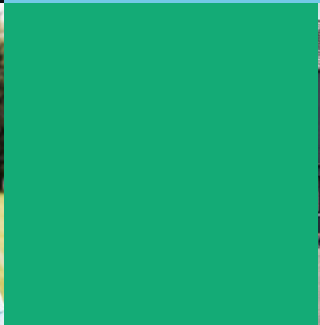




Clare
Volunteer Centre
Ionad d'Obair Dheonach an Chláir

Faces of Our Community

Photo Book



An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe
agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta
Department of Rural and Community
Development and the Gaeltacht



COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL





Introduction

It is my great pleasure to introduce *Faces of Our Community* – This photobook reflects the extraordinary spirit of volunteering that runs through our county: a spirit of welcome, solidarity and neighbourliness that continues to shape our communities every day.

Within these pages, you will meet volunteers of all ages and life experiences – young people discovering their voice and place in the world; long-standing volunteers whose dedication has strengthened communities over decades; people newly arrived to Clare who have chosen to root themselves here through acts of service; and those who work quietly and consistently to ensure that others are heard, supported and included. Together, they represent the rich diversity of what volunteering looks like today.

What binds these volunteers is not a single background, ability or story – but a shared belief that our communities are stronger when we show up for one another.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Clare Volunteer Centre, its staff team and the board of Clare Volunteer Centre, whose commitment to encouraging, supporting and recognising volunteering in our county is unwavering. Their dedication ensures that volunteers feel valued, connected and empowered. Their work continues to remind us that volunteering is not simply a task – it is a relationship, a way of belonging and a way of shaping the places we call home.

To the volunteers featured here – and to the many thousands more across Clare who give quietly and generously of their time – thank you. Your contribution resonates far beyond the moment in which it is given. You inspire, you encourage and you remind us of the best of who we can be when we act together. I would like to express my gratitude to Clare County Council for their support of this project and for their ongoing commitment to initiatives that celebrate and acknowledge the invaluable contributions of volunteers.

It is an honour to share these faces, these stories and this celebration of community.

Michael Foley Chairperson 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

Contents

Ade Olakotan	2
Ambrose Heagney	3
Deirdre Coleman, Nicola Welford, Alison Smith, Sarah Conroy & Marguerite Arthur	4
Dermot Hayes	6
Éabha Ashmore	7
Ellen Mulcahy	8
Halyna Khrapachevska, Alexandra Mukovoa & Natalia Polikreuych	9
Orla Vaughan	10
Pat Rutherford	11
Rob Cleary	12
Rob Stephen	13
Seán Roche	14
Shayla, Clint, Robert, Ulysses & Luvia Hilpert	15
Terence Mangan	16
Tina Boyle	17
Witness Mpande	18
Thank you	19

Ade Olakotan

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.

Today, she is 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. 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 may 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 to deliver 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.



LISDOONVARNA FÁILTE

Lisdoonvarna Fáilte is a community-based organisation dedicated to supporting the social, economic and cultural development of Lisdoonvarna and its surrounding areas. Established to enhance local life, it manages community facilities, promotes tourism and works on projects that foster inclusion, sustainability and well-being. Meals on Wheels North Clare is a service offered by Lisdoonvarna Fáilte in partnership with Obair CLG (based in Newmarket-on-Fergus) to bring the well-known “Meals on Wheels” support to older and isolated individuals in North Clare. The programme supplies nutritious two-course meals and friendly volunteer contact, helping people who may struggle to cook or live alone feel supported in their own homes. Beyond the nutritional value of the meal, the volunteers are a meaningful connection to the outside world for many elderly and vulnerable individuals. The friendly face and conversation, for a person who has limited social interaction can make a real difference.



Ambrose Heagney

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.

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.

He 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 volunteer who washes the jerseys, who lines the pitches, who coaches the underage teams, who organises 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.



“Away from the spotlight, people like Ambrose quietly keep everything running. His work as a groundsman isn’t for praise or reward but for pride in his county and community. Long before players or supporters arrive, he’s already lined the pitch, checked facilities and ensured everything is ready. It’s a role noticed only when things go wrong, yet without his dedication, our summer moments following the Banner County wouldn’t happen. Ambrose embodies the GAA’s true spirit – selfless service, pride of place and love of community.”

PRO, Aaron Carroll



Deirdre Coleman, Nicola Welford, Alison Smith, Sarah Conroy and Marguerite Arthur

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 of Derg AC is 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. While the club supports pathways for children with ASD, intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities to compete with Special Olympics and IWA Para Athletics if they wish, its central focus is providing a weekly inclusive programme for children 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. 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.



DERG AC INCLUSIVE ATHLETICS

Clare Sports Partnership through its Sports Inclusion Disability Officer plays an important role in advancing inclusive sports opportunities across County Clare for People with a Disability. Derg Inclusive Athletics Club is a prime illustration of this. Through this programme, children and teenagers with disabilities can participate in sports in a friendly, encouraging and completely inclusive setting. To help accessibility and sustainability of the programme, Clare Sport Partnership has helped Derg AC by providing equipment and training for coaches to help Derg AC's ongoing programme development. Derg Inclusive Athletics Club's success is evidence of the beneficial effects of inclusive athletics but also its commitment to diversify into other sports like cycling.



Deirdre Coleman



Nicola Welford



Alison Smith



Marguerite Arthur



Sarah Conroy

Dermot Hayes

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.

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 needed encouragement to find their voice – and to use this voice to campaign for their rights."*

CLARE LEADER FORUM

The Clare Leader Forum advances the rights and full inclusion of Disabled People through advocacy, education and support. They empower their members as equal citizens and active participants in their communities by eliminating barriers, promoting accessibility and non-discrimination and fostering a culture that recognises and upholds the inherent dignity and equal rights of all persons. Through meetings, consultations and awareness initiatives, the Clare Leader Forum ensures that the lived experiences of people with disabilities inform decision-making and help build a more inclusive County Clare for everyone, leading and contributing to local, national and international campaigns.



"Dermot is an extraordinary volunteer, tireless, supportive, kind and deeply passionate. He has dedicated his life to advocating for human rights, justice, equality and inclusion."

Even in recent years, as his health has deteriorated, Dermot has continued to show his deep commitment. From his hospital bed he rallied, motivated and encouraged people to take an active part in the issues impacting their lives."

We are so grateful for all that Dermot has given – his time, his leadership and above all his friendship."

Ann Marie Flanagan – Clare Leader Forum

Éabha Ashmore

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 she couldn't take part in sports, so Clare Youth Service became a place where she could join in a variety of activities and feel like a valued 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. That same year, 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.

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.

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."* Éabha's commitment shows how youth volunteering can empower young people, build confidence and strengthen the bonds that hold a community together.



CLARE YOUTH SERVICE

The Clare Youth Service Leadership Programme is a Volunteer Programme run in Ennis and Shannon each year. It trains young people as leaders to gain skills to work with children aged 7–11yrs. Volunteers work together as a team to run Summer camps for children from their local community during the Summer, gaining leadership experiences.

"Éabha became a member of Clare Youth Service in 2022 and has been a vital member of many groups and committees in Clare Youth Service. She has taken part as a Summer Camp Leader for two years and has brought so much to the Summer camp team."

Helena Slattery – Clare Youth Service



Ellen Mulcahy

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 generously as a volunteer at all of 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 her 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, 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.

CLARE SPORTS PARTNERSHIP

Clare Sports Partnership works to promote physical activity, health and wellbeing for people of all ages and abilities across County Clare. Through local clubs, schools and community programmes, it encourages participation in sport and active living.

Volunteers are essential to its success, giving their time as coaches, mentors and organisers to ensure that activities are accessible, inclusive and community-driven.

The volunteers assist Clare Sports Partnership in their goal to increase participation in sports and physical activity in County Clare and actively promote the benefits of involvement in sporting activity to improve fitness, mental well-being and social engagement.

"With her infectious laugh and sense of devilment, Ellen has become a very important part of our volunteering team"

Catherine Ryan,
Clare Local Sports Partnership



Halyna Khrapachevska, Alexandra Mukovoa & Natalia Polikreuych

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 to develop 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 learn 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.

They value the opportunity to help others while surrounding themselves with kindness and positivity. As Halyna says, volunteering at Clare Haven Horizons is rewarding because *"very good people work here."* 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.



CLARE HAVEN HORIZONS CHARITY SHOP

The Clare Haven Horizons Charity Superstore in Ennis supports the frontline domestic abuse services of Clare Haven Services and the national education and awareness programmes run by Haven Horizons, aiming to prevent relationship abuse in our society. The store's trading name reflects its funding relationship with both charities, with all proceeds benefitting their shared mission to end gender-based violence in our communities.

This large superstore offers a wide range of new and pre-loved items, including quality clothing, accessories, homeware, books, toys and furniture. A free furniture collection service across the mid-west and a convenient drive-to-the-door donation depot make it easy for donors to contribute. Clare Haven Horizons also promotes sustainability through reuse, repurposing and recycling, while providing volunteering opportunities that strengthen community involvement and awareness of its vital mission.



The charity depends on the dedication of volunteers who give of their time and energy to make this social enterprise a success. Whether retired, new to the community, a student, everyone is welcome. We are especially proud of our Ukrainian volunteers Halyna, Natalya and Oleksandra, honoured in the "Faces of our Community" initiative by the Clare Volunteer Centre for their invaluable contribution to our charity over the past number of years.

Orla Vaughan

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, 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.



QUARE CLARE

The mission of Quare Clare is to build a vibrant LGBTQIA+ community in Clare, celebrating diversity and inclusivity by creating spaces and opportunities for the LGBTQIA+ community to thrive through education, advocacy and community building. There is a full calendar of events and details of upcoming initiatives which can be found at www.quareclare.ie



Pat Rutherford

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. That 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 coaching, Pat has played a key role in co-ordinating fundraising events for Special Olympics Ireland, often working 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.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics vision is: *"An inclusive world for all, driven by the power of sport, through which people with intellectual disabilities live active, healthy and fulfilling lives."* The Ennis Special Olympics Golf Club is a community built on teamwork, inclusion and volunteer spirit. The heart of the Ennis Special Olympics Golf Club lies in the friendships formed between athletes and volunteers – proving that the true success of the programme isn't measured in scores, but in smiles, teamwork and shared joy.



Rob Cleary

Rob Cleary, from Miltown Malbay, is a facilities engineer by day and a dedicated volunteer with Clare Civil Defence, a volunteer-based organisation that supports frontline emergency services in County Clare. The Civil Defence assists in times of severe weather, flooding, major accidents and in searches for missing persons while also offering community support at local events.

Rob's volunteering journey began during his university years, when he served as a Unit Officer and EMT with the Clare Red Cross. In 2018, he joined Clare Civil Defence, qualifying as Swift Water & Search Responder and a Drone Pilot. He values the camaraderie, the chance to develop new skills, the positive atmosphere and the lasting friendships he has built through volunteering.

In 2024, Rob was honoured with the *John Cuddihy Volunteer of the Year Award*, created in memory of a long-serving Clare Civil Defence volunteer whose loyalty, dedication and selflessness set the highest standard. Civil Defence Officer Steven Hayes remarked that the award recognises volunteers who embody John's values and Rob's commitment and skill make him a worthy recipient.

CLARE CIVIL DEFENCE

Clare Civil Defence is part of the national Civil Defence network in Ireland, a volunteer-based organisation that supports emergency services and communities across the country. Established in 1950 under the Department of Defence, Civil Defence was originally formed to provide aid and protection to civilians in the event of wartime emergencies. Over time, its focus evolved to address peacetime challenges such as natural disasters, severe weather events and major public incidents.

The volunteers' dedication reflects a strong community spirit and commitment to public service that has been at the heart of Civil Defence since its foundation. Through ongoing training and national support, Clare Civil Defence continues to uphold the organisation's mission – to protect, assist and serve the people of Ireland in times of emergency and need.



Rob Stephen

Rob Stephen grew up in Kenya and first encountered the 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 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 the Clare Community Games County Executive and today serves as the Chairperson. 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.

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 only about winning medals, but about supporting community connections, fostering inclusion and inspiring the next generation to one day come back and lead.



CLARE COMMUNITY GAMES

Clare Community Games offers children and young people in County Clare the chance to participate in a wide variety of sporting and cultural activities. The structure is organised locally (area level), then county wide and onward to provincial and national finals.

Volunteers are absolutely vital to the success of Clare Community Games. From setting up tracks, organising competitions, arranging venues, distributing medals and managing the youth participants, the dedication of area and county-level volunteers ensures the events happen smoothly and safely. As County Chairman Rob Stephen put it: *"Without the dedication of volunteers at area and county level, the Community Games simply wouldn't happen."*



Seán Roche

Clare Youth Service was established in 1969 by the late Fr. Seán Sexton who was a tireless campaigner for young people in Clare, Ireland and at European level. Seán credits the late Fr. Seán 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, a trustee of Open Doors – Supporting Special Needs in Clare and Kilnaboy Recreational Facilities Limited, Traffic Management for community events and serving 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.

CLARE YOUTH SERVICE

Clare Youth Service is committed to the development and delivery of quality youth work and also applies youth work values and principles to the areas of Advocacy, Alcohol & Drugs Education/Prevention, Education and Training (young people, young adults and adult learners), Information Provision, Volunteer support, training and development, Targeted Interventions and Youth Justice Work. A registered Charity the Service works with almost three thousand young people each year across all areas in Clare. Each year two hundred volunteers work with the organisation in volunteers led youth clubs, alongside staff in targeted projects or in governance and compliance roles.

"Clare Youth Service is delighted to recognise Éabha and Seán whose leadership offers a great example of the talent and commitment that volunteers give to young people right across the county."

The development of volunteer youth leaders is core to the work of CYS. Éabha and Seán are in a great tradition of youth leaders in the county and I'm confident that their example will help generate yet more leaders in the future."

CEO, Clare Youth Service, Margaret Slattery



Shayla, Clint, Robert, Ulysses & Luvia Hilpert

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.

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.

Their commitment extends beyond litter picking. The family came up with the idea of creating a Junior Garden and 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.

ENNIS TIDY TOWNS

Ennis Tidy Towns is a local community group dedicated to enhancing and protecting the town of Ennis. As part of the national SuperValu Tidy Towns competition, it unites volunteers, schools, businesses and Clare County Council to keep Ennis clean, green and welcoming. Volunteers of all ages contribute their time and skills to improve the town and strengthen community spirit. The group's work extends beyond litter control to include biodiversity projects, pollinator planting, heritage preservation, waste reduction and environmental education. Ennis Tidy Towns has earned national recognition for its creativity and commitment, reflecting local pride and a shared vision of a sustainable future.



"When we volunteer, we build more than community – we build belonging. The Hilpert family have demonstrated this perfectly. Shayla and Clint have instilled a sense of volunteering in their children thus ensuring that this spirit continues."

Strong communities are built by helping hands and proud hearts and that is at the core of Ennis Tidy Towns"

Cllr Mary Howard – Cathaoirleach of Ennis Municipal District



Terence Mangan

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 an individual action in a small town like Ennis can have 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 Ennis Lions proves that compassion and service know no borders.



ENNIS LIONS CLUB

Ennis Lions Club is a long-established voluntary organisation that plays a key role in supporting individuals and communities across Ennis and County Clare. As part of Lions Clubs International – one of the world’s largest service organisations – Ennis Lions is committed to helping those in need through fundraising, community service and local initiatives.

Members volunteer their time and skills to deliver projects such as food drives, mental health awareness campaigns, supports for the elderly and vulnerable and youth development programmes. Their work reflects the Lions’ global motto, *“We Serve,”* and demonstrates a strong spirit of compassion, friendship and civic responsibility that continues to make a positive impact in the community.

Volunteers are vital to the success of these initiatives, helping to bring real change to people’s lives throughout County Clare. Lions Club members use their time and talents to provide hands-on assistance, enhancing the quality of life in their communities. Volunteering is deeply rewarding, offering opportunities to learn new skills, gain experience and connect with like-minded people who share a passion for helping others.

“Terence Mangan is a long-standing member of Ennis Lions Club who has served locally, nationally and internationally in various roles. For over more than 40 years, he has played a key part in many significant projects, offering inspiration, guidance and encouragement – particularly to new members. Terence truly embodies the values and spirit of the Lions and his contribution remains an enduring source of pride for the club.”

Maria Molloy Hanley – Ennis Lions Club

Tina Boyle

Originally from Buckinghamshire in Southeast England, Tina moved to Corofin in 2007 to take up a role as Supervising Pharmacist with Rochford’s 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.

Rochford’s 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 Cumhaill 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 Cumhaill 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 gained experience in new areas such as writing grant applications. 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.



FESTIVAL OF FINN

The Festival of Finn is a long-running annual celebration held in Corofin, County Clare, honouring the legendary Irish hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool). Rooted in local folklore and community pride, the festival takes place over a weekend in early summer and features a lively mix of music, dance, parades, family fun, sports competitions and heritage events.

Organised by a team of dedicated local volunteers, the Festival of Finn brings the whole community together and attracts visitors from across Clare and beyond. It highlights Corofin’s strong tradition of hospitality, creativity and local involvement, while also supporting local businesses and cultural groups.

“Tina’s volunteer spirit brings the people of our community together, making it stronger. Her endless energy and boundless determination are an inspiration to all of us involved in the Festival of Finn.”

Caitriona McMahon – Festival of Finn



Witness Mpande

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 Stephens 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 shared purpose.

Before long, he was not only running but also volunteering each week, helping to create a space where people from many countries, languages and life experiences could feel included. 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

The Sanctuary Runners is a nationwide initiative in Ireland that uses running and movement to bring together people from all backgrounds – including those living in Direct Provision, refugees and the local community – in a spirit of solidarity, friendship and respect. Founded in 2018, the movement promotes social inclusion and positive integration through shared physical activity, rather than competition.

Sanctuary Runners takes part in parkruns, community events and races across Ireland, proudly wearing blue T-shirts that symbolise unity and equality. The group’s ethos is built on three core values: solidarity, friendship and respect – fostering real human connections while breaking down barriers between communities. Supported by volunteers, local groups and sporting organisations, Sanctuary Runners continues to grow, showing how sport can be a powerful force for empathy, inclusion and social change.



“Witness, with his calm, positive demeanour, has been instrumental in encouraging people to join the Sanctuary Runners group in Ennis. Through his example, he has motivated a number of people to participate in local parkrun and road race events.”

Rob Stephen (Sanctuary Runners)

A Word of Thanks

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to this project:

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, 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.

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

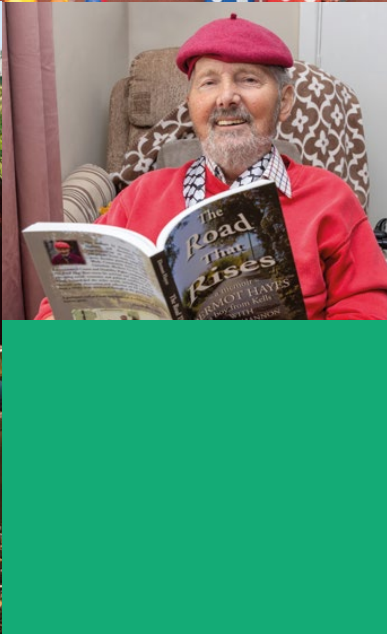
Above all, our deepest thanks go to the volunteers, whose openness, kindness and shared stories have been a true source of inspiration

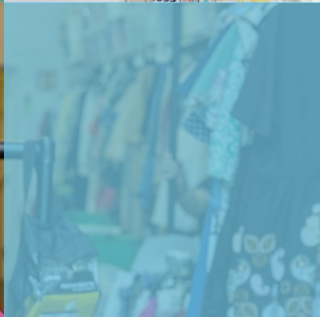
In appreciation,

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

See more about the volunteer stories on  

www.facebook.com/clarevolunteercentre and
www.instagram.com/clarevolunteercentre





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