

Traveller ethnicity formally recognised by the Irish State March 1st 2017



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Welcome to this issue of the Community Work Ireland newsletter, *Community Work News*. Many thanks to all our contributors. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Community Work Ireland

If there are issues that you think should be covered or you would like to contribute, please contact

info@communityworkireland.ie

World Community Development Conference 2018

Participation, Power and Progress:

Community development towards 2030 – Our Analysis, Our Actions

CWI members will know that planning is underway for the joint Community Work Ireland, International Association for Community Development and Maynooth University World Community Development Conference to be held in Maynooth University from June 24th – 27th 2018.

The conference offers the sector the opportunity to:

- Showcase Irish Community Development work practices,
- Make international networks and contacts, as well as
- Professional development and up-skilling



We are delighted that Mary Robinson has agreed to deliver a keynote speech at the conference. Given her central involvement, commitment and dedication to the issues being addressed we feel that her presence and contribution will add greatly to our deliberations, and provide an important and very timely recognition of the struggles and the work that CWI members and community workers throughout the world are engaged in. In addition, the Mary Robinson Foundation has offered to work with us to develop a workshop on community development and climate justice.

Agreed inputs and interactive workshops on rights-based community development so far include the themes of:

- Change and transformation;
- Impact and outcomes;
- Measuring and monitoring;

- The role of state agencies, regional and local authorities;
- Current rural and/or urban challenges;
- International development;
- Community economic development; climate
- justice and sustainable development;
- Women's rights;
- Gender;
- Poverty;
- Migration;
- Racism;
- Indigenous peoples and minority rights; Disability;
- Health;
- Community development standards, education and training;
- Community development and other disciplines; Civil and political rights;
- Economic, social, and cultural rights.



World Community Development Conference 2018

Participation, Power and Progress:
Community Development Towards 2030
– Our Analysis, Our Actions

24-27 June*, Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland

This conference will provide a unique opportunity for practitioners, participants, academics, policy makers, funders and other stakeholders to share perspectives on current contexts and challenges for community work.

The conference will encompass cutting edge inputs, papers, creative installations and poster presentations on rights-based community development, addressing and engaging locally, nationally and internationally with key current issues including:

- Change and transformation
- Impact and outcomes
- Measuring and monitoring
- The role of state agencies, regional and local authorities
- Current rural and/or urban challenges
- International development
- Community economic development
- Environmental justice and sustainable development
- Women's rights
- Gender
- Poverty
- Migration
- Racism
- Indigenous peoples and minority rights
- Disability
- Health
- Community development standards, education and training
- Community development and other disciplines
- Civil and political rights
- Economic, social, and cultural rights

Other suggestions welcome

Followed by an optional Practice Exchange

Visit www.wcdc2018.ie for special early registration prices and on campus accommodation. Early booking advised. For other enquiries please email: info@wcdc2018.ie

WDC2018 provides a unique opportunity to celebrate IACD's 65th anniversary.

* 24 June – International Induction
25, 26, 27 June – Main Conference

Community Work Ireland | IACD | Maynooth University

For early registration and to see all the latest please go to <http://www.wcdc2018.ie>

Formal Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity

On March 1st 2017, the Irish State formally recognised Traveller ethnicity.

Making the announcement, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said:

“We recognise the inequalities and discrimination that the Traveller community faces and have a range of special programmes and interventions. The development of the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy will build on this.

As Taoiseach I wish to now formally recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation.

It is a historic day for our Travellers and a proud day for Ireland.”



Speaking about the announcement, Martin Collins said, “This announcement shines a light on Travellers’ rich distinct history and culture and sends out a message of respect and inclusion,” said Martin Collins, Pavee Point Director at the announcement of State recognition of Traveller ethnicity.

“It also lays to rest notions that Travellers are a primitive, dysfunctional, failed settled people who originated from the famine and who just need to be normalised and civilised by the State,” he added.



In a statement, Pavee Point said, “We know that acknowledging Traveller ethnicity does not solve the problems that Travellers face in their daily lives – discrimination, unemployment, lack of proper accommodation and poor educational outcomes. But respect for our culture has the potential to deconstruct centuries of internalised shame within the Traveller community and allow future generations of Travellers to grow up with pride in their identity.”

Pavee Point has been campaigning on Traveller ethnicity for over 30 years. This campaigning has faced various types of highs and lows.



New National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

Reflecting on the Past and Informing the Future was the theme for the 2017 Social Inclusion Forum as the Department of Social Protection prepare for a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. Since 1997 Ireland has developed national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework in which to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The current strategy, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion), identifies a



wide range of targeted actions and interventions to support the overall objective of achieving the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR). The Plan adopts a life-cycle approach with goals set for each group: children; people of working age; older people and communities.

The Plan was recently updated for the period 2015 - 2017 to reflect the current issues and interventions to tackle poverty. The plan states that there is a greater focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers and strengthening active inclusion policies.

However, there is a long way to go to achieve the national social targets. Consistent poverty was at a low of 4.2% in 2008 during the height of the boom. It subsequently increased with the economic crisis. With the years lost between 2009 and 2012 reducing it now by over 75% is very ambitious and unlikely to be achieved.

The Updated Plan contains a high-level goal to reduce consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020 from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.2%. It is important to note that this is a reduction on the original target, which was to eliminate poverty, as originally set out in the National Action Plan against

Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003–2005 and again in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016.

In their briefing document on the new National Plan, the Department of Social Protection state that the target is very ambitious and there is a concern that the target will be reduced once again.

Social Inclusion Forum 2017

Community Work Ireland once again worked with EAPN Ireland to support participation in the annual Social Inclusion Forum. Pre-SIF workshops were held in Rialto, Dublin and Galway and a focus group on homelessness were part of the consultation process for the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.



A report of the main issues arising from the sessions was presented at the Social Inclusion Forum. CWI and EAPN took the opportunity to remind the then Minister of Social Protection (now Taoiseach) Leo Varadkar of the ambition to eliminate poverty from Irish society that prompted the first strategy and challenged him to return to that ambition for all those in Ireland, not just those that get up early in the morning. We also asked him to examine the current model of labour market activation that prioritizes getting people into jobs above all other considerations, including the quality of the job. We reminded him of the seriousness of issues such as the homelessness crisis, ongoing poverty, lack of services in many areas and the treatment of Travellers, migrants and asylum seekers. Finally, we reminded the Minister of the importance of participation and the role of community development in combatting poverty and promotion social inclusion.

A conference report will be prepared by the SIF rapporteur to be presented to both Houses of the Oireachtas. The CWI/EAPN report and presentation are available at <http://communityworkireland.ie/social-inclusion-forum-2017/>

CWI will be organizing further consultation events as the process of developing the new Action Plan for Social Inclusion progresses.

National Framework Policy Working Group

Following on from the Local and Community Development Forum held in November 2016 to discuss an implementation plan for *Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development*, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government established a cross-sectoral Working Group to develop the implementation plan.

The terms of reference for the Working Group have been agreed and the Working Group will:

- consider and prioritise the outputs from the national forum, feedback received since the forum, original submissions on the framework policy and other relevant Government policies and strategies;
- develop actions to progress implementation of the framework;
- draft a five-year implementation plan to progress the actions and submit the plan for approval to the Inter-Departmental Group on Local and Community Development – the plan should include expected outcomes, the timeframes for delivery of actions, performance indicators, and an appropriate monitoring and review mechanism;
- consider the need for revisions to the framework policy in the context of implementation and outputs from the Forum, and make recommendations to the Inter-Departmental Group in this regard; and
- consider and agree mechanisms for consultation and participation in the development of the implementation plan, as appropriate.

The work of the Working Group will be underpinned by an agreed set of values and principles. Initially drafted by Community Work Ireland, the values are:

- Active Participation
- Empowering Communities
- Collectivity
- Social Justice
- Sustainable Development
- Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination
- Social Inclusion

The principles that give effect to the values are:

- Respect
- Collaboration
- Subsidiarity
- Harmonisation
- Value for Money
- Implementation

The Working Group will be overseen by and report to the Inter-Departmental Group for Local and Community Development. .

The Group's work will be implemented over an initial six-month period, from May-November 2017 and will culminate in a five-year multi-annual implementation for the Framework Policy on Local and Community Development. It is expected that a draft implementation plan will be submitted to the Inter-Departmental Group by end-November 2017. It is envisaged that the implementation plan will be published in January 2018.

The Working Group is chaired by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, and comprises members from community development (Community Work Ireland – 2 members), local development (ILDN – 2 members), the broader sector (Community & Voluntary Pillar – 2 members), local authorities (2 members), the Departments of Health, Justice & Equality, Social Protection, and Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

To date the work of the group has been to examine and categorise the feedback on the Framework Policy with a view to establishing task groups to look at each area.

CWI has established a reference group to discuss issues that arise. Interested? Email us at info@communityworkireland.ie

Sustainable Development Goals

Coalition 2030 is an alliance of leading civil society groups working for the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in Ireland and across the globe. Over 100 organisations are represented working both in Ireland and in over 50 other countries. Expertise within the Coalition ranges from children's rights to environmental sustainability and from humanitarian relief to education. The SDGs represent a political, economic and social manifesto for the world over the next 15 years; their success has the potential to be one of the most important turning points in modern history.

Ireland co- chaired the negotiations, with Kenya, that led to their adoption. Now that the Goals have been adopted, Ireland must shift the focus to implementation and monitoring.

In the years up to and including 2030, along with leaders of every country in the world, Ireland will report to the United Nations on whether the promise has been kept. Did we do what we said we would to eliminate hunger, to stall climate change, to reduce global inequality?

Coalition 2030 was launched at an event attended by leading civil society and political figures, with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Denis Naughton TD, addressing the standing room only crowd.

Strong political leadership is needed, with effective coordination and a 'whole of Government' approach. Coalition 2030 wants to see from the Irish Government:

1. An ambitious National Action Plan led by the Department of the Taoiseach—involving all government departments—to steer, implement, monitor and report on the SDGs. This plan must emphasise the interlinked

nature of the Goals—making the link, for example, between agriculture and climate change, trade policy and global poverty.

2. An inclusive monitoring forum, one in which civil society and in particular those vulnerable groups—both in Ireland and internationally—who stand to gain or lose most from Ireland's work on the SDGs, are fully represented.
3. Increased financing for development. The Government must commit the resources required to achieve the SDGs, both at home and internationally.

This article was first published in the [EUCDN newsletter](#). For more on EUCDN please go to <http://eucdn.net/>

Community Work Ireland is active in the Coalition 2030. For more please email info@communityworkireland.ie



Rights Must Follow Ethnicity Recognition

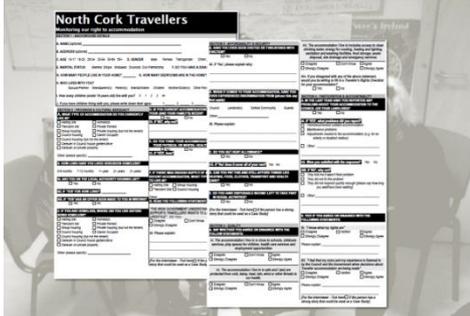
Travellers of North Cork launch the Traveller Accommodation Rights Charter and Human Rights Monitoring Process

Bec Fahy, Travellers of North Cork



In the autumn of 2016, 12 members of Travellers of North Cork (TNC) came together with a determination to end the discrimination, historic

Human Rights Monitoring Surveys



neglect and lack of dignity afforded to members of the Traveller

community when seeking decent standards of accommodation.

Supported by Belfast based PPR (Participation and the Practice of Rights), TNC carried out extensive research among the North Cork Traveller community to reveal the nature and extent of the unacceptable accommodation conditions members of the Traveller community have had to live with for decades.

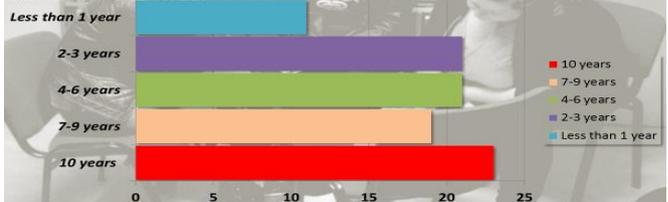
For us it was also important that Travellers were involved right from the start, in directing the work, as decision makers and that this involvement brought the experience of Travellers to the research phase. It was essential that this research gave Travellers a voice in what change they wanted to see happen, as previously the experience of Travellers has been ignored and their voices silenced. This is something that was confirmed in the survey results where 98% of those interviewed felt that their voice was not heard and their experience not listened to.

We decided that the best way for Traveller voices to be heard was for Travellers to be the key researchers...who best to identify the issues and how it affects families, than the families who have to live with poor accommodation.

One of the group at the launch stated that; "Previously research has been done on us and for us, not with our community taking the lead and using our distinct cultural experience and knowledge to decide what changes are needed to ensure that Travellers accommodation needs are fully met." Anita Toner

Human Rights Monitoring Surveys: Cultural Adequacy and Provision I

64% on the Local Authority Housing Waiting List
Only 1 in 10 have ever received an offer of accommodation



Traveller Researcher, TNC

On 24th May 2017, nearly three months following recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the state, the group of Traveller women from North Cork, announced their plans to monitor how the government are progressing their accommodation rights. Supported by Bec Fahy, TNC and Dessie Donnelly, PPR, the research group presented evidence they collected on the issues that their community experience relating to Traveller accommodation in North Cork.

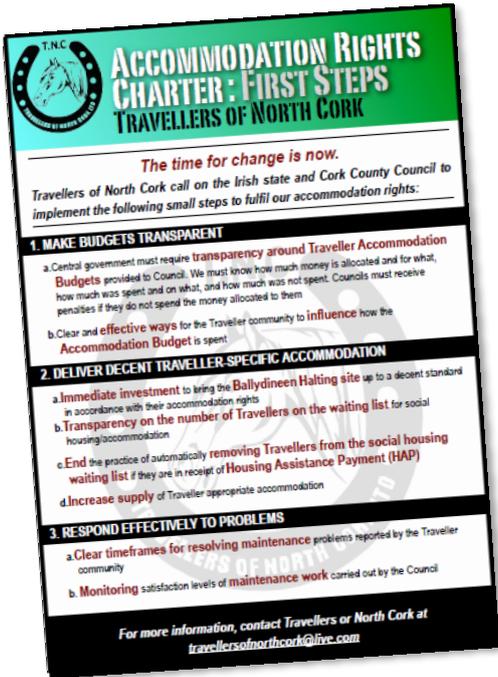
The event launched the results of their research, as well as a series of **Human Rights Indicators and Benchmarks**

which they intend to monitor over the forthcoming year to assess whether Cork County Council and the Irish state are fulfilling their obligations to progressively



realise the right to adequate accommodation.

In addition, the event also launched the **TNC Accommodation Rights Charter**, a series of practical actions which could be taken by both Council and the state over the next year to make real improvements. Liadh Ní Riada MEP, and Professor Alastair Christie (UCC) gave their support to the launch and took part in a panel discussion on the research, which also included Bridgie Casey, ITM (Irish Traveller Movement).



The TNC Accommodation Research Group: Catriona Dooley, Anita Toner, Leanne McDonagh, Margarita O Driscoll, Jessica O Donnell, Margarita O Reilly, Leanne O Driscoll, Margaret Meehan, Bridget O Brien, Noreen O Brien, Pamela Jones and Bec Fahy

Following the launch the Charter was taken to Cork County Hall, where it was presented to Cllr. Melissa Mullane, Chair of the LTACC (Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee)

The Accommodation Rights Charter Campaign, needs your support. Help us to raise awareness of this campaign and the issues facing many Traveller families, help ensure that Rights must follow ethnicity recognition.

The Time For Change is Now.

Find us on Facebook (Travellers of North Cork) and Twitter #TNCARC



Working for Change with Migrants, Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Social Change Initiative (SCI)¹ recently organised a peer learning exchange in Newcastle to examine some of the learning that can be drawn from the experience of community development workers and community organisers in Britain and Ireland (North and South) working for change with people from a migrant, refugee and asylum seeker background. The exchange was organised with the current and very challenging political climate in mind where “political debates have focused on concepts of sovereignty, identity and citizenship in which migration have become inextricably caught up and immigration and new communities have become easy targets of blame and stereotyped as the other”. MRCI participated in this exchange and Helen Lowry, community work coordinator with the MRCI, travelled to Newcastle and shares some reflections below.

Helen Lowry is a community worker with the Migrant Rights centre Ireland

The current and challenging context

Twenty-four hours before I left for Newcastle a rising number of children and adults were reported as having lost their lives at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester. After commenting on the glorious blue sky weather in Newcastle that morning, it was the first topic of conversation with the taxi driver on the journey into the city. Whilst the Muslim community in Newcastle was long established he was concerned about the backlash. A second-generation Muslim immigrant he was worried about his younger sister (who wore the hijab) that she might be target for racists being more easily identified as a Muslim woman. A short but honest exchange it established the most pressing context; the ever-present reminder we are engaging in community work and working with communities for change in unprecedented times.

In addition to Brexit, ongoing and in many ways increasing challenge of racism and right of centre conservative politics I was struck by the impact of privatisation and austerity policies in the UK. Particularly in the context community work, specifically community work in receipt of state funding. Not that we can take huge solace in the situation in Ireland (post cohesion, alignment and a labour market activation programme like SICAP being disguised as national community development programme). However, the impact of competitive tendering in this privatisation agenda and erosion of morale, talent and experience was clear. I was challenged by the scenario of practicing community work in deeply divided and diverse communities with an enforced agenda around cohesion that simplistically generalises white disadvantaged communities as ‘racists’ and newer immigrant communities as needing to be assimilated (thinly veiled as integration). The desire to ‘reclaim radicle’ (in community work) was shared and there was a clear and healthy scepticism about some of the policies and

politics at play. What is the cohesion agenda all about (in the UK)? Tackling root causes of disadvantage and marginalisation in communities and working collectively for fairer communities or keeping people happy (or in many cases unhappy) where they are at?

Community work analysis in action

An input from Anastasia Crickley reminded us that if community work is to create the capacity for collective analysis and collective action we have to be absolutely clear about the social and economic context we are in. That as community workers working with minority communities our practice goes beyond working on minority rights to incorporate an analysis on and concern with racism, sexism and all forms of inequality. Intersectionality in all of this is clearly key i.e. women from a minority background often experience racism in a sexualised fashion. Anastasia put it to us that identity politics has been abused and politicised across the board. Increasingly our interventions need to be influenced by a questioning of the sort of change happening and who is benefitting from it (e.g. women’s movement who benefited from it most in terms of northern/southern hemisphere).

In this there are clearly uncomfortable questions that we need to grapple with individually and collectively. It was good to be reminded that the fight against racism must remain central to our collective efforts and in this the importance of not side-stepping issues that sees minority communities being pitied or condescended. We all need to stay vigilant against the ‘deserving and non-deserving dynamic’ that is often set up in narratives and engagements with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. That without power analysis and clear values our practice can deny people agency and ‘make them vulnerable’. Social work it was suggested may have some useful language in this regard working with people who are at ‘risk of having their rights denied’ as opposed to ‘being vulnerable’. That at all costs we ensure our efforts do not contribute to the creation of hierarchies of oppression and that we retain a healthy suspicion of integration

(often a polite word for assimilation). Language matters and community work demands from us a critical power analysis informing action; thinking and doing, theory in practice.

How we frame narratives and start conversations

Some shared insights from Avila Kilmurray on SCI's research on public opinions and an input from Kathy Radford (Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast) on the challenge and art of difficult conversations provided rich context in which to consider language, narratives, stories; who is starting them and with what intention. SCI's research on public opinions asserts having facts is important (framing discussions on migration and social justice issues) but that feelings invariably trump facts. In framing narratives there may be a benefit to considering the 66-65% 'swingable and anxious middle' who are often 'economic pragmatists' or 'humanitarian sceptics' and address rather than ignore some of the concerns/fears they may have. Upon reflection there may also be a cost if in building consensus and allies for change we overly 'pitch' to this 'swingable middle' and potentially add to the rise of 'respectability politics' and its failure to challenge the mainstream.

At the same time whilst messages and narratives are important the messengers are most important. Who are the messengers in our work and efforts? Clearly in a community work context they need to be the people at the heart of the effort, those directly experiencing issues and be the messengers in an authentic, supported way. Kathy Radford questioned where are conversations starting in communities and who are starting them? This led to some useful and critical reflections on storytelling; checking our motivation for engaging people and their stories with agreement that retaining Freire's approach was important; that community work starts in the lived lives of people, in stories being told (and listened to). That thoughtless practice can at worst traumatise people and in general just being clear about the motivations for storytelling and story sharing. As we know the arts can play an important role in enabling alternative debates and discussions in difficult conversations about division, difference and conflict.

Cultivating conscious reflective practice at the heart of community work

Overall the peer learning event organised by SCI provided a valuable opportunity to engage in some conscious reflective practice;

- In bringing people together (often a starting point in community work) you cannot make assumptions about communities, how they interact or how they organise themselves. Take the time to find out!

- Community work interventions should be nuanced and respectful. In this, culture, cannot be disregarded. In working together for change we need to create a sense of shared purpose and collectivity. Creating an 'ecology of togetherness' and embedding ourselves in communities rather than imposing ourselves on communities.
- Putting people at the heart of our practice. Truly listening to people and building respectful, mutual relationships. Trust building and empathy at the heart of these conscious efforts (it doesn't happen behind a desk, although increasingly technology can help!)
- Conversations are key in relationship building. They need to be honest, avoid assumptions, be clear about expectations from each other if aiming for an exercise in sharing power. They don't always have to be constructed and engineered. Casual informal conversations are key in relationship building.
- Power is central to critical community work practice. And it operates at many levels; how we feel about our own power (do we need to build it up, do we need to be self aware of our unearned privilege), how we question power and our critical analysis of how decision makers use power and then the ultimately positive way in which we build power with people for change (in this seeing power as an enabling force and the people we work with as powerful agents of change not victims).
- Theories of change and values matter. Being explicit in organisations and groups about the values we hold dear and how we believe change happens. Let's be clear about the difference between occasional use of participative methodologies and a clear commitment to community work theory and practice.

Community work efforts are happening in multicultural and increasingly multi-ethnic communities across Ireland (North and South) and the UK. The issues and challenges at hand are deeply complex and yet some of the core components of good practice remain the same. As workers having a critical power analysis, being clear about the core principles of community work and ensuring these principles are embedded deeply in practice (values like equality, empowerment, participation and collective action). As a process ensuring people and communities are at the heart of a participative and empowering one; a process that tackles the root causes of people's disadvantage and injustice creating real and lasting change.

Community Education Virtually

Maria McHale is a community worker, currently working with the Virtual Community College

Can community education be replicated in a virtual environment? Absolutely, say the team behind An Cosán Virtual Community College (VCC). VCC is an innovative social enterprise initiative set up to bring An Cosán's tried and tested community education model into communities living with the injustice of poverty and inequality right across Ireland.

Officially launched in October 2016, VCC operates under the governance of the board of An Cosán in west Tallaght, Ireland's largest community education provider. VCC offers An Cosán's education courses to young and older adults all over Ireland through online blended learning combined with intensive learner-centred support.

VCC is acutely aware of the high drop-out rate from purely online courses and devised a blended model to overcome these difficulties. Each VCC course starts with a face-to-face workshop where learners meet each other, the tutors and become familiar with the course content and the technology. There is also a face to face workshop halfway through the course where learners are brought together to reflect on their experiences and the learning thus far.

VCC uses a community partnership approach to support and retain learners. It partners with a community organisation who recruits and supports learners as well as providing a communal hub for learners to attend live virtual discussions. VCC provides a range of support to the learner, including technological support, tutor support and a dedicated one-to-one mentor for learners.

VCC courses also represent significant progression for people – its most recent Learner Feedback reports showed that of the 121 learners surveyed, 73% were aged 18-40 and of that number, 81% reported as not having completed education over QQI Level 5 (Leaving Certificate).

VCC has worked with its collaborative partner, IT Carlow, to design and deliver ten-week Special Purpose Awards at QQI Level 6 and QQI Level 7 allowing learners to build up their academic abilities and credits at a pace that suits. With courses like *Transformative Community Education*, *Community Leadership* and *Learning to Learn at Third Level*; it is evident that critical thinking and the

principles of social justice, equality and inclusiveness are embedded in VCC's curriculum. Credits can be accumulated and bring learners towards achieving a major award. This is what one VCC group of learners in Wexford is aspiring to – they are currently undertaking their third VCC course and are effectively halfway through the first year in a third-level degree course.

VCC is currently expanding its academic programmes into Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship and has recruited Maria McHale, a Community worker from Mayo, to roll out a Social Enterprise and Leadership programme funded under the City & Guilds Group to women in Derry and Donegal. VCC is also developing a Special Purpose Award in Social Enterprise Development with Maria commenting that '*this is a great way of stimulating social enterprise development nationally*'.

As well as higher education programmes, VCC also provides unaccredited programmes such as *Introduction to Community Drugs Work* and *Introduction to Community Development* and these serve as stepping stones for learners who are not yet ready to commit to an academic programme.

Feedback from learners has been extremely positive as the following comments show:

The blended learning type course is a fantastic way of easing back into education. Taking part in this course, has completely opened my mind and given me a thirst for knowledge. (Wexford learner, Community Leadership, Autumn 2016)

I really enjoyed the course. It was a great learning curve with lots of communicating with others from different sectors of the community. I feel I came out a better person, gaining good leadership skills and more confident to take on my leadership role. (Mayo learner, Community Leadership, Autumn 2016)

Like all social enterprises, VCC is constantly struggling with obtaining funding to sustain core costs, earn income and to make courses affordable for learners. It is currently funded through a mixed model of state funding, corporate funding and philanthropic funds, a model that gives VCC a lot of freedom in meeting the needs of learners.

If you are interested in finding out more about VCC, see www.ancosanvcc.com or ring 01-534 1847

Statement from the Refugee Coalition

Refugee coalition calls on Irish Government to reunite families torn apart

On World Refugee Day, the Irish Refugee and Migration Coalition urges leaders to do more to protect people forced to flee

Every year thousands of people die crossing the Mediterranean and it has now become the most dangerous crossing in the world. Over 5,000 people died in 2016 and this year alone over 1,800 people lost their lives on the crossing. On World Refugee Day, the Irish Refugee and Migration Coalition, which is comprised of 23 Irish organisations, is calling on the Irish Government to welcome and protect people seeking safety. The Coalition asks that they ensure families can be reunited without having to undertake dangerous journeys and by doing so the Government can proactively help end the on-going needless loss of life.

Jim Clarken, Oxfam Ireland's Chief Executive, said 'it should not take days like World Refugee Day to draw the world's attention to the horrors facing people forced to flee. Tragically the numbers of refugees and migrants perishing in the Mediterranean in search of safety remain shamefully high as we watch the same scenes play out on our TV screens again and again.'

'It is vital that that our leaders live up to their responsibility and do more to protect people fleeing unimaginable situations of conflict, persecution, poverty and disaster. The Irish Government must save lives by bringing many more people to safety in Ireland, as the alternative leaves innocent people either languishing in misery in refugee camps or forced into the hands of smugglers to face unimaginable abuse. Too often, in the desperate search for safety, families are torn apart and there is no guarantee they will be reunited again. This only adds to the trauma of being forced to leave everything behind and it's vital that the Irish Government adopt more flexible family reunification practices to ensure families can stay together when fleeing conflict.'

Diane Kylecaleb, a refugee from the DRC who arrived in Ireland as an unaccompanied child described how being reunited with her family changed her life:

'For me, being reunited with my siblings meant that I could finally call Ireland my home. I can finally plan my life knowing that I have a home, which as a refugee, is the first home I have ever really known. It means the ambiguity of 'do I belong here or not?' is finally gone. It means my children can actually have a family too and if anything was to happen to me, I know I have people around to care for them. Family reunification, for me, meant I could actually sleep at night as the guilt of me being safe while not knowing if my family have eaten, are alive, dead or dying was removed and therefore I could actually see and plan my tomorrow.'

Nick Henderson, the Irish Refugee Council's CEO, remarked that 'with the change in family reunification rules introduced by the International Protection Act 2015, hundreds of families will continue to be separated and in some cases, loved ones will remain in volatile and hostile areas as they have no other way out. It doesn't need to be this way, Diane's experience illustrates what a positive impact flexible family reunification rules have made in her family's life.'

Henderson concluded: 'Ireland has committed to bring over 4,000 people by the end of the year under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, but less than one third have actually arrived. Given the number of people around the world who have had to forcibly leave their homes, Ireland needs to honour its commitments, show solidarity, and extend a welcome to people in need of protection.'

Community Work Ireland is active in the Refugee and Migrant Coalition