally and it is hoped that it will continue to do so long into the future. As of September 2020, a branch in Kildare is well established and branches are being established in Cork and Sligo. The resilience and generosity of Irish communities to help those in need is a testament to the character of Irish society.

### Quote from the manager of Bray Women's Refuge:

*"With the vouchers you have provided, we have been able to provide support to mums to enable them to buy essentials and presents (online) for children to mark birthdays and such like – it may seem like such a small thing to many but to these few mothers and children it is often 'the world'! As a service we have used vouchers to purchase essentials like cot sheets and blankets which always seem to disappear! The bedding, towels and cushions which were donated were provided to a number of families when moving on from refuge into their own new accommodation, all gratefully received and went a significant way to providing such simple, essential support. ... Thank you so much for the amazing support CRITICALL has provided over recent months – it has truly been invaluable to this and I imagine so many other services."*

## Irish Cancer Society National Volunteer Driver Recruitment

The introduction of restrictions and cocooning for over 70s at the end of March, meant that many of *Irish Cancer Society's* (ICS) existing volunteer drivers needed to stay at home and were unavailable to assist with transport needs of cancer patients. ICS urgently needed to recruit 165 new volunteers based in 11 counties, to continue to deliver their service around the country.

Given the urgency of the matter, ICS needed additional support with the recruitment process, managing volunteer applications, completing screening calls and reference checking.



*"We reached out to Dublin City Volunteer Centre who swiftly helped us to put together a recruitment plan and acted as the main contact for the relevant Volunteer Centres around the country.*

*The Volunteer Centres took on the responsibility to receive all expressions of interest, handle submission of completed application forms, screen all relevant applicants and conduct two references checks for each volunteer, using our guidelines."*

**Mary Quinn,  
ICS Volunteer Manager**



Dublin City VC worked with the ICS Volunteer Manager to finalise the recruitment documents and role advertisements for the I-VOL national database. The Dublin City VC liaised with each of the 11 Volunteer Centres in other counties to brief them on the process, provide information and deal with any queries during the campaign; as well as advertise opportunities on I-VOL to recruit volunteers locally in their county. Online files and folders were set up to facilitate these changes allowing individual VCs to collaborate in real time with the ICS.

### **The ICS Volunteer Driver recruitment campaign kicked off on 1st April and ran for three weeks:**

- 1. Volunteer Centres actively promoted** the role to people who had registered to assist with the COVID-19 community response and those interested in driving opportunities.
- 2. 330 people expressed an interest** through I-VOL, an amazing response to the adverts.
- 3. 172 volunteers have been selected** and processed by Volunteer Centres, ready for training to begin volunteering with ICS.

*"New drivers are already undertaking online training and will soon take to the roads, bringing patients safely to their appointments.*

*This coordinated, professional and reliable approach to volunteer recruitment is so appreciated by all at the Irish Cancer Society."*

**Mary Quinn, ICS Volunteer Manager**



## Age Action Home Safe National Volunteer Programme

Age Action saw a need to support older people to be able to transition quickly out of hospital, back into their own home and ensure a safe environment for them. This would also assist hospitals to focus on responding to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Older people often have reduced mobility after a hospital stay and adaptations to the home can be necessary to accommodate this. Home Safe would assist with tasks such as moving a bed downstairs, moving other furniture, installing grab rails, maintaining a garden or pathways, clearing clutter and completing other small repairs to make the home environment safer.

As a result of the COVID-19 safety protocols, the majority of their existing volunteers were self-isolating and unavailable to volunteer. Age Action urgently required new volunteers to be able to provide such a vital service at a time when it was most needed.

*“Age Action had a dedicated team of volunteers in place for our Care & Repair / Home Safe programme. However, our new safety protocols for visiting older people’s homes during the COVID-19 pandemic included restrictions on involving volunteers over 60 years of age and those with an underlying health condition. Over 90% of our volunteers were suddenly unavailable. This left us unable to provide a service at a time when it was most needed.”*

**John O’Mahony, Home Safe National Development Manager**

In response to increasing demand for the service, *Age Action* wanted to focus recruitment in Dublin and Cork and requested additional support from the Volunteer Centres to manage the process: return of applications, complete screening calls and reference checking.

**The Age Action Home Safe recruitment campaign kicked off on 31st March 2020 and ran for three weeks:**

1. Dublin City and Cork VCs actively promoted the role to people who had registered to assist with the COVID-19 community response and those interested in DIY / practical activities.
2. **202 people expressed an interest** through I-VOL (155 in Dublin and 47 in Cork).
3. **37 volunteers were selected** and processed by DCVC (27 for Dublin, 10 for Cork), ready for garda vetting and training to begin volunteering with Age Action.

**Age Action Service Users:**

*"The people who called were both gentlemen. I can't describe what it means to be able to sit with the sun on my face in the garden."*

Mary, Dublin

*"Thanks to Age Action and the man who fixed my side door. It is in perfect working order once again and thanks for coming out so quickly."*

Maura, Cork

*"We received enormous support from the Volunteer Centre, as they advertised the role, handled all applications, carried out screening and followed up on reference checks, in line with our guidelines.*

*Their support and professionalism is to be applauded, we are extremely grateful for their help in lightening our load during the response to the COVID-19 crisis."*

**Pina Attanasio, Age Action National Volunteer Manager**

### ALONE

Due to and since COVID-19, a variety of new volunteer roles in ALONE have been created to accommodate services required. ALONE responded quickly to create and develop all new training content and modules online. The organisation saw a need to support older people by implementing a seven-day a week service which included the introduction of a new 12-hour a day National Support Helpline with volunteers playing a vital role. The National Support Helpline is to complement the clinical advice and information being provided by the HSE through its website and helpline.

Support and Befriending volunteers continued to keep in touch and support older people during this difficult period. Visitation volunteers moved their visits to regular phone calls throughout the initial period while also continuing to provide practical supports such as help with shopping and collecting goods.

ALONE's Telephone Service provided companionship and support to older people before, but most importantly, during the pandemic. This subsequently included the launch of a brand new telephone service in Kilkenny. All Telephone Support volunteers are now working remotely to

deliver this service which enabled the number of volunteers involved to double in the last 6 months.

Since COVID-19 began, volunteer interest from around the country has risen considerably. ALONE have received an expression of interest from a notable **5,000** people in order to support ALONE – from all 26 counties.

Throughout the pandemic ALONE has worked closely with Volunteer Ireland – for the benefit of the organisation or to assist the Government.

*“Both Volunteer Ireland and the local Volunteer Centres have been a huge help to ALONE during this period. They have been there to help assist with volunteer role descriptions, recruitment and general support. They are a wonderful group of people who really care deeply about their roles and want to help each organisation in a kind and professional manner”*

**Cian Galvin, Volunteer Manager**



# Network Case Studies

---

Stories of Irish  
volunteering  
during COVID-19

[← BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

# Network Case Studies

Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services across the country provided vital support to organisations throughout the pandemic. From fast tracked Garda vetting to extra administrative support around recruitment, and perhaps most importantly a friendly ear and advice. Many organisations, some run solely by volunteers, understandably struggled to adapt to such sudden changes. Local VCs and VISs supported them to adapt and engage their existing volunteers in new ways or recruit new volunteers where necessary. Without this support, many organisations would simply have been overwhelmed.

## Fingal

### Restart Fingal – Malahide Street Ambassadors

COVID-19 restrictions triggered a resurgence in walking and cycling in towns and villages. Fingal County Council led a 10-week pilot initiative to transform Malahide's New Street into a pedestrian-friendly zone as part of Restart Fingal campaign to help businesses and the local economy get back on their feet. This picturesque street, home to shops, boutiques, restaurants, cafes and bars was given back to the people to explore and enjoy.

Having worked on many events across Fingal over the years, Fingal Volunteer Centre Event Volunteers were once again “out on the streets” whilst maintaining a safe social distance and following HSE guidelines. Between June and August 2020, over 50 volunteers were recruited as weekend Street Ambassadors to assist the Restart Fingal initiative and promotion of over 170 Malahide businesses to both locals and visitors and encourage them shop local and enjoy Malahide. Additionally, volunteers also welcomed anybody visiting Malahide village, assisted with directions and collected feedback regarding pedestrianisation of the street and overall greatly contributed to the Restart Fingal campaign. Fingal Volunteer Centre recruited and managed many new and existing Event Volunteers and also welcomed volunteers from Dublin who had already volunteered as Dublin City Street Ambassador Volunteers when Dublin City reopened.



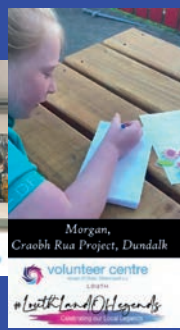
# Galway

## Community Response

Galway Volunteer Centre responded to the needs of the local community in a variety of ways. They engaged with the Galway City Community Response Forum daily. The VC sourced existing volunteers from local groups such as *Community First Responders*, *Claddagh Watch*, and *Serve the City Galway* to carry out shopping requests on behalf of vulnerable members of the community. They developed a volunteer portal where shopping tasks could be shared with volunteers and volunteers could select tasks that fall within a 2km radius of their home, all within safety guidance. Additionally, the VC provided its normal vetting service for free to any groups who needed volunteers vetted for COVID-19 response activities. They sourced volunteers for the *Irish Cancer Society* who urgently needed assistance to transport patients to treatment appointments; and also sourced digital media volunteers to assist *Galway Autism Partnership* to develop online materials for their clients.

Galway Volunteer Centre used its “This is Community!” [podcast](#) to broadcast conversations with volunteers and staff in organisations who had been active during the crisis e.g. *COPE Galway*, *Helplink Mental Health* and *Blood Bike West*. They also secured radio time for these groups on Galway Bay FM to raise the profile of their work.





# Louth

## #LouthLandofLegends

Under “normal” circumstances, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020 would have been the start of National Volunteering Week. It was also the first day of the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening Ireland. The team in Louth Volunteer Centre did not want to let this date go by without recognising and raising awareness of the fabulous volunteer response to COVID-19.

Their #LouthLandofLegends campaign, a play on the Louth “Land of Legends” tourism slogan, featured local Louth legends from the worlds of sport, music and entertainment sending messages of thanks to volunteers and daily stories of the true legends, volunteers. The campaign raised awareness of the breadth of activities volunteers were involved in and the sense of gratitude their community had for this contribution.

*“We were blown away by the positive response to this campaign. We had no difficulties getting local celebrities such as Rob Kearney, Deirdre O’Kane, Johnny Logan and Gavin Duffy to participate – they were only too delighted to give their thanks to volunteers. We had a bit more difficulty persuading volunteers to tell their story – volunteers tend to be bad at self-promotion! However, we knew the amazing work that was going on all around the County and got a good cross section of stories. Feedback from the public was that they didn’t realise how much was going on behind the scenes in terms of volunteer contribution so the campaign was really worthwhile from that perspective.”*

**Gráinne Berrill, Louth Volunteer Centre Manager**

## A volunteer's perspective – Cork

Sinead Crowley volunteered with both *Meals on Wheels* and *Darkness into Light* in Clonakilty, County Cork. She gave a first-hand account of volunteering during COVID-19.

*“COVID-19 changed my volunteering in the community. Having an underlying health issue means I’m restricted in some ways, and also following the necessary Government guidelines changed the whole running and hosting of events.*

*As Secretary of Darkness into Light Walk in Clonakilty, and in months where we would have been having regular meetings to organise the walk and registrations locally for Pieta House, the walk as well as all other events were postponed. This decision was essential. It was very important that people were aware of their continued services in uncertain and frightening times. To do this I continually shared photos and posts on our Facebook page, always including the contact details for Pieta House so people can reach out if needed. A national Sunrise Appeal was arranged instead of the Walk and again we encouraged people to take part and send their photos. This worked very well with people’s feedback saying they felt involved, positivity and support from our social media involvement.*

*I have also helped with our local Meals on Wheels for a number of years now and again our great community came to the fore here over the last few months supplying goods on a regular basis as the need for additional food and household requirements increased. I put my time to use here, researching the needs of the vulnerable and approaching businesses for assistance if they are able to help.*

*Our town of Clonakilty and surrounding areas is fantastic but especially the people in it. Many, many fundraisers have been organised and succeeded in not only raising money but also awareness of the organisations that care for the vulnerable in our community and beyond. Conscious of the vast amount of people Cork Penny Dinners take care of each and every day, I decided to organise a food collection for them. To keep within the recommended government guidelines and borrowing the idea from one of my college buddies, I put a post on Facebook and set up a table in my front garden where people could safely donate without any interaction. This collection reduced me to tears. The generosity shown from the community was matched by an offer of help from the Clonakilty branch of the Irish Red Cross when one of their ambulances was completely filled and kindly delivered to Penny Dinners by two of their selfless volunteers.*

*In a time of uncertainty and fear one thing that screams at me is community. From young to elderly, everyone is in this together, willing to help each other, mind each other, pull together (apart) where they can. We cannot foresee the future, but I would hope the positives will somewhat balance the negatives of this dreadful virus and in time bring a small comfort to the families who have lost their loved ones.”*

**Sinead Crowley - Meals on Wheels & Darkness into Light Volunteer**

# An organisation's perspective – Volunteering in South Dublin

*Serve the City*, a volunteer led organisation that serves the practical needs of the marginalised and isolated within Irish communities, were key partners in the South Dublin County community response. Their role during COVID-19 was to coordinate volunteers to respond to requests for shopping and prescription collections. To date, over 70 volunteers have been recruited to *Serve the City* from the South Dublin County Volunteer Centre.

*“Coordinating ‘Community Call’ assignments for Serve the City (STC) has been an extraordinary journey in recent weeks since volunteering in Ireland changed so radically. It’s been a fantastic, rewarding and engaging time for our charity and our volunteers. We - and I mean we - are all working long hours and smiling along the way knowing that almost every hour of the working day someone across Dublin is receiving the help they need. **The assistance from the Volunteer Centres has made all the difference!** I remember mid-March well: a time when I was unsure of where to find volunteers for the new Community Call home shopping assignments. Now there are now so many willing people offering their time and patience, and I remain humbled and grateful to every volunteer and for all the support we’ve received.*

*The bottom line is that none of the Community Call volunteering assignments would be possible without the kindness of our volunteers. Almost every volunteer I have called has agreed to help right away, made contact with clients at once and delivered a trolley full of groceries and essentials with*

*love in their hearts. “Thank you” are two little words that mean so much. To every volunteer who has become a shopper with STC, I therefore say thank you from the bottom of my heart. Not just for standing in long supermarket queues, their patience on the phone with cocooned folk but also for taking on each shopping assignment with purpose and helping make someone’s life a little bit easier.*

*Now, Serve the City’s home shopping is reasonably stable and we’re hoping to take on new volunteers again soon. The leadership team at Serve the City is always busy and as new community call volunteering assignments come to life; we’ll be sure to ask for more help. Thank you to everyone for helping and for putting their names forward during a brand-new era in our lifetimes. The benevolence and heart-filled spirit of the Irish is quite something to be part of and it gives me hope that this beautiful nation will come out of this time stronger, kinder and filled with determination.”*

**Brad Wilmot – Serve the City**

# Kildare

## Supporting the Frontline

Kildare Volunteer Centre provided many frontline responses to the pandemic, both big and small. Within a day of receiving a request from the HSE for COVID-19 testing centre escorts they were able to provide a cohort of volunteers and, according to the HSE, the testing centre would have been unable to open without them. Moreover, they were able to help the community response helpline team find psycho-social support after a significant number of distressing calls were received. They also recruited and vetted a reserve force of volunteers to assist all members of the Community Response forum.

Small changes can make a big difference in some of the most tragic of circumstances. When Kildare VC became aware of a HSE member of staff who had been transferred to St Brigids hospice on the Curragh they made contact and learned of his terrible isolation. When contacted, the patient explained that no visitors were allowed into the hospice and for patients without a laptop or smart phone trying to say goodbye to their loved ones was extremely difficult. He said that a laptop would be very helpful in allowing people see loved ones' faces. The director of service in Kildare County Council was contacted and asked for a small grant from the new COVID-19 fund to assist communities. It was agreed and an iPad was delivered within two days.

# Tipperary

## Volunteer Interpreters

Thirteen percent of the 169,000 people living in County Tipperary were born outside of the island of Ireland. In the town of Cahir that percentage is doubled with 1 in 4 residents being from our new communities. A lack of conversational English remains a barrier for many elderly members of these communities. Couple that with cocooning, self-isolation and a smaller social network the impact on the well-being could not be underestimated. With that in mind the Tipperary VC set about recruiting volunteer interpreters to assist those who needed it, to access the county helpline when English was not their first language. The

approach has provided extra functionality to the helpline and it has ensured that it is truly an all-inclusive service. Those who staff the county helpline now have access to volunteers fluent in languages including Polish, Russian, Slovak, Czech, Portuguese and Arabic. While traditional volunteering has been hands on, roles like this one that can be done from the comfort of the volunteers' home reinforce the national stay at home message and add real value at a time when the currency of kindness and listening have never been more important.

# Clare

## Clare Community Response



In mid-March, prior to any policy direction regarding the coordination of countywide community and voluntary sector response to COVID-19, the Clare Volunteer Centre established an informal group to discuss the community response. Initial membership included Clare PPN, Clare Local Development Company, Burren Community Meitheal and Clare County Council, this was further expanded to include North West Clare FRC, Gardaí, West Clare FRC, Clarecare, Citizens Information Centre, Love Shannon, Clare Immigrant Support Centre, Clare Leader Forum and Clare Youth Service.

The group identified four principles:

- ❑ Identify measures to facilitate people in communities who wish to volunteer; including linking with Clare Volunteer Centre to provide support to new and existing groups and/or statutory agencies which may require additional support to continue delivery of service.
- ❑ Identify geographic areas and/or vulnerable groups where additional community supports may be required.
- ❑ Identify how best the most vulnerable can be reached at a local level, for example through advanced awareness campaigns, community structures, a county centralised emergency number etc.
- ❑ Define the nature of the supports that could be provided by new and existing organisations.

Deliverables included agreement with BHP to provide insurance for registered groups who were providing volunteer led activity in response to Covid-19. The design & distribution of safeguarding protocols and guidelines to all registered groups. Provision of Garda Vetting Service for 400+ volunteers engaged as 'Clare Community Response Volunteers'. Development of Information flyer for over 46,000 households in Clare, including translation to French, Arabic and Romanian. Support of the establishment of the Clare County Council Helpline in development of resources for staff. The Clare Volunteer Centre worked closely with the network of VC's and Volunteer Ireland in disseminating and distributing information to safeguard communities and build resilience.





# Health

Stories of Irish  
volunteering  
during COVID-19

[← BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

# Health

Volunteers are critical to the delivery of many health services across Ireland year-round and this national health crisis was no different. From delivering medicine, driving patients to their appointments, manning HSE test centres and helping those with additional support needs, the contribution of volunteers to the health of our communities cannot be understated.

Aside from the delivery of services, volunteering also affects our nation's health by improving the health and well-being of those that volunteer. Volunteer Ireland's own research<sup>3</sup> has shown that there are numerous positive impacts for those who volunteer including improved mental health, an increased sense of belonging to the community and an increased range of social connections. With over 1 million people in Ireland volunteering each year, the impact of volunteering on our nation's well-being is vast.

---

3 [https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Volunteer\\_Ireland-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Volunteer_Ireland-Report_FINAL.pdf)

## South Dublin County Tallaght Test Centre

South Dublin County Volunteer Centre found itself assisting the frontline responses of the HSE COVID-19 testing centre in Tallaght, among its duties supporting other community groups throughout Ireland.

On 13th March, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre received a query from the HSE in relation to help with recruiting volunteers to deliver a meet and greet service for a new COVID-19 testing centre to be set up in Tallaght Stadium.



As the VC already had experience in managing volunteers at events via their Volunteer Corps Programme, they decided to give a provisional yes. That weekend, they worked alongside HSE staff and the National Ambulance Service at the stadium to ascertain if there was a need for volunteer involvement and what their roles would potentially involve.

They decided that volunteers could be an effective first point of contact with those arriving for tests, double checking personal details and answering any questions before a test gets carried out.

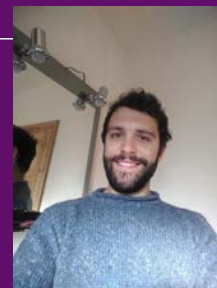
With PPE and clothing available for a corps of volunteers, a large team was ready to be deployed rapidly. 30 volunteers were recruited via the national volunteering database I-VOL, and screened for their health, level of English and interpersonal skills. The programme demonstrated Volunteer Centres' ability to manage volunteers directly; develop role descriptions, policies and procedures around volunteering; and get a volunteer programme up and running very quickly.

Soon, all the volunteers found their feet after relevant training on the requisite risk management procedures for dealing with COVID-19 positive members of the public. After much positive feedback was received, the *National Ambulance Service* withdrew to focus on other frontline services and the Volunteer Corps managed the test centre. As a result of this feedback, volunteers were also deployed to a Lucan test centre. The volunteers brought a diversity of skills and talents, with the team consisting of recently retired Gardai, teachers, Emergency Medical Technicians, fitness coaches, community workers and beyond.

*"It's basically like a drive-thru, they come in... and it's very daunting for people so you have to keep them as informed as possible, and get their details, keep them calm and make sure they know what's involved."*

**Joanne O'Dowd of the South Dublin Volunteer Corps  
pictured at Tallaght Stadium. (Credit: Ian Boyle, JOE)**

## Dublin City – Perspective of a Testing Centre Volunteer



Andrew King volunteered his time at the HSE test centre in Lucan Sarsfields during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here he recounts his experience as a volunteer during this very strange time.

*“Normally, as a post-primary teacher, my working day is regimented and time-kept by a bell. With Leo Varadkar’s 12th March statement from Blair House, Washington, that seemingly ceaseless rhythm ended.*

*As a teacher I knew my students would need me to continue working remotely, but I also knew that with this would come a new degree of flexibility. The facts of my circumstances, however, were not flexible and I felt that they compelled me to help. I am 28-years-old, as is my fiancée who I live with and our housemate who is 25. Thankfully, we are all in good health and none of us have dependants or vulnerable people for whom we must care.*

*And so, I began where most enquiries nowadays begin, with a Google search. Trawling through the results, I found an appeal on Twitter by Volunteer Ireland for volunteers to help with COVID-19 related responses.*

*In my mind, this entailed contact tracing, perhaps, or doing shopping for the elderly, or checking in on vulnerable people in the community. Had I known then what my voluntary work would turn out to entail, I may have been more reluctant to tick the “COVID RESPONSE” box when putting together my volunteer profile on the Dublin City Volunteer Centre’s website. I didn’t know, so I ticked it fairly thoughtlessly. And I’m glad for that.*

*It was in the late afternoon of the following Wednesday that a worker from the volunteer centre called me. I was on my way home on my bike, with a backpack full of enthusiastically purchased DIY materials, when I felt my phone vibrate.*

*She introduced herself as a volunteer coordinator, thanking me for putting my name down to volunteer. With a degree of hesitancy, she then asked if I thought I would be comfortable working in a COVID-19 testing centre, greeting patients, checking details and managing the queue for swabbing.*

*She explained that she had received my details and that my profile suggested I might be a good candidate for this type of work. She was exceedingly professional, exuding a warmth and patience, making it abundantly clear that there would be no pressure to do this and that she understood it would not be work for everyone.*

*The voluntary work, as the coordinator explained, would occur outdoors, with minimal person to person contact with patients. Nonetheless, the immediacy of having to decide made the choice seismic in my mind. Like others, I had seen camera phone footage circulated online of the drive-thru testing centre in Croke Park. Shaky images of anonymous, masked, hazmat-suited workers and large dramatic road signs floated through my mind: KEEP DRIVING. TURN OFF ENGINE. DO NOT GET OUT OF CAR.*

*I asked the coordinator if she could give me a day or two to discuss it with my fiancée and housemate, as, ultimately, if I were to contract COVID-19, I would very likely pass it on to them. She graciously accepted my request to stall and told me to call her if I had any other questions.*

*A couple of days later, and with my housemate now signed up and volunteering alongside me, I turned up for my first shift. The centre is located on the grounds of a GAA club, just off the M50. When we arrived, we were waved through at the gate by two friendly, yet assertive looking security guards, kitted out in hi-vis,*

*gloves, masks and Robo-cop sunglasses. We drove through an empty car park, sectioned into many spaces by a forest of bright, orange cones.*

*Two drive-through marquees stood at one end of the car park and we nervously noted the dramatic signs, mirror-images of the signage I had seen in those creepy, clandestine test-centre videos, replete with large, black lettering, imperative in tone and typeface.*

*Upstairs, in the repurposed clubhouse bar, we met the rest of the team, made up of volunteers like myself, HSE staff and nurses. People were stood in large circles for team discussions, appropriately distanced from one another. The same volunteer coordinator who had talked with me on the phone was there on the day, leading from the front.*

*She stressed the importance of hand-washing and physical distancing, underlining the need to follow hygiene protocol and the steps involved in dressing up and down before coming into this, the “clean room.” We, the volunteers, were briefed on our task, which was to welcome patients in their cars, issue information packages and face-masks to patients, take patient details and add patients to the queue for testing. Nurses would be conducting the actual swabbing procedure. Bedecked in masks, gloves, caps, coats and clipboards, we set to it.*

*A volunteer shift runs for between 4-5 hours, with a change in volunteer staff at lunchtime. The nurses work for the whole day. Typically, most patients seem friendly and understanding, glad to be receiving the test, tolerant of delays that can crop up. Other patients are understandably anxious, tense and frustrated. We must try and communicate with these patients in a friendly, non-threatening and clear way in order to put them at ease before they are swabbed by the nurses”*

**Andrew King – HSE COVID-19 testing centre volunteer in Dublin** (This is an abridged version of [an article](#) which originally appeared in the Irish Times on 24th April 2020)

## Cavan Civil Defence Volunteers

An astonishing 2,500+ hours on over 450 deployments during the COVID-19 pandemic were undertaken by the *Cavan Civil Defence* dedicated volunteers. Their work included transporting patients; delivering food and medicine and, on occasion, flowers; assisting with blood donations; and even delivering an expectant mother to the labour ward!





## Sligo

### Mental Health Mentoring

Sligo Volunteer Centre worked closely with the voluntary group *Connected While Apart* who were in the early stages of developing a crisis mental health support service when COVID-19 hit. They shifted their focus to move everything online and offer a response this way. Their coordinator explained:

*"It was 2018 when we came up with an idea to create a Buddy/Mentor programme for people experiencing mental health issues, with work starting proper in the summer of 2019, as part of a scheme to develop a mental health centre/crisis cafe in Sligo town. I began working with staff from Sligo Volunteer Centre soon after. Our plan has always been to rely heavily upon the goodwill of local people signing up to volunteer as buddies. And we felt there was a desire within the public to do more than to simply donate money. When COVID-19 hit, we quickly realised this was a service we could operate online, not just for the COVID-19 period, but long term. We are currently piloting the scheme for the HSE's CHO 1 area over 6 months and if successful will roll it out nationwide. I cannot imagine how on this earth we would have managed without Sligo VC. They have been a one stop shop for our recruitment of over 90 volunteers, who are presently beginning training. The quality of the volunteers has matched the excellence of the service and advice we have received. Moving forward, with the development of the crisis cafe now set to resume in late August, we know that recruiting volunteers to help us with the vital and innovative plans we have for mental health, nationally, is not something we need to worry about anymore. Volunteering is the future for our many societal ills, and the Sligo Volunteer Centre is as crucial to that truth as water is to the community it serves so well."*

**Hugh Myles – Co-Ordinator Connected While Apart project**

## Kerry

### Irish Red Cross

From the get-go, Tralee volunteers of the *Irish Red Cross Tralee* worked closely with members of An Garda Síochána helping the vulnerable people across Kerry. Kerry Volunteer Centre supported their expanded recruitment of volunteers in Dingle, Kenmare, Castleisland, Listowel and the Ardfert areas.

Among their many duties, volunteers conducted an emergency evacuation of a care home, transported people to vital medical appointments, delivered prescriptions, distributed COVID-19 safety information leaflet and carried out well-being checks on vulnerable people in the community. Additionally, they supported Meals on Wheels organising food deliveries for older people who were self-isolating.

*“The Irish Red Cross Tralee responded to approximately 200 calls to assist members of the public. We have had members available every day throughout the pandemic. We have responded to over 200 calls to help the public. Through Kerry Volunteer Centre we have gained additional members who have greatly assisted us with our response to COVID-19. We remain ready to respond to assist the people of Kerry and Ireland.”*

**Thomas White. PRO, Irish Red Cross Tralee**

Thomas White (Irish Red Cross Tralee) and Garda Aisling Connor (Tralee Garda Station) both distributing a care package to a vulnerable member of the community.



Ambulance on its way home from Dingle after carrying out an urgent request for medication.



Steve O Connor is the volunteer on the right and Dylan Knightly is the member of the public on the left.



Majella Forde of the Red Cross collecting the protective face masks from, rights, Susan Moriarty, Killorglin, who donated to the Red Cross with (from left) Red Cross personnel Lloyd Abraham, Thomas White and Nathan Comerford, photo by Michelle Cooper Galvin.

## PPE initiatives

A range of initiatives took place across the country making Personal Protective Equipment for vulnerable members of our communities. The following examples show the diversity and kindness of our volunteering spirit.

### Longford

The Longford Community Resources CLG SICAP team delivered online sewing classes to teach people how to make face masks and at the same time, distributing face masks already made by the Midlands Polish Community Group to vulnerable people and community and voluntary organisations.

In conjunction with the SICAP team, Longford VC engaged with 10 volunteers who knitted/crocheted/sewed ear protectors as an add-on to this initiative. Over a six week period 915 ear protectors were completed and distributed to frontline staff, care givers, community and voluntary organisations, local charity shops and the Longford train station. As one volunteer said: *“Great to be able to do something for those on the front line, care givers or those working in community and voluntary settings.”*



## Waterford

In May 2020, Waterford Volunteering Information Service set up a volunteer mask making programme, with the support of *Waterford Area Partnership*, *Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board* and the Department of Rural and Community Development. The plan was for volunteers to make re-usable cotton masks for distribution to communities in Waterford, including Roma and Travelling Communities, vulnerable elderly, and those living in Direct Provision Centres.

The role of Volunteer Mask Maker was advertised on I-VOL and through the Waterford VIS social media platforms. 30 volunteers from all over Waterford including Dungarvan, Kilmacthomas, Tramore and Waterford City decided to give their time and expertise. Waterford VIS linked in with several women's groups who were cocooning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With material donated from a curtain shop and available resources used to purchase elastic and cotton fabric, the volunteers made up 'mask packs' containing materials, bags, labels, instructions for use, and patterns. The mask packs were delivered to volunteers' homes and the completed masks were collected without contact. Approximately 500 reusable masks were made and distributed in Waterford by July 2020, with the programme still running throughout the summer. Many of the volunteers who have participated in the project reported a sense of pride in taking part in the programme and a feeling of 'doing something to help and be of use' in a very challenging time.



### Meath - Masks 4 All Ireland

When Cllr. Yemi Adenuga heard of the fantastic work being carried out by *Masks 4 All Ireland*, a voluntary organisation set up to provide masks for frontline workers and vulnerable members of the community, she decided to set up a Meath branch of her own.

Yemi knew that setting up such an organisation would require a lot of support from local volunteers, so she decided to get in touch with Meath Volunteer Centre to see what supports they could offer. Their staff spoke to Yemi over the phone and undertook a needs assessment and it was agreed that Yemi would benefit most with their expert guidance on volunteer role descriptions and recruiting volunteers.

#### According to Yemi,

*“Meath Volunteer Centre helped this initiative to recruit many different types of volunteers: sewists, drivers, boil washers, fabric cutters, fundraisers and sourcing. Three quarters of our team members were recruited with the assistance and support of Meath Volunteer Centre.”*



### Tipperary – Partnering with local industry

Conscious of the challenges, including financial, that community groups would face transitioning to the new normal, Tipperary Volunteer Centre partnered with an international Clonmel based business Camida and secured a substantial consignment of Personal Protect Equipment (Face Masks and Gloves). The PPE was distributed to community-based groups across the county to facilitate the reopening or scaling of their service provision by ensuring the lack of adequate PPE would not limit the re-engagement of their volunteer base.

## Wicklow

County Wicklow saw a number of different community initiatives to provide masks to those who needed them. According to Summi Wong of the **Southside Chinese Residents Association**, herself and the many Chinese people that have settled in Bray and surrounding areas met to figure out how they could contribute to the COVID-19 emergency locally. They wanted to show their solidarity with the people of Ireland and particularly of their hometown, Bray. After some thought they decided to source masks from China. So they raised the money to buy over 25,000 three layer disposable masks and ship them here.

With the help of local Garda in Bray, 15,000 of these masks were distributed to local nursing homes in the Bray and Greystones area, at no cost. A further 10,000 were sent to local not-for-profits with the help of the County Wicklow Volunteer Centre. These organisations include Sunbeam House Services, Bray Home Care Service and Wicklow Community Carers. All recipients were delighted as sourcing masks is difficult and expensive, so to get masks free was a huge gift.

Elsewhere, two women from County Wicklow founded **East Coast Mask Makers**. A non-profit crowdfunded group of voluntary sewists with the simple aim of taking up the needle during wartime to make cloth face masks for those who are vulnerable and caregivers within the community. East Coast Mask Makers registered their mask making opportunity with the County Wicklow Volunteer Centre. This opportunity was shared across the network of volunteer centres and Volunteer Information Centres and to date volunteers from Waterford, Cork, Kerry and Clare, Mayo, Galway, Louth, Kildare, Dublin, and of course, Wicklow have registered to make masks with the group which currently has 1,200 members and has delivered, with the aid of Bravo, Charlie, Tango a group of 1000 like-minded bikers, thousands of masks across the country.

## Kerry

Kerry Volunteer Centre was especially impressed by the selflessness, skill and commitment afforded by the lovely volunteers who made hundreds of facemasks during COVID-19 lockdown. Volunteers from Dingle, Listowel, Ardfert and Killarney made in excess of 600 face masks.

Kerry Volunteer Centre staff and volunteers were only too delighted to get involved in coordinating, logistics, collecting and distribution of these high quality, handmade masks around the county to worthy charities like the *Novas Kerry Homeless Shelter*, *Adapt Kerry Women's Refuge*, *Listowel Family Resource Centre*, *Camphill Community-Dingle*, *Our Lady of Fatima Nursing home*, *Tralee International Resource Centre (TIRC)*, *Killarney Asylum Seeker Initiative (KASI)* and *St. Vincent de Paul Kerry* to name but a few.

Volunteers involved in the facemask initiative shared patterns and tips through Kerry VC's Placement Officer and all reported a sense of importance and comradery. One of the volunteers, Josephine from Dingle, talked to Radio Kerry and Radio Na Gaeltachta highlighting the importance of volunteering in times of such uncertainty.

*"I registered with Kerry Volunteer Centre after my business closed during lockdown. The urge came to me one night, having seen some 'not fit for purpose' PPE on the News...thinking to myself that I could easily alter those & extend the sleeves. I had plenty of fabrics and the necessary machinery in my workroom, along with my newly found free time, so, by lunchtime the following day, I was a mask-maker. 'Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine' - the time had come to prove our lovely seanfocal and it felt good to be able to help in some small way."*



**Josephine Finn, Dingle, Mask Maker**





[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)



[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)



# **Social Isolation**

---

Stories of Irish  
volunteering  
during COVID-19

[← BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

# Social Isolation

Social isolation is a significant issue in many of our communities. From small rural towns to larger cities, people can suffer isolation and loneliness at any stage of their life, particularly in an increasingly digital world.

Volunteering is a positive tool in tackling isolation in two ways: volunteers can help support people who are affected by loneliness, and volunteering is also as a route to social interaction and engagement for volunteers themselves. Befriending services like ALONE and support lines like Seniorline and Aware rely on the support of volunteers to deliver their vital services, which help combat isolation. For volunteers themselves, one of the main motivations behind their decision to volunteer is to meet people and make new friends. Statistics show that volunteering has a very real impact on those that volunteer in terms of reducing isolation and increasing social circles. In Volunteer Ireland's 2020 survey of volunteers, 64% reported an increase in their feeling of being included and not alone while 61% experienced an increase in their range of friendships.

## Donegal

### Connecting Disability Groups

Donegal Volunteer Centre has a great working relationship with the local office of *the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)*, who deliver personal development programmes to individuals with various health conditions. Beneficiaries of this service were among the first to be told to stay at home under national restrictions and as such the project stepped up to support them via a range of Zoom sessions and workshops. The Donegal VC manager did a session around COVID-19 supports available to support individuals within the group and sought a range of volunteer tutors to provide all sorts of sessions. They secured art classes, fitness, mindfulness, Irish, meditation, well-being talks and much more.



## Meath

### Befriending Service

**Brigid Kelly** looks forward to the visit every week from Patricia from Meath Befriending Service. *“It’s the company really, we have a chat and a laugh. I look forward to the visit every week. She’s very good and kind to me.”*

Brigid, originally from Enniscorthy in Wexford, says she *“makes it her business to socialise”* and insists a lockdown is *“not the end of the world.”*

*“People say to me, you’ll miss your bingo but what can you do, if Christmas Day falls on a Sunday I’ll miss my bingo anyway so what difference does it make, there are more important things going on.”*

# Dun Laoghaire Rathdown

## Active Retirement

Many over-70s today are actively involved in the local community as volunteers, board members, Meals on Wheels drivers and more. When the country shut down, these volunteers suddenly needed assistance themselves, for example help getting their shopping or prescriptions. This was a huge change and an imposition on many.

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Volunteer Centre wanted to restore a sense of being needed, valued and actively engaged in their communities. They wanted to give them a way to volunteer. The #volunteerfromhome campaign did just that.

They worked closely with local groups and developed lots of different volunteering opportunities, including knitting for the *Team Hope Shoebox Appeal*. They then circulated these to local groups in the area who were working directly with those cocooning. *Dún Laoghaire Active Retirement* was one such group:



*“Dún Laoghaire Active Retirement recently closed in line with COVID-19 regulations. Information from the Volunteer Centre and others came in on my laptop. Normally I would have put this info on our noticeboard. I thought, why not create an email group? I texted members and now have 70 in the group.*

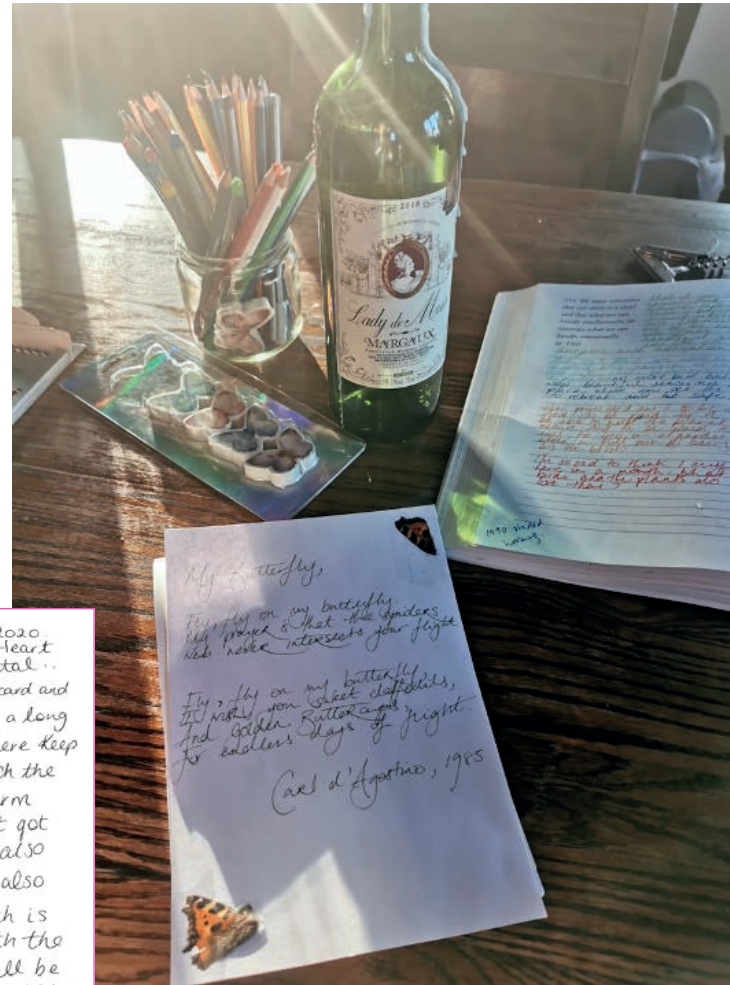
*I send emails with links to volunteer from home opportunities, some with knitting patterns. I send information on church services, virtual tours of the National Gallery, home exercises, PO forms and the DLR Community Helpline. For me, this volunteering, this connection with the group has given the days of cocooning a great purpose and keeps my brain alert.”*

**Gabrielle Lowe – Volunteer with Dún Laoghaire Active Retirement**

## Carlow

### Letters to Nursing Homes

The most effective projects for Carlow Volunteer Centre were about keeping people connected even when they needed to remain physically apart. Their *Letters to Nursing Homes* project under the #volunteerfromhome campaign was part of it. Volunteers, especially those with children, rapidly signed up to send correspondence to residents of nursing homes, who have been particularly affected by the visitor restrictions. Volunteers wrote letters, and sent postcards, cards and pictures to residents. Feedback was extremely positive from both volunteers and recipients inside the nursing homes. Moreover, the staff in the nursing homes have said they loved the idea and were delighted to be involved.



A Chava,

24th June 2020  
Sacred Heart  
Hospital ..

Thank you so much for your lovely card and letter. I haven't had any visitors for a long time due to the virus. The staff here keep me very informed and I do watch the news and read the paper. The warm weather was very welcome as it got me out in the garden a lot. I also got plenty of ice-cream. I've also played plenty of 25's which is my favourite card game with the activity staff here. We will be allowed very strict limited visits from Monday. All going well. I hope all at Carlow Volunteer group are well and staying safe. Many Thanks,  
Ward 76 Bed 14.

My butterfly,  
I fly on my butterfly  
the power is that the spider  
has never intersects your finger

Fly, fly on my butterfly  
the power is that the spider  
has never intersects your finger  
And Golden Butterflies  
for colorful days of flight.

Carl d'Agostino, 1985



Marie Conlon – volunteering her time to write stories for nursing home residents.

## Kildare Older Voices

During the crisis, Kildare VC got a call from Marie Conlon, who had received a request to write a letter to a resident in a nursing home. Marie wrote a story instead and was then asked by the nursing home to write more stories. They told Marie that they had read the story to a group of residents and it enabled them to reminisce and discuss the story's theme.

Marie wanted to engage a broader audience and contacted the Volunteer Centre for help. As a response they made other Volunteer Centres aware of the initiative and shared some stories with them. They then contacted the National Nurse Homes Association who provided access to a list of nursing homes.

Since then they forwarded 6 stories every 10-12 days, 36 in total, to 17 nursing homes in County Kildare. These were also circulated via Offaly, Carlow and Monaghan VCs to the many nursing homes in those areas to great appreciation.



## Roscommon

### Letters of Hope

Roscommon Volunteering Information Service organised a letter writing project to assist those feeling vulnerable in nursing homes across the county. Roscommon LEADER Partnership staff facilitated the process with a special email address to screen contributions before forwarding them to the community's nursing homes. Ten nursing homes received bi-weekly letters together with photos of favourite places and family pets of the volunteers.

Over several weeks, more than 30 letters of hope for the nursing homes together with audio clips of music and singing were received and forwarded. This was facilitated with a virtual volunteer role created on I-VOL and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

## Wexford

### Letters from Home

As part of the national campaign a local #volunteerfromhome campaign was launched in Wexford too. They got residents in the Signa Care Nursing Home in Bunclody to make pictures, letters and cards. The residents were unable to have visitors, so this was used as a little pick me up to make their day that tiny bit better. A total of 22 volunteers around Wexford participated in this role.

### Monaghan

#### Good Morning Monaghan

Monaghan Volunteer Centre and their parent local development company, *Monaghan Integrated Development*, worked closely with their local authority and other agencies involved in the Community Call helpline. They set up a COVID-19 shopping and support volunteer role that they managed directly.

Requests for help mainly come through the helpline, but also from other sources such as the Monaghan Integrated Development *Good Morning Monaghan* phone call service. The volunteers on this service made calls to people who were lonely or isolated, whether due to age or other reasons.

So far requests to their shopping and support service have included daily delivery of newspapers, once-off delivery of medication and requests for grocery shopping. The requests are received by the Monaghan Volunteer Centre coordinator who contacts the person in need of help to discuss their requirements. Thereafter the coordinator contacts a volunteer in their area to make arrangements, and then follows up afterwards to make sure the task has been completed. The final stage is to report back to the service who referred the person in need of help, such as the HSE social worker.



### Wexford – Dog Walking

*“As the restrictions got tighter, life got difficult for the older generation. Wexford was contacted as a lady needed a volunteer to walk her Labrador while she was cocooning. On the same day we had a volunteer agree, and within 3 days her dog had the chance to get out and about for its walks!”*



## Leitrim

### Fáilte Isteach

Like the rest of the educational sector, volunteer-led language learning suffered during COVID-19. The *Fáilte Isteach* English language volunteer conversation classes for migrants in Carrick on Shannon and in Ballinamore were unable to continue and had to adapt. Many of the volunteers assigned to these programmes were accessed through the I-VOL system and Leitrim Volunteering Information Service staff worked with the Social Inclusion and Community Action Programme (SICAP) staff to keep this programme up and running.

The VIS directly set up and hosted these conversation classes online via Zoom. The classes continued throughout the summer in large groups and on an individual basis. It proved to be an effective method of ensuring that contact between volunteers and students didn't lapse. Online conversations enabled people to express their feelings of isolation and concern during the lockdown.

## Dún Laoghaire Rathdown COVID Crafters

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Volunteer Centre ran a wide-ranging #volunteerfromhome initiative. It allowed people to stay actively connected to the organisations they cared about all from the safety of their home.

COVID Crafters was one such example. *“At the moment, our volunteer team cannot come into our home to make moments matter for the people in our care. Instead of volunteering in our home we’re looking for you to volunteer from your home. Put your creative skills to work to brighten up someone’s day in Saint Joseph’s Shankill.”*

**According to one of the volunteers, Pauline:**

*“The role of crafter gives me a purpose and helps fill in time on our long days and I am delighted to be involved and am hopefully being useful. I also had a house full of unused yarn that was crying out to be used up!”*



Joan, another of the volunteers, knitted a full crib for donation to St Josephs.

A cardboard box filled with fresh food items including oranges, ginger, lettuce, and jars of sauce. The box is placed on a tiled surface against a textured wall. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Social Disadvantage

Stories of Irish  
volunteering  
during COVID-19

# Social Disadvantage

Social disadvantage and poverty reach all corners of society. Many individuals and families suffer economic hardship, food poverty and homelessness. Organisations tackling these problems like the Simon Communities and St Vincent de Paul rely heavily on volunteers to deliver their service.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers with Meals on Wheels services in communities across the country delivered hot meals to those in need. Volunteers with local homeless services helped provide food and shelter to people without a home of their own. Many volunteers even created and crafted goods to be sold in charity shops to raise money once they re-opened. These essential services could simply not be delivered without the support of volunteers.

## **Supporting Essential Deliveries**

Across Ireland the biggest need by many cocooning individuals was for deliveries of essential medicines and food. In some areas, Meals on Wheels services were started for the first time and many creative approaches were taken across the country. The following are some examples.

## Laois

### Hope for Laois Project

In Laois, as in the rest of the country, many families and elderly people had to self-isolate and cocoon to keep safe during COVID-19 crisis. Laois Volunteering Information Service was approached by local activists to see if a free food distribution service could be set up to assist vulnerable members in the community.

The *Hope for Laois Project* was a collaborative community response effort involving Laois VIS, Laois Partnership and local community activists. The *Hope* project assisted vulnerable families, elderly and self-isolating individuals in Laois by providing food hampers for those who required them.

Laois VIS supported the formation of this project by advising on best practice guidelines, insurance cover and safeguarding procedures. The VIS, with its extensive community contacts, was also able to provide the Hope project with important linkages with other agencies.



Through links with *Laois Partnership* the *Hope* project could avail of *FoodCloud* services, which ensured a consistent supply of fresh food and essential products to be distributed in the hampers. Linkages with local family resource centres, community development officers, Tusla and the Gardai who all made referrals to the service, helped ensure that the most vulnerable members in the community received the hampers.

Laois VIS also assisted this project by recruiting, interviewing and Garda vetting all the volunteers involved and leveraging funding to cover volunteer expenses. The service now provides hampers to over 100 households across County Laois.

## Monaghan

### Truagh Development Association's Community Services Programme

Fiona McCaffrey Jones is Joint Manager of *Truagh Development Association CSP* in County Monaghan. Here she describes the support she received from Monaghan Volunteer Centre:



*“The prompt and efficient support from Monaghan Volunteer Centre has been of enormous benefit to Truagh Development Association’s Community Services Programme (CSP) since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The CSP is based at the Blackwater Valley Centre, Knockconan, Emyvale and has been in operation since 2008.*

*Since 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the focus of our social enterprise had to change radically, and subsequently volunteer support had to be ramped up dramatically to ensure we could meet the emerging needs of the community in Truagh and the wider north Monaghan area. As our building is closed to the public the new way of operating is to bring the services to the people. Monaghan Volunteer Centre was able to source suitable volunteer drivers at short notice to help us deliver hot meals and care packages to older and vulnerable people cocooning in Truagh and the wider north Monaghan area.*

*We envisage that the CSP will continue to rely on Monaghan Volunteer Centre to source volunteer drivers for the foreseeable future particularly this autumn and into Spring 2021 due to the pandemic. For example, we are already going to lose three volunteers who, happily for them, return to work next week but we are confident that the MVC will help us find new volunteers to replace them.”*

**Fiona McCaffrey Jones -  
Joint Manager of Truagh Development Association CSP**



## Cork

### Farranree Meals on Wheels

*Farranree Meals on Wheels* is a small Cork charity that provides a Meals on Wheels service for the vulnerable and elderly in the community with the help of five volunteers. COVID-19 caused an urgent need for new volunteers to join their team and forced the organisation to change their day-to-day volunteer management. It was a massive task to implement such changes almost overnight, but they managed it by instructing staff and volunteers and introducing new rules to the centre.

*Farranree Meals on Wheels* registered with Cork Volunteer Centre and they helped them with finding 20 new volunteers willing to help. With the addition of so many volunteers it has allowed three of their regular drivers to cocoon, which they were loath to do until they knew that Meals on Wheels would be able to continue the service. They hope that most if not all of those who have recently volunteered will stay with them after the crisis ends.



Noel Brady  
Meals on Wheels volunteer



Andrew Lane  
Meals on Wheels volunteer



A volunteer from ChefAid Donegal power washing the front tiles of the Honeypot restaurant.

## Donegal ChefAid

*ChefAid* was a Donegal response to the many empty kitchens and furloughed chefs yet people in need of food. Donegal Volunteer Centre supported the work of *ChefAid* by providing advice, guidance and volunteers to operate as both chefs and drivers.

*"I would like to send my heartfelt thanks for the support all the volunteers have given over this past number of months. I have appreciated the food and the chat at the door I would like to wish each and every one of you and all the volunteers good health in the future my thoughts and prayers are with you all thank you."*

**Michael Gibbons,  
owner of Honeypot**

## Tipperary

### Nenagh Red Cross

As an established volunteer involving organisation, the *Red Cross* branches across Tipperary played a pivotal role in responding to the COVID-19 emergency. Recognising the importance of adding to their skilled volunteer base and building on their existing relationship with Tipperary Volunteer Centre, a structured volunteer recruitment drive was initiated.



Newly recruited volunteers were partnered with and learned from the experience and expertise of full *Red Cross* members with the most vulnerable people across Tipperary benefiting from the volunteers' selfless efforts. From grocery shopping to welfare visits, from prescription delivery to hospital transfers, the impact of the Red Cross was front and centre in the Community Call and visibly evident across the county.

The words of Denise Kennedy, Secretary of Nenagh Red Cross, showcase the benefit of involving volunteers:

*"The community support sector of the Nenagh Red Cross was truly strengthened by the addition of many volunteers and indeed the work that still carries on. Although the work is not always easy the kindness and appreciation that is felt from the public while we are volunteering makes it all worthwhile. Nenagh Red Cross have assisted many in our community and wider afield. We hope to continue to support those who need us most into the future."*

### Leitrim Food Cloud

The *Breffni Family Resource Centre* were unable to continue their *FoodCloud* programme at the start of the COVID-19 crisis as many of their volunteers were unable to safely volunteer. They contacted Leitrim Volunteering Information Service, who developed role descriptions for volunteers during the crisis to bring unsold but edible food to those who need it most. Leitrim VIS worked to engage 12 volunteers to visit Tesco four nights per week to collect available food donations and distribute them to over 30 families in the Carrick on Shannon area. Additionally, another *FoodCloud* programme was established in Drumshanbo to serve a wider area of the county and further volunteers were sourced via Leitrim VIS.

Many of the volunteers who came forward were young, energetic and keen to help. Some stated that it gets them “out of the house” and even ask if they could do more. Leitrim VIS staff met with each of them at the start of their role, ensured that they have the right PPE and that all Garda vetting was in place before they began.

### Monaghan Daily News Delivery



Monaghan Volunteer Centre received a referral from the Good Morning Monaghan phone call service in early April. An older lady living alone wanted a daily newspaper. None of the shops locally deliver papers. The Volunteer Centre arranged for a husband and wife pair of volunteers to collect her newspaper daily and drop it off. This was still continuing six days per week, six weeks later. They also offered to collect groceries if needed, though the lady has a relative who generally does her shopping on Saturdays.

## Meath

### Food Initiative

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, it became apparent that many people were struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table. *Meath Partnership*, the local development company responsible for the delivery of the Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP) in Co. Meath, took action. It set up the *Meath Food Initiative*. Between April and July with the support of Meath VC staff and many diligent volunteers, over 1,491 food hampers were delivered to over 120 families.

According to Emma Prunty, the Coordinator for Meath Food Initiative:

*“The Civil Defence volunteers have been absolutely fantastic and they have been delivering around 100 hampers for us each week. We could not do this without them - they are coordinated and organised so it is hassle free when they arrive. They are giving up their free time to do this which is amazing. They are invaluable and we could not operate without them.”*



## Limerick Response Teams

At the start of the crisis, staff from Limerick Volunteer Centre devised a plan to provide a cohort of locally trained volunteers for essential household deliveries. This was to ensure that in the event of increased demand for supports, frontline services would have all the help they needed. Moreover, it was hoped that such preparations could be replicated elsewhere.



To achieve this, they met with chair of the Limerick Local Community Development Committee to demonstrate the plan and invited him to a meeting in Ardagh Hall on Saturday 14th March. Then and there, *The St. Kieran's Area Response Team* was founded for West Limerick, which developed into a group of 88 Volunteer Shoppers.

At the same time in the east of the county, *The Meanus Area Response Team* was founded and sourced a network of 32 volunteers. As a result of these groups, Newcastle West, Ballingarry, Askeaton and St. Senan's Area (Shanagolden/Foynes) were assisted by their flyers and written procedures along with HSE-recommended safe shopping protocols. As a result of Limerick VC's initiative, all of the above Limerick-based groups were responsibly shopping for cocoons in a safe manner weeks before the launch of Community Call in Limerick in April.

## Kerry

### Meals on Wheels

Many existing organisations counted on the expert support of their local Volunteer Centre to expand their capacity on the ground where it mattered most. This is one such story.

*“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its Meals on Wheels Tralee Division is eternally grateful to the Kerry Volunteer Centre for its outstanding support throughout the lockdown in Kerry.*

*Since the 14th March, we have distributed over 20,000 dinners around Kerry. We operated a 7-day service, distributing over 1,400 per week throughout the lockdown and its aftermath. Prior to the 14th March, Meals on Wheels worked on its own, as a weekend service distributing 70 dinners on a Saturday.*

*The Kerry Volunteer Centre stepped right into action throughout the lockdown and assisted us with gaining volunteer drivers, chefs, packers and coordinators. They provided a lifeline for assisting us to support those in need. They helped unite the Kingdom of Kerry with an army of volunteers.”*

**- Paddy Kevane, Meals on Wheels - Tralee Area President, Society of St. Vincent De Paul**





## Thomas Dillon Meals on Wheels Coordinator

*“From the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown in March, I volunteered with Tralee Meals on Wheels. It is something I am incredibly proud of being involved with and I was delighted to have been part of a whole company of volunteers who delivered over 20,000 meals to people in the community as part of the local response to the virus between that date and the end of July.*

*As a volunteer coordinator, I was part of a team that organised volunteers for the various tasks required to get the meals served and delivered each day. From plating, packing and bagging the dinners to organising them into delivery lists and handing them over to the volunteer drivers formed the hands-on everyday tasks in my role. As someone who is known to avoid the job of washing dishes, I was even happy to help out with the wash-up in the kitchen. Frequently, I also delivered the meals to those in need which was a humbling experience. A small effort on my part meant the world to some of the people I met and that was very, very rewarding.*



*The news of tragedies in other parts of the world and the uncertainty of what was happening when the unthinkable lockdown happened here at home in Ireland meant it was a scary time. Many people, and I can include myself in that, initially felt helpless, however the virus brought out the best in people as communities and individuals rallied to help other.*

*When I received the call from the Kerry Volunteer Centre about the role of Volunteer Coordinator, I jumped at the chance to make a contribution to Ireland's response to COVID-19. When older people and those at risk were asked to stay inside for their protection and to help stop the virus spreading, we were able to help them do that by going out on their behalf and delivering meals to their doorstep. Our contribution helped save lives and that is something everyone who helped out with the Meals on Wheels service can be extremely proud of. Every day I worked with the most amazing people who were selfless in their time and willingness to help. I loved every moment of my involvement with Tralee Meals on Wheels as a volunteer during the COVID-19 lockdown, and now that it has wound down to a weekend service, I am delighted to be still involved helping those in need.*

*Thank you to the Kerry Volunteer Centre for recruiting me to the role."*

## Dún Laoghaire Rathdown

### Meals on Wheels

In the first week of lock down, before the Community Call had even begun, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Volunteer Centre (DLR VC) reached out to Meals on Wheels groups in their area, discovering that many needed help. One volunteer co-ordinator reported that nearly all her current drivers were over 70 and were no longer available to volunteer. This was at a time when many were cocooning, and the delivery of meals was all the more important.

DLR VC developed sample role descriptions and started recruiting. Within little more than a week they had recruited and processed all the vetting for an initial group of 12 volunteers. All Meals on Wheels drivers and cooks had such positive things to say about their experience.

*“Lovely feeling of being part of a community effort to help each other and the more vulnerable. As nice for me as for them!”*

**Gillian, volunteering with Meals on Wheels**



# Culture

---

## Stories of Irish volunteering during COVID-19

[← BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

# Culture

The impact of volunteering on Irish culture in general is tremendous. The range of impacts that it can deliver on us as a culture of people within Ireland are broad and diverse. From supporting local events and festivals to ensuring vital museums and cultural landmarks remain open, the mark of volunteers on our national culture is indelible.

With over a million people volunteering in Ireland both formally and informally each year, it is possible to lay claim to a vibrant and strong culture of volunteering within it. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated to the world the importance of the resilience of communities in many different ways.

## Clare

### Carrigoran's Call for Talent

With the support of Clare Volunteer Centre, Veronica Callinan, the activities coordinator at the Carrigoran House nursing home, set up *Carrigoran's Call for Talent*. It invited people to upload a one-minute video showcasing their singing, dancing or musical talents. A €5 entry fee went towards dementia services in the home and winners received vouchers of up to €100. This proved to be highly successful and was featured on an RTÉ news report.

*"A win-win for residents and contestants alike!"*

#### Clare nursing home launches talent show for residents to connect with loved ones

Updated / Tuesday, 19 May 2020 14:43



Carrigoran House in Newmarket on Fergus has launched a weekly online talent competition with the residents themselves judging the winning entries

## Dublin City Book Delivery Scheme



### Dublin City Libraries book deliveries in collaboration with Dublin City Volunteer Centre

Dublin City Council, as part of the Community Call, approached Dublin City Volunteer Centre (DCVC) about delivering books to people who were cocooning. Phase Two of the community response had a focus on maintaining well-being and the Dublin City Libraries (DCL) were keen to give cocooning library users access to books and other materials to increase their well-being. DCL had to set up a Home Delivery Service and needed to mobilise volunteers quickly. As they were new to volunteer programming, Dublin City VC suggested a partnership approach to the service. Here are the perspectives of some of the programme's participants:

*"We're really happy to be working with Dublin City VC and so happy that they were enthusiastic to get involved. I met three of the volunteers this morning face-to-face and it was lovely to meet them and send them off with the books."*

**Betty Codd,**  
**Dublin City Libraries, May 2020**

*"This service is an opportunity to not only order books, but to have an actual conversation. Cocooning can be a lonely experience and the staff here relish the chance to speak to those in our community who may not get to talk to many others during the day."*

**Anne Pigott,**  
**Senior Librarian at Cabra Library**

*"It's such a pleasure doing the drop offs with the 'treasure books' that are so gratefully received - the faces and chat with the ladies and gentlemen - because they are, makes this small job so rewarding. I am so happy I can be part of it."*

**Eleanor,**  
**COVID-19 Book Delivery Volunteer**

## Leitrim

### Educational Deliveries

The challenges raised by the move to online learning affected a wide range of communities during the crisis. Migrant families seeking to continue to improve their English language in direct provision centres, required materials to assist attendance at their now online classes and workshops. To address such needs and help their cultural integration Leitrim VIS sourced volunteers to deliver materials to facilitate gardening, card making and baking workshops. The provision of these materials allowed them to actively take part in the online classes and helped combat the social isolation of the lockdown.



## Dublin City

### Street Ambassador's programme

For those living in Dublin's city centre and those recently out of work due to the restrictions on the hospitality and other industries in force across the country, Dublin City's *Street Ambassador Programme* was a great opportunity. In partnership with Dublin City Council, Dublin City VC designed and implemented the Street Ambassadors Programme to aid the relaxation of restrictions within the city centre, thus helping the wider public and local businesses.

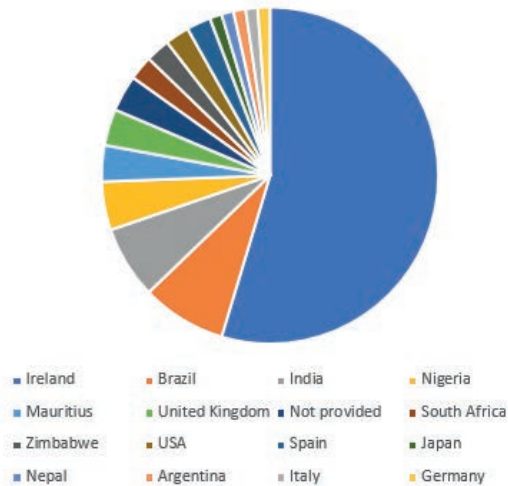
The role of the Street Ambassador Volunteers was to welcome members of the public back to the city centre and to provide information on shop openings and where to find newly erected public toilets.

*"I enjoy meeting and talking to new people, and this role is a nice opportunity to do something good for my community in such strange times. It will be great to help the Dubliners to slowly go back to normal."*

**Hugo,**  
**Street Ambassador Volunteer**



Nationalities of Street Ambassador Volunteers





In total 91 volunteers took part in this programme and donated 815 hours of their time to assist the city's return to normality. Thanks to the effective management systems in place from Dublin City VC and the efficacy of the Community Call, this programme ran smoothly with full adherence to the relevant public health guidelines.

*"Thank you so much for the opportunity to volunteer this week, it was such a fabulous experience and I was grateful to be a part of the team. Thank you for all your organisation, fantastic support as well as lovely treats."*

**Natalie, Street Ambassador  
Volunteer**



*"I am currently unemployed due to the COVID-19 situation, I would love to give back to society during this difficult time. I am good with people and enjoy Dublin city, I would love to get involved in this opportunity."*

*"I'm a South African who relocated to Ireland earlier this year. I would like to give back to the city that has welcomed me so warmly. I think it will be lovely to work in a team to assist with the easing up of restrictions for the general public."*



# Conclusion

All across Ireland during the COVID-19 crisis, the response of the ever larger and more diverse volunteer community was tremendous - from food and medicine carriers to city ambassadors, dog walkers, letter writers, book couriers, COVID-19 test centres volunteers and initiatives for victims of domestic violence. The diligence, generosity and empathy demonstrated by those willing to get involved was inspiring. This document is a small glimpse but gives insight into the variety of creative approaches taken by the national community of volunteers with the support of their local Volunteer Centres, Volunteering Information Services and Volunteer Ireland. We are proud to have played a small part of Ireland's response to an unprecedented national crisis.

*"In years to come... let them say of us... when things were at their worst... we were at our best."*

**An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D.,**

**17<sup>th</sup> March 2020**



supporting volunteering in ireland



volunteer centres



volunteer ireland



volunteering information  
services