



Louth Volunteer Centre CLG Annual Report 2020



Contents

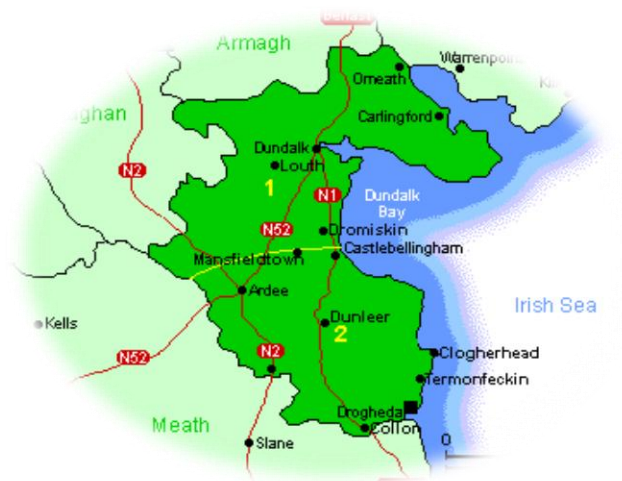
1. About Us.....	2
1.1 Our Vision.....	3
1.2 Our Mission.....	3
1.3 Our Values.....	3
1.4 Our Strategic Aims	3
1.5 Our Governance	3
1.6 Our Board.....	4
1.7 Our Team	6
1.8 Our Services	9
1.9 Our Thanks	10
2. Chairperson’s Statement	11
3. Our Environment.....	13
3.1 Demographics	13
3.2 Area Strengths.....	13
3.3 Area Challenges.....	14
4. Our Activities & Achievements	15
4.1 Core Objective One – Increase access	16
4.2 Core Objective Two – Increase quality	20
4.3 Core Objective Three – Increase awareness.....	27
4.4 Core Objective Four – Sustainability.....	35
5. Director’s Report and the Financial Statements.....	44
5.1 Directors’ Report.....	44
5.2 Profit & Loss Account.....	52
5.3 Statement of Income and Retained Earnings	53
5.3 Balance Sheet.....	54
5.4 Statement of Cash Flows.....	55
5.4 Notes to the Financial Statements.....	56
5.8 Detailed Profit and Loss Account	61

Company Number	404719
Charity Number	17034
Charities Regulator Number	20062644
Registered Office	Old Motor Tax Office Bolton Street Drogheda Co. Louth A92 DKR0
Auditor	McEvoy Craig 10 Dublin Road Drogheda Co. Louth A92 K6FA
Bankers	Bank of Ireland Laurence Street Drogheda Co. Louth

1. About Us

This report outlines the work and highlights the achievements of Louth Volunteer Centre (LVC) in 2020. Louth Volunteer Centre was initially established as Drogheda Volunteer Centre by Drogheda Community Forum in 2003 through funding received through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. We registered as a company limited by guarantee with a Board of Directors in 2005, in the same year the organisation was officially launched by President Mary McAleese. Louth Volunteer Centre is one of 22 Volunteer Centres and seven Volunteer Information Services nationwide and is an affiliate of Volunteer Ireland. All Volunteer Information Services will become Volunteer Centres in May 2021 making it a truly national Volunteer Centre network.

As per our constitution the principle activity of the company is to promote the benefits of volunteering to the inhabitants of Louth and the surrounding area by association with statutory and voluntary authorities in a common aim to advance education and provide facilities in the interest of Social Welfare and other charitable purposes of benefit to the Community of Louth and its surrounding areas; and to provide support, training and advice which enhances the effectiveness of organisations involving volunteers to promote charitable activities on behalf of the Community of Louth and its environs. To that end we offer support and guidance to individuals and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to reach their individual and collective goals while making a significant contribution to their local community and society; and advocate on behalf of volunteers and volunteering in County Louth at local and national level.



1.1 Our Vision

Our vision is to make volunteering part of the way of life in Louth.

1.2 Our Mission

To help individuals find meaningful opportunities to volunteer and to support not-for-profit organisations to involve volunteers in their work.

1.3 Our Values

Our key values are:

- **Equality.** We believe all people should be valued and respected equally. We are also committed to removing barriers that exclude vulnerable groups from participating fully in society.
- **Sense of Community.** Volunteering is ultimately about people helping others and feeling connected with their community
- **Professionalism.** We work in an environment where honesty and integrity is paramount and where people are encouraged to bring their ideas to life while remaining accountable to ourselves and others.

1.4 Our Strategic Aims

We have four strategic aims:

- Promote awareness of Louth Volunteer Centre and benefits of volunteering
- Increase access to volunteering
- Increase quality in volunteering
- Ensure Louth Volunteer Centre's effectiveness and sustainability to deliver

1.5 Our Governance

Louth Volunteer Centre is a registered charity and Company Limited by Guarantee. The organisation is overseen by a board of up to 12 voluntary Directors. Board members serve a term of up to 5 years and officers of the board up to 3 years. Louth Volunteer Centre board members are appointed on the basis of geographically representing the population of Louth County and having the sufficient qualifications, contacts and experience to deliver the objectives of the Volunteer Centre. The board have responsibility for ensuring that the organisation fulfils its legal obligations and is properly financially managed; they are also responsible for the strategic development of the Centre and ensuring that it operates effectively and efficiently.



We achieved compliance with the Voluntary Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in 2018. In 2020 we implemented the Charities Governance Code and will be evidencing compliance with the code in 2021.

In addition to being bound to regulatory and legislative governance requirements we are required to maintain national Quality Standards which were developed by the Volunteer Centre network and are externally evaluated by Volunteer Ireland. We were scheduled to undergo external review in April 2020 however due to COVID-19 this was postponed until October. We were successful in maintaining our Quality Standard Award, further details available in Section 4.4, page 37.

1.6 Our Board

The Directors of the company serving during the year were as follows:

Jonathan Lynch* (Chair)

Jonathan has held a number of roles in the Irish Higher Education sector, managing student welfare and student engagement functions across a number of Dublin Universities before joining the Ambulance service in 2018. Jonathan holds a BBS. (Hons) in Business Management from the National University of Ireland, an MSc in International Management from DIT and a PG Diploma in Education from the National College of Ireland. Jonathan has extensive experience in the volunteer sector with particular emphasis on community festivals and first responder schemes representing both on a national scale.

Julie Devitt* (Treasurer - outgoing)

Julie is a CIMA qualified management accountant and has over 12 years' experience in senior roles within the FMCG industry as well as 6 years previous experience in the Financial Services sector. Julie served as Treasurer to September 2020.

Mary Cleary* (Treasurer- incoming)

Mary was appointed Treasurer at our AGM on the 21st September 2020. Mary is a CPA qualified tax advisor with over 20 years accounts and finance experience in a broad range of sectors. Mary is also an active volunteer, she is a Gaisce Presidents' Award Leader providing mentoring supports to young people outside of education settings and volunteered at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann through Louth Volunteer Centre.

Siobhan Molloy (Secretary – incoming. Appointed 08/09/2020)

Siobhán is an Company Executive Director / Creative Director at Horseware Ireland with considerable brand and general marketing experience. Siobhán is also a qualified psychotherapist, with a Masters in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy and volunteers her time in the fields of adolescent and relationship counselling. She also recently completed a Professional Diploma in Leadership and Management

Kevin Light (Appointed 05/05/2020)

Kevin is a leadership coach, helping business and other leaders and their teams to be more effective and inclusive. Kevin has over 30 years leadership experience – including managing the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg; founding and running an NGO and establishing an organisational development business with clients in IT, Telecoms, Energy, Construction, Pharma (both private and national health), Financial Services, Hospitality, Research, Legal, FMCG, Property, Media and Sport.

Geraldine McStravick (Board staff liaison - Appointed 19/10/2020)

Geraldine is a Human Resources Management professional with over 20 years' experience in Human Resources and Learning & Development. She is currently contracted as a HR Service Partner with St. Vincent de Paul Homeless Services tasked with embedding HR strategy and providing professional HR support, guidance and service during a period of change within the organisation.

Michael Walsh* (Resigned 10/09/2020)

Michael holds a BSc. in Psychology from DCU and a MPsychSc. in Psychological Science from UCD. Michael is passionate about the Irish not-for-profit sector, previously volunteering with SOSAD Ireland for 5 years. Michael is a member of the Recruitment Team in 2into3, a company which seeks to transform not-for-profits through consulting, recruitment and research. Michael resigned from the board due to changes in work commitments.

Agata Laszazynska (Appointed 17/02/2020 Resigned 10/09/2020)

Agata is a Certified Public Accountant with a Masters in Applied Accounting. Agata is also a prolific volunteer and sits on the Board of Management of St. Mary's Primary School in Drogheda, a large school of over 1,000 pupils. Agata unfortunately had to resign due to a sudden illness and we wish her the very best in her recovery.

Jubilee Osawa* (Appointed date, 05/04/2019)

Jubilee has been taking a sabbatical from the Louth Volunteer Centre board to pursue postgraduate studies, he is hoping to rejoin us towards the end of 2021.

***Board sub-committees as at 31/12/2020**

Governance	Jonathan Lynch (Chair); Siobhán Molloy, Mary Cleary
Risk	Jonathan Lynch (Chair); Siobhán Molloy, Mary Cleary
Finance	Mary Cleary (Chair); Julie Devitt; Jonathan Lynch
HR	Geraldine McStravick (Chair); Siobhan Molloy; Kevin Light

1.7 Our Team



Team planning day 14/01/2020, Barlow House, Drogheda

In 2020 Louth Volunteer Centre's staff numbers grew from two full time and one part-time staff to two full time and four part-time staff members. Two full time and one part-time staff positions are funded through Department of Rural and Community Development grant to Strengthen and Support Volunteering. Three part-time staff members are employed on fixed purpose contracts relating to the PEACE IV funded Good Relations Initiative.

All staff members have significant qualifications and experience in areas such as community development; training development and delivery; and marketing.

- **Gráinne Berrill**, Louth Volunteer Centre Manager.

Gráinne joined Louth Volunteer Centre in April 2016. Gráinne is responsible for the operational management of the organisation including financial and staff resourcing and the delivery of our operational plan. Gráinne works closely with the Board of Directors to ensure organisational compliance with regulatory requirements and quality assurance. Gráinne also provides administrative support to the board on their journey towards compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code. As Volunteer Centre Manager Gráinne fulfills the role of Company Secretary for the board.

Gráinne seeks to identify emerging needs in the community served by Louth Volunteer Centre in relation to volunteering and develops appropriate service responses to these needs. Gráinne represents Louth Volunteer Centre and advocates on behalf of volunteers and volunteerism in a number of fora, including the Local Community Development Committee and Public Participation Network.

- **Kayleigh Mulligan**, Volunteer Liaison/Garda Vetting Liaison Support Person

Kayleigh joined the Louth Volunteer Centre team in January 2013. Kayleigh has responsibility for quality management in our placement service; volunteer communications and the design and development of our website.

Kayleigh's role involves developing Louth Volunteer Centre's North Louth service - supporting organisations and volunteers in the area, assisting in identifying and filling volunteering roles within organisations and helping volunteers to find suitable, fulfilling volunteering opportunities. She represents Louth Volunteer Centre in the Dundalk Education and Training Network and promotes volunteering in a monthly slot on Dundalk FM. Kayleigh is our liaison person for Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), providing advice, guidance and administrative support to their Volunteering Society.

Kayleigh is also the centre's Garda Vetting Liaison Person, providing access to Garda Vetting services for small organisations that cannot access a Garda Vetting Liaison Person through their own organisational structures. In this role she supports our Garda Vetting Clerks, trains Garda Vetting officers in local community and voluntary organisations and provides advice and support in relation to Garda Vetting to the wider community.

- **Karen Donlon**, Organisation Support Officer. Staff member since May 2009.

Karen joined Louth Volunteer Centre in May 2009. Central to her work is the aim to provide a free, high quality volunteer placement service to not-for-profit organisations in County Louth in a friendly and professional manner. Karen offers professional support and advice to organisations around their volunteering needs so that they can achieve best practice principles in volunteer management. Karen is an experienced trainer and facilitates the nationally recognised Volunteer Leadership Training to local volunteer leaders. She has responsibility for overseeing quality in our engagement with organisations.

Karen leads our service delivery to both volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and the wider community in mid Louth. She also provides this support as needed to the Drogheda/South Louth area.

- **Mairéad Hearty**, Good Relations Initiative Coordinator

Mairéad joins us with a wealth of experience in community development, youth work and project coordination. She has delivered and managed a number of PEACE funded projects, since PEACE II and her role prior to joining Louth Volunteer Centre was managing a three year Irish Fund for Ireland (IFI) project working with young women. Mairéad is also Comhairle na nÓg Coordinator for North Louth. She is responsible for the development and implementation of the Good Relations Initiative project strategy and delivery; coordination of programme recruitment and delivery; coordination and monitoring the submission on monthly, quarterly and annual reports; and coordination and monitoring of the financial administration of the programme.

- **Tracy Rooney;** Good Relations Initiative Administrator

Tracy has progressed through the organisation from internship to paid employment. Tracy was our Fleadh Volunteer Programme administrator in 2018 and 2019 in addition to looking after our financial administration. She is currently responsible for all administration in relation to the Good Relations Initiative, including financial administration, maintenance of participant records, reporting and claims submissions.

- **Lorraine Treanor;** Good Relations Initiative Training Officer

Lorraine joined us as on a part-time basis, as Training Officer for our Good Relations Initiative. She has experience in the delivery of IFI Projects, women's programmes, community development and youth work. She is also undertaking education as a youth worker.

This staff team is strengthened by the support of a team of volunteers and interns. Across the course of 2020 ten volunteers and interns enhanced our service contributing to all aspects of our work including placement, project supports, graphic design and social media. We thank each one of those individuals for enriching Louth Volunteer Centre with their time, energy and experience. We would not have been able to deliver a quality service to the community of County Louth without their support.

- Aisling McGuinness; Placement Support
- Eamonn McDermott, Placement Support, Garda Vetting Clerk and Volunteer Communications
- Enda McBride; Placement Support
- Fanny Sih Kelle; Placement Support, Garda Vetting Clerk and Volunteer Communications
- Fergal Purcell; Placement support
- Gavin Winters; Graphic Design
- Karen Coyle Cunningham; Placement Support & Marketing
- Martin Boyle; IT Development
- Marisa McHugh; Placement Support & Cavan Volunteer Centre supports
- Robin Barnes; Social Media and Photography
- Stephen Culligan; Placement Support, Garda Vetting Clerk and IT support

As with many other community organisations, COVID19 presented us with challenges in relation to continuing to engage volunteers in our service provision. Wherever possible we continued to engage our volunteers, including invitations to attend virtual team meetings or including them in conversations relating to service development. Despite this, the number of volunteers/interns directly involved in Louth Volunteer Centre service provision was only 66% of 2019 levels. While we are developing new innovations in involving volunteers in our service delivery in 2021 we expect this to continue as long as the pandemic continues.

1.8 Our Services

Our Services

Volunteers

The opportunity to meet with a member of staff to discuss volunteering opportunities.

Access to a database of volunteering opportunities so that the volunteer can choose the opportunity that best suits them.

Information on the how, why and where of volunteering

The volunteers rights and obligations and best practice in volunteering.

On-going support for the volunteer through regular contact.

VIOs

We offer a free volunteer placement and referral service.

Guidance and support in developing volunteer roles.

Guidance and support on policy issues.

Guidance and support developing new projects involving volunteers.

Training, guidance and support around best practice issues when involving volunteers

Garda Vetting Service to organisations who do not have access to their own Liaison Person.

Advocacy & the Promotion of Volunteering

Represent volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and volunteerism on local decision making bodies.

Promotion of the societal and individual benefits of volunteering and volunteerism

Host events and coordinate awareness campaigns that celebrate, publicise and showcase volunteers and volunteerism

1.9 Our Thanks

We would like to thank the **Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)** for their continued support of Louth Volunteer Centre and their backing of volunteering and volunteerism in Ireland. We particularly welcome the publication of the National Volunteering Strategy on International Volunteers Day, 5th December 2020; the provision of emergency financial supports to Volunteer Centres through the 'Mobilising Volunteers in Response to COVID19' budget; and supports provided to the community sector as a whole through initiatives such as the COVID19 stability fund.

Our thanks also to **Louth County Council, Louth Local Community Development Committee** and **Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB)** for awarding us with the contract to deliver the PEACEIV funded Good Relations Initiative in late 2019 and which we have been delivering throughout 2020.

We would like to mark our gratitude to **Amazon Web Services (AWS)** for their COVID-19 grant which enabled us to enhance the supports we provide to community organisations in continuing or reopening their services in the face of COVID19 challenges.

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals whose support and / or time has contributed to our success in 2020:

Louth Public Participation Network
Louth Leader Partnership
Louth County Libraries
Carmichael Ireland
Volunteer Ireland
Our colleagues in the Volunteer Centre Network
Rural Health Partnership
Connect Family Resource Centre
New Leaf Project, Dee Hub
Boomerang Youth Café

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to the following media outlets for their consistent support of our work throughout 2020

Dundalk FM
The Drogheda Independent
Drogheda Life
Dundalk Leader
LMFM

We would also like to thank the following media outlets for their coverage of our activities in 2020

Drogheda Leader
Dundalk Democrat
Mid Louth Independent
The Argus

2. Chairperson's Statement

2020 WAS A BUSY, CHALLENGING YEAR FOR LOUTH VOLUNTEER CENTRE; AS FOR MANY OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS. NONETHELESS SUBSTANTIAL AND IMPACTFUL WORK WAS DELIVERED ACROSS THE YEAR AND OUR TEAM ARE TO BE COMMENDED FOR THIS.



Many of the targets and priorities that we had set for the year became invalid as we faced into the COVID-19 pandemic and had to adapt and adjust much of our service delivery. The move almost overnight to remote working; the intensity of service delivery, particularly in the March – May 2020 period; the need to ensure we did all that we could to 'protect' volunteers and volunteering all served to make 2020 somewhat of a whirlwind.

Our team continued to innovate throughout 2020 to ensure that we continued to be effective in serving the needs of volunteers, volunteering and our community as a whole. As the desire to volunteer increased, the opportunities to volunteer collapsed, a trend that was reflected internationally. Our team identified that Louth Volunteer Centre may need to bridge that gap and created volunteer opportunities that facilitated engagement in volunteering that felt impactful for both the volunteer and the broader community. These include our Cards of Care, Bubble Buddies, and CRiTiCall initiatives.

The CRiTiCall initiative illustrates how partnership working is and will be key to our effectiveness as an organisation and this is further evidenced by our activity in supporting

the Community Call, a central pillar of our work in 2020. Partnerships enhanced by this work, especially those with Louth County Council, Louth LEADER Partnership and Louth PPN will be built upon into the future.

It was a challenging year from a risk management, service delivery and funding perspective. We embarked upon delivering our largest project to date, the PEACEIV funded Good Relations Initiative at the beginning of the year. The move to remote delivery proved very challenging for this project, which is based on creating community connections. In fact, inability to meet in person has had a significant negative impact on all aspects of our work – both core and project. We had to reprofile our milestones, cashflow and risk assessment for the Good Relations Initiative a number of times in 2020 as the COVID-19 crisis evolved. However, the team have been doing a fantastic job, and thanks to the approval of an extension to November 2021, are on track to overachieve many of the milestones set.

Whilst we managed to maintain a surplus, our projected finances were impacted as increased COVID costs coupled with needing to cashflow the PEACE project took effect. We are grateful to the Department of Rural and

Community Development for their quick action and the provision of a number of COVID19 stability funds to ourselves and the community sector as a whole; and we are grateful to private organisations such as Amazon Web Services who provided us with a grant that facilitated the provision of additional supports to community organisations and initiatives such as CRITiCall, to ensure safe opportunities to volunteer were available to our community.

Conversely strategic decisions taken by our board over the past three years, including the development of comprehensive risk strategy and contingency plan, were validated in the crisis, as much of the ground work was in place to facilitate both our team and board to transition to the new world of remote work relatively smoothly. Indeed, the transition to virtual meetings actually facilitated our board, as attendance at meetings improved and a very large body of governance work was undertaken this year, including working towards Charities Governance Code compliance; significant improvements in our financial reporting; consultation for our strategic plan; shortlisting in the Good Governance Awards and achievement of the Volunteer Centres' Quality Award.

Undertaking our Strategic Planning process in this year was timely as the pandemic afforded us the opportunity to look at our organisational 'why' in a new light and enabled us to be more open to reviewing our purpose with a critical eye than we might have done pre-COVID19. Our new Strategic Plan 2021-2025, due to be launched at our Annual General Meeting in 2021, will ensure the impact and sustainability of Louth Volunteer Centre into the future.

Looking forward to the future, the publication of the National Volunteering Strategy in December 2020, the imminent publication of

the County Louth Volunteering Framework, and the publication of our own Strategic Plan in mid-2021 provides us with multiple opportunities and an exceptional suite of policy documents from which to develop our work. 2021 is likely to continue to be a challenging environment, and we have taken this into account in our budgetary projections and key performance indicators. We have adopted our new strategic vision, mission, objectives and outcomes into our 2021 workplan and have developed an ambitious 'year of two halves' plan of work that is optimistic about the possibility of direct engagement from Q3 2021 at the very least. We recognise that volunteering may have to be 'rebuilt' in many areas post COVID19 and are following the publication of our Strategic Plan with the development of funding and communications strategies to ensure that we are best placed to lead on this into 2021 and beyond.



Jonathan Lynch, Chair,
Louth Volunteer Centre

3. Our Environment

Our core funding is allocated by the Department of Rural and Community Development to **Strengthen and Support Volunteering** in County Louth. We therefore need to know our local landscape – demographics; community and voluntary sector; statutory agencies – very well.

3.1 Demographics

Louth is the second most densely populated county in Ireland, with a population density of 155.4 (1,000 per sq km). The two main towns in the county, Drogheda and Dundalk, topped the table of 'most populated towns' in Ireland in the 2011 census. There are also a number of substantial towns and villages such as Ardee, Dunleer, Clogherhead and Carlingford. The fastest growing areas in the county are amongst these dispersed smaller towns and villages – Collon, Carlingford and Termonfeckin. Isolated rural areas with low levels of access to public transport are also represented in the county, for example the Cooley Peninsula.

The 2011 Census shows that Louth's population structure has a younger profile than that of the state at 27.1% aged 17 or under as opposed to the state figure of 25.1%.

The HASSE Deprivation index lists Louth as being the ninth most disadvantaged LCC area nationally, with significant disadvantage and low educational attainment to be found in the urban areas of Drogheda and Dundalk. Louth also has a higher than average proportion of unskilled workers, young people not in education, training or employment (NEETs), and people living in disadvantaged communities (IRIS Data 2017)

3.2 Area Strengths

Louth has a vibrant community and voluntary sector, this is evidenced by the fact that Louth Volunteer Centre currently has over 400 organisations registered on our database, 275 of whom actively engage with Louth Volunteer Centre supports on a regular basis.

At policy level volunteerism is recognised as an important element in creating a vibrant and inclusive society – the Louth Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) references this with a number of key actions relating to volunteering listed under its Community Objectives and Actions. This was due, in no small part, to the engagement of Louth Volunteer Centre with the drafting of the LECP plan.

There is a positive history of collaborative and cross-sectoral working in Louth. This proved to be advantageous from March 2020 onwards as we faced into the COVID-19 crisis and it became clear that community engagement would be a vital component to the response at both local and national level.

The benefits of a collaborative approach by key stakeholders in the local landscape will be outlined later in this document.

Louth Volunteer Centre is a member of a number of localised and county-wide groups such as Dundalk/Drogheda Education & Training Networks; the Rural Development Plan oversight group and local advisory groups. Louth Volunteer Centre also has a seat on the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Centre Manager a member of Louth Public Participation Network (PPN) Secretariat. This long-standing contribution to the local landscape enhanced our ability to support the response to the COVID19 crisis across County Louth in 2020

3.3 Area Challenges

Although Louth is the smallest County in Ireland there are very strong regional divides within it (across North, Mid and South Louth; between the urban centres of Drogheda and Dundalk and between particular rural areas such as the Cooley Peninsula and the wider Ardee region) and differences of engagement are required for locations that, while being geographically close, are very different in culture and demographics. As outlined in our 2019 annual report we had identified that to facilitate good quality volunteer opportunities and a flow of volunteers to fill these opportunities requires a physical presence within the local area. This was hugely challenged by COVID19 and is definitely a factor in our (in)ability to achieve some of our key priorities in 2020. It continues to present a challenge as we face into 2021.

While Louth has a vibrant and active community sector the main towns within the county are within the commuter belt with the resultant 'dormitory' activity amongst significant numbers of the population – impacting community engagement amongst the younger population in the region. It remains to be seen what the impact of remote working will be on people's availability to and engagement with volunteering in their local community.

4. Our Activities & Achievements

Each year an operational plan is developed by the Louth Volunteer Centre team in consultation with and approved by our board. This plan is developed by reviewing previous years' activity; local knowledge and feedback from key stakeholders such as volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

For the past number of years we have identified key priorities and a series of key performance indicators for the coming year when developing our annual plan. In 2020 we identified four key priorities across our four core objectives, we did not achieve any of these priorities and many of our usual metrics for success became defunct as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Further, many of our standard metrics were no longer being captured as they were sourced from I-VOL, the national volunteering database, which we manage at local level. A national decision was made in May 2020 to cease issuing surveys by email which evaluate our service delivery and the impact of volunteering, as the experience was completely changed and challenged by the COVID environment. It was felt that those metrics, which had been used for the previous three years, would be invalid in this context. It is also difficult for us to utilise comparative data which we reported on for the past number of years as the environment was completely different. The loss of this data has presented us with somewhat of a challenge in evaluating the impact of our service delivery. Identifying this over-reliance on data gathered centrally via Volunteer Ireland has been eye opening for us and for 2021 we have integrated our own evaluation measures, where feasible, into our service delivery. Our presentation of activities and achievements for 2020 must therefore be viewed through the prism of COVID19.

Whilst 2020 was hugely challenging for our team, we nonetheless delivered a series of new initiatives during the year and like many others managed to pivot and adapt our service offering as the crisis unfolded. The volume of work for Volunteer Centres in 2020 was unprecedented and Louth Volunteer Centre was no different. In presenting our activities we therefore present here a snapshot of some of these to give a flavour of our work over the course of a very unusual year.

4.1 Core Objective One – Increase access

Increase Access to Volunteering by offering a Support Service to the Public and Volunteering Involving Organisations

Key Priority: *Retain volunteer placement rate of 50% - 2020 placement rate 38%, national average 27%*

A focus on our placement rate¹ has been a key priority for Louth Volunteer Centre for a number of years. In 2017, the first year of such data being available to Volunteer Centres, we attained a placement rate of 46%; in 2018 and 2019 the years we delivered the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann volunteer programme, directly recruiting, training, rostering and supporting over 1,000 volunteers, we set a Placement rate of 50% as our target, achieving this rate in 2018 and exceeding it, at 52%, in 2019.

Our volunteer placement rate is intrinsically connected to many of the KPIs related to the provision of a support service to the public and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs). These include contacting volunteers within 48 hours of registration; offering volunteers the opportunity to meet with a member of our team; having a wide variety of volunteer roles available; ensuring our service is accessible to the public and VIOs; providing best practice supports to VIOs so that they can engage positively with volunteers. However, it is also aligned to factors outside of our control, such as organisations' capacity to follow up appropriately with volunteers or changes to volunteer circumstances. As we moved from 2019 into 2020 we were aware that not having a major volunteering event (Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann) which we managed directly ourselves could have an adverse impact on our placement rate so set the priority of stabilising this placement rate at 50%.

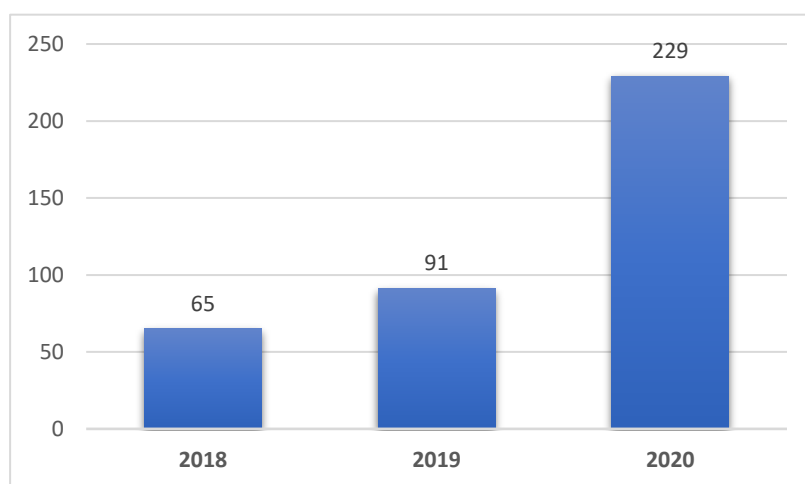


Fig. 1: New Volunteer Registrations 1st March – 30th April

¹ The number of unique volunteers placed in a volunteer role, this is a key metric across the Volunteer Centre network and the data is sourced from I-VOL.

In 2020 many of our standard KPI activities which positively impact the service we provide, and therefore our placement rate, became defunct; for example, our ability to offer a face to face meeting with a member of our team. By June 2020 we were offering volunteers the opportunity to meet a team member via zoom with weekly drop in sessions and from September 2020, when groups had settled into recruiting volunteers again (only for this to stop a few weeks later) we began offering [virtual volunteer expos](#) offering volunteers the opportunity to meet with groups who were looking for volunteers.

Challenges in providing 'placement supports' during COVID19 - an illustrative example

264 volunteers based in Louth applied for a national befriending role in April and May 2020. By the 30th November the journey towards volunteering had started for just 16 of these volunteers and only 1 had commenced volunteering in the role (ie had been 'placed'). This was entirely outside the control of our team and was reflective of the national and international volunteering landscape in 2020 where there was a huge upswing in volunteer registrations and a downswing in opportunities to volunteer. The level of inputs required from our team to ensure that the prospective volunteer still had a positive experience even if they did not get the opportunity to volunteer was also immense; in this example the team made 500+ calls and sent 100+ emails to volunteers and the organisation in relation to this single volunteering opportunity. The provision of a positive experience for the potential volunteer was crucial as 61% of new volunteer registrations in 2020 had never volunteered before

The availability of volunteer roles also collapsed as Community & Voluntary sector organisations nationwide and locally withdrew services, or key access points to volunteering such as community events were cancelled. Conversely the desire to volunteer increased hugely at the outset of the pandemic as evidenced by Fig 1 above. We therefore had a large pool of volunteers seeking to volunteer with only a small base of volunteer roles.

In addition, many of the opportunities to volunteer that were available were often not accessible to young people, people with low levels of English, or people with disabilities/those who had to cocoon because they were vulnerable or living with a vulnerable person.

This was an extremely challenging environment for our team to be operating in, and we are grateful to DRCD for recognising this and providing us with an emergency COVID-19 fund which allowed us to provide overtime payments to our core DRCD staff; some of whom were working double their standard hours in this period to ensure we could maintain quality service provision.

Creating opportunities to volunteer

By late May/early June 2020 it became clear that to increase access to volunteering we would need to develop or deliver volunteering initiatives ourselves that provided access to volunteering for a broader range of the community; in addition to continuing to contact and support organisations to safely involve volunteers in their activities. We did this through a variety of initiatives including CRITiCALL, Cards of Care, specific purpose roles such as grant writing and wellbeing volunteers, and the #VolunteerFromHome campaign led by Volunteer Ireland and delivered by a number of Volunteer Centres around Ireland.

The identification and delivery of such opportunities paid off **whilst we saw a 25% drop in overall applications for voluntary opportunities, the number of applications to volunteer nationally dropped by 47%** despite a national increase of 85% in volunteer registrations in the same period.

Obviously the assumption of the role of volunteer involving organisation² for specific volunteer opportunities also required additional inputs by team members however this was deemed to be appropriate not only in terms of fulfilling our strategic objective of increasing access to volunteering but also in terms of ensuring that volunteers and potential volunteers had a positive experience, resulting in a higher likelihood of them continuing to volunteer or returning to volunteering. Volunteers reported just being pleased to be able to help as a positive outcome from their experience. We would like to reiterate our thanks here to our volunteer placement team – mostly made up of interns and volunteers - who really went above and beyond in 2020, particularly in terms of our new activities in taking on the role of Volunteer Involving Organisation for many of the voluntary opportunities on our system.

CRiTiCall

- Initiative set up in response to increase in Domestic violence as a result of COVID-19 by Dublin City Volunteer Centre with community partners in early June 2020
- Louth Volunteer Centre set up CRiTiCALL Louth late June & first collection event held on 9th July
- Collaborative community partnership with Safe Ireland, Scouting Ireland Louth and Red Cross – Louth Volunteer Centre lead agency & directly managing project
- Volunteers providing practical, requested supports to domestic abuse services
- 60 applications to volunteer received on I-VOL, 42 took up opportunity (ie 70% placement rate)
- In addition 8 x scout volunteers; 3 x Red Cross Volunteers; 2 x Volunteer coordinators engaged in project & donations received from corporates
- Portion of Amazon Web Services funding utilised to purchase COVID19 compliance materials (gloves, masks, etc)



Fig. 2 CRiTiCALL Louth Initiative

² ie not just promoting the role to volunteers but going through the recruitment process, screening if required, providing support to volunteers, etc

Impact of CRiTiCall voluntary activity

Hi Gráinne

Quick email to say a massive thank you for the wonderful donation day on Saturday.

Absolutely fantastic, and very happy clients...thank you so much.

Caroline

Social Care Team Leader, Drogheda Women's Refuge

Hi Gráinne

Just letting you know that a family have moved on from the Refuge yesterday to their new home and the items your volunteers collected were invaluable to them.

Catherine

Refuge Housekeeper

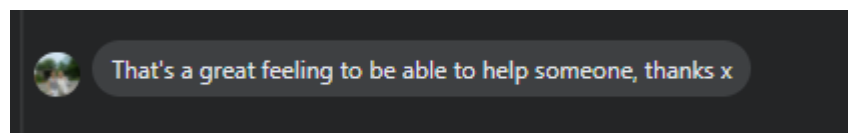


Fig. 3: Social media comment by a CRiTiCALL volunteer after a collection event

Volunteers from new communities

In 2019 we focused a lot of energy in attaining a positive placement rate for people who are not originally from Ireland and had identified this as a key priority area. In 2020, with the onset of COVID19, we were very conscious that the kind of volunteer opportunities which tend to suit new migrants were no longer available. Roles such as Cards of Care ([see here for Cards of Care case study](#)) and CRiTiCALL were designed to be accessible to people of all backgrounds, age groups, and abilities. We also created a Communications Volunteer role specifically to engage people from migrant communities with the Community Call, see Section 4.2 for more information on our engagement with the Community Call.

Our team reached out directly to volunteers via phone, email and text to inform them of these volunteering opportunities and to offer our support in accessing volunteering. Despite this, and the fact that volunteers from **63 nationalities** registered with us in 2020, just 14 of those volunteers applied for a volunteer role and the vast majority did not commence volunteering.

There are potentially many factors which could be influencing this - were the roles on offer not what these volunteers are interested in? Do they not feel confident in applying for roles? Are the communication channels that we are using not appropriate? We have plans in place for 2021 to try

Fig. 3 Communications Volunteer role on I-VOL

and identify what the barriers to involvement may be so that we may work to address them.

We have also identified some issues in how we identify these volunteers, and quantify their engagement, I-VOL no longer captures nationality data in a systematic way; I-VOL does not capture other demographic data points such as ethnicity; our local placement rate by nationality data reports solely on newly registered volunteers and does not capture the significant number of active volunteers who registered in previous years. Such reporting challenges have been taken into account in developing our 2021 workplan.

4.2 Core Objective Two – Increase quality

Increase the quality of volunteering in County Louth

Key Priority: *Develop a Community Event Volunteer Support Programme – Programme Paused*

As noted in our 2019 Annual Report, towards the latter end of the year we commenced the development of a [Community Events Support Programme](#) to support best practice in the management of event volunteers– which can include anything from on street bucket collections to community festivals. This initiative built upon our learning in delivering the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann Volunteer Programme and was a response to volunteer feedback in the County Louth Volunteering Framework consultation. This programme was to be our flagship ‘beyond placement’ support for 2020 and was due to be launched in Spring 2020 anticipating take up commencing March 2020 as St. Patrick’s Day is historically the ‘kick off’ for ‘once off volunteering’. Unfortunately, the COVID crisis negatively impacted our ability to deliver this programme, and indeed its’ current usefulness to the local community. The Government’s inclusion of the establishment of a Volunteer Reserves Corps in the Resilience and Recovery Plan, published in September 2020, raised some questions about the intersection between the Volunteer Reserves (renamed to Community Volunteers in May 2021) and programmes such as this. The Louth Volunteer Centre board made a decision to pilot the ‘Full Volunteer Involving Organisation’ model of the Community Volunteers initiative to leverage our prior experience in delivering a large scale volunteer programme and to ensure that Louth Community Volunteers would have a quality volunteering experience.

Despite not having the opportunity to deliver our Community Event Volunteer Support Programme we undertook many initiatives and activities to protect, support and enhance volunteering in Louth over the course of 2020.

Supporting the volunteer response to the Community Call

The Community Call, a major initiative linking local and national government with the Community & Voluntary sector to mobilise resources in responding to the effects of COVID-19 was announced on 2nd April 2020. At both local and national level it's priority was to coordinate community activity, direct community assistance to where it is needed and marshal the volunteering energy of the community. From the moment of its inception on 28th March 2020 when local authorities were directed to establish Community Response Fora Louth Volunteer Centre have played a central role in relation to volunteers, volunteering and the Community Call. Fig 4 provides some headline activities in relation to this, but at its heart was a collaborative working approach between ourselves and other key statutory and community stakeholders – specifically Louth County Council, Louth LEADER Partnership and Louth Public Participation Network. This collaborative working relationship very much fulfils our organisation purpose as outlined in Section 1. This partnership approach is something that we will take into the future with several initiatives identified for 2021. It has also been recognised as a model of good practice outside County Louth, in with the Louth Volunteer Centre Manager, Louth County Council Community Development Officer, and Louth LEADER Partnership Social Inclusion Activation Programme (SICAP) being invited to present on their collaborative working at a National SICAP Responses to COVID 19 – Challenges, Opportunities & Learning, Workshop in the first quarter of 2021.

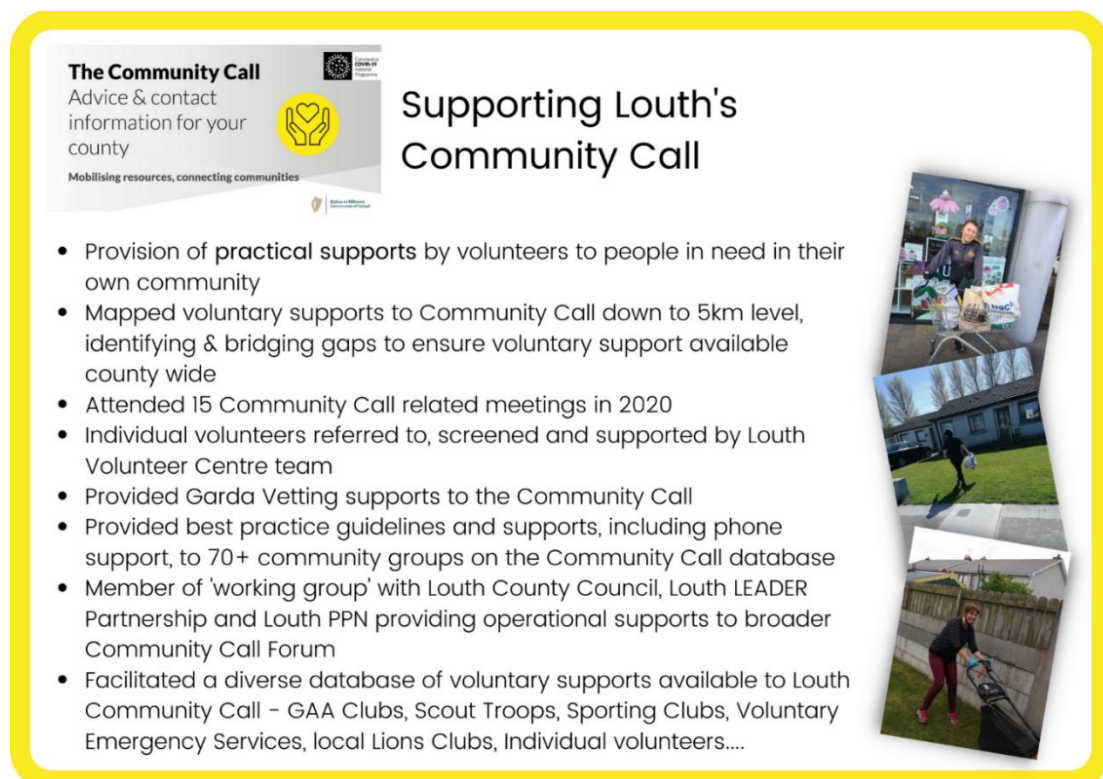


Fig. 4 Louth Volunteer Centre supporting Louth's Community Call

Case Study – Extreme Makeover COVID-19!

In June 2020 St. Oliver's 3rd/4th/6th Scout Troop in Drogheda received a call from Louth Community Call helpline– a lady with complex needs was leaving hospital having undergone cancer treatment. She would have to cocoon, would any volunteers be available to clear a few brambles in her garden so she could at least avail of the garden and enjoy the sunshine?

The 'few brambles' was a major understatement!



Over the course of two months volunteers removed 18 tonnes of waste from the garden and created an oasis of calm for someone in need.

"We set up our COVID-19 taskforce to help people in our local community. Joining the Community Call, alongside the support of the Louth Volunteer Centre team, gave us the platform to help those in need in our local area during the COVID-19 lockdown. Having Louth Volunteer Centre promptly process Garda Vetting for us as Community Call Volunteers also meant we could deploy additional volunteers to this task. It was a positive cross-community collaboration to be involved in – rewarding for all and is making such a difference to the day to day life of the people we helped!"

Eoghan Khan, Troop Leader

Increased supports to Volunteer Involving Organisations

We increased our Organisation Support Officer's working hours by 25% from March 2020 to November 2020 to ensure availability and enhanced supports in supporting volunteer involving organisations in (re)engaging volunteers safely. In addition, our Organisation Support Officer was our lead point of contact for voluntary groups providing supports to the Community Call and provided ongoing supports to these groups, many of whom are not registered on our IVOL system. This increase in hours was facilitated by DRCD's emergency COVID19 fund and AWS' COVID Grant, the AWS grant also enabled us to procure specialist training for community groups as outlined below. In November 2020 we identified that it was likely that there would be a significant lockdown in the country after Christmas, and that we were likely to need to invest considerable resources in 2021 to re-engagement with volunteering and made the decision to a portion of our AWS grant to facilitate this.

450%

Increase in
organisation support
emails sent in 2020
compared to 2019

"Hi Karen

Many thanks for the COVID-19 updates.

*We are well cocooned here and looking forward to the 'magic' day
when we can get up to fully stretch the legs.*

Keep up the good work"

In addition, we provided four **training and networking support sessions** between 15th June 2020 and 24th September 2020 to community groups to support them in reopening and re-engaging volunteers safely. We elected to procure two of these sessions (Ready & Able and Operating in a New Landscape workshops) as we do not have health and safety expertise however both workshops were adapted according to our requests, which were based on feedback we had received from community groups as to their needs. Our thanks to the Carmichael Centre, in particular, for their support with this. All sessions were delivered via the zoom platform which was a learning curve for ourselves and the attendees! One of our learnings has been to download zoom polls and other evaluation tools built into zoom – not having realised this until the end of the year meant we no longer have our evaluation data in relation to this activity.

We found by September that the novelty of zoom had begun to wear off and less people were attending. Of course, after September we moved into another 'lockdown' and we switched our offering to encourage organisations to participate in our [Virtual Volunteering Expos](#) – promoting #VolunteerFromHome roles.

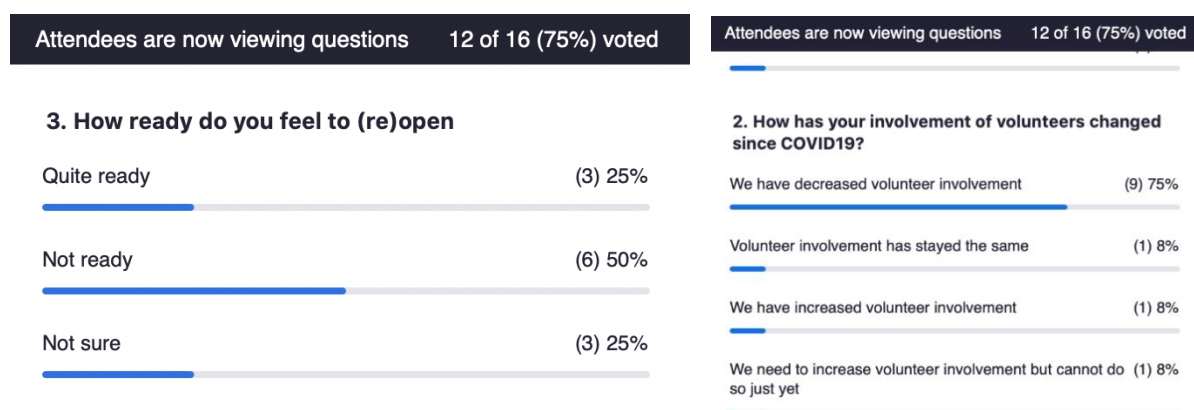
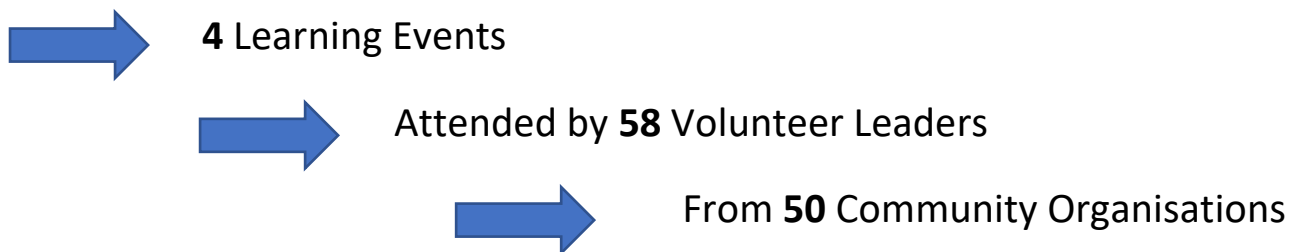


Fig. 5 attendee responses at Ready & Able workshop 01/07/2020 indicating challenges with volunteer engagement



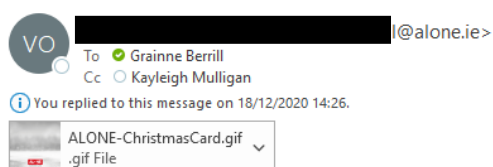
Feedback on training events

*"Thank you for a very informative presentation.
Feel so much better moving forward"
Ready & Able Training 1st July 2020*

*"Informative webinar, plenty to think about, many
thanks to all concerned"
Carmichael training 7th July 2020*

*"Thank you, this was extremely helpful, I have three pages of
notes taken!"
Operating in a new landscape training,
24th September 2020*

Christmas Card



Dear Grainne, Kayleigh and the Team,

Thank you for all of your amazing support throughout 2020.

This year we have supported more older people than ever before.
We truly couldn't have done it without you.

We hope you have a wonderful Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Best wishes,
From all the staff at ALONE

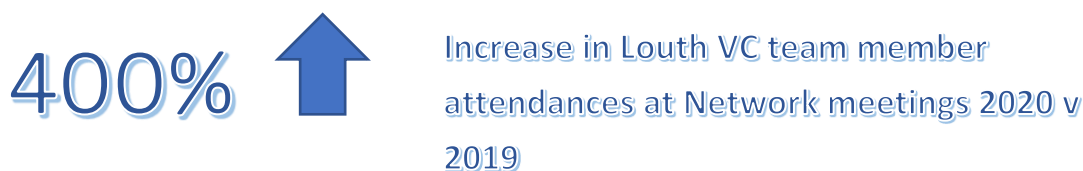
At the outset of the pandemic, as we tried to figure out how best we could serve and support our community the Louth Volunteer Centre board made a decision to waive Garda Vetting fees from March to June 2020 for our registered organisations, at the peak of the pandemic from a service delivery perspective, to smooth the path to involving volunteers and in recognition of a collapse in fundraising income for organisations. As projected in our 2019 report our Garda Vetting income has been significantly impacted with a 35% reduction due to the waiving of fees

but also the collapse in vetting throughout the year. This is an indicator of the low level of involvement of new volunteers in supporting vulnerable people in our community. All of the indicators are that this will not recover until at least the second half of 2021, further illustrating that the significant inputs required to maintain activity in 2020 will continue into 2021

Fig. 7 email received from ALONE thanking for support in volunteer engagement but particularly **Garda Vetting services**

Actively contributing to the National response to COVID19

As discussed above during 2020 we were very active in supporting the Community Call response at County level. Our team were also very involved in the 'volunteering infrastructure'³ response to COVID-19, particularly in relation to informing network and government actions in safeguarding volunteering. The Louth Volunteer Centre Manager was co-opted onto the Joint Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centre Managers National Executive (JVIVCMNEG) in early March 2020 to represent the North Leinster Regional Volunteer Centres. The JVIVCMNEG were a key stakeholder in informing DRCD, other government departments and statutory agencies such as the HSE on best practice in engaging volunteers.



Whilst the inputs required here were considerable, and at a time when the team were under pressure in terms of workload, moving to remote working, and the challenge of dealing with a pandemic; there were benefits, beyond the moral obligation to support our national as well as local community in the face of a major international emergency. Involvement in the JVIVCMNEG enabled the Louth Volunteer Centre Manager to have insights into imminent national directives or movements and non-confidential discussions could be relayed to Louth Community Call Forum, not only empowering our local Forum but also giving Louth Volunteer Centre a standing in terms of knowledge of what was going on. Involvement with the National Network facilitated knowledge, resource and idea sharing. We were in a position to share resources such as 'Volunteering Safely'; 'Being Winter Ready' and other national guidance with Community Call groups and local community organisations. We were in a position to participate in national initiatives providing safe access to volunteering such as



³ Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Information Services and Volunteer Ireland

#VolunteerFromHome. We could take on and adapt initiatives such as CRITiCALL and grant writing volunteers (conceived of by Sligo Volunteer Centre)

Creating volunteer roles to support organisations

As outlined in section 4.1 we stepped into the space of creating volunteer roles ourselves to offer opportunities for community contribution. We also created roles that would support further volunteer engagement. For example, we recruited a panel of **grant writing volunteers** as a variety of funding supports were being offered during the COVID-19 crisis but voluntary organisations were too stretched to apply for them, creating the catch 22 of organisations not having the resources to involve volunteers but also not being able to apply for the resources to involve volunteers. We reviewed the experience of applicants and when an application came in for grant writing supports for a community organisation our team reviewed their needs and matched them with a suitable volunteer from our panel.

Case Study – Family Addiction Support Network

Background:

The Family Addiction Support Network (FASN) is a voluntary organisation and a dedicated support service for Family Members/Concerned Persons who are impacted by a loved one's substance misuse, covering the four counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. It grew organically from the needs of family members who were impacted by a loved one's addiction behaviour.



"As a completely voluntary organisation FASN applied to Louth Volunteer Centre for the valuable resource of a Volunteer to help us with grant applications during the COVID crisis. We were so lucky to secure a volunteer with incredible experience of grant writing skills who also shared his knowledge around other skills such as using Google Docs, learning about what funders are looking for in their applications, even down to simple things like learning the 'funding lingo' which will have a more long term impact for us. And, of course, we had a successful grant application!"

*As well as matching us with Gerry, Louth Volunteer Centre team also provided us with practical advice and guidance and were there to assist us if we had any queries, I could not recommend their service highly enough. Thank you to everyone involved and congratulations for providing not just customer satisfaction but **customer delight!**"*

Jackie McKenna, Project Coordinator

4.3 Core Objective Three – Increase awareness

Increase awareness of volunteering by marketing and promoting volunteering

Key Priority: Publish County Louth Volunteering Framework– Publication delayed to 2021

We outlined in our 2019 Annual Report that we had secured LEADER funding to commission a Volunteering Strategy for County Louth, the consultation for which commenced in September 2019. The production of this strategy is a key goal for Louth Volunteer Centre during the lifespan on the current Louth Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2022 as is strongly aligned to our vision of making volunteering a part of the way of life in Louth. A very comprehensive consultation with over 350 members of the community was held between September 2019 and January 2020. Full details on the consultation were outlined in our report last year. As also noted in our 2019 report, the ‘final’ stage of the consultation in early 2020 resulted in the co-design group requesting a reframing of the document. We were also waiting for the publication of the National Volunteering Strategy (NVS) which had been due in the first half of 2020. The impact of COVID19 resulted in the NVS not being published until 5th December 2020 and the County Louth Volunteering Framework being held back. As a result, we had to request extensions to our project timeline and are grateful to both Louth LEADER Partnership and Louth LCDC for their support and generosity with this.

We are delighted to report that as of May 2021 the Framework has been published and as considerable work was done on it in 2021 we will report more extensively on this in our 2021 report.

We delivered on a number of other awareness raising initiatives across 2020, including the Good Relations Initiative, Louth Land of Legends and the Louth Volunteer Leaders’ Awards. Some of these were planned but had to be adapted to the circumstances of the pandemic; others were very much a response to the COVID19 crisis. Further details below.

Good Relations Initiative



We referenced a number of times in our 2019 report that we had been successful in securing funding to deliver the Good Relations Initiative (GRI), a project supported by the European Union's PEACEIV Programme, managed by the Special European Programmes Body (SEUPB) and supported locally by Louth County Council and Louth Local Community Development Committee (LCDC). The GRI was launched on 5th December 2019, International Volunteers Day, in the Dolmen Centre Omeath.

Project targets for the Good Relations Initiative were ambitious with 100 participants to undertake 26 hours of training time in areas such as cross community connections, capacity building, conflict resolution and Lifeskills, in addition to community networking and celebration events, over the course of 2020.

COVID-19 had a huge impact on the ability to deliver this project; events had to be cancelled, programmes had to be moved online and completely reconfigured; there were challenges with participant engagement, motivation and retention; and programme recruitment was significantly hampered. The project has been extended through 2021 as a result, although this must be delivered within the original funding allocation for the project. See our Directors' Report to the Financial Statements, below, for further discussion on challenges relating to funding the Good Relations Initiative. Despite this, some very effective programmes raising awareness of volunteering and volunteerism were delivered by the Good Relations Initiative team; who had to contend with commencing employment with a new organisation and recruiting for / rolling out a new programme in the midst of a pandemic.

We noted in our 2019 report that following on from the consultation for the County Louth

“The Good Relations Initiative Life Skills programme has been a unique opportunity for young people that ordinarily wouldn’t get to explore issues that affect them in their own community and enhance their skills to tackle these while making new friends and having fun along the way”

Teresa Kearney, Senior Youth Worker, Boomerang Youth Café

Volunteering Framework we would utilise the GRI to reach out to and involve young people. As soon as was feasible (August 2020) the GRI team delivered in person, COVID compliant, Lifeskills programmes with hard to reach young people in both Ardee (in partnership with Dee Hub) and Drogheda (in partnership with Boomerang Youth Café). A planned programme in

Dundalk fell through due to logistical challenges relating to COVID-19. These programmes resulted in the **establishment of two new youth groups**, both of whom **progressed to undertake and complete youth leadership and conflict resolution programmes** with the project.

Programme Impact: Lifeskills Project Participant Evaluation

88% Gained confidence

82% Know more about volunteering

71% Know more about community

62% Know more about themselves

100% Would recommend the programme to other young people



A series of other programmes were delivered to adults in Moneymore (Partnering with Connect Family Resource Centre), Cooley (Working directly with Cooley Connect Well) and South Armagh (partnering with Rural Health Partnership), by the GRI team in 2020 although the move to online delivery was a very significant challenge. Within our Moneymore programme we lost almost 60% of participants because of the shift to zoom. We could not have moved to online supports at all were it not for the support of our partners in this programme, Connect Family Resource Centre, who loaned laptops to the remaining participants. Our GRI team had to invest considerable hand holding inputs with the group to build their confidence to use technology, connect with one another, and deal with issues that can emerge in a programme such as GRI where people are speaking about challenges with conflict in their community and personally. All of the remaining participants engaged in voluntary activity in their community and have progressed to become peer leaders in a Women's Shed in the Moneymore area – providing peer support to other women, including in terms of accessing technology!



A cross border letter writing projects where volunteers wrote to one another to share their differing experiences of the COVID crisis was also particularly impactful and once the hurdle of the virtual meeting was gotten over many participants expressed their gratitude for having the opportunity to stay connected to others at a time of great disconnect.

Impact of GRI participation

"Being involved in the Good Relations Initiative has been fantastic for me personally. I look forward to every Thursday. I am more involved with people and have the confidence to speak up and I feel included in helping in the community"

Good Relations Participant, Moneymore Group

"Cooley Connect Well have found it very beneficial to be involved with the Good Relations Initiative. When we first established our committee the Capacity Building programme was very valuable and built our committee skills and confidence as a group. The Conflict Programme and resource has created great and emotional conversations and we are delighted to be linked with the Cross Border group in South Armagh to develop connections across the border."

Good Relations Participant, Cooley Connect Well Group

"A group of women from Connect FRC signed up to Louth Volunteer Centre's Good Relations Initiative last year. This course proved to be a real lifeline for these women throughout the pandemic. Alongside allowing the group to socialise and connect with each other it exposed them to new technologies which none of us had ever used before."

Whilst taking part in this programme one of the participants was taken into hospital for a long stay. This programme, she would say herself, helped her get through a very tough time in her life, she logged on each week even from her hospital bed. She remembers a session where 'selfcare' was spoken about and how she became very emotional, she says this session encouraged her to journal and to accept what was going on at that time.

From a professional point of view, it was great working alongside the Volunteer Centre, especially given the year it was! Mairead, and everyone involved, was always so enthusiastic and willing to try new and creative approaches to make sure the programme went ahead. Connect were able to recruit the group, hand out the Volunteer Centre wellness packs and support the women with IT support and laptops if they required it. We did all this in the knowledge and confidence that we were working alongside an organisation that wanted to support these women exactly where they were at.



During the Good Relations Initiative programme the group were exposed to volunteering opportunities and also saw the benefit of giving back within their own community. As a result, a number of participants volunteered to support the Connect Christmas food hamper initiative. The group grew in confidence and gained many new skills. As the Good Relations programmes came to an end Connect FRC were setting up and recruiting for a much needed Womens' Shed programme in the area; The women who had taken part in the Good Relations programme moved seamlessly from this programme into the Women's Shed programme and are now volunteer peer leaders within that shed. As stated already these women became leaders amongst their peers and indirectly helped us to recruit new participants. They showed other women who initially had a fear of technology that it was possible to engage online with each other. They continue to lead in this group and have a great awareness of community led initiatives and the importance of volunteering within the community. It is always a pleasure working alongside the Volunteer Centre."

Sinead Nugent, Community Development Worker,
Connect Family Resource Centre

Partnership approach

As with many other areas of service delivery in 2020 a partnership approach has been crucial to the GRI programme, not only in terms of the recruitment of participants but also in terms of providing clear progression paths for our participants so that they can build on their learning from the programme and implement that learning to the betterment of their own communities. As we develop our funding strategy in the second half of 2021 and look towards funding for 2022 a recommendation from our experience of delivering this project will be that we integrate partnership implementation into future projects and funding applications.

Louth Land of Legends



VC-LLOL-animation-logo-reveal-final.mp4

The beginning of the first phase of 'Reopening Ireland' on 18th May 2020 coincided with the date National Volunteering Week was originally scheduled to take place (postponed to September 2020). Although there were a lack of formal opportunities to volunteer during the COVID-19 crisis there was nonetheless a huge upsurge in organic or informal volunteering within communities. There was also no denying that volunteers were essential to the national and local response to the crisis. In the context of our core objective to increase awareness by promoting volunteering we developed a **#LouthLandOfLegends** social media campaign to raise awareness of this voluntary effort and aligned to the original dates for National Volunteering Week, 18th May to the 24th May 2020; coordinating messages of thanks by local legends to volunteers (the real legends) and encouraging both volunteers and members of the public to submit their stories, closing the week with a [message of thanks](#) from our own team. The response from local legends, who gave their time freely to this project was really uplifting with stars of sport, screen, music and entertainment submitting messages of thanks.



Click on the image above to view the compilation 'Legends' video

The full suite of videos, including videos of volunteer stories and each individual legends video can be viewed on our [YouTube page](#). One of the volunteer submissions from this campaign subsequently went on to win a national Volunteer Ireland Award.

We **recruited volunteers** to assist us with the graphic design and video editing for the project. The graphics were created by volunteer **Rachael Masterson Macken**. These graphics created such an impression and the campaign so effective that we embedded #LouthLandofLegends as our communication theme for the rest of 2020.

136k

Overall campaign reach across all Louth Volunteer
Centre social media channels

There was also a fantastic response to the campaign amongst traditional media with features in all local papers and the Louth Volunteer Centre team securing interviews on both LMFM and Dundalk FM to discuss the campaign.

Louth Volunteer Leaders' Awards

In May 2020, as part of their suite of supports to recognise and enable volunteering, DRCD, through Volunteer Ireland, opened a small funding stream supporting local volunteer recognition awards. In the midst of our Louth Land of Legends campaign to raise awareness of the voluntary effort in County Louth we were very struck by the need to also recognise the work of people who manage, support and lead volunteers in our community. We submitted an application for a 'Louth Volunteer Leader of the Year' Award – this was intended to be quite small scale in the context of the funding available and in light of the probability that we would still be impacted by COVID. Nonetheless even on a small scale this action would map to both core objectives two and three as it would highlight quality in volunteering and our role in supporting quality volunteering, in addition to raising awareness of voluntary activity in County Louth.

Louth Volunteer Leaders' Awards



Find out more

Celebrate those leading the volunteers
who support our communities

#LouthLandOfLegends
Celebrating our Local Legends

We were delighted not only to be successful in our application but also to receive double the funding we anticipated – this enabled us to run the ‘Louth Volunteer Leaders’ Awards’ and offer three awards, a beautiful ceramic piece by a local artist, one for each municipal district in the County. This is the only award in Louth specifically recognising volunteer leaders for their role.

Once again, the response to this campaign by both local media and the general community was extremely positive with multiple features in newspapers and on local radio in addition to key local social media pages. This resulted in a significantly higher number of nominations being received than anticipated and a tough job for our independent judges!

5x Target number of nominations received

The awards campaign was run to coincide with the winners receiving their awards on 5th November, International Volunteer Manager Day. Whilst we couldn’t have a big event we did coordinate with the help of their volunteers surprise presentations of the awards to the winners on that date. The award winner details, and what their nominee said about them, [are available here](#). We have included the delivery of the Louth Volunteer Leaders’ Awards 2021 in our annual workplan and hope to build on the success of this year.

4.4 Core Objective Four – Sustainability

Ensure the organisation is sustainable through good governance and management

The sustainability of any organisation, and especially Charities, is dependent on good governance and management. Each year, in addition to organisational key priorities, the Louth Volunteer Centre board identify key priorities, set within their own plan of work for the year and relating to leading the organisation, risk and financial management, governance and legislative obligations.

Some of these key priorities will be ongoing, others are due to be completed in a calendar year. For example, a key priority under Core Objective Four for 2019 was the production of a Contingency/Disaster Plan to follow on from the development of a comprehensive risk register in 2018. Our Contingency / Disaster Plan was ratified by the board in July 2019. This followed on from an organisation wide IT audit carried out in December 2017 – the actions for which were implemented across 2018 and early 2019. COVID19 demonstrated the value of carrying out these exercises as actions taken (such as having moved our shared documentation to a cloud based Sharepoint server in January 2019 and investment in both hardware and software in 2018 and 2019) meant a relatively painless move to home working in March 2020 when the COVID-19 crisis hit. Despite this readiness we still needed to invest in additional IT hardware and peripherals to ensure all team members had a comfortable working environment, even if that environment was their home. Our thanks to DRCD once again for providing the emergency funds to enable us to make these purchases.

At the first Louth Volunteer Centre board meeting of the year, on the 13th January 2020, board members signed off on their most ambitious workplan to date with **six** key priorities for the year, an ambitious agenda in an year but significantly challenged in 2020.

Board Priorities 2020

- Succession Planning (ongoing)
- Complete Quality Standards Evaluation and maintain quality award
- Complete a full review of Louth Volunteer Centre constitution
- Compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code
- Develop a new strategic plan for the organisation
- Develop a new funding strategy in line with our new strategic plan

Succession planning – Status: Ongoing

Succession planning has been on the Louth Volunteer Centre board agenda for the past number of years and has formally been a key priority since 2018. As with previous years we experienced some departures and continued to recruit new members in 2020. The COVID19 pandemic presented some unexpected gains in the world of voluntary boards as people with very high skillsets, now working from

home, found themselves with more time to give to their community and a much greater interest in doing so. We were very successful in recruiting new board members for a number of our registered organisations in 2020 and indeed we ourselves recruited 4 new board members through IVOL. These board members bring significant skills in the areas of finance, marketing, psychotherapy, HR, leadership and strategic development.



Fig. 6 board engagement

The other unexpected benefit has been the move to virtual meetings which has greatly enhanced attendance rates as evidenced in Fig. 6 above, where we exceeded our annual target of 80% attendance at meetings,, a target which we have not achieved in the past two years, achieving a **96% attendance rate**. This has also been reported by many of our registered organisations. We are therefore likely to retain some element of virtual meetings post pandemic as it evidently facilitates a higher level of member engagement.

Even though we finished 2020 with a net positive in relation to board members we are still experiencing some attrition and challenges in relation to board membership; a longstanding board member is due to retire in 2021 and our current Chair is due to complete his term in 2022. One of our new members has also requested a leave of absence from the board due to the challenge of balancing work commitments, third level education and board commitments. The significant body of work required by Louth Volunteer Centre board members – reviewing policies; oversight of financial activity; risk management – which was a very busy area of work in 2020; serving as a steering group for larger projects such as the Good Relations Initiative; and subgroup work means that considerable contribution is required from board members.

In late 2020 and early 2021, in tandem with our strategic planning and **board self-evaluation process**, our board held several succession planning discussions. A lack of diversity and range of voices from the communities we serve was identified as a gap, in addition to the need to share out the workload further. Whilst we have completely overhauled and streamlined our application and induction process over the past two years board members still considered that they may be barriers to people joining our board, not least the commitment, workload and that the regulatory and legislative burden may be too daunting.

It has been proposed for 2021-2022 that we recruit for diversity and also that we trial inviting membership within specific projects such as developing our funding and communications strategies rather than Directorship to 'ease people in' who may progress to full board membership over time.

Quality Standards - Status: Achieved

As members of the national Volunteer Centre Network and as a condition of our core funding from DRCD we are expected to adhere to the comprehensive Quality Standards Framework developed by Volunteer Ireland and the Volunteer Centre Managers' Network (VCMN). The framework aims to ensure excellence and consistency across the volunteering infrastructure. As flagged in our 2019 Annual Report our Quality Standards were due for renewal in 2020, this involves an independent evaluation by Volunteer Ireland's Quality Standards / Outcomes and Impacts Manager. Our date for review was initially April 2020 however due to the COVID crisis was delayed until September 2020, just as the second lockdown came in and we were adjusting our service accordingly. As we had implemented a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan and had been preparing for the Quality Standards review, in terms of gathering evidence, from November 2019 this was not an overly arduous process for our team or board despite the external challenges at that time.

We are delighted to report that we have not only **achieved the Volunteer Centre Quality Award** but also improved upon our score from the previous review.

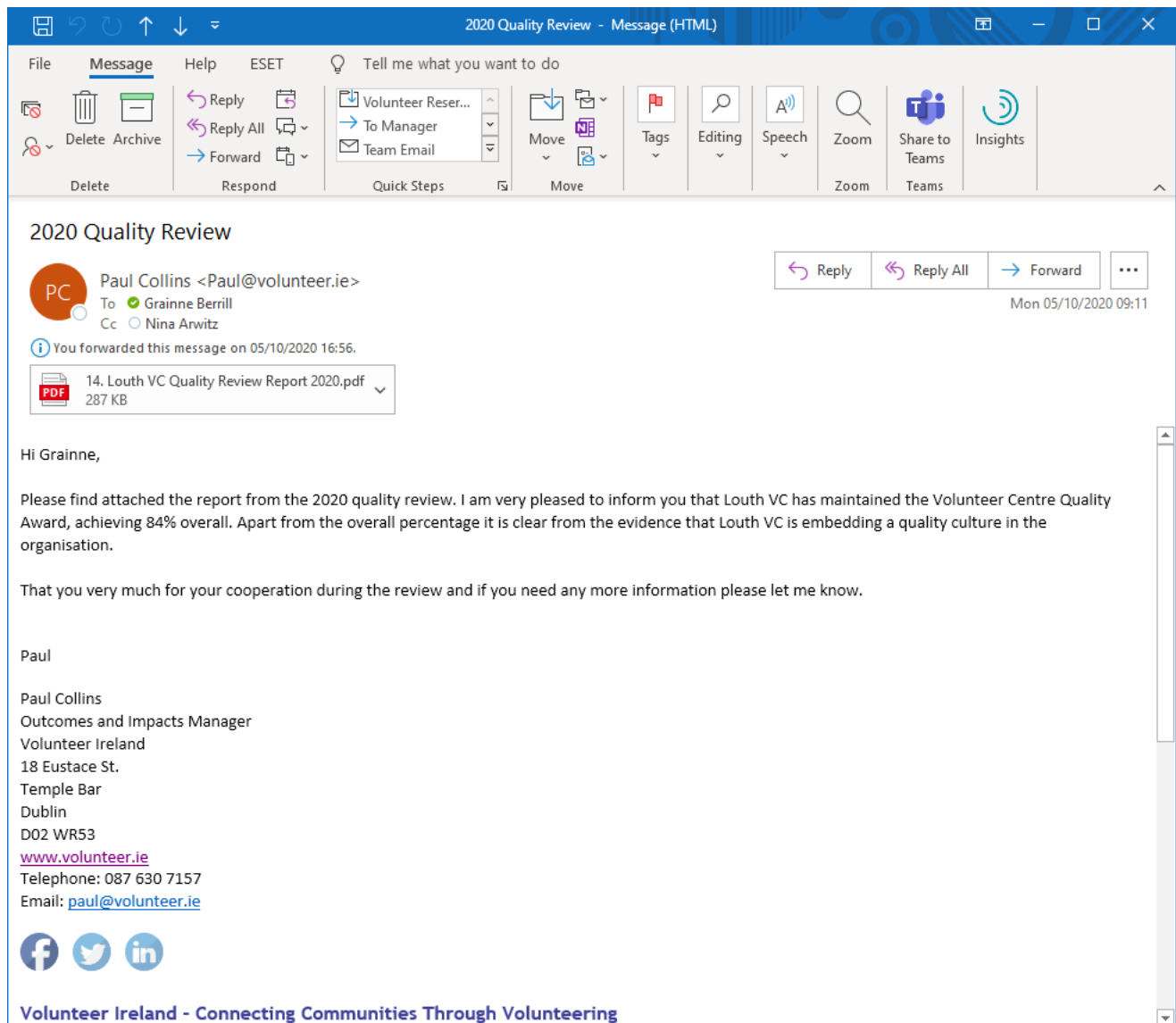


Fig 8. Email from Volunteer Ireland confirming retention of Quality Award

Compliance with Charities Regulator Governance Code - Status, On Target

Louth Volunteer Centre achieved compliance with the voluntary Governance Code in 2018 and embarked upon the road to compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code in 2019. The Louth Volunteer Centre manager was appointed to take lead responsibility for compliance with the Board Governance subgroup supporting the compliance work and the board overseeing the overall process. Our board decided that we would complete the code as a complex charity, therefore taking on core and additional standards.

On completing the Compliance Record in 2019 our board identified that whilst we were compliant across the majority of standards there were a few key areas to work on:

Finance & Annual Report

Our board identified that we were not in full compliance with Principle 6, and in particular additional standard 6.6 ***Produce unabridged (full) financial accounts...*** Our board decided to address this as a priority in 2020 (2019 accounts). Our Finance Subgroup, consisting of a qualified auditor, and an experienced Management Accountant, assumed responsibility for writing a detailed Director's report in partnership with the Centre Manager. We also worked closely with our auditors to provide additional detail throughout our financial statements, including reporting on restricted and unrestricted income, more detail relating to income and expenditure and considerably more detail within our Director's Report. These accounts were presented in detail to our board and were discussed in depth before ratification. We have gone further with our accounts in 2021 (for 2020 accounts) and have provided additional information required by the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice. We are working towards SORP compliance however have identified that the potential financial cost in addition to the high inputs of board, manager and finance administrator resources required to achieve SORP will be challenging.



We had identified in 2018-2019 that we needed to make improvements in this area and submitted our 2018 annual report to Carmichael's Good Governance Awards to gain some feedback and guidance. This feedback was invaluable in identifying failings within our report. Concurrent with the process of improving our company accounts we completely overhauled our annual report, restructuring it so that the story of our year is told through our core objectives rather than the services we deliver. We have retained much of that structure in this year's report. We resubmitted our annual report to the Good Governance Awards and were really delighted to have improved our score from **38% to 82%** and in addition to be **shortlisted for a Good Governance Improvement Award**. Whilst we did not undertake the process for awards it was nonetheless rewarding for our board, as volunteers, to be recognised for the work that they had carried out. It is our intention to continue improving our reporting and are looking forward to writing our 2021 annual report which will be closely aligned with our new strategic plan.

Governance Issue

The Manager of Louth Volunteer Centre stepped into the role of Secretary of the board as a temporary measure at our AGM in November 2018. This temporary stopgap continued longer for intended and was discussed at several board meetings as being inappropriate and needing to be dealt

with. The Louth Volunteer Centre Manager is listed with the Companies Registration Office Register of Beneficial Ownership for the company. As we reviewed the Charities Governance Code compliance document it was evident that we were non-compliant on the basis of this action alone and prioritised resolving it. At our AGM in September 2020 we appointed a new secretary to the board and the Centre Manager has been removed completely from the Louth Volunteer Centre board. In addition, we have disclosed the Manager's remuneration as we recognise it should be treated as a Director's salary. Full compliance with the division of Board and Operational management will be adhered to for the future.

Review of Louth Volunteer Centre Constitution

- Status: completed early 2021

The Louth Volunteer Centre Constitution had been fully reviewed in November 2016 as the organisation transition from a Limited Company to a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Charities Regulator Governance Code, Standard 4.1 mandates Charities to *Decide if you charity's current legal form and governing document are fit for purpose*. In tandem with our strategic planning process we undertook a review of our Constitution in late 2020. This exercise sought to validate whether our work fulfils our charitable purpose as set out in our governing document and, conversely, given the consultations we undertook to complete both the County Louth Volunteering Framework and our own Strategic Plan, whether our constitution's purpose allows us to appropriately serve the needs of our community. On reviewing our purpose our board found that this had *more* validity in the light of the recent COVID-19 crisis as it emphasises highlighting the benefits of voluntary activity; working in association with statutory and voluntary bodies; offering support and guidance to individuals and organisations to reach their individual and collective goals while making a significant contribution to their local community and society; and for us to advocate on behalf of volunteers and volunteering at local and National level. The previous 12 months have served to validate this purpose and we have distilled out of this our new vision and mission – outlined in the discussion of our Strategic Plan, below.

Whilst our review of our Constitution was an affirming exercise we did identify a number of items that needed tweaking and/or updating to reflect the current environment and how our board, as our governing body, now operate. This process was completed and ratified at our board meeting of 1st March 2021 and sent to the Charities Regulator for approval.

*Louth Volunteer Centre Strategic Plan**- Status: to be launched at 2021 AGM***New Louth Volunteer Centre Vision***“Our Community is enriched by the benefits of volunteering”***New Louth Volunteer Centre Mission***“We advance the practice, processes, and benefits of volunteering”*

As an organisation we have been operating under our 2015-2019 strategic plan. Due to delivering the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann volunteer programme in 2018-2019 the Louth Volunteer Centre board had made a decision to continue operating under our current strategic plan and commence a comprehensive planning process for a new strategy in 2020. We had a board member, Kevin Light, join us in early 2020 with vast experience in strategic development to support this process. However, as with everything else this process got pushed out to later in the year and we commenced consultation in September 2020. The process undertaken was a three-phase process with grassroots



Fig. 8 Comhairle na nÓg members in Ardee attending strategic planning consultation

community development methodologies at its heart. At each phase emergent elements were reviewed by the Louth Volunteer Centre board. Further details in relation to the process will be available in the strategic plan itself, being published in tandem with our Annual General Meeting 2021. However, it is worth noting that in the context of COVID19 we went right back to our roots and examined our purpose in the community, who do we serve and what do we do for those we serve. Much of our consultation process was also informed by our experience of consultation for the County Louth

Volunteering Framework – for example, having noted the gap in youth engagement with the Framework consultation we consulted directly with Louth Comhairle na nÓg⁴ members. We were also in a position to absorb elements of both the County Louth Volunteering Framework and the National Volunteering Strategy into our own review.

By December 2020 the bulk of the strategic plan had been developed and the Louth Volunteer Centre board approved key elements – vision, mission, values, guiding principles, and strategic objectives. A decision was taken to develop our 2021 workplan in line with, and through the prism of, our new strategic objectives. The COVID experience further enabled us to view our purpose and work with a much more critical eye. The emphasis on placement rate as a measure, whilst still an important

⁴ Comhairle na nÓg is the children and youth council of Ireland, giving young people aged under 18 the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policy. Louth Comhairle na nÓg is structured in accordance with Municipal Districts with a council group in Drogheda, Dundalk and Ardee.

metric, does not necessarily reflect our purpose or goals as an organisation. We have begun to shift our language and emphasis **from volunteer placement to volunteer engagement**; recognising our role in journeying alongside the volunteer and the value of the part we play in this process, even if the volunteer does not reach the end point of placement.



Having also experienced the limitations of action focused, annually bound key priorities during COVID19 in January 2021 the board approved 12 high level outcomes from our five strategic objectives. These high-level outcomes are broad enough to face significant changes to the external environment and to have validity in any context. This is a Strategic Plan that we believe will underpin our sustainability as an organisation for the coming years, allowing us to take a longer term view than we might have done in the past as our outcomes are focused on a vision for what we want to see in terms of the impact of Louth Volunteer Centre and volunteering in our communities.

Development of a Funding Strategy - Status: delayed, to be developed post publication of Strategic Plan

Our Strategic Plan recognises that sustainability needs to reflect the external as well as our internal environment. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call on all people to ‘think globally and act locally’ and the SDGs have been identified internationally as a Framework for COVID-19 recovery. We have therefore mapped our Strategic Objectives to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and from 2021 will review and report on how our actions and outcomes as an organisation contribute to building stronger, more resilient societies and addressing inequalities in our community.

Strategic Objective Five further expands upon our objective under our previous plan to state that we will *Strengthen our Competence, Capacity and Sustainability*. This requires a commitment to developing our people and organisation as a whole. To that end our next steps following publication of our Strategic Plan mid-2021 will be to produce complementary **funding and communications strategies**. Originally the development of a funding strategy was listed in our 2020 board workplan however this has been pushed out to accommodate the prior publication of our strategic plan.

As noted earlier in relation to Succession Planning we see this exercise as also providing an opportunity to upskill team members and/or provide a stepping stone to board engagement/Directorship for volunteers with specific expertise in our community. Our board will therefore be inviting external individuals and/or Louth Volunteer Centre team members to join the membership of subgroups established to undertake the development of these documents. Draft Terms of References for both subgroups have been drawn up as of April 2021.

The process of developing this strategic plan has reinvigorated our team after a very challenging year, it has provided not only clarity of focus but a greater sense of the breadth and value of our work and has provided a very positive ending to a challenging year.

5. Director's Report and the Financial Statements

for the financial year ended 31 December 2020

5.1 Directors' Report

Income

Overall income for 2020 (€208,896) increased by 34% from 2019 rate (€155,912), however this was still lower than projected (€237,591) by 12%. Comparing projected budget against actual income we had a deficit of 19% however we also received income that had not been in our projected budget which offset this and brought it up to 12% or €28,695.

Louth Volunteer Centre's core grant from the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) remained static €121,000 and as projected.

A significant proportion of the reduction in projected income, at 82% of the overall deficit, relates to the PEACE IV Funded Good Relations Initiative (GRI) (€65,665), which is paid on the achievement of milestones. Louth Volunteer Centre had to provide a cashflow of €10,300 for this project at year end; this has been recouped in early 2021. The impact of COVID19 on programme delivery, participant recruitment, and participant retention cannot be underestimated – despite the best efforts of the team who succeeded in recruiting 65 participants over the course of 2020. The programme targets are however for 100 participants to complete 26 hours of contact time and the delivery of 13 training programmes and 8 events.

Even when carrying out a mid-year adjustment to reflect our new environment the impact COVID would have on delivery of these milestones was not clearly evident as at that point the country was reopening and the size of the second and third lockdowns were much more restrictive than expected on programme delivery. SEUPB/Louth County Council (project funder) offered the opportunity to extend the project to November 2021 however this extension to be delivered within the original budget allocation. An analysis carried out by the Volunteer Centre manager and board identified that extended expenditure could be offset by reduced expenditure on budget lines such as participant travel, room hire and study visits without negatively impacting participant experience and it was decided to prioritise delivering on project commitments and continue the project to November.

The fact that we did not publish the LEADER funded County Louth Volunteering Strategy / Framework in 2020 is another source of income deficit against projected budget – this is another funding stream that is paid on delivery. We are on track however to publish this document in May 2021 so we will see the projected €7,000 income which had been allocated to 2020 in our 2021 budget projections.

Garda Vetting income (2,623) was 25% lower than projections and 35% lower than 2019 (€4,045). We had forecast a potential upswing in Garda Vetting in 2020-2021 due to the possibility of the National Vetting Bureau bringing in mandatory re-vetting however the COVID crisis has pushed that action out so that it is unlikely to happen even in 2021. A slow plateauing of Garda Vetting activity over the past few years has been compounded by Garda Vetting coming to a near standstill as a result of COVID19. The bulk of our vetting in 2020 was on behalf of ALONE's North East office, based in Dundalk. We are seeing a slow return to vetting activity as of May 2021 however are not predicting any great increase in garda vetting income for 2021.

Reductions in these income streams were offset by alternative funding sources. The Department of Rural and Community Development provided a hugely welcomed 'Mobilising Volunteers in Response to COVID19' budget

(€9,240), enabling us to purchase computer equipment to facilitate our team working from home and to fund additional hours for DRCD employees in the Mar – Jun period when we saw a 150% increase in core activities, in addition to supporting new initiatives in particular the community call. We also received a grant from Amazon Web Services (€5,000) to respond to the COVID19 crisis at local level. The unrestricted nature of these funds afforded us flexibility in targeting the funds to areas where we felt it would have most impact. This facilitated us in funding additional hours for our Organisation support officer from June – November 2020 to provide enhanced supports to community organisations in responding to the crisis; in addition to funding training for groups and enabling us to provide PPE and other supports to the CRITiCall initiative – responding to the growth in domestic violence as a result of COVID19.. A decision was taken in November 2020, as it became clear that there were going to be significant challenges in 2021 for our community in reengaging volunteers, to defer some of our AWS grant (€2,831) to 2021 to ensure we had flexible resources to respond to community need. We also received a donation from AIB (€150) which we used for our Louth Land of Legends campaign highlighting the impact of volunteering in our community.

Additional income was received for providing 'Buddy' supports to Cavan VC (€2,400); a grant from DRCD to run the Louth Volunteer Leader Awards (€1,133); from Louth County Council's Communities Enhancement Programme to purchase screens and other COVID19 equipment (€2,164) and developing volunteer role descriptions to support volunteer engagement nationally (€1,200). We received donations from Councillors Tully and Corrigan (€300) for which we thank them.

Expenditure

Overall expenditure for 2020 (€200,614) 41% above 2019 (€142,350) however was 9% below projected budget. The fact that spend decreased less than income resulted in our surplus for 2020 being less than projected. (€17,000). Salaries (€164,864) were 68% higher than 2019 (€97,946) and 10% above budget, as a result of additional hours to cope with COVID19 pressures. Salaries represent 82% of overall expenditure, which is considerably higher than 2019, at 69% of overall expenditure and reflective of the importance of staff expertise and support as a resource in responding to the pandemic.

Our overall core grant expenditure in 2020 was €121,082 which was broadly in line with budget projections. Expenditure on rent (€4,000) stayed static and will remain at this level for 2021 with thanks to our landlord, Louth County Council.

Expenditure on the GRI PEACE project was €65,644 and 25% below budget projections. This underspend will be used to facilitate the extension of the project to November 2021 and is as a result of a COVID related reduction in PEACE IV spend across many budget lines including project delivery (€8,721.37 – 65% below budget), travel and subsistence (€1,159: 51% below budget) and marketing & PR which was for in person materials (€541: 61% below budget). Indeed, overall project spend for the year (€11,492) was 64% below budget allocation.

Travel and subsistence (€1,634) costs were 67% below budget projections, the bulk of this spend was for delivery of the GRI project. Marketing and PR (€1,744) was significantly below budget (67%) as the need for in person promotional materials and project activity reduced. Office supplies (€1,824) was 37% below projected expenditure, at the initial stages of the pandemic we thought that this budget line would take a hit as we needed to provide materials for 10 people working in disparate locations however the underuse of the office levelled this off. Volunteer & intern expenses (€263) were 34% below projections. Expenditure on telephones (€2,492) was slightly below budget; as were bank fees (€211).

Insurance costs were 27% above projections, some of this was due to premium increases to cover additional wage roll however our premium has increased by 82% in the past five years. We compare prices every year but our current provider, BHP, are by far the cheapest and provide an excellent service in terms of their understanding of the role of the Volunteer Centre. That being said BHP have issued a warning for 2021 that they are currently in a hard market and we have some concerns that we are going to see a significant premium hike in our Director's liability insurance. As projected we saw an increase in audit fees for 2020, this is reflective of having appointed McEvoy Craig as our new auditors at our AGM in September. McEvoy Craig were significantly lower in cost than the majority of auditors quoting, and we are extremely happy with their work. However, the significant workload involved in preparing accounts for a Charity, both from the board and the auditors perspective is worth noting here and we have concerns that costs will increase further in 2022 and beyond due to increased regulatory requirements in this area.

Training costs (€1,266) were above budget by 27% which reflects the requirement to provide additional COVID related training to team members. Equipment costs (€4,800) were 140% of budget projections, reflecting the COVID crisis and the need to provide or improve team members' equipment for working from home. This would have been a much larger figure had we not been investing in our IT hardware and software since 2018. €428 was written off as debt outstanding for 180+ days across 15 debtors with multiple efforts to collect. The vast majority of this is Garda Vetting related.

Reserves

Louth Volunteer Centre's policy is to maintain reserves at a level which ensures the stability and long-term viability of the organisation, to ensure protection from fluctuations in income, and to allow immediate and efficient response to urgent needs which may arise subject to the Centre's objectives. Having solid reserves and cash flow capacity in place was instrumental in our securing of PEACEIV funding at the end of 2019 and this has proven beneficial to us in 2020 as we had to provide cashflow to the project beyond our initial projections due to COVID19 impacting service delivery.

We are working towards having sufficient funds to maintain operations for 6 months as per best practice recommendations. Since 2016, LVC has worked hard to increase its cash reserves having increased its cash at bank from €28,419 in 2016, €44,719 in 2017, €63,230 in 2018, to €73,528 at the end of 2019 and €86,654 in 2020. The reserves balance at year end 2020 represents 5 month's expenditure. It is the intention of the Louth Volunteer Centre board to review and produce a new reserve policy in alongside a new funding strategy.

Operational Risk Management

The company operates solely in the Republic of Ireland, therefore it is not subject to significant currency risks. The company does not rely on significant borrowings and has a minimal exposure to interest rate risk. As part of our commitment to good Governance, and our journey towards compliance with the incoming Charities Regulator Governance Code, Louth Volunteer Centre undertook a comprehensive risk assessment in 2018 resulting in a comprehensive risk register and Contingency Plan being completed in 2019. These are reviewed on an annual basis or more frequently if required. The Risk Register identifies potential risks in the following categories; Finance, Health and Safety, Governance, Technology, Reputation and Legal. We completed an additional risk assessment specifically for the PEACE IV Good Relations Initiative.

The unprecedented COVID-19 international health crisis struck created, and continues to create, significant uncertainties for all organisations within our sector and beyond. It had immediate impact on some income streams such as Garda Vetting and to targets set for 2020 across core and project funding. We sought to mitigate some of this uncertainty through regular risk reviews, adaptation of service delivery and close communication with funders. We also continue to draw on and contribute to the very active network of Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Information Services and Volunteer Ireland to advocate for our work and funding into the future.

In tandem with reviewing our risk register we also implemented actions within our contingency plan in the context of COVID19. We developed a full COVID19 Policy and response plan which was regularly reviewed in tandem with changes to Government restrictions. We also had to carry out additional risk assessments on GRI in person project activity and risk assessed each decision made in the context of our service delivery and COVID 19 – for example office reopening.

Our Directors conducted a mid-year review of finances in 2020 leading to an assertion that COVID19 would not overly adversely impact our budget projections. However, whilst we have posted an operating surplus it was significantly lower than expected. We are projecting slightly lower income (€204,775), expenditure (€197,240) and surplus (€7,500) in 2021 and are aware of the potential risks that with only one or two budget lines altering this could be under threat. 2021 looks to be just as challenging a year, if not more so, and potentially income could reduce further, it will be beholden on our Directors to monitor finance tightly to maintain vigilance in terms of risk throughout 2021.

Looking at risk in the longer term we have identified the challenges of restricted income, short term project funding and the ability to retain a surplus as a risk to our organisation, particularly if the fiscal environment changes nationally as a result of the COVID19 crisis. We will take this into account when developing our funding strategy and reserves policy.

Plans for the future

Core funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) has been confirmed as remaining at €121,000.

Looking to the future we will be continuing to deliver the GRI until November 2021 and are projecting income of €49,680 from this funding stream in 2021. DRCD has identified Volunteer Centres to deliver the National Volunteer Reserves Corps, first mooted in the Roadmap to Resilience and Recovery in September 2019; we are developing a Bubble Buddies initiative for the Staying Connected campaign and will be continuing to provide supports to Cavan VC. We are therefore projecting a very small increase in income of €5,000 in 2021 but as noted earlier this could be precarious in the current climate.

As we move into 2021, despite the continuing COVID19 crisis and a precarious surplus, there is much to be positive about; the publication of the National Volunteering Strategy in December 2020 and the imminent publication in 2021 of the County Louth Volunteering Framework and our own strategic plan provide us with a framework for identifying appropriate revenue opportunities. The publication of the County Louth Volunteering Framework will result in revenue for the organisation, although this will be offset by expenditure as it is funded at 90%. It is our intention in 2021 to follow the publication of our strategic plan in June with the development of new funding and communications strategies to give our team a template for the furthering of organisation objectives and clarity in pursuing funding opportunities. New funding streams are

emerging in 2020 including the LEADER transitional fund although we will have to be mindful of accessing funds that are restricted, short term and not funded to 100% grant aid. Volunteering has never been so powerfully in the public and government consciousness and we are in a position to leverage the partnerships we have developed in the COVID crisis; our role as Secretariat of the County Louth Volunteering Framework and our new strategic plan to position ourselves as *the* facilitator of volunteering in County Louth.

With the completion of GRI in November 2021 and an unclear fiscal environment as we (hopefully) emerge out of the COVID crisis we will need to be mindful of the principal risk identified in 2019 of being over dependent on DRCD funding which represented 78% of overall income in that year. We have mitigated against that risk by securing alternative funding streams, resulting in DRCD core funding only representing 58% of overall income in 2020. Our team will need to spend some time in 2021 identifying and applying for potential funding streams for 2022 onwards that enable us to continue this diversity of income sources, they will be in a stronger position to do so with a solid framework of strategies to guide them.

Accounting records

The measures taken by the directors to secure compliance with the requirements of sections 281 to 285 of the Companies Act 2014 with regard to the keeping of accounting records are the implementation of necessary policies and procedures for recording transactions, the employment of competent accounting personnel with appropriate expertise and the provision of adequate resources to the financial function. The accounting records of the company are located at the registered office.

Relevant audit information

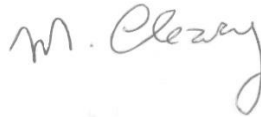
In the case of each of the persons who are directors at the time this report is approved in accordance with section 332 of Companies Act 2014:

- so far as each director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's statutory auditors are unaware, and
- each director has taken all the steps that he or she ought to have taken as a director in order to make himself or herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the company's statutory auditors are aware of that information.

This report was approved by the board of directors on 14th June 2021 and signed on behalf of the board by:



Jonathan Lynch
Director



Mary Cleary
Director

Directors' Responsibilities Statement

The directors are responsible for preparing the directors report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable Irish law and regulations.

Irish company law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under the law, the directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with the Companies Act 2014 and FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" issued by the Financial Reporting Council. Under company law, the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the company as at the financial year end date and of the profit or loss of the company for the financial year and otherwise comply with the Companies Act 2014.

In preparing these financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards, identify those standards, and note the effect and the reasons for any material departure from those standards; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for ensuring that the company keeps or causes to be kept adequate accounting records which correctly explain and record the transactions of the company, enable at any time the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit or loss of the company to be determined with reasonable accuracy, enable them to ensure that the financial statements and directors report comply with the Companies Act 2014 and enable the financial statements to be audited. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Independent auditor's report to the members Louth Volunteer Centre CLG

Report on the audit of the financial statements

We have audited the financial statements of Louth Volunteer Centre CLG (the 'company') for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 which comprise the profit and loss account, statement of income and retained earnings, balance sheet and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies set out in note 3. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is Irish law and FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland. In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the company as at 31 December 2020 and of its profit for the financial year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014.

5.2 Profit & Loss Account

Profit and loss account
Financial year ended 31 December 2020

		2020	2019
	Note	€	€
Income	5	208,896	155,912
		<u>208,896</u>	<u>155,912</u>
Staff costs	6	(164,864)	(97,946)
Other operating expenses		(35,750)	(44,404)
Operating profit		<u>8,282</u>	<u>13,562</u>
Profit before taxation		<u>8,282</u>	<u>13,562</u>
Tax on profit		-	-
Profit for the financial year		<u><u>8,282</u></u>	<u><u>13,562</u></u>

The company has no other recognised items of income and expenses other than the results for the financial year as set out above.

5.3 Statement of Income and Retained Earnings

Statement of income and retained earnings
Financial year ended 31 December 2020

	2020	2019
	€	€
Profit for the financial year	8,282	13,562
Retained earnings at the start of the financial year	82,560	68,998
Retained earnings at the end of the financial year	<u>90,842</u>	<u>82,560</u>

5.3 Balance Sheet

Louth Volunteer Centre CLG
(A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having Share Capital)

Balance sheet
As at 31 December 2020

	Note	2020 €	€	2019 €	€
Current assets					
Debtors	9	10,705	.	10,718	
Cash at bank and in hand		86,654		73,528	
		<u>97,359</u>		<u>84,246</u>	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	10	<u>(6,517)</u>		<u>(1,686)</u>	
		.			
Net current assets		<u>90,842</u>		<u>82,560</u>	
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>90,842</u>		<u>82,560</u>	
Net assets		<u><u>90,842</u></u>		<u><u>82,560</u></u>	
Capital and reserves					
Profit and loss account		<u>90,842</u>		<u>82,560</u>	
Members funds		<u><u>90,842</u></u>		<u><u>82,560</u></u>	

5.4 Statement of Cash Flows

Statement of cash flows
Financial year ended 31 December 2020

	2020 €	2019 €
Cash flows from operating activities		
Profit for the financial year	8,282	13,562
<i>Adjustments for:</i>		
Accrued expenses/(income)	738	
<i>Changes in:</i>		
Trade and other debtors	13	3,017
Trade and other creditors	3,313	(6,281)
Cash generated from operations	<u>12,346</u>	<u>10,298</u>
Net cash from operating activities	<u>12,346</u>	<u>10,298</u>
 Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	 12,346	 10,298
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	<u>73,528</u>	<u>63,230</u>
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	<u>85,874</u>	<u>73,528</u>

5.4 Notes to the Financial Statements

Financial Year Ended 31 December 2020

1. General information

The company is a private company limited by guarantee, registered in Ireland. The address of the registered office is Old Motor Tax Office Building, Bolton Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth.

2. Statement of compliance

These financial statements have been prepared in compliance with FRS 102 Section 1A, 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland'. The Triennial review 2017 amendments to the standard have been early adopted.

3. Accounting policies and measurement bases

Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared on the historical cost basis, as modified by the revaluation of certain financial assets and liabilities and investment properties measured at fair value through profit or loss.

The financial statements are prepared in Euro, which is the functional currency of the entity.

Turnover

Turnover is measured at the fair value of the consideration received or receivable for goods supplied and services rendered, net of discounts and Value Added Tax.

Revenue from the sale of goods is recognised when the significant risks and rewards of ownership have transferred to the buyer, usually on despatch of the goods; the amount of revenue can be measured reliably; it is probable that the associated economic benefits will flow to the entity and the costs incurred or to be incurred in respect of the transactions can be measured reliably.

Operating leases

Lease payments are recognised as an expense over the lease term on a straight-line basis. The aggregate benefit of lease incentives is recognised as a reduction to expense over the lease term, on a straight-line basis.

Financial instruments

A financial asset or a financial liability is recognised only when the company becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Notes to the financial statements (continued)

Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at the transaction price, unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where it is recognised at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest for a similar debt instrument.

Debt instruments are subsequently measured at amortised cost.

Where investments in non-convertible preference shares and non-puttable ordinary shares or preference shares are publicly traded or their fair value can otherwise be measured reliably, the investment is subsequently measured at fair value with changes in fair value recognised in profit or loss. All other such investments are subsequently measured at cost less impairment.

Other financial instruments, including derivatives, are initially recognised at fair value, unless payment for an asset is deferred beyond normal business terms or financed at a rate of interest that is not a market rate, in which case the asset is measured at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest for a similar debt instrument.

Other financial instruments are subsequently measured at fair value, with any changes recognised in profit or loss, with the exception of hedging instruments in a designated hedging relationship. Financial assets that are measured at cost or amortised cost are reviewed for objective evidence of impairment at the end of each reporting date. If there is objective evidence of impairment, an impairment loss is recognised in profit or loss immediately.

For all equity instruments regardless of significance, and other financial assets that are individually significant, these are assessed individually for impairment. Other financial assets are either assessed individually or grouped on the basis of similar credit risk characteristics.

Any reversals of impairment are recognised in profit or loss immediately, to the extent that the reversal does not result in a carrying amount of the financial asset that exceeds what the carrying amount would have been had the impairment not previously been recognised.

4. Limited by guarantee

The company is one limited by guarantee not having a share capital. The liability of each member in the event of the company being wound up is limited to €2.

Notes to the financial statements (continued)

5. Income

The total income of the company for the financial year has been derived from its principal activity wholly undertaken in Ireland.

	Year Ending 31/12/20 €	Year Ending 31/12/19 €
<u>Unrestricted Income</u>		
Garda Vetting	2,623	4,045
Donations	2,619	550
Services	4,452	
	<u>9,694</u>	<u>4,595</u>
<u>Restricted Income</u>		
Grant Funding - Department of Rural and Community Development	121,000	121,000
Grant Funding - Louth Co Council Peace IV	65,665	
Grant Funding - Central Government COVID 19 Emergency Fund	9,240	-
Fleadh Funding	-	15,473
LEADER Rural Development Programme	-	3,623
Services	1,133	1,644
Project Funding	2,164	9,577
	<u>199,202</u>	<u>151,317</u>
Total Income	<u>208,896</u>	<u>155,912</u>

Notes to the financial statements (continued)

6. Staff costs

The average number of persons employed by the company during the financial year, including the directors was 6 (2019: 3).

The aggregate payroll costs incurred during the financial year were:

	2020	2019
	€	€
Wages and salaries	149,165	88,571
Social insurance costs	15,699	9,375
	<u>164,864</u>	<u>97,946</u>

7. Directors remuneration

The directors aggregate remuneration was as follows:

	2020	2019
	€	€
Emoluments in respect of qualifying services	<u>34,831</u>	<u>-</u>

8. Appropriations of profit and loss account

	2020	2019
	€	€
At the start of the financial year	82,560	68,998
Profit for the financial year	8,282	13,562
At the end of the financial year	<u>90,842</u>	<u>82,560</u>

9. Debtors

	2020	2019
	€	€
Trade debtors	405	10,718
Other debtors	10,300	-
	<u>10,705</u>	<u>10,718</u>

Notes to the financial statements (continued)

10. Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2020	2019
	€	€
Amounts owed to credit institutions	780	-
Trade creditors	938	474
Other creditors including tax and social insurance	-	(18)
Accruals	1,968	1,230
Deferred income	2,831	-
	<u>6,517</u>	<u>1,686</u>

11. Government grants

The amounts recognised in the financial statements for government grants are as follows:

	2020	2019
	€	€
Recognised in other operating income:		
Government grants released to profit and loss	<u>195,905</u>	<u>121,000</u>

12. Approval of financial statements

The board of directors approved these financial statements for issue on 14th June 2021.

5.8 Detailed Profit and Loss Account

Detailed profit and loss account
Financial year ended 31 December 2020

	2020 €	2019 €
Turnover		
Fleadh Income	-	15,473
Garda Vetting	2,623	4,045
LCC project	2,164	9,577
County Councillor Donations	300	450
Private Donations	2,319	100
Services	5,585	1,644
Leader Income	-	3,623
Government grants recognised directly in income	195,905	121,000
	<u>208,896</u>	<u>155,912</u>
 Gross profit	 <u>208,896</u>	 <u>155,912</u>
 Gross profit percentage	 100.0%	 100.0%
 Overheads		
Administrative expenses		
Wages and salaries	(114,334)	(88,571)
Directors remuneration	(34,831)	-
Employer's PRSI contributions	(15,699)	(9,375)
Training & Development	(1,266)	(1,115)
Board expenses	-	(100)
Project activities and event expenses	(11,492)	(7,641)
Volunteer & intern expenses	(263)	(1,282)
Rent payable	(4,000)	(4,000)
Insurance	(1,401)	(1,053)
Website Hosting	(317)	(379)
Repairs and maintenance	(314)	(1,232)
Equipment	(4,800)	(1,934)
Office Supplies	(1,824)	(1,425)
Marketing & PR	(1,744)	(827)
Telephone/Communications	(2,472)	(3,437)
IT/Server Support & Maintenance	(1,127)	(2,787)
Travelling and Subsistence	(1,634)	(2,719)
Auditing, Accountancy & Professional Fees	(2,458)	(1,230)
Bank charges	(211)	(223)
Bad debts	(428)	(13,000)
General expenses	1	(20)
	<u>(200,614)</u>	<u>(142,350)</u>
 Operating profit	 8,282	 13,562

Detailed profit and loss account (continued)
Financial year ended 31 December 2020

	2020 €	2019 €
Operating profit percentage	4.0%	8.7%
Profit before taxation	<u>8,282</u>	<u>13,562</u>



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Cornhairle Contae Lú
Louth County Council

