

National
Volunteer
Management
Conference



Volunteer
Ireland

Obair Dheonach Éireann

Highlighting the stories of our volunteers

Claire McGowran (*She / Her*)

We Act Campaign



Highlighting Volunteer Stories



WE ACT



**Hello,
this is me**



WE ACT
We Act Campaign

From ensuring vulnerable people feel less isolated over Christmas to providing the basics for those who have very little, thousands of unpaid volunteers in communities across Ireland have been working away over the last few weeks to make Christmas a little more special for others. Here are the stories behind some of them...

Celine McNamee – plans the Allenwood GOAL Mile in Kildare every St. Stephen's Day



Volunteering

WHEN WE SEE A NEED
WHEN WE WANT
CHANGE
WE COME TOGETHER

WE ACT



DID YOU KNOW?
There are over
1 million
volunteers
in Ireland



JERSEY WASHERS
MURAL PAINTERS
HOSPITAL DRIVERS
WHEN WE SPOT A GAP
WE VOLUNTEER

WE ACT

Ireland's
Charities and
Communities
in Action

Visit [WeAct.ie](https://weact.ie) to learn more



**How are
you
telling
volunteer
stories
already?**



Do volunteer stories really matter?

- Public awareness and understanding are vital to the success and sustainability of our work.
- If you're doing the work, and not telling anyone about it, you're missing out on maximising its impact.
- Without consistent communication, you lose potential volunteers and disengage existing volunteers.
- You need to maintain communications year-round so that your events or big call to action moments have impact.
- Communications adds context - it tells the story of what you do.

This is Linda





What do we use volunteer stories for?

- Social media
- Volunteer recruitment and onboarding
- Volunteer recognition
- Media engagement
- Website content
- Newsletters and supporter updates
- Video content
- Annual reports
- Fundraising materials
- Submitting to We Act or Volunteer Ireland



Before you do anything, ask yourself:

- 1 What do we want to say?
- 2 Who do we want to hear it?
- 3 What is the call to action?
- 4 Where will this appear?
- 5 What is the best way to convey this message?

- Real life stories don't need to be sensational or dramatic, sometimes the every day can be just as impactful
- Look around your organisation, think about all the roles volunteers do - is there someone with unique skills or an unusual volunteer role?
- Think about the people who are funny, honest, articulate, passionate or have had a journey to get to where they are
- Choose someone who is confident and happy to share their story, that doesn't mean the leader of the group or the loudest person in the room

What Makes a Compelling Story?

Natalia's Story

In 2023, Natalia was forced to flee her home in Ukraine.
She arrived in Castlebar with her mother and her son.



Interviewing your Volunteer

- **Allow plenty of time for interviewing**
- **Tell your volunteer exactly how their story will be used**
- **If the subject matter is difficult, check in with them regularly**
- **Have a lot more questions prepared than you think you'll need**
- **Tell them why their story is important - build them up so they don't feel silly talking about themselves**
- **Be prepared to (gently) pull some teeth!**

Sample Questions

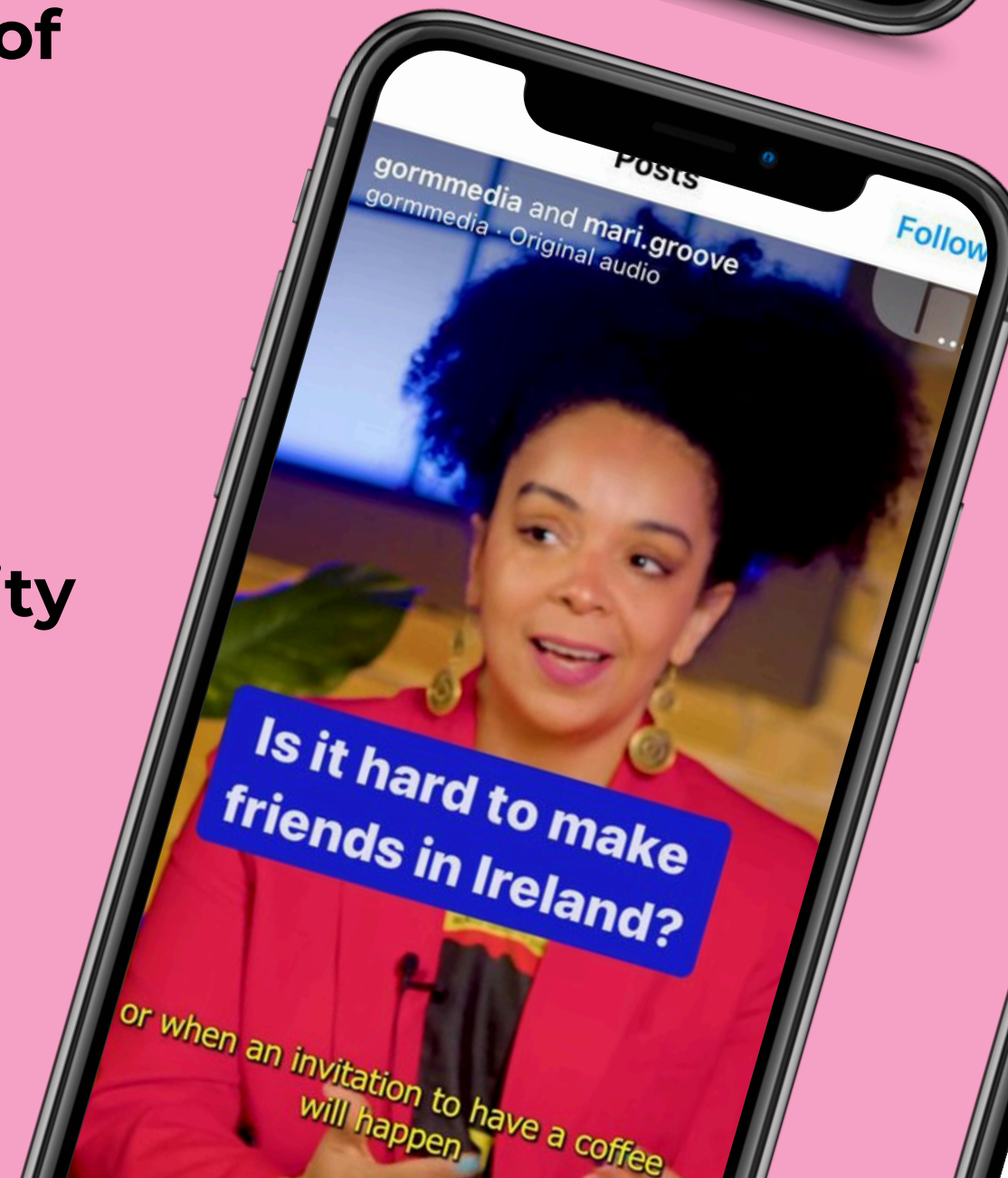
- What drew you to our organisation?
- Have you a personal connection to our cause?
- What do you do on a typical day volunteering with us?
- What's your favourite thing about volunteering with us?
- What are the benefits of volunteering for you?
- Tell us about a moment from volunteering that has impacted you?
- What skills or experience are you bringing to the role?
- What impact do the volunteers have on the people you support?

- Keep it as short and as personal as possible.
- Start with something punchy and impactful - often that's their connection to the organisation.
- Think about the parts of the story that you found most compelling or something they said that surprised you?
- Think about how the story will be presented, interview vs first person, written vs video, and the imagery that might accompany it.
- Consider how to get the most out of each story across every possible platform - you might put a story together differently for social media vs your annual report.

Putting your Story Together

Things to Consider

- Think about creative ways to use your volunteers for communications, such as social media takeovers, POV videos, Ask Me Anythings.
- Ensure your stories are representative of your volunteer community.
- Explore ways to be as inclusive as possible with your stories, eg: using a translator.
- Use big volunteer days as an opportunity to bank lots of content.
- Find a template or 'house style' for volunteer stories to build brand recognition and save time in future.





WEACT



weactireland
RNLI Lough Derg



[weactireland](#) All this week, to mark [#InternationalWomensDay](#), we'll be sharing the stories of women in the organisations and communities around Ireland. First up, is Ania Skrzypczynska, a mother, graphic designer, and volunteer with [@rnli](#) [#LoughDerg](#)... [#WeAct](#)

"We moved to Dromineer in 2020. My neighbour Eleanor mentioned she was involved in the RNLI on Lough Derg and it sounded exciting. I thought it would be a great adventure combined with something meaningful.

I felt I hadn't been doing enough to give back to society and now would be a good time. I'm a full time graphic designer in Nenagh and I have a small boy. He takes priority now, but I know as he's more grown up, I'll have more time to be more involved. This is just the beginning of my journey.

At the moment, training on the boat is twice a week, we go on the lake and do different training exercises, it's all really stimulating and hands on. It can be physical, some nights are very cold, and very choppy on the lake, you have the elements coming at you, so it helps to be fit, but it's not main thing. Likewise, it helps if you feel comfortable in the water, but the

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Liked by [climateloveireland](#) and 223 others

7 MARCH 2022



Add a comment...

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WEACT



weactireland



weactireland Established in 2020, @nagaeilaeracha, the Rainbow Gaels, is Ireland's first explicitly #LGBTQIA+ inclusive GAA club. Karl Shannon is the founder and chairperson. This is his story...

"It all started when I put out a tweet. I'm no influencer, I don't have any kind of mass following. But I said I'd be interested in getting something going for GAA, that would be an explicitly queer-inclusive gathering and the tweet took off.

The amount of support I received was so overwhelming, I knew I needed to get something up and running. We now have two teams, GAA (men's Gaelic football) and LGFA (ladies' Gaelic football) and over 160 registered members. We don't currently have a club house, but I dream of it all the time, I can just see it! I definitely think it's in our future.

GAA was very central for me from a young age, and for my family. I think knowing that a club like Na Gaeil Aeracha existed - a club that exists within both of your communities; both within the queer community itself and within the GAA community - would have helped make coming to terms with who I am, and celebrating who I am, a lot easier and a lot

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Liked by **volunteerlaois** and 54 others

7 SEPTEMBER 2022



Add a comment...

Pos



weactireland



weactireland Last year we spoke with Danny forde, a volunteer firefighter with [@communityairamb](#) and he told us his volunteering story. 🚒🚑📋

"I'm a retired panel beater and spray painter and I was a first aid instructor with Civil Defence, where I'd had brilliant training in fire fighting, treating casualties, and search and rescue. When I retired, the Air Ambulance came to Rathcool at the right time - and I was delighted to be able to join it, I thought it was a great opportunity to help the community.

The difference the Air Ambulance makes is immense for the people of Munster. You've probably heard about the Golden Hour - the first hour after someone getting hurt is the most important, it determines how your casualty will recover. Our helicopter is the fastest civilian Air Ambulance in the world - from the time a call comes in, it's in the air in three minutes. It can get to Dingle in under 20 minutes. It could land in your back garden. We have an expert crew, both the paramedics and the pilot, they're top class.

We're getting a great response from the community because they realise how invaluable it is. It's all run on donations,

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Liked by [volunteerlaois](#) and 16 others

13 JANUARY



Add a comment...

[Post](#)

“We are all volunteers.
Where we know it or not.

You may drive a local child to their
GAA match. You may go do the
shopping for an older person. You
may drive somebody to their
hospital appointment. You may
walk their dog if they’ve broken
their ankle. It’s all volunteering.
Whether you know it or not, each
and every one of us is a volunteer.”

**Carolyn Akintola,
Lifelong Volunteer**



"Young Travellers
are left on the
margins of society,
and when you're
on the outside, it's
very hard to get
back in."

Martin, Involve Youth
Services, Letterkenny



**WE
ACT**

Turn to the person next to you and interview each other about your role. What stands out most about their story?



Five minutes

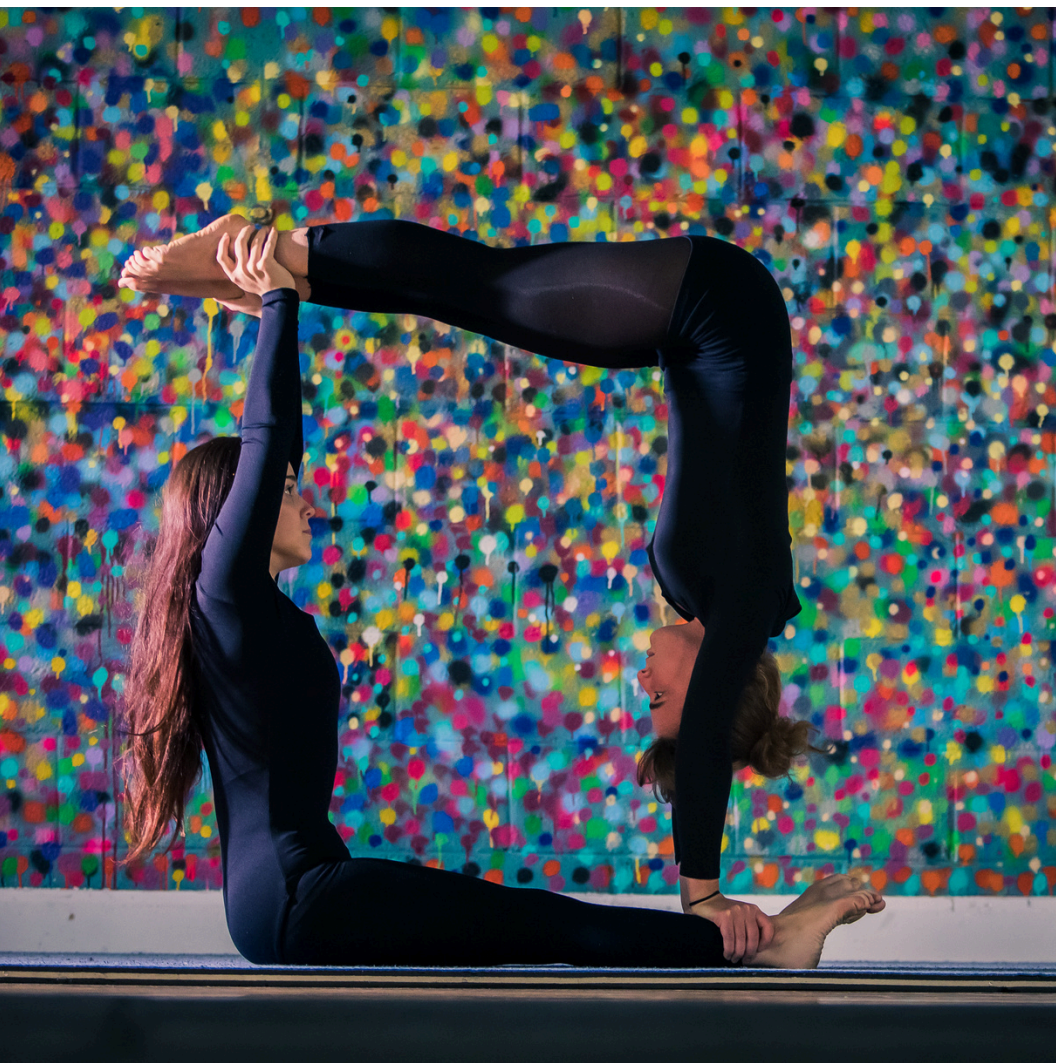
Volunteering Surprise Video





Invest in Great Imagery

- **Bright, clear, non-stock images and video are essential**
- **Images can be dramatic, funny or emotional, candid or posed, but should be eye-catching and stand out in the scrolling**
- **You don't need expensive equipment; portrait mode on your phone, free apps, Canva, iMovie, ColorStory etc**



Tell Stories with Statistics and Graphics

- Pull quotes from volunteers to make your stories go further with graphics for social media.
- Present attention-grabbing facts and stats about your volunteers as stand-alone statements
- Use myth-busting as a way to reverse common misconceptions about volunteering with your organisation



DID YOU KNOW?
There are over
1 million
volunteers
in Ireland

**"IT'S THE
BEST HOUR
OF MY WEEK."**

Our volunteers speak 28 different languages!

A hand holding a small globe of the Earth, showing continents and oceans. The globe is positioned in the center of the graphic, with the text 'Our volunteers speak 28 different languages!' curved around it.

**Our average
volunteer
donates
4 hours
per month**

11,076

inches of hair

11,076 inches of hair were donated through LauraLynn's Locks of Love last year. Not only are funds raised for the children's hospice through a brave haircut, the actual hair is donated to the Rapunzel Foundation too. Double win!

1569

toys

Carrickmacross Toy Library had a bumper 2023. In total 1569 toys were borrowed from the library, saving 800 kilos of plastic from landfill. The Toy Library has 800 toys to choose from tailored across ages and interests.

40,000

miles

Over 40,000 people took part in the Goal Mile over Christmas. With 160 events around the country, communities came together to walk, run, scoot and raise funds for humanitarian aid.

Be creative with it:

How many cups of tea have you served?

How many hours of counselling did you provide?

How many sales did make in your charity shop on Saturday?

How many bags of litter did you pick?

**Chat to the person next
to you about stats or
fun facts you could pull
from your volunteers!**

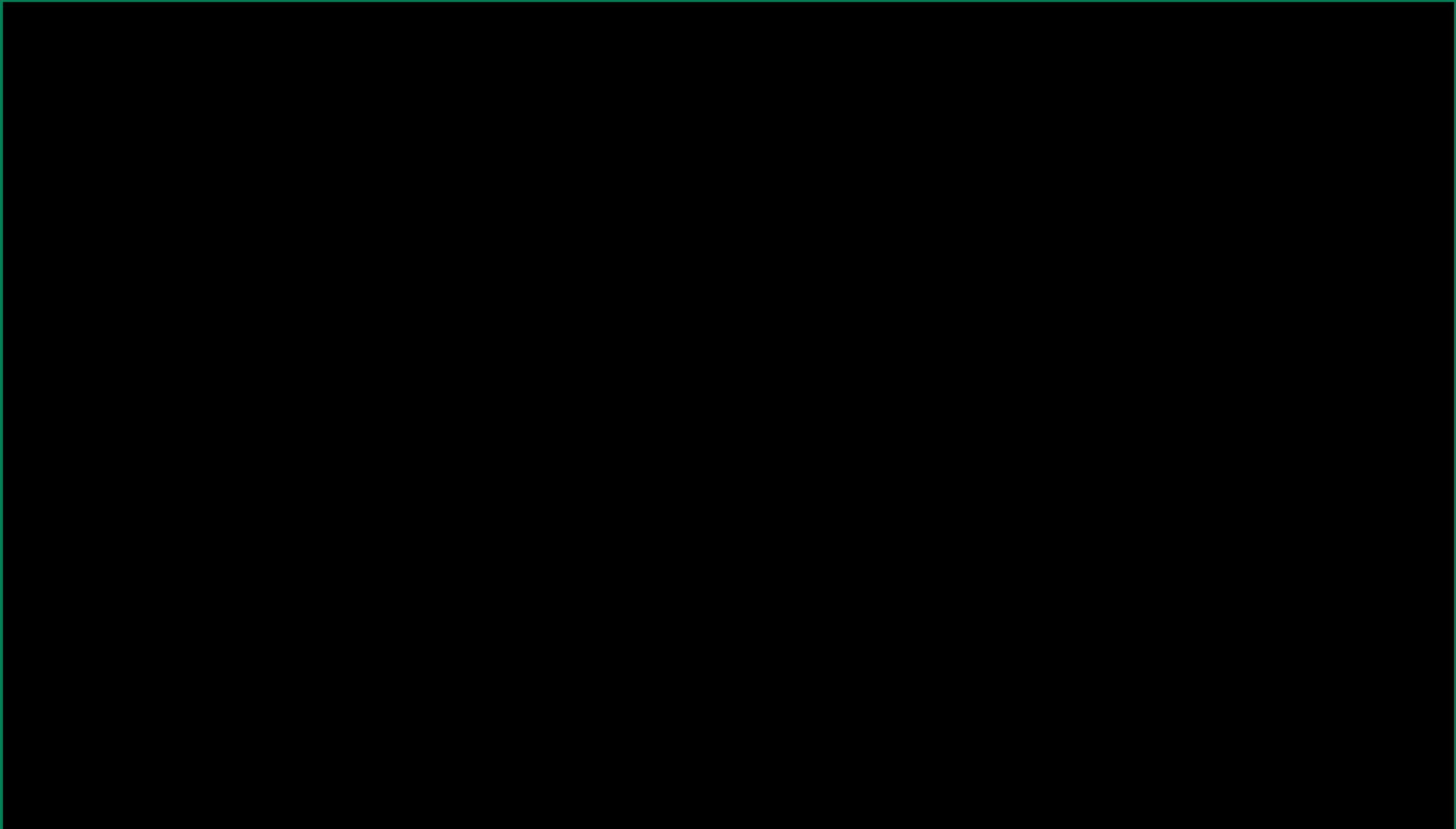


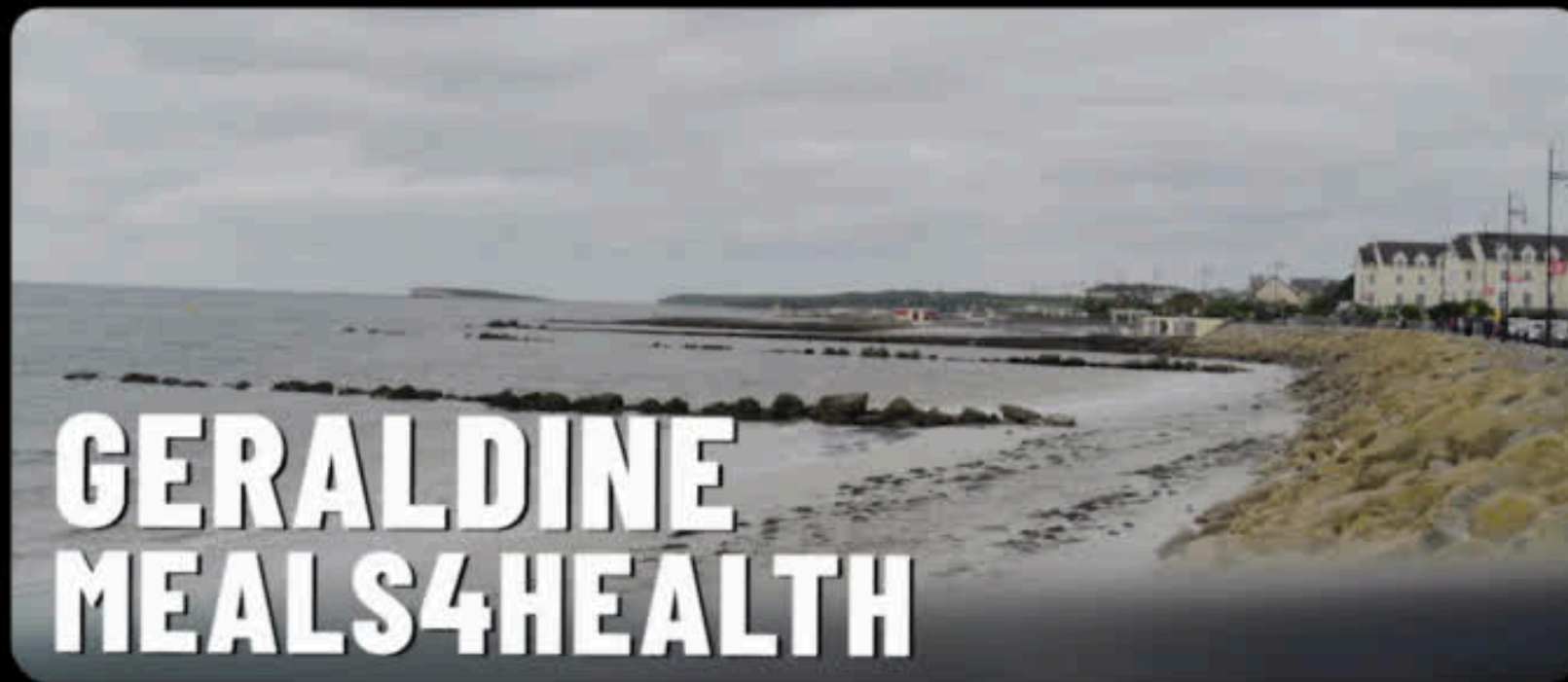
Two minutes

A Clear Call to Action

- Actionable next steps are vital to the real-life impact of a story.
- Make it as easy as possible, give people all the tools or information they might need.
- 'How-to help' lists or slides can be really useful for a more substantial campaign.
- Tell them exactly what they need to do to take part
- Ensure someone available to respond if they make contact
- Manage volunteer expectations







to set me up for the day, before I enter

**WE
ACT**

"I have a deep
realisation of the
social impact that
together, we can
achieve to make
older people feel
valued and cared
for."

**Geraldine, Meals4Health,
Cope Galway**



Inclusive Communications

- **Use plain English** - keep sentences short and avoid jargon, acronyms, abbreviations
- Speak as if you're **speaking to a friend** who doesn't know or understand the space you work in.
- Use **clear fonts** and **contrasting colours**
- Use **captions** and **alt test** on social media
- Communications should **reflect your entire community, without tokenism**
- **Keep up to date on** the most appropriate **language and guidelines**
- **Avoid speaking for others** in your communications
- If in doubt, ask someone!
- **Resources:** NALA, European Blind Union, Gorm Media, [WeAct.ie/Training](https://weact.ie/training)

Tips for Telling Volunteer Stories

- First person stories can have big impact
- Avoid the generic and include personal anecdotes
- Communicate the skills of volunteers
- Share the motivations of your volunteers
- Show the behind the scenes of their roles
- Discuss the impact of their roles
- Take lots and lots of photos!
- Encourage them to talk about what they gain from their experience



Emma is the CEO

**Nickie volunteers on
the Board of *Aoibhneas***

-Yeah.

-Yeah, sorry, I forgot to ask.

Homework

Identify one story within your organisation, and make a commitment to capture and share it this month.



Get Involved

- **Send us your stories**
- **Sign up to the Good News Gazette and send good news our way**
- **Follow @WeActIreland on social media**
- **Get your teams involved in the campaign**
- **Take the We Act Pledge**
- **Come to our training and our events**
- **Get involved with our calls to action**
- **Download our toolkit**





**Questions
Please!**



Volunteer
Ireland

Obair Dheonach Éireann

National Volunteer Management Conference

Join in the
conversation online
#NVMC2025

