

National  
Volunteer  
Management  
Conference

**Masterclass (*navy*)**  
**From survival to leadership:  
Migrant led volunteer  
innovation**

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## Who am I?

- Irish-Cameroonian journalist & author (4 books)
- Survivor of SGBV
- Founder & CEO, CAD AID Foundation
- Chairperson, UNHCR Refugee Advisory Board
- AU/CIEFFA Girls' Education Ambassador
- New Women Connectors Ambassador
- DCU President's Award for Engagement (Category: Student Special Merit, 2023)
- Finalist, Undergraduate of the Year Awards 2026 (Category: Difference Maker)
- Member, Dublin South Central Local Community Safety Partnership
- Nominee, DCU President's Awards 2026

*"I did not survive to fit in.  
I survived to change things."*

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This masterclass is built on lived experience, research, and over 2,500 individuals whose lives were transformed through migrant-led volunteering.

*Let us begin.*

# The Problem We Need to Name

## 15% vs 11%

- ❑ 15% of Irish citizens volunteer, but only 11% of non-Irish citizens.
- ❑ The gap is not about willingness.
- ❑ It is about access and belonging.

*CSO Census 2022, Ireland*

## “Unseen”

In my years of practice, migrants consistently describe feeling invisible in volunteer spaces.

*Volunteer Ireland Research, 2022 |  
CAD AID Foundation, 2017–2025*

## 2,500+

individuals reached through migrant-led programmes, across 5 countries via CAD AID Foundation

*Migrants are not the problem. The gap in how we engage them.*

# The 5-Pillar Framework for Migrant-Led Volunteering

01

## Dignity First

- ❑ Every engagement must begin with dignity.
- ❑ Not gratitude.
- ❑ Not compliance.
- ❑ Just Dignity.

02

## Lived Experience as Leadership

- ❑ The person who has survived the system understands it best.
- ❑ Trust them to lead.

03

## Trauma-Informed Practice

- ❑ Build safe spaces.
- ❑ Remove barriers.
- ❑ Respond to the whole person, not just the role.

04

## Storytelling & Narrative Power

- ❑ Stories are data with a soul.
- ❑ Use them to recruit, retain and celebrate volunteers.

05

## Co-Creation & Peer Learning

- ❑ Design with, not for.
- ❑ Communities shaped by their members are communities that last.

**Actionable takeaway 1** | These 5 pillars are your starting point for redesigning volunteer engagement.

# A Story of Survival

*"I was not looking for a programme.  
I was looking for a reason to keep going."*

That is how many of the people we serve arrive. Not as volunteers. As survivors.

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## What turned survivors into leaders?

1. Safe spaces to tell their story
2. Tools to write, heal and reclaim identity
3. Mentorship that walked beside them
4. Opportunities to lead, not just participate

# Trauma-Informed Volunteering in Practice

## What it is NOT

- ✗ Asking someone to perform their trauma
- ✗ Treating people as fragile or incapable
- ✗ One-size-fits-all onboarding
- ✗ Ignoring cultural context
- ✗ Speed over trust

## What it IS

- ✓ Starting with trust, not tasks
- ✓ Flexible and dignified structures
- ✓ Listening before designing
- ✓ Cultural intelligence in every interaction
- ✓ Making it safe to say no

**Actionable takeaway 2** | Audit your onboarding process. Does it build trust or demand compliance?

# Storytelling as a Leadership Tool

*"Stories are data with a soul."*

## For RECRUITMENT

- ❑ Share real stories from volunteers with lived experience.
- ❑ Let authenticity do the work that job ads cannot.

## For RETENTION

- ❑ Create spaces where volunteers can narrate their growth.
- ❑ People stay where they feel their story matters.

## For CELEBRATION

- ❑ End each programme cycle by honouring stories publicly.
- ❑ Recognition through narrative builds belonging.

**Actionable takeaway 3** | Introduce a volunteer storytelling circle in your next programme cycle.

# PAUSE & REFLECT

**Think of one person in your community  
who has something to give  
but has never been asked.**

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*Turn to the person beside you. Share who came to mind. 2 minutes.*

**This is where volunteering begins. Not in a form, but in a conversation.**

# Design With, Not For: The Co-Creation Model

## OLD MODEL

Organisation decides  
Migrant follows instructions  
One-way communication  
Volunteer as recipient  
High dropout, low belonging



## CO-CREATION MODEL

- ✓ Community co-designs the programme
- ✓ Migrant leads and facilitates
- ✓ Dialogue and feedback loops
- ✓ Volunteer as expert and leader
- ✓ Higher trust, retention and impact

**Actionable takeaway 4** | Invite one migrant volunteer to your next planning meeting as an equal partner.

# Migrant-Led Volunteering in Practice: What the Evidence Shows

**2,500+**

Individuals  
supported & empowered

**5**

Countries  
(Ireland, Cameroon,  
South Africa, Senegal, Côte  
d'Ivoire)

**8+**

Years of sustained  
community impact

**80+**

Conferences & events  
across Africa & Europe

## What This Model Produces

Safety & protection pathways

Leadership development for  
women & girls

Education & skills access

Media & narrative  
leadership

*From isolation to employment. From trauma to leadership. From silence to voice.*

# Your 3 Takeaways to Implement Today

1

## Redesign your engagement strategy

Apply the 5-Pillar Framework. Start with dignity. Build from there.

2

## Audit your onboarding for trauma-awareness

Replace compliance-first processes with trust-first conversations.

3

## Invite lived experience into leadership

One seat at one planning table changes everything.

# The future of volunteering

is migrant-led.

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*It always has been.*

*We just need to create the conditions for it to be seen.*

*If there is one thing I want you to take from today, it is this:*

- People do not need more programmes.
- They need to be seen, heard, and trusted.

# Questions & Discussion

Let's talk.

- What resonated most with you today?*
- What will you change in your organisation from now?*

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[www.cad-aid.org](http://www.cad-aid.org) | [#FromSurvivalToLeadership](https://twitter.com/FromSurvivalToLeadership)



National Volunteer Management Conference 2026

# From Survival to Leadership

*Migrant-Led Volunteer Innovation*

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