



FACES OF OUR  
COMMUNITY  
Photo Exhibition



Clare  
Volunteer Centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach an Chláir



COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR  
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL





# FACES OF OUR COMMUNITY

## Photo Exhibition

Welcome to *Faces of Our Community*, a celebration of volunteers across Co. Clare who give of their time, energy and heart to make our communities stronger.

Across our towns and villages, volunteers are the heartbeat of community life. They bring people together, create opportunities and ensure that no one feels left behind. This exhibition captures that energy – showing the many faces of volunteering and the unique way in which every person makes a difference.

Among these portraits are people new to our communities and those who have lived here all their lives; families who volunteer together, friendships that flourish through volunteering and those who believe even one person can make a difference. You will also see the vibrancy of youth who are beginning their volunteering journey, alongside the wisdom and dedication of older volunteers who continue to give so much of themselves.

Each face tells a story of kindness, connection and shared purpose. Together they remind us that when we share our time, skills and compassion, we build stronger, more resilient communities. Volunteering is a shared journey, where the efforts of one can inspire many to take pride in the community's well-being.

*Faces of Our Community* is more than an exhibition of photographs – it is a tribute to the everyday acts of generosity that shape who we are, across generations and make our communities truly thrive.

*Sharon Meaney*

Sharon Meaney, Manager – Clare Volunteer Centre

# PHOTOGRAPHERS BIOS



Natasha is a freelance photographer based in Co. Clare whose heart belongs to sport. Rarely far from a sideline, she has a gift for capturing both the triumphs and the heartbreak of the game. As an event and portrait photographer, Natasha's easy humour and relaxed approach puts people instantly at ease, from community parades to portraits, from the rush of a final whistle to the quiet pride in a winning smile, Natasha's work celebrates people, their stories and the spirit of the place she calls home.

 [@natashabartonphotography](#)



Orlaith is a portrait and event photographer known for her relaxed, candid approach. She tells stories through vibrant, creative images - from the energy of festivals to intimate portraits and the power of the ocean.

Her work focuses on making people feel at ease, turning nerves into authentic moments and creating images that reflect true connection.

 [@orlaithjane\\_photography](#)

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## ADE OLAKOTAN

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LISDOONVARNA FÁILTE

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Ade and her son, Joshua, arrived in Ireland from Nigeria in 2023 and were resettled in Lisdoonvarna. Although Ade had never volunteered back home, she quickly realised how volunteering could open doors to new friendships and connections.

Ade is a regular volunteer with **Lisdoonvarna Fáilte**, assisting at community events, as well as an active volunteer with **Meals on Wheels North Clare**, helping deliver meals to people in Lisdoonvarna, Doolin and Kilshanny. Ade enjoys taking in the stunning local scenery while coordinating and supporting the volunteer drivers in delivering meals to people in North Clare. The Meals on Wheels service, which began in 2023, now relies on the dedication of 16 volunteer drivers and assistants.

When Joshua, now eight years old, asks why she chooses to volunteer, Ade explains: *“People depend on us for their meals and sometimes we might be the only people they see all day.”*

Beyond Meals on Wheels, Ade also volunteers with **Mary’s Meals**, where she supports fundraising efforts through bake sales and other events. This initiative raises vital funds to provide daily school meals to disadvantaged children worldwide and delivers aid during emergencies, offering care and assistance to struggling communities.

For Ade, volunteering is deeply rooted in Irish culture and one of the things that makes Ireland truly unique. She values the spirit of connection, conversation and kindness—believing that even the smallest gesture, like sharing a smile, can brighten someone’s day.



## AMBROSE HEAGNEY

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CLARE GAA

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When Ambrose retired from his role as a mental health nurse three years ago, he was eager to find new ways to spend his time. With a lifelong love of both hurling and football and previous experience as an underage manager with Corofin GAA, he was naturally drawn towards **Clare GAA**.

The Gaelic Athletic Association is Ireland’s largest cultural and sporting organisation with a reach far beyond the playing field, fostering a sense of belonging for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Ambrose first joined the Clare GAA fixtures committee, before being invited to take on the role of Volunteer Safety and Facilities Officer. As a key member of the Clare GAA executive, he is primarily responsible for ensuring the safety and upkeep of *Zimmer Biomet Páirc Chíosóg* in Ennis. On any given day, you might find him power washing, painting, or assessing what improvements are needed to keep the county grounds in top condition for players, supporters and the wider community.

Ambrose speaks passionately about the friendships and camaraderie that come with volunteering: *“This is what the GAA is all about—volunteering and being part of the community. The GAA is like a jigsaw, made up of all different pieces – from the volunteers who wash the jerseys, line the pitches, coach the underage teams, organise the fixtures and the fundraising, to the player who lines out with the team. For the full picture, we need all the pieces.”*

Originally from Ballinasloe, County Galway, Ambrose still enjoys travelling to local matches in his home county. Yet, the saffron and blue he paints on the dressing room walls and around the grounds show that Clare GAA has firmly captured his heart. As a former referee, he knows many of the players now representing Clare at senior level and takes great pride in seeing them succeed, knowing that his contribution, like that of countless other GAA volunteers helps make their achievements possible.



## DEIRDRE COLEMAN, NICOLA WELFORD, ALISON SMITH, SARAH CONROY & MARGUERITE ARTHUR

### DERG AC INCLUSIVE ATHLETICS

**Derg AC Inclusive Athletics** is based in the scenic grounds of Clarisford Park, a state-of-the-art facility with a running track, outdoor gym and expansive green spaces – an ideal setting to nurture both the skills and confidence of its athletes.

The club was established in 2019 through the vision of Deirdre Coleman and the support of local families. The aim was to give children, particularly those with autism and additional needs, the chance to engage in regular physical activity in a safe, welcoming and encouraging environment. The club supports children with ASD, intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities providing a weekly, inclusive programme for the athletes and their families.

At the heart of the club is a dynamic all-women leadership team: Chairperson Nicola Welford, Inclusion Coach Deirdre Coleman, Autism Specialist Alison Smith, Membership Officer and Timings Coordinator Sarah Conroy, Treasurer and Coffee Dock organiser Marguerite Arthur. Together, they champion a family-centred model. While children train, parents benefit from an informal peer-to-peer support network and the weekly coffee dock offers a simple but meaningful moment of respite.

Alison, both a parent and an Autism Specialist, highlights that the club is a place where children and parents alike feel understood and supported. She offers guidance to families on helping their children thrive in sport, ensuring that every child can progress at their own pace.

Thanks to the dedication of its volunteers, Derg AC Inclusive Athletics has now achieved Special Olympics status, where children can compete in Special Olympics or IWA Para Athletics events. Sarah credits this milestone to the team’s unwavering commitment, while Deirdre emphasises the collective effort behind their success: *“Not one of us could do this on our own—we support each other because we can see the difference it’s making.”*

Nicola also underscores the importance of supporting parents as much as the children: *“As a club we place equal emphasis on creating a space where families can connect and share experiences. That’s what keeps us volunteering.”*

At the heart of Clarisford Park, children with autism and additional needs are not just welcomed, they are celebrated, encouraged and given the chance to experience the joy and lifelong benefits of sport.





## DERMOT HAYES

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### CLARE LEADER FORUM

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Dermot Hayes' volunteering journey has been driven by a lifelong commitment to challenging inequality and injustice. Widely recognised as a community activist, Dermot has worked alongside and on behalf of a diverse range of marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, trade union members and others experiencing social and economic exclusion. His activism is rooted in the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" – the belief that no policy or decision should be made without the direct involvement of those affected.

In 1992, he co-founded **Disabled People of Clare**, an organisation dedicated to representing and advocating for people with disabilities. A passionate campaigner for independent living, Dermot has consistently championed the right of people with disabilities to participate fully in society, with equal access to employment, education and community life.

Beyond disability rights, Dermot has worked closely with trade unions and grassroots movements, uniting workers and community activists to address systemic inequalities and defend dignity in the workplace. He recognises that the fight for justice is interconnected and that solidarity across movements is essential.

In 2013, he established the **Clare Leader Forum**, which takes a human rights-based approach to disability, advocating for the full inclusion and participation of disabled people in all areas of society. Dermot plays a pivotal role in empowering members of the Forum to speak for themselves, influence decision-making and lead campaigns for equality.

Reflecting on his life, Dermot says volunteering has brought him the greatest joy. *"It has enabled me to meet people who are not afraid to talk about independent living, people committed to the ethos of inclusion and accessibility and people who just need encouragement to find their voice – and to use this voice to campaign for their rights".*



## ÉABHA ASHMORE

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### CLARE YOUTH SERVICE

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Éabha became a member of **Clare Youth Service** in 2022, immediately drawn to its positive energy and the chance to socialise and make new friends. Living with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT) meant that Éabha often found herself excluded from sports and other physical activities that many of her friends enjoyed. Clare Youth Service offered her a welcoming space where she could take part in a wide range of activities suited to her abilities. Éabha

discovered opportunities to build friendships, express herself and contribute meaningfully, helping her feel not only included but also truly valued as a member of the community.

Éabha is also a member of the Ennis Brass Band, participating in concerts, parades and travelling to Lagenfield in Germany in 2024 as part of the Ennis – Lagenfield Twin Towns Project.

For Éabha, youth clubs are essential—they create safe spaces where young people can truly be themselves, meet others with shared interests and always have someone to talk to. She believes that these spaces not only build friendships but also provide the foundation for future community involvement. In 2024, she was invited to take part in the Clare Youth Service Leadership Programme to train as a summer camp leader at Clare Youth Service's summer camps for children aged 7–12 years, which she accepted.

Reflecting on her second-year volunteering at summer camp, Éabha says, *"Volunteering does not make me feel left behind—it supports me to make decisions, volunteer with friends and feel good about myself."* For Éabha, the experience is about more than just giving her time; it is about gaining independence, developing new skills and being part of something bigger than herself. Her commitment is a powerful reminder of how youth volunteering can open doors to personal growth, empower young people to take on responsibility and nurture self-confidence, strengthening the bonds that hold a community together.



## ELLEN MULCAHY

### CLARE SPORTS PARTNERSHIP

Ellen is from the town of Ennis and works with **Clare Sports Partnership** one day a week, providing vital administrative support. A valued member of the team, she has contributed to many of the organisation’s key programmes. Her work reflects the shared vision of a County Clare *“where everyone can enjoy physical activity and sport to their full potential, where physical activity and sport is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone’s responsibility.”*

Outside her paid role, Ellen gives of her time as a volunteer with Clare Sports Partnership’s inclusive summer camps for children with additional needs, including:

- + Derg AC Inclusive Athletics
- + Clare Comets Basketball
- + Clare GAA / Clare Sports Partnership Cúl Camp
- + FAI Down Syndrome Camp

At each camp, Ellen assists with registration, distributes equipment and supports children to get fully involved in every activity. Catherine Ryan describes Ellen as, *“an excellent volunteer, so friendly and welcoming, with a great sense of humour. We love having her as part of our team. Ellen inspires many of the other volunteers in our programmes with her positive attitude.”*

Beyond sport and volunteering, Ellen’s great passion is Munster Rugby. This year she added two treasured items to her collection of memorabilia—a signed jersey for her birthday and a special pair of Simon Zebo signed rugby boots.

Ellen is a team player in every sense of the word, embodying the Clare Sports Partnership ethos of active participation for all and helping make the vision of inclusive, community-supported sport in County Clare a reality.



## HALYNA KHRAPACHEVSKA, ALEXANDRA MUKOVOA & NATALIA POLIKREUYCH

### CLARE HAVEN HORIZONS CHARITY SHOP

Halyna, Alexandra and Natalia arrived in Ireland in 2022 from Kyiv, Dnipro and Kremenchuk, seeking safety after fleeing the war in Ukraine. Though they did not know each other before coming to Ennis, they have since formed a close bond through their shared commitment to volunteering. Several days each week, they work together in the sorting depot of the **Clare Haven Horizons charity shop**.

The shop was established to raise funds for Clare Haven Services, which provides frontline domestic abuse supports and develops vital education and prevention programmes aimed at breaking the cycle of gender-based violence in Irish society. Shop manager, Mairead Mannion has reflected that the war in Ukraine itself can be seen as an act of violence against women—many of whom have lost their homes, their country and in some cases, their families.

For Halyna, Alexandra and Natalia, volunteering is both a new and meaningful experience. None of them had volunteered before in Ukraine, but in Ireland they see it as a way to integrate, to improve their English and to give back to the community that has welcomed them. Volunteering also provides a welcome distraction from the painful news that continues to reach them from home.

When speaking about the reasons why they volunteer with Clare Haven Horizons charity shop, Halyna reflects that it is rewarding because *“very good people work here.”* Alexandra, Natalia & Halyna all value the opportunity to help others while surrounding themselves with kindness and positivity. Together, they are not only supporting a service that changes lives but also building friendships and finding hope in a new chapter of their own lives.



## ORLA VAUGHAN

### QUARE CLARE

Orla is originally from Kilfenora, where she grew up in the heart of the village as her parents owned the local pub and restaurant. From a young age, her family encouraged her to volunteer, instilling in her the importance of community connection—a value that has remained central to her life. With a strong interest in tourism, Orla has contributed to a variety of tourism and community groups, advocating for the promotion of local culture and the development of sustainable initiatives.

A natural communicator with a solutions-focused mindset, Orla is a board member of

The Burren Visitor Centre and part of the fundraising team for **Kilfenora Corner**, a project that proposes to purchase and re-open Linnane's Pub in Kilfenora as a community-driven social enterprise. Orla also serves as secretary of **Quare Clare**, an organisation founded in 2020 to create a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ people in Clare

Quare Clare places a strong emphasis on fostering friendships and meaningful connections through regular events and activities. Recognising isolation as a significant challenge for many, Orla takes pride in Quare Clare's warm and inclusive atmosphere:

*"We are not cool, we are not trendy, but what we are is a safe space where people can tell their stories. Our members range in age from 18 to over 80 and while their stories may differ, the shared need for support and connection unites us."*

For Orla, this sense of belonging extends beyond Quare Clare. She believes that open, honest communication is key to tackling misinformation and negativity within the wider community:

*"I have no objections to people highlighting issues or problems—but let's work together to find solutions."*

Quare Clare runs several events each month, including a brunch on the last Sunday and a cinema night on the first Saturday of the month as well as organising the annual Clare Pride Festival in September. Over time, the group has expanded to include karaoke nights, games evenings and other member-led activities—all sharing the same ethos of connection, support and friendship.



## PAT RUTHERFORD

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Originally from Donegal, Pat began his volunteering journey in the 1980s with **Project Children**, a Northern Ireland initiative that gave thousands of children from troubled areas the chance to spend peaceful summers with host families across New York State. This early experience shaped his lifelong commitment to helping others. For Pat, volunteering is both a calling and a pathway to becoming a better person.

Since 2010, he has been a dedicated volunteer with the **Special Olympics**, coaching athletics for the **Brothers of Charity** in Ennis and golf with the Ennis Special Olympics Golf Club. His dedication has taken him and athlete Paul Kirrane to competitions across Ireland and even further afield. In 2015, Pat and Paul proudly represented Ireland at the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles, where they won bronze medals. More recently, Paul has gone on to compete in singles events, with Pat by his side as caddy—winning a silver medal at the prestigious Portmarnock Golf Links.

Alongside his work as a coach, Pat has played a vital role in co-ordinating fundraising events for Special Olympics Ireland. These events are essential, not only for raising the funds needed to provide training, equipment and opportunities for athletes, but also for bringing communities together in support of inclusion and sport for all. Pat works closely with the Clare Volunteer Centre, whose support he greatly values in rallying volunteers to ensure these events succeed.

For Pat, the true heart of volunteering lies in the qualities it nurtures, **kindness, helpfulness, trustworthiness and reliability**. What he treasures most is the joy of sharing in someone else's happiness—a feeling he sums up with a single word: **confelicity**. For Pat, confelicity is what volunteering is all about. It is this spirit of shared joy and connection that continues to inspire his commitment and enrich the lives of those around him.



## ROB CLEARY

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### CLARE CIVIL DEFENCE

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Rob Cleary, from Miltown Malbay, is a facilities engineer by day and a committed volunteer with **Clare Civil Defence**. The Clare Civil Defence is a vital, volunteer-based organisation that supports frontline emergency services across County Clare. The Civil Defence steps in during severe weather, flooding, major accidents and searches for missing persons, while also providing essential presence and first aid at community events.

Rob's volunteer journey began in his university years, when he served as a Unit Officer and EMT with the Clare Red Cross. He joined Clare Civil Defence in 2018, going on to qualify as a Swift Water & Search Responder and a Drone Pilot. He values the camaraderie, the opportunity to gain new skills, the positive atmosphere and the lasting friendships formed through volunteering, *"the best thing about Civil Defence is that you're never on your own—you always go out on duty as part of a team."*

As of 2024, Clare Civil Defence comprised **74 active volunteers**, who together responded to **113 separate events and incidents**, including **24 missing-person searches**—marking one of the busiest years on record.

In recognition of his outstanding dedication, Rob was awarded the **John Cuddihy Volunteer of the Year Award** in 2024. The award was named in memory of John Cuddihy, a long-serving Clare Civil Defence volunteer whose loyalty, dedication and selflessness set the highest standard. Civil Defence Officer, Steven Hayes presented the award to Rob, acknowledging his embodiment of those same values and serving with exceptional commitment and skill.



## ROB STEPHEN

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### CLARE COMMUNITY GAMES

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Rob Stephen grew up in Kenya and first encountered **Clare Community Games** after moving to Sixmilebridge over 20 years ago, when his children became involved. Quickly drawn into the spirit of the event, he began volunteering as a coach for the draughts and chess competitions.

When Rob later moved to Shannon and his children were no longer competing, his own commitment didn't stop. He joined Clare Community Games County Executive and today serves as Chairperson of this voluntary sporting organisation. Affiliated with the National Community Games body, Clare Community Games offers children and young people opportunities to grow, learn and thrive while exploring a wide range of sporting and cultural activities and is sponsored by St. Francis Credit Union in Ennis.

For Rob, the heart of Community Games is summed up in the words of founding member John O'Sullivan (1938–2015): *"The beauty of Community Games is that children can find their niche - the thing they love - and carry it into adult life."* That legacy is alive today, with many past participants returning as adult volunteers, ready to give back to the same communities that once supported them.

Rob believes that Community Games is much more than competition, it's about building connections within your community: *"You can only compete with the children who live in your own community. That means we're not just building teams—we're building friendships and relationships that can last a lifetime."*

Through his leadership, Rob continues to ensure that Clare Community Games is not just about winning medals, but about supporting community connections, fostering inclusion and inspiring the next generation to one day come back and lead.



## SEÁN ROCHE

### CLARE YOUTH SERVICE

Seán credits the late Fr. Sean Sexton with first introducing him to the world of volunteering. A simple question about his opinion in secondary school, followed by an invitation to join the school pioneer council sparked in him the realisation that he could influence change and make meaningful decisions through volunteer work. Driven by the deep pride in his parish of Kilnaboy and a belief that everyone deserves a safe, welcoming space, Seán began volunteering with the **Kilnaboy Youth Club** in 1967.

His commitment to youth work has remained strong ever since. Seán reflects that the energy, positivity and fresh outlook young people bring continue to inspire and motivate him.

Over the years, his volunteering journey has grown to include involvement with the **Kilnaboy Community Development Association, North Clare Community Groups, Kilnaboy Athletic Club, Clare Youth Service, North Clare Agricultural Show, Kilnaboy Recreational Facilities Limited**, as well as providing Traffic Management for community events. Seán is also a trustee of **Open Doors** – Supporting Special Needs in Clare and serves nationally as a board member of **Youth Work Ireland** representing rural communities.

At the heart of Seán’s work lies a deep commitment to the spirit of *Meitheal* – the traditional Irish practice of community cooperation and mutual support. This principle is beautifully echoed in the words of poet John Donne: **“No man is an island.”** Through his tireless dedication to local initiatives, support for neighbours and efforts to foster inclusive networks, Seán embodies this belief – that no one thrives in isolation; we all belong to something greater.



## SHAYLA, CLINT, ROBERT, ULYSSES & LUVIA HILPERT

### ENNIS TIDY TOWNS

Originally from Canada and the United States, Shayla and Clint made County Clare their home three years ago. With a young family, they wanted to become part of the community and saw family volunteering as the perfect way to do it. By giving their time and energy, the Hilpert family not only help to keep their town vibrant and welcoming but also demonstrate how volunteering can weave new families into the fabric of community life.

Every week, they join **Ennis Tidy Towns** for a litter pick, familiarising themselves with the laneways and streets of Ennis while meeting neighbours and others who are also new to the area. Along the way, they have built strong friendships and a deep sense of belonging.

For Shayla and Clint, volunteering as a family is more than a community activity—it’s a way to share values with their children and teach the importance of being responsible citizens. Volunteering has enabled the family to feel connected to their new community and Shayla believes that as you lay down a part of yourself you really get to care deeply for the people and place around you.

Their commitment extends beyond litter picking. The family came up with the idea of creating a **Junior Garden** and a **Sharing Library** in their local area. Working with **Ennis Men’s Shed**, they developed a safe, welcoming space where children can meet, swap books and enjoy the outdoors together.

Their motivation each week comes from a mix of commitment, care for the environment and the joy of social connection with Shayla believing that when people see children out volunteering, it shows that everyone can volunteer and make a difference. For Shayla and Clint, these projects are not just about tidying streets or planting flowers—they are about nurturing community spirit and creating spaces where their children and others, can grow up feeling connected and included.



## TERENCE MANGAN

### ENNIS LIONS CLUB

The **Lions Clubs International** network spans 48,000 clubs and 1.45 million volunteers in almost every country. Guided by the motto “*We Serve*,” Lions take on projects from small-scale local initiatives to global efforts in health, refugee support and disaster relief.

Founded in 1976, the **Ennis Lions Club** welcomed Terence in the late 1980s, when he sought both a social outlet and a chance to contribute to causes with global reach. Over the years, he has attended conventions across Ireland and abroad, forging friendships and partnerships that have inspired his work at home.

Locally, Terence has played a key role in initiatives including the **Breakfast Club** at Scoil Chríost Rí, which ensures children start the day nourished; **Annual Food Appeals** for families in need; and the **Wood Chopping & Bagging Service** providing winter fuel to vulnerable households. He has championed the **Remembrance Tree** project for Cahercalla Hospice, the **Message in a Bottle** programme supplying vital medical information to first responders and **Recycle for Sight**, which delivers used eyewear to people in developing countries who would otherwise go without vision correction.

Terence motivates his fellow members, offering encouragement and practical support even when not leading a project. His detailed reportage—whether calculating the euro value of a food appeal or tracing the journey of a pair of glasses to a child in South America, keeps members focused on the real-world impact of their work.

His commitment reaches beyond County Clare. In 2018, Terence travelled to Lebanon to witness the conditions faced by women and children displaced by the Syrian war—an experience he calls life-changing. “*I have seen how individual action in a small town like Ennis has real impact beyond our county boundaries*,” he reflects.

Whether restoring sight to someone in the developing world or offering hope to refugees facing fear, hunger and war, Terence’s work with the Ennis Lions Club proves that compassion and service know no borders.



## TINA BOYLE

### FESTIVAL OF FINN

Originally from Buckinghamshire in Southeast England, Tina moved to Corofin in 2007 to take up a role as Supervising Pharmacist with Rochfords Pharmacy. Having no previous ties to Ireland, other than an interest through genealogy, she gave herself six months to see if life in North Clare would suit her.

Rochfords pharmacy is at the heart of the community in Corofin and supports events held by the school and other organisations in the village. Through her employment Tina soon found herself building community connections.

When the inaugural meeting of **Corofin Tourism and Traders** association was held in 2012, Tina attended and became involved with promoting Corofin as a tourist destination before becoming part of the **Festival of Finn** committee. This annual celebration of Irish culture and heritage, named after the legendary warrior Fionn Mac Cumhail, takes place over the May Bank Holiday weekend and brings the village together through music, talks, walks and family fun events.

Volunteering has helped Tina grow as a person, sparking her creativity and nudging her beyond her comfort zone—from dressing up as Fionn Mac Cumhail to visit local schools to coordinating the much-loved *Lark on the Lake* with help from other committee members. Through her role as treasurer, she has also gained valuable experience in new areas such as preparing budgets, managing accounts and writing grant applications, skills that help keep the committee’s work organised and ensure events can be successfully funded and delivered.

Over time, she has become deeply woven into the fabric of village life, building lasting friendships and developing a true love for the place she now calls home. For Tina, volunteering isn’t just about giving back—it’s about belonging and being part of something bigger—her community.



## WITNESS MPANDE

### SANCTUARY RUNNERS

Originally from Zimbabwe, Witness arrived in Ireland in August 2022. He first joined the **Sanctuary Runners** in Limerick that November and after moving to Ennis the following month, he connected with Rob Stephen of the **Ennis Sanctuary Runners** in January 2023. Eager to learn more about his new community, Witness quickly found that the Sanctuary Runners—a solidarity-through-sport initiative bringing together asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and local residents—was the perfect way to feel at home.

In Ennis, Rob Stephen leads the weekly gatherings at the Fair Green, welcoming people of every background. For Witness, who had never run before moving to Ireland, these meet-ups soon became far more than exercise—they opened doors to friendship, belonging and a shared purpose.

Before long, he was not only running but also volunteering each week, helping to create a welcoming space where people from different countries and life experiences could come together, proving that language is never a barrier to belonging. His athletic journey has since taken him to races like the Kilkee 10k, the Great Limerick Run 10k and the Streets of Galway 8k. Yet, Witness says his greatest achievement has been the friendships he has made along the way.

*“What keeps me going is Rob’s encouragement and the spirit of the group,”* Witness explains. *“Sanctuary Runners keeps me healthy—both mentally and physically—and has introduced me to people I would never have met otherwise.”*

Through his dedication, Witness shows how sport can break down barriers, build understanding and strengthen community. Sanctuary Runners has become more than just a running club—it is a place of welcome, friendship and belonging. More widely, the group demonstrates how simple acts like running side by side can challenge isolation, create connections across cultures and build stronger, more inclusive communities where everyone has a chance to belong.

## A Word of Thanks

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generosity, enthusiasm and support of so many people and organisations across County Clare.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who took part: Clare Civil Defence, Clare Community Games, Clare GAA, Clare Haven Horizons Charity Shop, Clare Leader Forum, Clare Sports Partnership, Clare Youth Service, Derg AC Inclusive Athletics, Ennis Lions Club, Ennis Tidy Towns, the Festival of Finn, Lisdoonvarna Fáilte, Quare Clare, Sanctuary Runners and Special Olympics. We are also deeply grateful for the support of Clare County Council and the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. Special thanks go to Úna and her team in De Valera Library, Muiriosa and her team in Súil Gallery and Helen Walsh for their invaluable contributions.

A very special word of appreciation goes to our two talented photographers, Orlaith Martin and Natasha Barton, whose work has captured the spirit and humanity of this project so beautifully.

Above all, we thank the volunteers themselves—those who shared their stories, welcomed us with kindness (and scones!) and inspired us with their generosity. You are the reason this exhibition exists and the reason our communities continue to grow stronger.

*In appreciation,*

*Sharon, Dolores, Marguerita & Olena from the Clare Volunteer Centre, together with Brendan and the Integration team in Clare County Council.*

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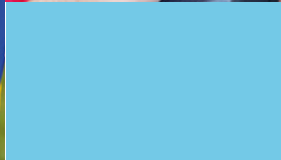
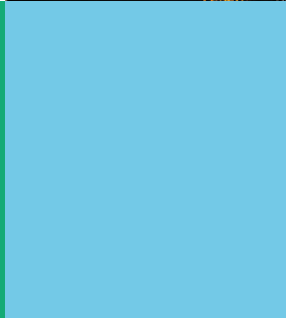
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agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta**  
Department of Rural and Community  
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**Clare  
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