



ANNUAL REPORT

2021

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Board of Trustees 2021
Padraig McGrath, Marian Fitzpatrick, Annette Barr-Jordan, Jim Rock, Jackie Flannery, Eugene Boland, Laura Barry, Catherine Bracken, Gerard Keena, Bernie O' Neill, Deirdre Feely, Louise Gorman

Chairperson Address

Welcome to our 2021 Annual Report.



I would like to begin by thanking the organisation's Board of Trustees, senior management team, staff and volunteers for their ongoing dedication to supporting the young people of the Midlands. While the Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect the work of the organisation, due to the tremendous effort made by each and every member of staff, our services to young people have persevered.

I wish to thank our funders, without whom this work would not be possible. In particular I would like to thank The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, The Department of Justice, Longford Westmeath ETB, and Laois Offaly ETB for their continued support. I would also like to express my appreciation of Youth Work Ireland for their unwavering support, insight and guidance.

Reflecting on the year just gone, I am proud of what the organisation has achieved. We have increased our contact with young people, families and communities across the region due to the allocation of additional once off funding. The development of external partnerships and working in collaboration with key partners in the region allowed us to reach some of the most vulnerable in our society, this included our work with the HSE in setting up and encouraging local communities to avail of testing and vaccination facilities in Grange in Mullingar.

Due to the pandemic, two key areas of focus for the Board in 2021 were ensuring compliance with health and safety measures and risk management. I am pleased to say that we met our compliance obligations with regards to both of these areas. We also met our compliance obligations for Revenue, Lobbying and Charities Regulator Governance Code and Annual Reporting, and we met all our funder deadlines in terms of Annual Applications, Progress Reporting, Financial Reporting requirements, Audits etc.

As I anticipate the year ahead I see potential for new projects across the region as The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth increase the number of UBU Projects and The Department of Justice increase the reach and number of Garda Youth Diversion Projects. I look forward to the planned development of Columb Barracks Mullingar and ongoing housing and community development across the region which will have a significant positive impact for our service and the young people we serve.

Thank you once again to our staff and volunteers for the extraordinary work you do that enables us to continue to meet the needs of the growing numbers of young people within our Service.

Padraig McGrath, Chairperson

CEO Address



Welcome everyone, it is such a nice experience to be all together again for this our 2021 AGM. 2021 was in a lot of respects a blur, it opened with a bang – bringing us right back in serious lock-down as a result of the two C's – Christmas and Covid.

As usual the amazing team that is Youth Work Ireland Midlands responded; we knew we were going to be in a serious lock-down until at least April (which was painful) but we also knew we had the skills, competences and experience to make *youth work* work for young people across the region. There was, as during 2020, the anxiety of not getting to the most in need, but overall the impact of the ongoing, dedicated engagement with young people, families and communities throughout 2021 was, once again, powerful.

We had a few staff changes in 2021; Kevin Beaumont, a stalwart of youth work in Athlone retired, we wish Kevin all the very best. However when one door closes, another opens as we welcomed back Keith Simpson as YJW with the ALF Project. Anna O'Neill, our Edenderry Youth Café Manager, also moved on, although not too far, and Anna continues to support the Youth Café and the LGBTI+ project in Edenderry – not sure if Anna actually sleeps!

We also had some losses; Liam Cornally who volunteered with the Tullamore Youth Project for over 10 years sadly passed away during 2021, we express our deep sympathy to everyone who experienced such a loss especially with such strict public health guidelines in place.

Some Highlights: A lot more detail in the Annual Report

Even though we were in and out of lockdown during the year, there were windows of opportunity for Our European Solidarity Corps support to continue in 2021. 5 young people participated in ESC in 2021 who were highly supported by Tracey Moore with placements in Croatia, Greece, Italy, UK and Spain.

Our very own Kevin Farrell (The Acorn Project) was invited to contribute to Dr. Karen Treisman's published work on Creating Trauma Informed Organisations.

MusicJam – YoYo Youth Café and Mullingar EYE Project produced their Musicbox Originals Vol 2 album, winning a Garda Youth Award for the production – the link to the album is in the digital version of the annual report and well worth a listen. The EYE Project also hosted the Midlands Hub of the Irish Youth Music Awards again in 2021.

Roscommon Comhairle na nOg produced their '[Things to do in Roscommon](#)' promotional video with Spicy Dog Media, again the link is in the annual report.

Young people across the region achieved their Gaisce awards in a very tough environment of in and out of lockdown, well done everyone.

Acorn Midlands Education & Training Service was shortlisted for the AONTAS Star Awards and received a 'Highly Commended Initiative' under the third level access and engagement category. AMETS and Smaoinigh Mor (our DoJ funded educational project) had 86 learners achieve formal QQI awards in Level 3, 4 & 5. This was a massive achievement in the circumstances.

Work To Learn: In 2021, 7 young people availed of the opportunity to work part time. Covid lock downs and uncertainties made it difficult for all to finish out the entire programme but there is no doubt that being involved for all was a very positive and affirming experience.

Accountancy, Butchering, Carpentry, Auto Parts retail, NCBI charity Shop, Golf Club Restaurant, Youth Cafe and Allotments all hosted participants throughout the year.

In Mullingar Youth Project Zompocalypse was created; a movie project that was designed to scare the life out of those who watched the final film but provided an opportunity for creativity, learning and a lot of fun – the makeup effects were particularly impressive. The Mullingar Arts Centre hosted the premier and boy did those young people (and not so young) work the Red Carpet.

Across all our Projects and Clubs Summer programmes proved to be a huge success; public health guidelines eased and outdoor youth work came back with a bang – everything from Soccer, Water Sports, Hiking, Fishing, Cycling, Activity Centres, Tayto Park, STEM Projects, Gardening, BBQ's, Swimming the list is endless but a much needed getting together and great fun.

Our LGBTI+ Projects across the region continued to provide a safe, non-judgemental space for young people to be themselves. They tackled events and activities with gusto including Pride, Stand Up Week and even a BeLonGTo On-line Disco.

The FUSION Project continued to deliver its QQI programme and support young people with their education through the iScoils programme. In partnership with Tullamore Youth Project a 'Random Act of Kindness Day' was great fun and supported by the LOCYPSC.

Healthy Ireland Round 3 funding was a vital support to targeted and universal provision during 2021 allowing the Youth Service to reach out and impact the lives of young people who may not ordinarily have been involved or aware of the Youth Service

Here4U continued to provide a vital listening and advocacy service to young people across the region with demand extremely high once schools returned full time with a total of 240 sessions delivered over the school year.

Our Rural Youth Club team were very busy with their 'Get Back Clubbing' Roadshow; to encourage existing and new volunteers to avail of the Youth Service supports to get Youth Clubs back up and running safely. The annual competitions continued apace with Halloween Masks, Christmas Cards, Valentines Cakes a plenty.

Our network of Youth Clubs were also very busy; members of the Athlone Darts Academy participating in our virtual Darts Competition and going on later in the year to participate in the Westmeath Mixed Doubles Darts event in Streamstown.

St Ciaran's, Clonmacnoise had a very special visitor at Christmas who forwent the Reindeer and arrived via Quad. A busy year of activities as soon as lockdowns were lifted.

CodorDojo Mullingar is in its 10th Year, an amazing achievement, the group utilised online (not too surprising) and face to face activity during the year and continue to grow from strength to strength.

Emerald Lakes were on a continued winning streak taking world No1 spot in Championship dancing as well as producing a highly evocative production; ‘The Voyage’ as part of the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising.

Our Youth Information Service in partnership with SpunOut.ie continued its participation in the YIChat service delivering 3546 conversations with young people, with young people waiting an average of only 15 seconds to speak to a youth information officer. Youth Information officers across the country were available for over 978 hours to young people in 2021.

Westmeath Comhairle na nOg hosted 190+ young people at its 2021 AGM – Edweena has a challenge on her hands to beat that in 2022. The Comhairle hosted among other events; a local climate conversations consultation, participated in “One million stars Ireland” which highlights domestic abuse and violence, and participated in Longford Westmeath Children and Youth People’s Services Committee, Wellness week of activities.

During 2021 Youth Work Ireland Midlands worked with and supported over 5,500 young people, almost 200 active, adult volunteers, 12 student placements, a 32 place Community Employment Scheme with an amazing staff team of dedicated Youth Workers, Tutors, Counsellors & Administrators.

My sincere thanks to Martha and Kevin, the best Admin and Finance team who keep a very, very busy ship steady, and to Tracey for her determination and amazing work ethic, I would be lost without all your expertise and friendship.

I know everyone thinks they have the best team in the world but I **know** we do, from the Boardroom to the front line, this team makes me very proud to be a part of the Youth Service with its culture, its values and its determination to continually strive for excellence in service of the young people and communities we serve. I congratulate each and every one of you on another extremely difficult and successful year faced with resilience, compassion and determination.

Geraldine Lacey, CEO

Finance & Administration

“In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity”

I'll start my contribution for 2021 with the ever important “thank you's” as we have a lot to be thankful for, Covid has taught us that much.

So thank you to everyone who helped me in any way during the last year either in person or virtually. Special thanks those with whom I have a daily/regular interaction:

- To Ger for everything you do and being the best boss
- To Tracey for looking out for our wellbeing in spite of our resistance
- To Kevin for all your hard work and attention to the details.
- To the crew in Inis Oir who keep me sane
- To all the rest of the Youth Work Ireland Midlands staff keeping me in a busy job
- To the FA&GP members Annette, Jackie, Jim and Padraig,
- To the board of Trustees all 12 of you for your continued support and collective wisdom
- To Philip and David in O'Farrell & Co for their help and guidance during the year with the accounts and audit.
- To the Finance Officers & administration staff in other Youth Services, Funds admin unit, Laois/Offaly & Longford/ Westmeath ETBs, Youth Work Ireland, local County Councils, Court Offices, Youth Officers, Youth Affairs Unit and HSE/TUSLA.

Ger asked me to put a piece together for the annual report 2021 from a finance point of view and knowing the world of admin doesn't vary all that much from year to year you will be thankful I have very little to say.

2021 was definitely a challenging year in a different way to 2020. We were in, we were out, we were vaccinated, and boosted all the while trying to avoid catching Covid and mostly working remotely with minimum face to face encounters until near the end of the year. Funding came at us from all sources and these certainly helped to make an impact to our service delivery. We are very thankful to funders who recognised the needs encountered and supported us to make a difference.

We had no department name changes in 2021 and so we still have DCEDIY, DSP, DOJ and UBU who all kept a watchful eye on our spending during 2021.

External Audits & Monitoring

In 2021 we had 6 external audits, 1 of which was an on-site visit while the other 5 were desk audits. We also had regular spot checks on expenditure for YIC/UBU budgets during 2021. The audits were as follows:

1. Department of Social Protection – Financial monitoring on CE scheme desk audit June 2021
2. Department of Social Protection – Programme and Training monitoring on CE Scheme desk audit June 2021
3. Pobal – Healthy Ireland 2020 Funding interim audit – July 2021
4. Youth Work Ireland Youth Service Grant 2019 desk audit - October 2021
5. Laois/Offaly ETB – UBU 2020/2021 for Tullamore Youth Project desk audit in October-December 2021
6. ETBI – LOETB - on site & desk audit November 2021

The outcomes for all 6 audits were positive with confirmation that we had demonstrated our compliance with all appropriate financial policies and procedures in place.

Day to day accounts and payroll 2021 – some of the boring stats:

Total gross payroll processed weekly/monthly in 2021 - €1,360,550.

Total number of employees during the course of the year - 97

This included full/part-time staff, CE participants, Work to Learn participants, and tutors varying from 1 to 52 weeks of employment

Total accounts transactions processed - 2430

This included invoicing, recording receipts from funders and payments to suppliers across the Midlands.

We are looking forward to more of the same in 2022

Martha Murphy - Finance Manager

Service Manager Reflection

Despite the blended way of work we all adapted to in 2021 - the year in practice showed that our staff and management team have become “*Agile*” in their work. An agile workplace is one that fosters an environment of complete flexibility. For example - we have observed our staff mastering challenges and seizing opportunities to maintain contact with young people and support their efforts to continue participating in programmes on offer for them. All while maintaining the administrative requirements of funders, managers and other work. The flexibility in practice meant that all staff had the opportunity to plan their work and activity from both remote and project bases to suit their own workloads and personal needs throughout a year that was still very demanding in the country.

Through supervision and support over 2021, almost 80 sessions have been carried out with Coordinators and Youth Workers alike resulting in end of year reflections that mirrored the peaks and troughs of young people’s coping skills versus staff efforts. That said, the effectiveness of the work could not be questioned as we saw many staff continue to achieve personal and professional development goals through education, peer support and active participation in regional staff meetings.

Many staff undertook opportunities for professional development over the year at 3rd level. We expect to see graduations in 2022 in many disciplines that will positively impact our organisation, also worth mentioning is Kevin Farrell’s (The Acorn Project) contribution to Dr. Karen Treisman’s published work on Creating Trauma Informed Organisations



Congratulations Kevin on your contribution to this incredible book and resource for staff who work with children, young people and families. Kevin was a contributor along with highly recognised International academics in the area of trauma

Staffing

We were delighted to welcome back Keith Simpson to the organisation in the ALF project as Youth Justice Worker.

We hate saying goodbye to any staff member, particularly one who has contributed so much and stayed with us till Retirement! We wish Kevin Beaumont all the very best of health, love and luck from all his colleagues across the region.



Unfortunately our Youth Cafe Manager - Anna O'Neill moved on - but not too far! She took up post with Eden Childcare, CE Scheme and now continues to support the ACORN Project as CE Supervisor as well as continuing her support to both the Youth Care and LGBTI Project.



We were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Liam Cornally who volunteered with the Tullamore Youth Project for over 10 years.

Liam was not only a kind and caring soul but an inspiration to every young person and adult that had the pleasure of sharing their time with him. I had the pleasure of working alongside Liam in TYP down through the years - he will be fondly remembered by us all.

The impact of Covid 19 across the region remained challenging but manageable all year - I put this down to the diligence and hard work of all staff who maintained a strong sense of personal and professional safety in their work practice. High levels of community transmission led to some impact on staff, however, we only had 1 reported case of Covid in staff in 2020 and 3 in 2021! This is incredible considering the local infection rates and our work and proximity to communities in the 4 major Midlands Towns. Thankfully all recovered well and returned to work as warriors - armed with renewed health and hope for their work with young people.



Being a Youth Work organisation, it's always important for me to stay grounded in the practice and meet young people during the course of my work. I maintained roots in Youth Work over Summer programmes and am so grateful for projects who welcomed me into sessions with their young people.

A highlight was on a hot summer's day taking 14 young people from Mullingar EYE to the Slieve Blooms for a hike in August. They jumped in the river any chance they could - and we had ice cream under the trees in Cadamstown. A lovely memory of that summer.

The Quality Group and Health & Safety Group continued their work plan throughout 2021 and my thanks to both groups for their continued dedication and hard work getting the new Safety Statement to the Board for approval and launch in October.

To all the staff across the region who hear more from me by phone than they see of me in person - you're all Rockstars and I bow to your expertise - You're all fantastic role models for our Students and CE Staff - but even more, you are great youth workers and every one of your different styles makes for an unbelievable mix across the region.

Lastly to Ger and Martha - A downside to Covid is that the Regional Office is quieter and we 3 (and Key) don't get together in person as much anymore. How our management meetings have become virtual coffee breaks will always bring a smile to my face, there are too few - but always worthwhile as we put the world to rights - and then settle down to business of the day. We seem to get so much done over coffee - long may it continue - my kind of style of business.

Tracey Moore, Service Manager

International Programmes

During 2021, while restrictions to travel across the world were slowly resuming, our organisation took the decision not to participate in European projects that involved travel to parts of Europe that were still affected by Covid, particularly when our own country wasn't in a stable enough health situation.

However, some fantastic opportunities still managed to take place including travel for some individuals under the European Solidarity Corps.

Here at home, across the region, many staff participated in online training courses under Erasmus+ in areas such as Inclusion, Digital Youth Work and Future Skills for young people. Tracey Moore represented Youth Work Ireland Midlands as a panel speaker in two events that were broadcast across Europe and at Kinia's Creative Techfest in October 2021. We also contributed to the MOOC on Digitalization of Society and Youth Work.

We contributed to and participated in these online Trainings;

- HOP Crash Course for developing Training courses online.
- Online Digital Skills Education
- 21st Century Skills and recognition via open badges
- ETS Conference Quality Bonus
- Supporting Non Formal Learning in Digital Environments

Our Youth Information Coordinator - Edweena Farrell commenced the NUI Maynooth Cert in European Youth Mobility Project Management.

Our European Solidarity Corps support continued in 2021 with highly supported measures to ensure the safety of our volunteers who took on placements in Croatia, Greece, Italy, UK and Spain. We supported 5 young people in 2021 and they all had fantastic experiences despite restrictions. Pre departure training took place online and ongoing support happened by phone and online for the duration of their projects.



Community Employment

The year 2021 commenced with restrictions remaining in place within the sector, due to COVID 19 cases and high transmission nationally. However, due to the hard work of the organisation already in place such as protocols, health and safety guidelines and clear procedures much of the work was able to be completed online and/or detached, ensuring that the CE participants' health and welfare were to the forefront of all decisions.

Throughout the year we saw many of the participants continue with their training and development and engaged positively with all opportunities afforded to them. They were easily able to adapt their approaches to the work they completed with young people, showed great determination in providing care and support to them and the resilience many of the participants showed throughout this time was remarkable.

The year saw participants continue with their QQI modules and much Industry standard training was completed online and/or with reduced numbers face to face, in accordance with government guidelines. Throughout the year the CE participants completed a combined total of 32 QQI minor awards, forty five industry standard awards and seven participants were enrolled in courses which ranged from level 6-8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Recruitment continued despite restrictions and we were successful in recruiting eleven new participants throughout the regions within the positions of Youth Worker, Caretaker and Community Liaison Worker. During this time we also saw the departure of fourteen participants within this scheme year with eight progressing to full time employment.

The year 2021 saw many challenges for the CE Scheme as the numbers of referrals from the DSP reduced significantly and people's unwillingness to work during the pandemic due to many reasons resulted in some of the positions not being filled. Other challenges faced was the uncertainty for some of the CE participants who were due to finish on the scheme and the lack of development in regard to participants gaining practical work experience and/or losing their social network did cause some concern. The pause in progression in some participants was evident when face to face work commenced and the extra support that needed to be put in place to provide the much needed support to enable them to return to the workplace and be confident and motivated within their working environments.

Overall the CE Scheme had a very challenging yet successful year supporting 39 participants over a rolling scheme contract with 9 participants progressing to employment.

Our continued thanks to all CE Participants who have weathered the Covid Work Life Blend to their fullest ability.

GARDA YOUTH

DIVERSION

PROJECTS

Mullingar EYE & YoYo Youth Café

Creativity & Improvisation 2021 saw a year of improvisation and creativity in EYE & YOYO with changing Covid restrictions encouraging us to come up with new ways & places to engage young people. From the military precision required to safely facilitate our Music Box Studio Experience that resulted in the development of Musicbox Originals Vol 2 album to the young people & staff getting our hands dirty with the development & decoration of a covered garden space to carry out outdoor youth work. We also participated in hikes and adventure trips. Many friends, volunteers & agencies helped this year to be special. Our great partnership with Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath helped to make this year one of our best so far in EYE & YoYo. We were especially delighted to win the Garda Youth Award for creating the music album showcasing brilliant original songs by our music jam young people

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/1ozkAReRM4tysZZsVKB3A?si=vADqT-qVQfZ69r-w3Gdg>



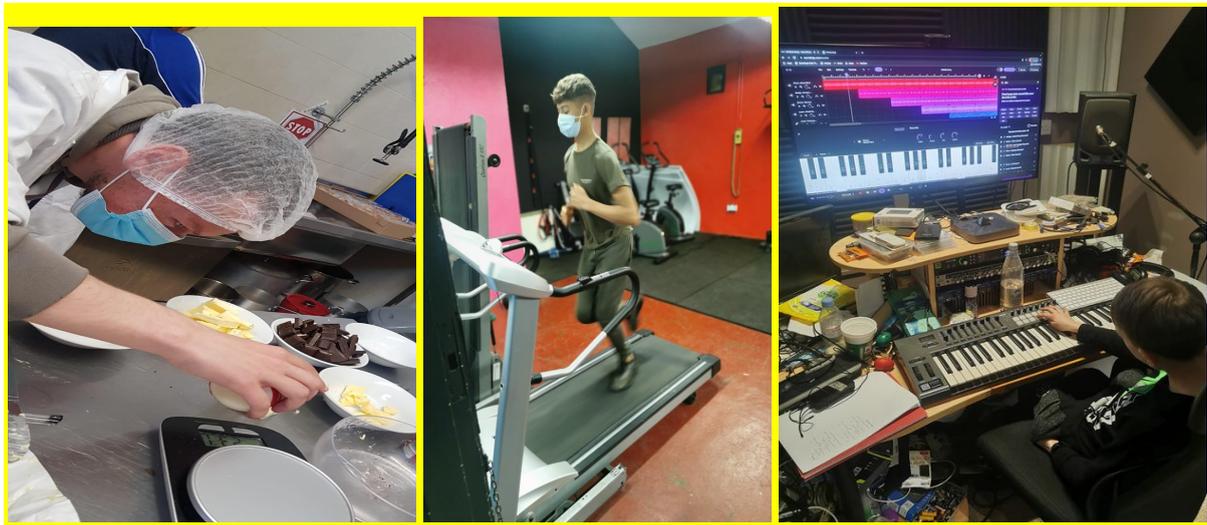
YOYO POP (Pathways of Progression)

This programme is aimed at NEET's Young People & Provides QQI & Experiential Learning along with Positive mental health aids. This very successful programme was revamped in September to accommodate needs of new participants and to further progress skills of participants who joined the programme at the start of 2021

New QQI modules were introduced in Personal Effectiveness IT & Career Planning & Health Related Fitness, Celebration Cake creation is now being taught with a view to young people starting a micro social enterprise. Customer Service and Food Prep now happens weekly and young people make and serve food to the community & groups using the barracks facilities eg music jam mams, choir participants, men's shed, arts groups, & later in 2021 when Covid guidelines relaxed we encouraged the public to attend the cafe

Music production has progressed too with young people learning to mix/master/song write & prep for live appearances. Junior youth leader experiential learning started in September with our YOYO POP participants completing Safeguarding Training, HACCP, Youth Leader training & leading dance & sports programmes with younger members of our Project.

We used our new found skills in food prep, customer service, music production & filming to host a special outdoor event for Culture Night with our partners Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath



GAISCE

Delighted to report a new Gaisce Programme in Mullingar EYE IN 2021 with new skills being acquired in menu design and cookery, drama dance, musical instruments, fishing, new sports of basketball and boxercise, new community initiative to develop dance/ drama sessions and to join GAISCE Bulbs for Bees Initiative



Music Jam came back live to the home of EYE & YoYo in Columb Barracks after covid restrictions brought the programme online. Initially outdoor, Music Jam evolved to multiple small pod tuition with whole family involvement! Every Wednesday we provide musical tuition and band practice starting with tiny jam for 4yrs and up at 2.30pm and proceed by age and musical ability to teach guitars, drums, ukulele to include up to 18 yrs. In 2021 we had older music jam members coming in to peer mentor the newbies as part of college or TY work experience. Intergenerational ukulele sessions are now happening every Monday at 10AM and 11AM for adults, with adult family members of our participants & other community members learning new skills

Community Call with Westmeath County Council

EYE joined with MYP & Westmeath County Council, FEAD, School Meals Programme to ensure that all of our families who needed assistance during the Covid Pandemic were looked after in 2021. This programme really helped youth workers to build relationships with parents & families and allowed us to better understand and address arising needs and issues in the community.

IRISH YOUTH MUSIC AWARDS



YoYo Cafe hosted the IYMAs for the Midlands again in 2021. We facilitated songwriting and music production workshops in our rehearsal rooms & studio and submitted 7 original songs by 15 young artists to its National Hub Day.



The Acorn Project

Teach Na Nog & Niteline

It was great to see the young people enjoy the summer programme esp. the trip to Lilliput, it felt like we were a little bit free and able to let our hair down. Young people were talking about it for ages after. The core group also joined Teach Na Nog and YAG on an end of year trip to Lilliput Adventure centre.



Homework Club

It's great to have Teach Na Nog open up again. Homework club is doing great. Parents are so glad it's back they really did struggle with doing Homework online and at home. The boys club is also well attended. Girls club was slow to start. This is due to 80% of them just growing out of it. The call is out for new members so let's just see what happens...

Girls only - Girls club was slow to start when things came back to the new normal.... This is due to 80% of them just growing out of it. The call is out for new members so let's just see what happens...

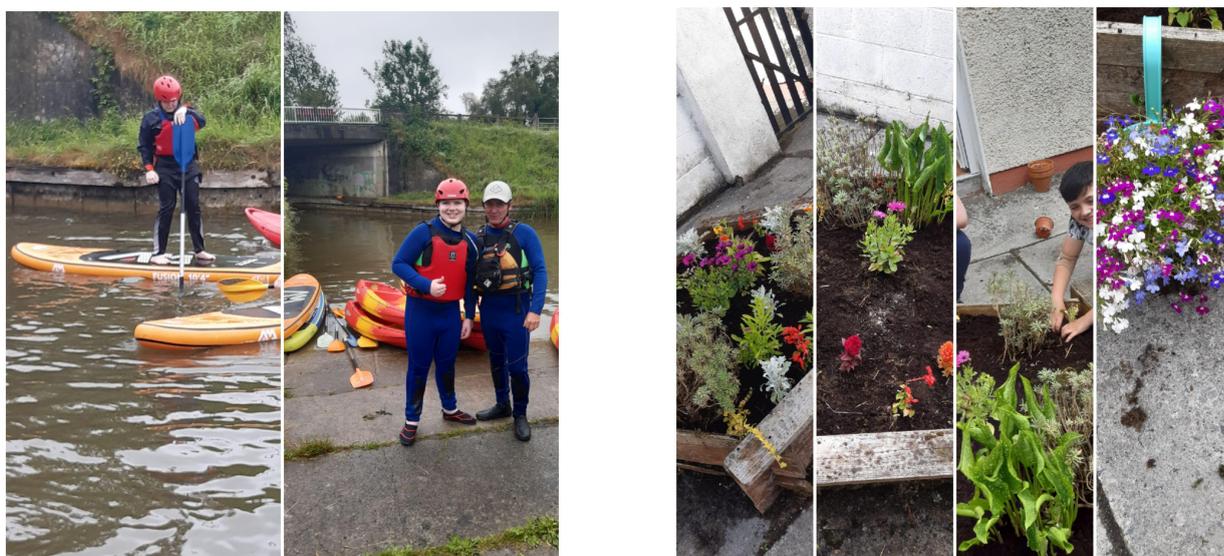
Boys Only - The boys club is also well attended.

While things remain challenging everyone is glad to be back working face to face, with this in mind we are all working hard to keep each other safe and are being very mindful of the risk that still very much exists, let's get through the next few months with this in mind.

Summer programme

The young people attended the summer programme right up until the end of July. The summer programme took off and grew legs... we were blessed with the weather as most of our programme was based outside our garden and the place looks great. The picnic nature walks were a big hit with our younger groups. The Darts, Table Tennis, ring board, and pool got very competitive.

Participants really enjoyed the summer programme and appreciated the work that went into organising it and keeping everyone safe. They were glad to be back and have a real sense of things looking up for September. We had a great response to our FB page where we posted pictures of all the activities over the summer months. The Parents were very grateful for the work we do. Young people's resilience remained strong.



Food Cloud

Food parcels are going to our core group; these are proving very much needed and appreciated by the families concerned. This is allowing families a little flexibility around available money in their household.... In the current situation families have partners and children at home most of the time and the need for extra food and fuel is proving demanding on the family budget.

Food from the food cloud continued to be delivered to the most marginalised families in our community on a weekly basis.

The Acorn Project- *a reflection on the impact of Covid in 2021 - Kevin Farrell*

What have I learned in over twenty years of practice and training and reflection? I have learned how much I do not know. I have also learned that the concept of the expert is greatly overrated. I have learned however that if the work we do does not function directly from the heart, then it will not have long term sustainable results. The people we deal with are hurt, damaged, traumatised and vulnerable. For us professionals to be brave enough to show our damaged humanity can often bridge the perceived divide of us and them. This provides the momentum to create a sense of a shared journey. That sense of connection is pivotal.

No person can come through life without experiencing and carrying their own traumas. In the very moment of disclosure, the chances of providing a real and sustainable pathway forward will be significantly increased if the professional is brave enough to acknowledge their own traumas and their own insecurities. It is in these moments that real progress is made as the professional is then repaying the faith placed in them by sharing some of their own self-doubt.

So, it was with me recently as I welcomed back a young boy into the project following a Covid lock down. He was in disarray. His appearance, his clothes and his demeanour all screamed crisis. In a silent moment he said, 'I need to talk to you'. Abuse at all levels, alcohol, and drug consumption gone viral and a deep self-loathing had led to suicidal thoughts, and eventually serious self-harm.

My professional mode began to kick in. My mind began to process all of the potential options and choices out there that we could access to help him. To fix him. And then thankfully my experience dating way back to twenty two years dwarfed my urge to fix and instead I just listened. I sat and I heard. And thankfully made no effort to find a solution. Yet it was that honesty to say straight out to him that I did not have a simplified answer to his situation that brought about huge change. It was him in his youthful innocence who said, 'I'm not looking for answers, Just be with me'. Our true strength can come from accepting that we don't have all of the answers, nor should we. Connection provides for strong communication, even if that communication is silence.

So one more time I got schooled by our young people. Humbled and in awe I walked away and wrote this poem.

Be

*Sit but do not speak
Hear as stubborn silence reigns
Anxiety, fear and doubt
Thumbling in a head of pain
Be with me here and now
Anger simmers in a stew
Of the blame and shame
which like a fungus grew*

*upon the soul and in the mind
those hateful seeds took root
In silence sit, but wonder this
What fertilised the sapling shoot?*

*How to live as I scream to die
Stumbling, falling heed my cry
Connection gone my spirit void
Broken down I cannot hide
So sit with me and do not speak
Anger swells when I am weak
Do not fix me, do not try
In silence let us sit and wonder why?*

Kevin Farrell

Please see link attached for our young people's video- [Same Storm different Boats](#)

Work To Learn.

The Acorn Project is unique in that it was the only Youth Diversion Project being part funded by the Department to operate a Work To Learn programme nationally in 2021. Our project Chairperson Inspector Kieran Keyes regularly references the fact that for him it is one of the most important programmes we operate. It is if you like a gateway programme out into the real working world. At some stage in 2021 at least seven young people availed of the opportunity to work part time. Covid lock downs and uncertainties made it difficult for all to finish out the entire programme but there is no doubt that being involved for all was a very positive and affirming experience.

Accountancy, Butchering, Carpentry, Auto Parts retail, NCBI charity Shop, Golf Club Restaurant, Youth Cafe and our Allotments all housed participants at some stage throughout the year. The feedback from both sides; employers and participants, was very positive.

Another feature of this programme is that all young people must open either a bank account or a Credit Union account so that their wages can be paid in directly each month. From the selection process, to interview, to getting CV,s prepared, to doing the work, and reflecting upon it and then handling their own money this process provides such a deep pool of learning. So many of our young people manage to discover what their pathway forward is by participating in a hands-on manner. As our butchering boy declared ‘I know for certain that is not what I want to do’.

When we explored this with him he discovered that it was not the butchering per se that he disliked but the lack of affirmation he felt was missing. When we brought this concern to the employer he was confused because he felt if anything was wrong he’d have let him know. So sometimes no feedback is as positive as it gets. Computer skills and high tech mechanics is where he now knows he is heading. WTL is compact. It is easy to administer and easy to track progress. Reporting on successes seems to be our norm. What is of utmost importance is two strands of the one rope. A good and honest relationship of trust with the employer pool and a knowledge from within the project of which young people to send out. Without this degree of insight the results may not be so positive.

AMETS and Smaoinigh Mor

Student and Learner Wellbeing and Engagement Group

As a member of AONTAS, we were asked to represent community education on a national level by attending virtual webinars on a weekly basis during 2021. This working group was established by Minister Simon Harris under his department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. All findings and recommendations were fed directly back to Minister Harris. The working group consisted of representatives from the Further and Higher Education sectors alongside Community Education. This platform allowed us to highlight the needs of all young people attending our education programmes across the region.



Online Teen Programmes:

We developed and facilitated two brand new programmes online for teenagers in 2021. Makeup Artistry for Teens ran from Feb - May and Nail Technology 4 Teens ran during the summer. A total of 16 young people took part in these programmes and they were a great success ensuring we could continue to engage young people during covid times.



AONTAS STAR AWARDS 2021

Highly Commended Initiative
Third-level Access and Engagement
AMETS Youth Work Award

Aontas STAR Awards

AMETS Youth Work programme was shortlisted for an Aontas STAR award in the category “access to third level”. As we had 4 learners progress from this programme into third level, we were a very strong contender in the category. Tutors, coordinator and learners met with the Aontas judging panel on the 8th of February. Aontas also helped us develop a promotional video for the day which is available on our social media channels. [Facebook](#)

Quality Assurance and Google Drive Management system:

The use of google drive expanded and continued to drive a quality driven service in 2021. All tutors are trained in the use of the system and all programmes now align to the quality standards via drive. The continued upkeep and development of the QA standards was a priority and working towards re-engagement while continually highlighting the challenges of such at national level.

ITEC

In 2021, The project became an ITEC centre accredited to offer a suite of awards in Makeup, Nail Technology, Beauty Therapy and Reflexology. In September 2021 our first group of ITEC learners commenced their training in level 2 Makeup Artistry.



AMETS and Smaoinigh Mor Awards:

Total Learners	Level 5 -66
Total Folders- 86	Level 4 -19
Non Accredited-14	Level 3- 1

A breakdown of our assessments in 2021 saw a total of 100 + learners come through our classes and courses. AMETS continued to offer major awards in the areas of Beauty, Business Studies, Youth Work and General learning.

Smaoinigh Mor continued to work with Garda Youth Diversion Projects across the region in the provision of educational programmes for young people which included modules at levels 3 and 4 and some non accredited hobby courses.

Kilbeggan groups

We continued our work in SWEETS in Kilbeggan continuing to cement our relationships with other community providers to bring our courses to the wider community. Working through covid and online was a challenge but, we finally came together to finish our practical classes and give our certificates. Well done to all.



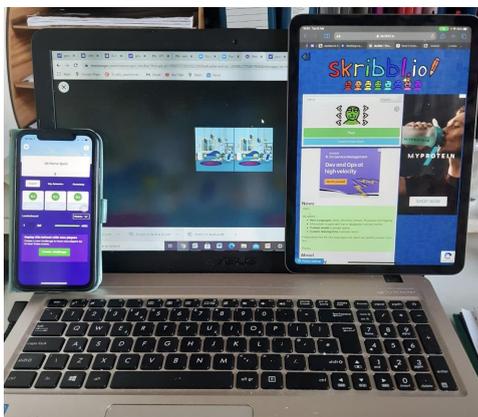
ALF Project

Even though 2021 was the second year in which Covid Restrictions had an impact on the work of the ALF Project, youth workers and young people continued to adapt and changes were made which ensured that young people still had the opportunity to take part in a range of activities and programmes and to achieve positive outcomes.

The year started off with young people taking part in online activities and programmes. Quizzes, Football Competitions, Pictionary and Bingo were very popular. As young people became more comfortable with online youth groups, youth workers carried out remote youth work, dropping resources to young people so that they could take part in activities and programmes during times in which they were in contact with youth workers. Other Remote Youth Work activities in which young people had the opportunity to take part in during this time were Walking challenges, Gardening and Youth Work Ireland Midlands Art Competitions. A Restorative Programme was delivered online. The Get Back Programme also continued with young people having the opportunity to gain QQI Level 4 certification.

When restrictions began to ease young people and youth workers were involved in developing outdoor spaces for youth work activity. Even though the setting had changed, these spaces remained young person friendly, comfortable and provided opportunities for young people to participate, learn and have fun. The flask replaced the kettle, outdoor bean bags replaced the couch, the dart board became portable and when the rain didn't stay away there was always a gazebo.

Summer Programme took place in July where young people continue to take part in outdoor activities. Fishing, Cycling, Bike Maintenance Programme, Food and Bay Sports were the highlights. Work with the Gardai continued during the year with the introduction of the Community Response Programme in response to antisocial activity in areas of Athlone. This programme also ensured that youth workers were visible in areas where young people hang out and provided opportunities for Outreach and Detached Youth Work.



Young people were enthusiastic about the return to indoor youth work and lots of effort went into planning activities and programmes that they could now take part in. Drop-ins, Driver Theory preparation and STEM activities were very popular. New youth groups were formed and we even managed a Slieve Bloom hike and Go Karting.

2021 brought about changes to the staff in the ALF Project. Youth Work Ireland Midlands said goodbye to Kevin Beaumont who retired after working with the ALF Project since its inception.

We welcomed Keith Simpson to his new role as Youth Justice Worker.



FUSION Annual Report 2021

Young people at the Fusion project were engaged in a blended approach of outdoor and online interventions at the beginning of 2021 as restrictions remained in place to prevent the spread of COVID19. Encouraging and supporting young people to get outdoors and keep active in pro social and recreational activities was a priority of project staff during this time alongside promoting and facilitating engagement in programmes utilising online platforms.



Food and care packs were delivered to homes to ensure young people had access to the necessary resources vital to supporting positive mental and physical health throughout the lock down period. Detached youth work and door to door visits provided the opportunity to meet with the young people in person, have a chat and check in with them face to face while social distancing. In line with government guidelines the FUSION project welcomed youths back to the project for face to face work and activities in May. Programmes remained in a 1:1 capacity to support the safe delivery of programmes and the famous words ‘Pull up your mask’ was born.

Installing an outdoor purpose built canopy allowed the project to facilitate programmes such as a ten week woodwork programme in partnership with AMETs. For this programme, the youths worked on a project that encapsulates both theory and practical elements of woodwork. The outdoor space provided the facilities for youths to attend programmes as a group which was much needed after the extended lock down period.



As the school term returned, some young people found it challenging to return to education for a multitude of reasons; predominantly due to the large gap of time missed and low mental health related to same. FUSION provided intervention support to a group of young women in the form of 1:1s and group work to support the transition back to school and the development of routine.

In partnership with AMETS, FUSION facilitated a Nail course that incorporated an introduction to gel and acrylic nail extensions which created the pathway to progression for the accredited programme at A.I.N.T (advanced institute of nail technology). This programme supported the young people to return to educational engagement, increasing social ability and skills, while building confidence. One young person progressed on to attending the Community Training Centre to study Hair and beauty, while others have progressed to learning about eyebrow and eyelash tinting. The Hear4u listening programme was facilitated heavily during this period as the demand for mental health support was high.



With the return of face to face work, education started back in September with three young people beginning their QQI level 3 on Iscoil. Two youth who previously completed the QQI level 3 took part in Health and Safety Training along with Manual Handling over the summer months. One youth with the support of Fusion was successful with starting an apprenticeship in carpentry with a local based company.



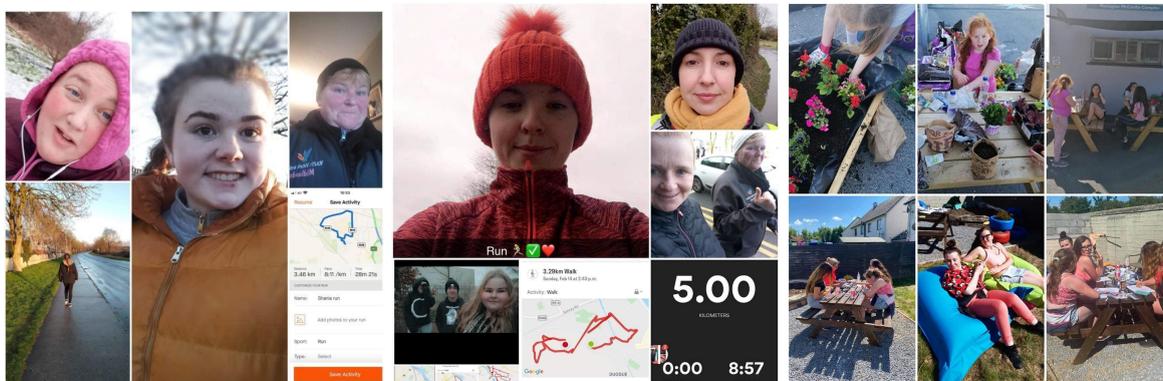
In April, in partnership with Tullamore Youth Project, Fusion facilitated a 'Random Act of Kindness day'. This day was funded by Healthy Ireland and was planned with the intention of boosting the morale of the community and giving back to the frontline workers following the recent COVID lockdown. Young people supported by project staff, facilitated several Random Acts of Kindness during this day including, donations of coffees to frontline workers, meal vouchers to leaving cert students and an afternoon of Bingo for the elderly residents residing in a private estate. This event promoted the positive image of youths and provided space for them to engage in an event that fostered community spirit and kindness.





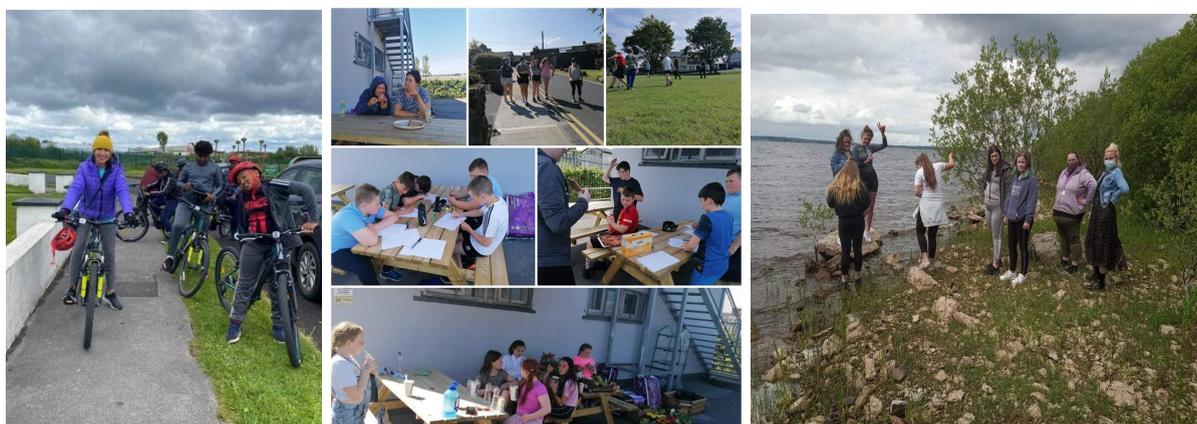
Athlone Youth Project UBU

As 2021 began we had the dreaded feeling of it being another year of digital and remote work. Another kahoot quiz to be made, more online game sessions to be done and any excuse to drop a pack and check in on our young people was taken at every opportunity. However, it was time to get active, get moving and keep our mental health somewhat intact. We decided we would run a 10km challenge every weekend where young people took part online and connected with youth workers. This was a challenge that was greatly accepted by one and all.

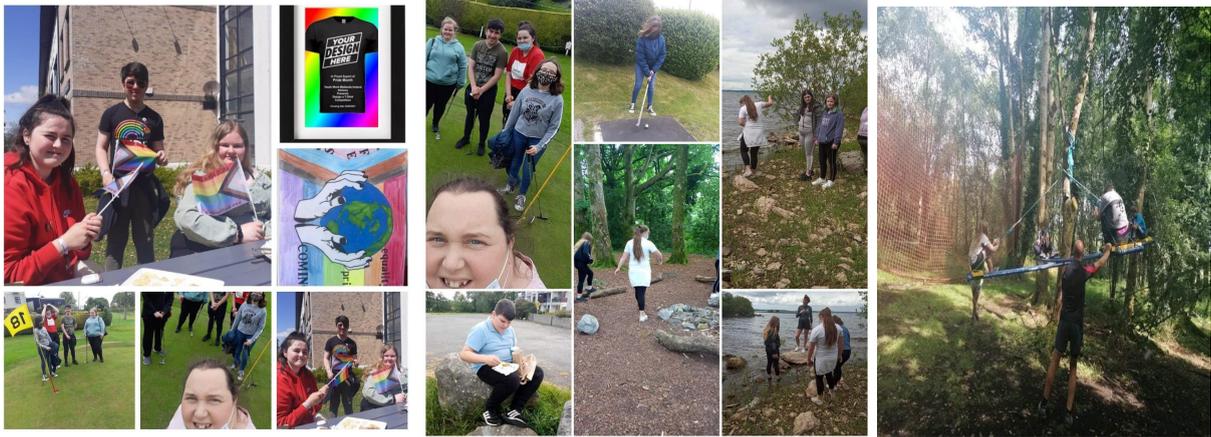


February and March saw our competitions soar from making your own board game to baking the challenges were endless and the fun and photographs were always there to ensure we saw everyone was getting a chance to take part.

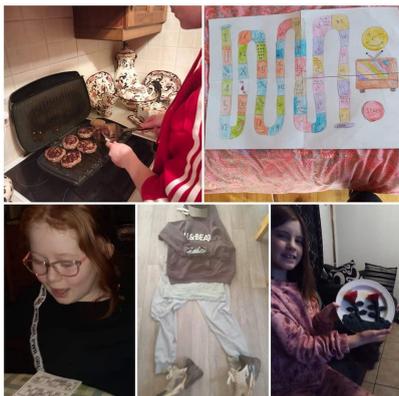
April came and the sunshine returned, and we were allowed to return to outdoor face to face work and we were racing to get to our young people, there was bike rides, walks, parks, football loads of fun and games in great weather, garden projects were planned and outdoor spaces were been made available so clubs could return to somewhat 'normal'.



We planned a summer programme with lots of activities outdoors was on the top of our agenda because this way we had the opportunity to continue our face to face work with our young people who had missed so much over the past two years and it was time to allow them space to be young people without worrying about restrictions. Summer programme arrived with a bang and we continued with sports days, fun walks, scavenger hunts, water fights and nerf wars. Some young people got dirty in an obstacle course challenge in cuckoo hill and some young people prayed the rosary while hiking in the slieve bloom mountains. Fun laughter and memories are what we made with the young people while teaching life skills and survival skills at a Saturday workshop. One and all enjoyed it.



September saw us planning for events such as halloween and christmas and always been prepared for restrictions some lifting and some not, the wearing of masks continued and as much outdoor work where possible was happening. October came and we linked up with the family resource centre and residents of Battery Heights and had a Halloween party on the grey pitch. We took on Farmaphobia which isn't for the faint hearted. It was then we chatted with young people who said it's not just the trip they enjoy, it's the opportunity and experiences we give them that they are grateful for.



November saw covid spike in our local communities and in order to protect staff and young people at times some groups had to go online and some had to solely work outdoors and as hard times come and go they still got to meet, have fun and enjoy experiences they might not have had a chance to do.

December then saw a dramatic rise in cases and we had to move a lot of work online and only meet with young people who were still informing if they had covid or not. Christmas treats were had with walks around the local town and a coffee to keep the cold out and a sneaky ice cream too.

It was late in December 2021 when our Dear Joanne 'our Queen' According to the Willow older boys, decided it was time for her to move on and informed us January 2022 would be her final month in Athlone Youth Project.

Mullingar Youth Project (MYP) UBU

2021 continued where 2020 had left off, Covid-19 was still lingering around which meant that restrictions were ever changing. Mullingar Youth project continued to adapt and think outside the box to work with the young people in the Mullingar area. The work that every staff, volunteer and young person put in that enabled MYP to move between digital, detached and small group work was a credit to the continued success throughout 2021.

The year provided many highlights that we here at MYP have reflected on and are proud to be able to say that we have worked with over 350 young people. Below is a synopsis of some of the work MYP has achieved throughout the year of 2021.

With the increasing use of zoom & google meets in schools, changing up the activities to keep young people engaged was a welcome challenge. MYP teamed up with E.Y.E to deliver a weekly online cookery programme of healthy meals. Young people and staff delved into new flavours that would leave the mouth watering for more.

The collaboration did not stop there, from filling belly's to getting a sweat on. MYP and E.Y.E took turns to facilitate exercise classes that were full body and fun.

Small Group Work

With the restrictions easing it provided an opportunity to reintroduce small group work on an outdoor basis. This meant relying on the weather was a harder feat than being creative for the staff and volunteers at MYP. It was also an opportunity to link back face-to-face with the young people and take their minds off the elephant in the room that was Covid19. Between outdoor arts & crafts workshops along with various team building and physical games it provided a space for the young people to have fun and use their imagination.



Building Skills

The return of the building skills programme was an essential return for some of the young people as it provides an opportunity to explore the tradesmen sector and a chance to get a foot into full time employment.

Engaging in the building skills programme offers an opportunity to break down some of the barriers the young people have erected which can result in building relationships and developing character.



The young people had identified a new project, constructing an outdoor hut which they could meet in. With the help of the tutor the young people researched suitable materials and got to work digging out the foundations. The sense of achievement in the young people was evident when talk of couches and tv's were mentioned to kit it out.

Zompocalypse

With the lockdown in full swing, it meant that being creative and thinking outside the box was required. The young people got their heads together along with the help of staff and as a result Zompocalypse was created. It was a chance for the young people to express themselves and let their creative side out.



The project provided the young people the opportunity to get to know all the different elements that making a film requires. Scouting out locations, creating the plot, developing the script, getting familiar with the equipment, how to use the equipment and the many different parts to editing and piecing the whole thing together. The film also provided the young people a chance to work as a team, enhance relationships between them and staff while also giving the young people a taste for acting and a break away from the bombardment of Covid-19 that was proving hard to escape.

The Arts centre provided the perfect space for the movie supporting local projects. The young people even took part in public speaking voicing their appreciation for the staff who encouraged and supported them throughout the project and to say thanks to the Arts Centre for providing their building for the premiere.



Summer Programmes

With the elephant in the room still deciding to hang around along with the reliable Irish Summer weather facilitating summer activities with the young people would prove a challenge. A challenge that the team in UBU MYP would indeed rise to. The need to be flexible, creative and have as many different games that you could think of was essential. Not to mention an endless supply of footballs, basketballs, hula hoops and paints proved to be at the forefront of many activities.



The first week began as most weeks do, wet and dull. Thankfully that was the weather and not the spirits of the staff & young people who made the most of the space and activities that could be facilitated. Luckily the weather only got warmer and dryer ensuring that plenty of games, smiles, laughter, BBQs, trips, water fights and bouncing around the bouncing castles occurred.



Canoeing & Water sports

The success and enjoyment of canoeing and water sports from the previous year continued. Young people were eager to sign up for the localised fun on the canal. Young people continued to build on their skills from the previous year while some required a little bit of extra encouragement to realise how fun the water can be. Towards the end of the week the smiles on the young people's face stretched from ear to ear.



SOCCER ACADEMY

The soccer academy facilitated by MYP, staff and volunteers offered structure to the underage boys while also trying to teach discipline which can be a valuable characteristic especially when applying for jobs in the future. It also provided a creative and healthy output for built up emotions while also positively impacting on mental health. The young people continued to build relationships with the staff, volunteers and each other while also developing their team working skills. The continued high attendance at the weekends is evidence of the preparation, hard work and commitment to everyone involved.

STEM

Another programme which worked well was the STEM project. Following training that staff received the STEM programme was facilitated towards the end of the year. It was incorporated into many different projects which the young people got great enjoyment from.

LGBTI+

The LGBTI+ programme which ran across 2021 was extremely busy over the restrictions Covid proposed as young people were more isolated. The Facebook platform provided a space where young people reached out to MYP. This resulted in lots of individuals and small group meets which have continued to grow into the new year.

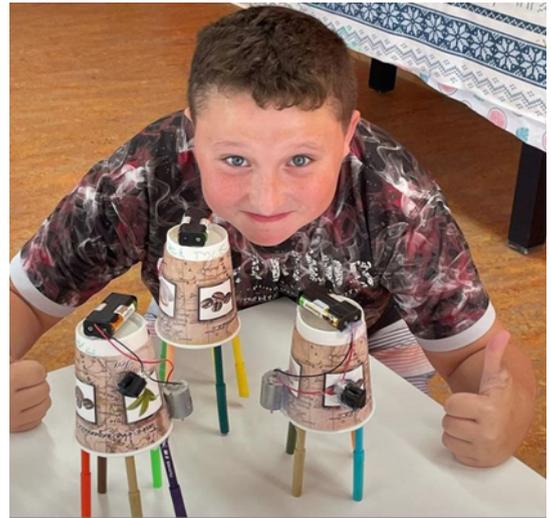


Tullamore Youth Project (TYP) UBU

TYP provides a targeted youth service to young people residing in the areas of Eiscir Riada, Puttaghan, Tara Crescent, Kilbrook and Arden View. From January-March, as the country continued with National restrictions due to COVID 19, we were challenged to tailor the way we engage young people in programmes and interventions.

TYP project staff in consultation with young people, their families and relevant professionals, continued training and planning to begin engaging young people in a blended way via online platforms and outdoors where safe to do so.

Challenges experienced by young people engaging in online work included; lack of technology/WIFI, lack of private spaces at home to engage and low levels of interest in online work. For these young people the benefits of online engagement included, a continuation of support and engagement, a safe space for young people to continue to meet peers and project staff, engagement in activity outside of school work and support managing COVID 19 related stress and concerns.



Some of the programmes we delivered online during 2021 included the following; Online games evenings, bingo, film reviewing, outdoor sports, fly tying, STEAM, arts and crafts, cookery, gaming groups, pride/LGBT+ events/activities, soccer and bespoke programmes during school breaks such as dance classes.

During 2021 TYP was awarded funding to support the development of the LGBTI youth service. This funding provided much needed resources and hours for an LGBTI specific youth worker to focus on expanding the reach of the service.

Throughout 2021, the LGBT+ group grew. A blended approach was taken in the delivery of these groups. Young people were provided with a weekly online session with young people participating from all around Offaly and surrounding areas. Young people met weekly outdoors moving indoors once restrictions were lifted participating in coffee mornings.



In partnership with Outcomers, TYP hosted a variety of online information sessions for young people and parents with different topics chosen by yp and parents to discuss. For Pride 2021 many online activities were organised such as nature walks, monster bingo, Equine Assisted Personal Development Programme, information sessions and also attending “Belong to’s online disco”.

In partnership with FAI Offaly, young people participated in multiple soccer programmes for young people of all ages. Utilising facilities in Aura leisure centre.

This was a great opportunity to re-introduce young people to face to face youth work whilst promoting good physical and mental health.

Young people learned and developed new skills promoting team and relationship building with project staff and peers.



During Summer 2021 Equine Assisted Personal Development (EAPD) Programmes was delivered to two groups during this time; ‘Traveller women’s and ‘LGBT+’ group in collaboration with Offaly Local Development Company. Through groundwork training, participants in an EAPD workshop begin learning how to communicate with horses using only their [body language](#). This is a very powerful introduction to how developing horse sense relates to human potential.

Community Fun Day- Young people participated in a community programme designing and painting outdoor games and activities in their local community. In partnership with Offaly Local Development Company young people developed a new space for all in their community to enjoy. As a celebration of their great work a fun day was organised with furry friends and an ice cream van on the day with all in the community invited on the day to enjoy the great work the young people have done.





In June 2021 Traveller pride was celebrated in TYP. Due to Government restrictions we were restricted to the activities we could provide. Young people participated in arts and crafts such as glass arts and paintings representing traveller history and culture. Young people also shared stories of culture and values.

Summer programmes took place for all groups with a variety of activities taking place such as; arts and crafts, outdoor games, scavenger hunts, tie dye, pavement art, photography, nature walks, fishing and bingo. Young people adapted well to outdoor work and enjoyed engagement in activities utilising community green areas and local open spaces such as the ‘greenway’ canal walk, the town park and Charleville Castle. Young people from all 5 centres participated in outdoor sports programmes such as boxing, tennis, tug-of-war and much more with “Offaly Sports Partnership”. After successful summer programmes young people went on trips to “Tayto Park”, “Liliput”, “Baysports”, “Turoe Pet Farm” and “Birr Outdoor Education Centre”.



Young people from 10-25yrs benefited from the **Young Carers Programme**. Completing needs assessments, attending weekly groups and 1:1s, due to restrictions this was delivered in a blend of online and in person sessions. Young people who required additional support were linked in with Family Carers Ireland where they can avail of additional needs based supports such as counselling, tuition etc. Support in the form of food hampers was also provided to these groups. Young people in the Young Carers group participated in a shopping trip to Athlone before Christmas.

In November 2021 both Tara Crescent and Eiscir Riada “young women groups” participated in a 6 week **Music Generation** project. This programme aims to create inspiring experiences for children and young people through music. Young people enjoyed learning new ways of expressing themselves through music. For December, as young



people prepared for Christmas, young people participated in arts and crafts.

Young people decided that they wanted to share their work with their families and community. They showcased their creations outside the Centres and invited family and friends to come and join with goodies on the day.

While challenging, this year has provided the opportunity for project staff at TYP to re-evaluate how we work, upskill and become more creative with regards to the programmes we deliver and methods of engagement. It was observed during 2021 that young people respond very well to a blended approach of youth work and prompting us to identify the elements of our new way of working that will remain in place post Covid-19.

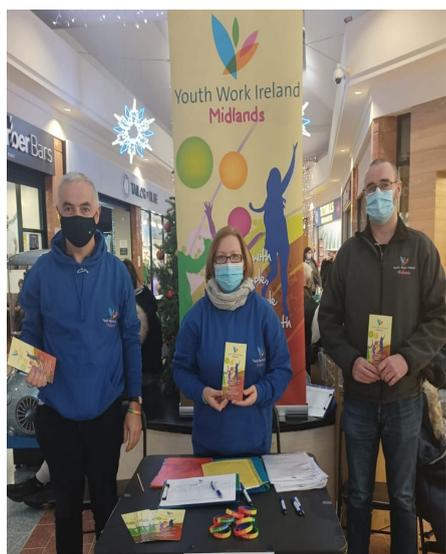
Online and outdoor work carry several benefits' and is now the first choice of engagement for some of our youth participants, while for others, their youth space is pivotal to their engagement, so we continue to look forward and strive towards the safe delivery of a youth service that is inclusive and supportive to all needs and preferences.



RURAL CLUBS

Rural Clubs & HERE4U

2021 began with a great start as we continued to support a network of 15 affiliated Youth Clubs and Special Interest Groups in Westmeath, Offaly and Roscommon. There were a total of 181 Adult Volunteers working with 2,215 young people in rural communities on a weekly basis.



Level 5 restrictions were imposed again and as the year progressed and with lots of uncertainty, the majority of groups went online again with activities through zoom, google meets etc. which in itself was challenging! We offered “Digital skills, tools, tips and games”, which was a 1 hour workshop for all our volunteers. A special thank you to our Service Manager, Tracey Moore, who kindly offered to facilitate the session.

In October our Regional Club Forum group met online and guidelines for re-opening face - to face clubs was the theme. We held our annual Halloween Costume Competition, which showed great imagination and staged worthy costumes. We also had our annual Christmas Card Competition, where the budding artists in our clubs were allowed to display their talent in great colour, they did amazing, creative work. We received entries from across the three Counties for both competitions and every year the standard gets higher and the judging gets harder.

Unfortunately, we had to say “farewell” to our Coder Dungeon Youth Club in Clonmellon who just couldn’t keep going with such few volunteers. The four volunteers along with rural youth workers had exhausted every avenue to keep the club going, but sadly it wasn’t enough. We would like to wish Karsten, Jolanda, Michael & Gerard all the best in the future. Without you all there would have never been a club in Clonmellon.

Volunteer Led Youth Clubs Network

for further information or if you would like to set up a club contact:

Eileen emcardle@youthworkmidlands.org /Faustina fmonaghan@youthworkmidlands.org

AIRC Midlands	Athlone Youth Darts Academy	Ballymore Youth Club
Clara Youth Club	Coder Dojo Mullingar	Coder Dungeon Clonmellon
Edenderry Youth Café & Youth Club	Emerald Lakes Dance & Theatrical Community Group Rochfortbridge	Kinnegad Youth Club
Moate Performing & Visual Arts Club	Moore Youth Club	Mullingar Charity Variety Group
St. Ciaran’s Youth Club, Clonmacnoise	St. Mary’s Youth Centre and P2B Youth Café, Tullamore	YoYo Youth Café & Youth Club, Mullingar

Here4U is a national listening service for teenagers aged 12-19 years. Simply, Here4u is one-to-one youth work outside of a group context. Through enhanced listening skills and employing the youth work approach, Here4u facilitators can offer young people:



Listening - Here4U Facilitators provide a listening ear that is non-judgmental, confidential and non-directive.

Referral - Here4U Facilitators are in a position to provide help to the young person by identifying and presenting options for support or services that may be of assistance.

Guiding Support – Discussion with young people is goal orientated and progressive. In this way the service provides more than simply sign-posting, it assists young people to take steps to avail of the services they require, or to become active agents in their own self-care.

There were a total of 240 sessions delivered over the school year. During the lockdown they were offered the alternative of a phone session or session over Microsoft teams. Less than half of the young people took up the offer. The young people much prefer face-to-face sessions.

The main issues presented were: anxiety, state exam worries, parental separation, bullying, friends – making new ones in first year, death of a parent & a sibling, family, not attending school, anger, Covid – not being able to hang-out with friends, Parental addictions.

The Here4u listening service is currently offered in 2 secondary schools in Westmeath and 1 in Offaly. Since November 2021, we were able to offer the service in 1 Secondary School in Roscommon.

In December 2021, the Marist College Athlone had a non uniform day to raise awareness and funds for the Here4u Service to continue in the school. Thank you lads, it is very much appreciated.



If you would like further information about the service please contact Eileen on 0863294763 or email emcardle@youthworkmidlands.org

“Get Back Clubbing - Join A Youth Club Expo!”

Youth Work Ireland Midlands had a very successful “Get Back Clubbing – Join a Youth Club Expo on Saturday 18th September 2021 at the YoYo Youth Café, Fair Green, Mullingar. The idea of the event was to invite the public to see what youth clubs are available in the Mullingar area. The event showcased youth and sporting clubs as well as organisations that can be contacted for support if setting up a youth club/group.

It also gave the public an opportunity to get information, to join clubs and of course to get some free bee’s. Some young people got the opportunity to try some hurling skills and they also learned how to weave stars as part of Mental Health Ireland’s “One Million Stars project!”



As it was an outdoor event, we were blessed with the weather and there was plenty of lovely food on offer too. Exhibitors included: CoderDojo Mullingar, Mullingar Charity Variety Group, Youth Work Ireland Midlands, Westmeath GAA, Westmeath Macra, ARCH Club, Mullingar Mental Health Association, Westmeath PPN, Westmeath County Council Community Development Section. We would also like to thank Westmeath County Council who funded the event.



After evaluating the Mullingar event, it was decided by the Regional Club Forum group of Volunteers that the next event would take place in Golden Island Shopping Centre in Athlone on the last Friday and Saturday in November. This was slightly different as covid restrictions were still in place for large indoor gatherings.



The “Get Back Clubbing!” idea stemmed from a conversation with our Board Member Gerard Keena, who was thinking of going back to basics to get our rural youth clubs and special interest groups back after the first covid lockdown. A sincere thank you to all our volunteers at every level in the organisation. We could not do the work without you. You do make a “big” difference.

Athlone Youth Darts Academy:



2021 was another great year for Athlone Youth Darts Academy. The club was online & in-person when restrictions were lifted. In March 2021, Athlone Youth Darts Academy had four members that upgraded to a higher level in their throwing ability due to a lot of hard work on the dart board. Here is a photo of two of our boys John Morris went from purple to yellow & his brother James from yellow to green. Well done boys.

Winner of our virtual darts competition in March was David Flynn beating Ben Manning 3-1 in a very hard fought final. Well done to all our boys that took part, keep up the practice. David just proved that the hard work does pay off.



Like every other group in the country we plodded along through zoom during the lockdown, but as soon as restrictions lifted the young people just wanted to meet up again and do what they do best - play darts. In November 2021, what an amazing day for the Westmeath Mixed Doubles Darts held in the Beach Tree Streamstown. Mark Dolan & Michael Smyth beating Jason Waters & David Flynn in a top class final. Mark took out 116 finishes to take the title.

On behalf of the Westmeath Youth Team we would like to thank our sponsor Michael Tumulty, Plastering Contractor Athlone for all our new shirts. Big thank you to Eileen McArdle from Youth Work Ireland Midlands for all her help with our club over the years.



Also we would like to say a big thank you to all who gave spot prizes for the raffle, we really appreciated them. John Kelly who sponsored our trophies - a massive thank you. Graham & his wife Corrina for their hospitality at the Beech Tree, Streamstown for making us all feel so welcome thank you both. It was a real family event.



Last but not least Tommy & Mark Dolan, Paula Greene, Connor Smyth for all their help in making a perfect day for everyone. To all our Youth & Senior throwers ye were all fantastic well done. We could not forget Seamie Tynan, who is chairperson of the Athlone Youth Darts Academy and who really is the backbone of the club since its inception in 2015. Without you Seamie, there would be no club. We really appreciate you and all you do for us all.



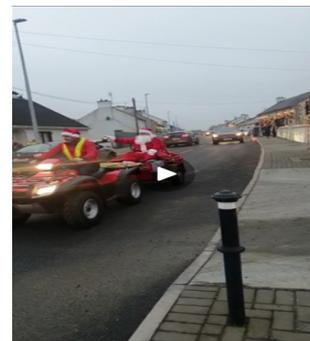
Some of our upcoming stars at the Beech Tree event. Everyone who is part of Athlone Youth Darts Academy got a medal on the day. I think this picture says it all. They are really looking up to the Champ himself "Seamie Tynan!" If you would like to join Athlone Youth Darts Academy, you can find us on facebook and DM us [Athlone Darts | Facebook](#) The door is always open for members.

St Ciaran's Youth Club, Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly.

We came back in October and due to Covid we were permitted outdoor activities only. So we put on our thinking caps and had a walk in the evening, starting at the playground and ending up at Shannonbridge power station. Then back to the playground for hot chocolate and marshmallows. It was a bright moonlit night and we made the most of the dry cool evening.

In November we had a swim in Ballinasloe pool, the staff were excellent and the giant inflatable was up for us.

December – restrictions were back. But we didn't let that deter us 😊. We had a cinema night at the start of December. On the 20th December we had Covid compliant Santa in Shannonbridge village. Lots of the community came out to enjoy the party with us. Santa drove down the main street escorted by a club member's father, on his quad bike!!



January was back to restrictions, but again we got around that. We had a walk in the new walkway around Shannonbridge football pitch.

Glowsticks helped brighten our paths. February – it was panto time. The Dean Crowe provided us with great entertainment by Robin Hood.



Early March we had Smoothie night, for healthy concoctions of fruit and berries. Pancake night was competition time, for the most original pancake, and the table who worked best together for teamwork and cleaning up afterwards.

We enjoyed being back in the hall so much, we had another hall night, with the Exploratory Dome.

Reminding of the many constellations of stars, and what Astronomy is all about. Yoga night was a very relaxing and soothing night. Fun was had as we stretched ourselves out and worked in pairs to get the most benefit out of the class.

Our Big Day out was at the end of April to Forest Park in Boyle, to the Zipline. We got the bus from Clonfanlough hall, and stopped for snacks and goodies in Roscommon town. We arrived and took it in turns to zip through the trees. While one team started, the others were exploring the park. We had our lunch near the bus, and stopped again for more refreshments. Sing Songs were our entertainment on the journey home.

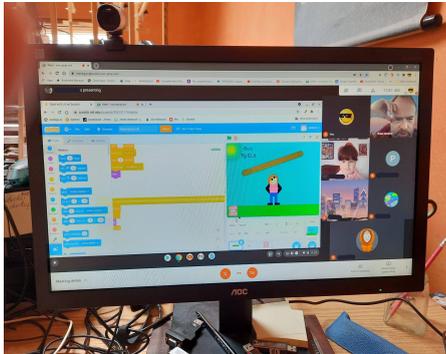


End of May was our final evening, the sun obliged and we had an ice-cream sundae for Down Syndrome Ireland. We raised €300 for our charity of choice, while having fun at the same time.

We capped our membership at 39 members. It was a great year, we had our challenges but met them head on.

CoderDojo Mullingar

CoderDojo Mullingar is in its 10th year (a mere blink!) and we're happy to report that we're still standing, and continuing to evolve. CoderDojo itself has become part of the Raspberry Pi foundation but that hasn't affected 'local' operations and each Dojo still operates independently, with support where needed from the parent organisation.



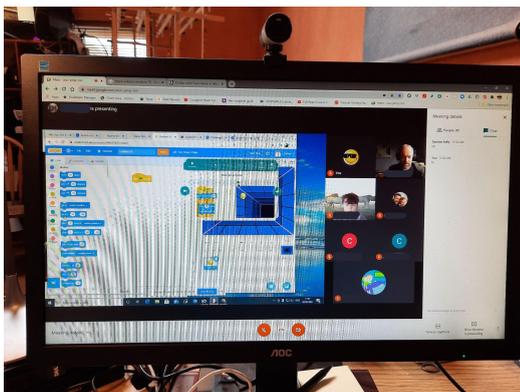
In common with other groups, we were unable to run our normal in-person sessions during 2021. Being the big techie geeks we are though, we weren't going to let little things like a global pandemic and government health guidelines stop us! During 2021 we moved to online sessions using Google Meet; these continued into early 2022. There was a definite drop-off in attendance, particularly among teenagers, which we are still recovering from. The remote sessions, though, were an interesting experience for us as

Mentors - it might be because they were shorter than the regular meetings, or the attendees had less space on their screens for distractions but there was a definite sense of improved engagement.

Post easing of Government restrictions, we returned to in-person sessions. As we were unsure of how things would go in terms of managing the space, we didn't really publicise our 'return' so numbers were low. Thanks to the usual 'word-of-mouth' effect, though, we've noticed a slow-but-steady increase in interest which is encouraging. At time of writing we have one session remaining before we go on our regular summer hiatus but we'll be back in September 2022, and we'll be back to making our usual publicity effort in the meantime.



We've acquired some interesting hardware via donation and investment, particularly in the areas of micro-controllers and robotics. We've really just started to scratch the surface of what we can do with these and there is HUGE potential for them, so from September on we'll be pushing the 'physical computing' agenda much more than we ever have before. We'll still be working with Scratch and HTML/CSS, but we'll also be looking to expand into Javascript and Python.



As with every club, our door is also ALWAYS open to volunteers, but we particularly need women to be visible in this endeavour. Volunteers DO NOT NEED TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE - what is REALLY important is that we are seen to not be afraid of the technology, or frustrated by it to the point of giving up. We do have some great parents attending regularly - both Mums bringing Sons and Dads bringing Daughters - but despite our best efforts (to date!) there is still a huge percentage gap in the number of

boys attending vs. the number of girls. Historically, women were the first coders and were dominant in the sector for decades. There is no technical or biological reason that girls can't carve out a rewarding career for themselves in IT, or even learn a little coding to help them in other fields of endeavour; Data modelling and analysis is vital in all fields of research.

We all, however, need to SEE IT to BE IT (apologies to other associations if I'm breaching copyright!) so if you think this is something you'd like to be involved with, or know someone who you think would be up for it, drop us an email to mullingar.ie@coderdojo.com



Short Video Competition funded by Healthy Ireland Westmeath.

Youth Work Ireland Midlands ran a very successful short video competition in the spring of 2021. The themes and the rules for the competition were decided by the youth forum. The idea was to create a short video highlighting three different themes over two different months. Youth Work Ireland Midlands Youth Forum asked the young people of county Westmeath to deliver a positive message to their peers and the wider community to communicate the importance of Friendship, Connecting with others and managing school or work-life balance. A poster and a google application form were also designed for the competition.

Short Video Competition

Youth Work Ireland Midlands are inviting young people of Westmeath to create a video highlighting three different themes over the next two months.

Friendships- the importance of bonding or Overcoming Isolation & reconnecting. Closing date is the 23rd of April 2021
Managing school / life balance. Closing date is the 21st of May 2021

Age categories are 10-12 years, 13-15 years & 16-18 years.

€1,000 worth of prizes to be won, so it pays to be original and creative!

All entrants are reminded to adhere to Covid19 guidelines at all times.
The competition will take place online over email and WhatsApp.
Videos must be accompanied by an online application form.
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ksVxKaY6XWSUBglwvUk33jKZ4eqGA4_zuAlwG9zhCkA/edit
Send entries to: emcardle@youthworkmidlands.org / fmonaghan@youthworkmidlands.org or Whatsapp to 0863294763

This project is supported by:

The rural youth work team had the responsibility to get the word out there. The Poster, Rules and Application Form were sent to Youth Service across its funded projects, Rural Youth Clubs, Comhairle na nOg and inviting other organisations in the County working with young people in the age group e.g. Family Resource Centre's, Foroige Rural Clubs, Gateway, Scouts, Schools and Special schools including St. Hilda's and St. Brigid's and all sporting organisations.

All young people were encouraged to participate. The competition was also promoted through all YWIM Social media platforms. LWCPsy, LWETB as well as YWI nationally had also been informed on the competition.

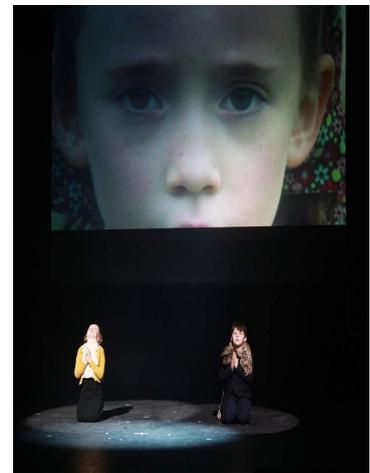
Uptake for the April Short video was slow as all students were not back to school until after the Easter break, so we extended the closing date by a few days. In saying that, there were 20 video entries for April. **Here are the winners:**

Kyran Monaghan - Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí, Athlone, David Burke & Ciaran Connolly - St Finian's, Mullingar, Cian Furlong, Gordon Medforth & William Medforth - Wilson's Hospital School, Multyfarnham, Jack Dolan - Marist College, Athlone, Daniel Berry - is a former student at Colaiste Chiarain, Athlone and Aimee Murphy – Athlone Community College.

May's theme was school/work life balance and there was a much bigger response this time round. We had a total of 40 video's and the lucky winners were: Kayleigh Ring, Lillie Nolan, Maddie Nolan, Rihanna Ward, Conor O'Regan, Jazelle Berry. Congratulations to all who took part.

Emerald Lakes TTC Group, Rochfortbridge & Mullingar.

Since returning to group classes and teams club we have worked so hard to bring as many opportunities to our members as we can. Emerald Lakes TTC Group is a unique blend of Irish Dance, Irish Culture, Theatrical Performance, Cinematic & Production group who volunteer to bring a diverse range of cultural activities & experiences to its members. Our core age groups range between 4 and 73 years of age with the majority in their teens at present. This gives our members a space to perform and to express themselves through their own talent whatever that may be.



As members of Youth Work Ireland Midlands we have excelled in our work in the communities we serve, thus providing a positive outlook and experience for all involved.

Anyone wishing to find out more about Emerald Lakes TTC or to join up DM us on facebook [The Emerald Lakes Academy of Irish Dance | Facebook](#)

The Voyage

Emerald Lakes TTC Group had an extremely productive and busy time recently bringing its members together on stage at Mullingar Arts Centre for what was an emotive and epic production called 'The Voyage'. The show created and written by Kevin Lyster & Choreographed by Kevin Lyster & Philip Hynes with the assistance of the groups remaining volunteers brought a cast of over 70 members to this Irish Dance Theatrical Production with Cinematic elements to make it a show to remember.



"The Voyage' which was created, written & directed by Kevin Lyster wowed audiences as did his previous shows at the Arts Centre for example "Forgotten Children" in 2016 which was created for the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising. This new production was based on the Great Famine from c1847 and promised to bring a powerful and emotional story to the stage as they recreated The Voyage and the Journey to America.

The group commenced filming for the project in December 2019 which interacted with the show. The filming took place at multiple locations in Westmeath including Rochforbridge and Lough Derravaragh. The sheer scale of this production gave the Emerald Lakes group a sense of pride with the releasing of the breathtaking Trailers on Social Media which have gained tens of thousands of views.



Emerald Lakes will return again to the Arts Centre in the Autumn with The Voyage to facilitate all of those who wanted to see but couldn't. Emerald Lakes will extend a welcome to all Clubs from across Youth Work Ireland (Midlands) to come and see what they do as a group.

Emerald Lakes crowned World Champions in Digital World Championships

Emerald Lakes participated in the Digital World championship in 2021 which was a change from the usual enormous event held annually on a world stage. The qualifying requirements for the 2021 Digital World Championships were adapted so that participants were not required to have participated in a qualifying event in 2020. As a wholly inclusive event, entries were welcomed from everyone which offered every dancer the chance to participate in a global competition. Yet again success was evident for the Lakers who had winners across multiple categories. The successes achieved comes down to the commitment and consistency of the group.

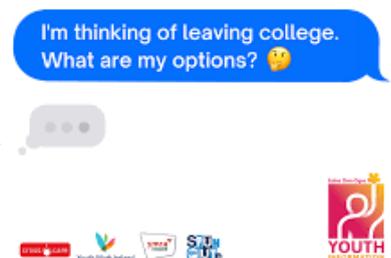
YOUTH INFORMATION

Youth information spent 2021 working to uphold the right of young people to full and reliable information. Never more than 2021 was access to youth information for young people more needed; the problem was creating ways for young people to access this information service.

In order to support the well-being of young people, Athlone Youth Information service had to be more accessible, fully resourced and welcoming for young people and run online and in person depending on which stage of lockdown was faced in 2021, both ways of work were utilised in 2021.

When public guidelines allowed, Athlone YIS was back working one on one, in groups, schools and at public events to promote the service, and facilitate programmes and activities, and as usual, the Internet Awareness Programme “Mind UR Selfie” came out on top of all requested programmes. 2021 seen young people spend an unprecedented amount of time online, and the increasing popularity of new video apps and the over sharing of personal information and video’s/photographs created its own set of problems. Athlone YIS was on top of this issue and added these apps to the programme to support young people to make good choices when online.

The queries that topped the polls regarding what information young people were seeking in 2021, aside from Covid-19 itself and mental health, was the Leaving Cert. The main issues were around the written/accredited grade from the State Examination Commission (SEC) and the Candidate Self Service Portal (CSSP). This meant that YIS staff had to learn very quickly what was happening, when and how the most up-to-date, easy to understand and relevant information could be given to young people.



The middle of 2020 seen the partnership nationally between Spunout.ie and all existing youth information centres across Ireland come together to provide a national information service for young people to access information online, and have a youth information worker support them to navigate the information overload of modern-day society, and aid young people in the decision making process. 2021, seen this national chat service (YIChat) go from strength to strength, and expand beyond expectations.

Hoping to have at least 2,000 conversations with young people in 2021, YIChat exceeded this by having 3,546 conversations with young people. On average, young people only waited 15 seconds to speak to a youth information officer and young information workers were available for over 978 hours to any young person in Ireland in 2021. This is an incredible project, Athlone YIC feels privileged to be able to support young people in this way.

The work that YIChat carries out has been motivated by the desire to provide young people with the information, advice and guidance that they need about the issues that matter to them. The

most element being this work is carried out one-to-one, in a confidential and non-judgemental space which meets young people where they are. The team in YIChat have continued to provide this essential service for young people across the country in 2021 while adapting to the changes that the year brought. We look forward to continuing this partnership with Spunout.ie, Crosscare, YMCA and our Youth Work Ireland colleagues in 2022!



Westmeath Comhairle na nÓg



Westmeath Comhairle na n Óg had a rollercoaster of a year in 2021, like every other group, but still managed to complete a mountain of work, have fun, and make a difference to their environmental habits and that of other young people in Westmeath. Using online methods to meet when 2021 locked the country down, and seizing every opportunity to meet in person when possible meant the Comhairle crew worked and played hard. There were many many highs in 2021, and a number of challenges, but an overall success.

Some of the highlights included hosting a local climate conversations consultation, participating in “One million stars Ireland” which highlights domestic abuse and violence, participating in Longford Westmeath Children and Youth People’s Services Wellness week of activities, hosting a huge and energetic AGM 2021 and created a fun informational and informative video highlighting the need to act on the climate crisis NOW.

The Westmeath CNN AGM 2021 was held on 23rd November 21, and was attended by a record breaking (Westmeath) 190+ young people. Westmeath CNN planned and executed an AGM with the perfect balance of learning and fun, and had very creative ways in keeping all 190 young people engaged and actively participating. The work of 2021 was presented, information to inform the work plan 2022 was gathered from the all of the students from 13 schools all over the county. The AGM 2021 was officially opened by Cllr Frankie Keena, Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council, and a video from Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Mr O’Gorman strengthened the importance of being part of a dynamic group like Comhairle.



Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg 2021

Comhairle na nÓg Induction Training

Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg (RCNN) began 2021 with virtual Comhairle na nÓg Induction Training. The training content included members' hopes & fears, the role of a Comhairle member, leadership skills, listening skills, teamwork, programme planning, committee skills and Gaisce introduction.



Consultations and Collaborations

RCNN members took part in the following consultations, youth advisory panels and events:

- Comhairle Members Networking Events Youth Advisory Committee
- Comhairle na nÓg Climate Action Conversation
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Consultation to get the views of children on their experience of being a child in Ireland.
- Department of Education, Teachers' Professional Learning Consultation
- Youth Advisory Committee to assist the National Participation Office in designing and piloting a survey for young people on Universal Youth Services and the Youth Services Grant
- National Cancer Control Programme on Sun Protection Behaviours Consultation
- Dáil na nÓg Topic Consultation (x3)
- Rural Youth Assembly Consultation to inform 'Our Rural Future', the Rural Development Policy for 2021 – 2025
- Ulster / Connaught Comhairle na nÓg Members Regional Networking Event
- Roscommon County Council – Roscommon Town Urban Regeneration Consultation

'Things to do in Roscommon' Video

In response to 2021's topic, amenities for young people, RCNN worked on their '[Things to do in Roscommon](#)' promotional video with Spicy Dog Media to showcase some of the magnificent amenities County Roscommon has to offer. The committee took part in three workshops: video planning, shooting, and editing. And spent a full day filming, travelling to various locations around the county. The video was officially launched at RCNN's AGM in November 2021. Visit

Roscommon shared the video to their social media platforms. Shannonside FM interviewed RCNN members about the video and Comhairle na nÓg in general. RosFM featured the video on their website and social media.

AGM 2021

Eighty-one young people, representing all nine secondary schools in Co. Roscommon, attended this year's event. The AGM was opened by Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council, Joe Murphy and featured guest speaker Luke 'Ming' Flanagan, Member of the European Parliament from Ireland for the Midlands–North-West constituency. Attendees participated in a workshop on the 'Theory of Change' facilitated by Trócaire's Youth Development Education Officer.

Topics for discussion were pre-selected through RCNN's 'Issues Affecting Young People' survey. This informed RCNN's 'World Café' workshop discussions. The topics identified were Facilities / Amenities for Young People, Drugs & Alcohol, COVID-19 and Mental Health. Mental Health was chosen, by 53% of the votes, as the main issue affecting young people in the county, making it Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg's primary work topic for 2022.

Committees

RCNN members sat on the following youth-led and adult committees working on issues affecting young people:

- Comhairle na nÓg National Executive working on the national topic of Climate-Conscious Transport Solutions.
- Youth Work Ireland Midlands Youth Forum.
- Roscommon County Council Joint Policing Committee
- Roscommon County Council Climate Action Sub-Committee.
- Roscommon County Council Planning, Environment, Climate Change & Corporate Governance Strategic Policy Committee
- Galway Roscommon Education Training Board Youth & Arts Committee
- Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee.
- Registered member of Roscommon County Council's Public Participation Network



Youth Work Ireland
Midlands

www.youthworkmidlands.org

Charity No. 20037253