

WESTMEATH COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY FORUM



Newsletter

Issue No. 6

November 2006



*Shaping your
future...
with you, for you!*

Westmeath Tourism Council - Wild Wild Westmeath



Westmeath Tourism is a voluntary body supported by Westmeath County Council and Westmeath Community Development Ltd.

Flagship attractions such as Belvedere House, Gardens and Park and Locke's Distillery Museum, all major hotels and a range of business activities such as cruising, clay pigeon shooting, accommodation and attractions geographically outside Westmeath find it beneficial to be a part of Westmeath Tourism Council.

Westmeath Tourism Council facilitates members who wish to participate in national shows and can be invited to share Westmeath Tourism stands at such events.

The Tourism Council produces a unique brochure- the Westmeath Holiday Guide containing information on accommodation, attractions, activities, festivals and events in Westmeath. 25,000 copies of the Westmeath Holiday Guide were distributed at events at home and abroad in 2006.

This year Westmeath Tourism, with the help of trade support, embarked on a new domestic advertising campaign. This consisted of billboard adverts on display for one month in eleven DART stations in the Dublin area.

Overseas Tourists to County Westmeath increased by 5.4% from 111,000 in 2004, to 117,000 in 2005.

Westmeath, along with Meath has the third highest number of visitors in the Midlands East region.

Westmeath has the third highest amount of revenue generated by overseas visitors to counties in the Midlands

East region (€40 million)

Revenue generated by overseas tourists to County Westmeath has increased by €5 million, from €35 million in 2004 to €40 million in 2005.

If you would like copies of brochures or are interested in becoming a member of Westmeath Tourism Council contact Rhona Rogers, Marketing Officer Tel: 044 9345871

Email: info@westmeathtourism.com

Visit: www.westmeathtourism.com

Westmeath Way launched

The recently completed section of the Westmeath Way walking route, extending from Kilbeggan to Mullingar, was officially launched by Cllr. Mark Nugent on June 15 last in Lockes Distillery, Kilbeggan and represents a significant additional tourism activity in Westmeath.

This section of the Westmeath Way extends from Kilbeggan to Mullingar. The development of this project was led by Westmeath County Council and Westmeath Community Development Ltd; in co-operation with a number of other agencies.

Particular thanks must be extended to the seventeen landowners who allowed the route to cross their property.

This is a facility for everyone and will hopefully bring enjoyment to many over the coming years.

Leaving Cert Applied Success in Mullingar Senior Education and Training Centre

A group of twelve traveller women attending the Mullingar Senior Education and Training Centre had a very special reason to celebrate at the end of the 2005 – 2006 academic year. They were the first travellers in the area to sit and successfully complete the Leaving Certificate Applied course. This achievement is even more significant when one considers that none of them have ever attended secondary school. The group of twelve includes five members of the same family and spans two generations.

Some of these women were

involved in setting up the Mullingar Traveller Action Group, in 1995, which in turn helped to establish the Mullingar Senior Traveller Training Centre (now known as the Mullingar Senior Education and Training Centre.) Since 1999 the range of educational options within the Centre has grown and FETAC accreditation is offered at Levels 3 and 4. In September 2004 the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme was introduced and the twelve women enrolled on the course.

Along with the course modules, they also completed a Vocational

Preparation and Guidance module. Westmeath Adult Educational Guidance Service delivered this component which enabled each student to compile a career action plan. These career plans are much more feasible now that they have obtained their Leaving Certificate Applied qualification.

In September 2006 another group within the Mullingar Senior Education and Training Centre started the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme hoping to achieve the same high standard of success.

Athlone Family Learning Project

Benefits for After-School Projects in RAPID areas

Through the provision of teaching supports to after-schools projects in each of the RAPID areas, Co. Westmeath VEC identified a need to further develop this role and to introduce a philosophy of family learning to the projects.

Funding was sought under the first round of Dormant Accounts by the VEC and a total of €133,500 was approved for the provision of teaching supports and the employment of a part-time Family Learning Co-ordinator.

The Athlone Family Learning Project commenced in April 2005 with the appointment of Christine Reid-McDermott as Co-ordinator. Christine has been involved in artwork with groups and communities for many years and is a community representative on the RAPID Area Implementation Team.

Family learning programmes emphasise that parents are their children's first and most important teachers, and that they should be encouraged and supported in this role. The aims of the Athlone Project include improving the skills and attitudes of parents towards education and improving the developmental skills of children.

Work carried out includes the following:

- A calendar produced by the children of the after-schools projects, printed and circulated to all homes;
- Scrapbooks, which encourage cross-generational communication, seasonal activities, murals, crafts;
- The use of board-games has been successfully introduced, which enhance memory and mathematical skills;
- A banner for the Athlone St. Patrick's Day parade won Best Youth Entry and a banner for the Athlone Active Age Group provided an opportunity for inter-generational cooperation;
- A horticulture project where the children brought plants



home proved to be very popular;

- Art and craft classes and computer classes for parents, and parents from a number of the after-schools having taken these classes.

An internal evaluation of the Family Learning Project was carried out in 2006 and the following were identified as some of the benefits from the project:

- Projects focus on recognising the importance of the family and reinforcing family values and traditions;
- The use of the medium of art and crafts contributes significantly to the development of co-ordination and the right side of the brain in children;
- Parents are provided with the opportunity to partake in courses and update their skills. The computer courses were particularly successful;

The project is due to finish in June 2007 although all involved hope that further sources of funding will be identified before then.

1428 Club

The 1428 Club is an active retirement group and registered charity.

It was founded in April 1998 to cater for the social and recreational needs of all retired citizens residing in the Westmeath area.

The committee intend to construct a centre in Mullingar for its 300 plus membership.

Westmeath County Council offered a site, which is in the centre of a large development area in the Ashe road/Grange area.

The new centre will be open seven days a week for social activities, dancing, bowling, bingo, music, cards,



art, computers, knitting etc. There will also be a library, information centre, games room, training centre and cafeteria.

The committee is currently operating at rented premises, 46 Dominick Street, Mullingar, which is open from 9.30am to 5.30pm Mondays to Fridays and 9.30am to 4pm on Saturdays. The following facilities are currently available: Library, information centre, games room, and facilities for tea and coffee with



seating accommodation for eighty people. All the daily newspapers are available at the centre.

Computer classes are also available for all age groups.

The 1428 Club also provides a first class printing and secretarial service. It is always looking for Volunteers so if you have a few hours to spare and would like to assist the committee in any area of its work you should ring 044 9384290 any weekday during office hours.



Your Local Citizens Information Centre



Citizens Information Centres provide free, confidential and impartial information, advice and advocacy on a variety of subjects. Everybody has information needs, therefore everyone is equally encouraged to use the service. The service provides information on topics such as social welfare, health services, employment, tax, housing, justice, immigration, family issues and consumer affairs.

An important feature of the service is the comprehensive nature of the information provided.

We have full access to a database of information; a variety of publications; legislation and government related information, the internet and general information such as pamphlets, magazines and reference articles.

Westmeath Citizens Information Service (CIS) has two fulltime centres, in Athlone and Mullingar, as well as a number of outreach services. We endeavour to bring our service to all local communities by arranging public information evenings and using our mobile information service throughout the county.

Both Mullingar and Athlone CIC's provide a Free Legal Advice Service on a fortnightly basis and Athlone CIC also provides a Free Financial Advice Service by appointment.

Each Citizens Information Centre has a mix of employed staff and practising volunteers. Every information provider receives specific and recognised training. People are



Staff and volunteers attending a recent public information evening in Athlone.

encouraged to apply as a volunteer. Each volunteer commits to attending for a 3-hour session on a weekly basis within the centre and to attend training in relation to information provision as required. If you are interested please contact your local centre.

Westmeath CIS dealt with 22,727 queries in 2005 and up to June 2006, 10,658 queries and have highlighted 18 social policy issues. 144 people have availed of the Free Legal Advice Service this year.

The Information Officers dealt with 7 advocacy cases in 2006 to date. Westmeath CIS are currently advertising for a full time advocacy

worker to work with people with mental health difficulties.

Citizens Information has a telephone service: Monday to Friday (9am – 9pm) Lo-Call 1890 777 121 Citizens Information has an online service: www.citizensinformation.ie

Local contact details:

Athlone CIC, St. Mary's Square, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.
Tel.: 090 6478851 Fax: 090 6478738
Email: athlone.cic@comhairle.ie

Mullingar CIC, Market House, Market Square, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.
Tel.: 044 9340700 Fax: 044 9345642
Email: mullingar.cic@comhairle.ie

Launch of Midland Regional Drugs Taskforce Action Plan 06-08

Minister Noel Ahern TD officially launched the Midland Regional Drugs Task Force Action Plan 2006-2008, on November 2nd 2006 in Tullamore.

The Midland Regional Drugs Task Force (MRDTF) is one of ten regional drugs task forces set up across the country in 2003, by Minister Ahern, to deliver a more co-ordinated response in tackling the issues around drug mis-use. The region covered by the Task Force includes the midland counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. The Task Force

undertook a comprehensive consultation process, and drew up the first Midland RDTF Action Plan. This plan was then completed during 2005, and submitted to the National Drugs Strategy Team and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, for consideration and approval for government funding.

Actions in the plan formally launched in November this year are presented under the headings of:

- Structures, and Governance
- Education/Prevention

- Treatment/Rehabilitation
- Supply Reduction
- Research.

It is anticipated that the Plan will be subject to change during its lifetime according as actions are implemented.

The MRDTF Action Plan is available from the Co-ordinator, Midland Regional Drugs Task Force, c/o Health Promotion Service, HSE Clonminch, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. Tel: 057-9357800 / 057-9357818 Fax: 057-9357823 Email: mrddf@mailq.hse.ie

Greener Schools



Pupils and teacher from Gaelscoil An Mhuilinn, Mullingar receive their Green Flag from Ms. Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education at An Taisce Awards Ceremony in Dublin May 2006

53 Westmeath Schools are now signed up to the Green Schools Programme and 21 schools have reached green flag status.

Any school, using the guidelines provided by An Taisce, who run the programme in co-operation with Local Authorities, can adopt the green schools award scheme. The Programme can help schools to:

- Improve the school environment
- Reduce litter and waste
- Reduce fuel bills
- Increase environmental awareness
- Involve the local community
- Create links with other schools in Ireland and internationally
- Gain local publicity

In 2006 to date, the following schools have received green flag status:

First Green Flag for Litter and Waste Management awarded to:

An Grianan NS, Mount Temple, Moate
Castlepollard Parochial School,
Pakenham Hall Road, Castlepollard

Convent Primary School,
Rochfortbridge
Gaelscoil An Mhuilinn, Mullingar
Scoil Bhride, Rochfortbridge
St Joseph's Secondary School,
Rochfortbridge
St Mary's National School, Raharney

Second Green Flag for Energy awarded to:

Ardnagrath NS, Walderstown, Athlone
Milltown NS, Rathconrath, Mullingar
St Colmans NS, Mullingar
St Mary's National School, Gracepark Road, Athlone

The closing dates for schools wishing to apply for Green Flag status in the current academic year is December 1st 2006 and March 1st 2007. Good luck to the schools applying this year.

Further information on the Green Schools Programme is available from the Environmental Awareness Officer, Westmeath County Council tel: 044-9332226.

Comhairle na nÓg 2006

The Voice of Youth

What is Comhairle na nÓg?

Comhairle na nÓg is a recognised gathering of young people who want to discuss issues that effect how they live their lives.

It is a chance for young people to express concerns they may have about their daily lives and their future. It gives a space for open conversation and suggestions for future planning with agencies that have a role in working with young people.

Without participation children and young people often do not have the option of asking for a better quality of life.

What are the benefits of participating in Comhairle na nÓg?

- It allows young people of Westmeath to develop personal and social responsibility.
- Engages young people more fully in their community.
- Prepares young people for participation in national democracy.
- Improves the relevance of local services for young people.
- Assists in improving the social and communication skills of children and young people.
- Recognises children and young people as a valuable resource.
- Provides an enjoyable way of meeting new people in their peer group and debating issues of concern.

The annual Westmeath event takes place in November.

Irish Wheelchair Association

The national organisation of people with limited mobility

The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) is the national organisation of people with limited mobility. It is a voluntary charitable organisation working independently and in partnership with state bodies. IWA's goal is to achieve the full inclusion of people with physical disabilities in the community.

The association was founded in 1960 by a small group of wheelchair users and today has over 20,000 members and service users.

The role of IWA is to advocate for change, locally and nationally, by representing the issues and concerns of adults and children with limited mobility; to research,

develop and pilot new concepts of service delivery and to deliver services in partnership with state agencies.

IWA has a broad range of services for people with physical disabilities, which are available to members and non-members. These services include; advocacy, assisted living services, resource and outreach centres, independent living apartments, transport, information provision and also youth services.

IWA is constantly looking for volunteers and supporters. Visit www.iwa.ie for further information or phone the regional office in Athlone at 09064 477666 or Springfield Centre Mullingar at 044 9347511.

Pride of Place All-Ireland Awards

The All Ireland Pride of Place Awards were presented at a Gala Event in the Mount Wolseley Hotel, Tullow, County Carlow on Saturday the 14th of October 2006. Carlow County Council hosted the event. This was the first time for Westmeath to participate in the Pride of Place competition and the county performed very well with representation from Rochfortbridge, Lockes Distillery Museum Kilbeggan, Killucan Area, Streete and Ballinahown. All involved put in a huge effort and congratulations are due to the communities and their representatives.

Westmeath County Council supported and co-ordinated the programme at a local level with all Ireland co-ordination provided by Co-operation Ireland.

This initiative was put in place to celebrate and reward community development activity throughout the island of Ireland and to further encourage networking and information exchange between entrant groups.

Ballinahown and Killucan were short listed in their respective categories. However, Westmeath tasted success with Lockes Distillery Museum receiving the All Ireland Industrial Heritage award.

Earlier in the evening Cllr. Joseph Flanagan, Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council presented an award to each of the five participant groups. The Cathaoirleach paid tribute to the commitment and dedication of all concerned.

Participation in the Pride of Place competition provided the five communities with an opportunity to review progress and look at development over the past number of years. It is important that we now reflect on the huge positive contribution made by the community and voluntary sector to the wellbeing of the county and society. Once again congratulations and well done to all concerned.

Locke's Distillery Museum

All Ireland Pride of Place Industrial Heritage Award

Established in 1757, Locke's Distillery is the oldest licensed pot still distillery in the world. The distillery produced Locke's Irish Whiskey and Kilbeggan Whiskey for almost 200 years until its closure in the 1950s. It then lay idle for many years and the building was used for sheltering pigs, among other things!

However, in the early 1980s, a local community group called the Kilbeggan Preservation and Development Association (K.P.D.A.) was formed, with the aim of restoring the old distillery buildings and eventually opening them up to the public as a visitor attraction. Several years of hard work followed.

The distillery finally opened its doors to the public in 1987 as Locke's Distillery Museum. Today, almost 20 years later, the Museum welcomes 40,000 visitors annually. Guided tours take visitors through the distillery and each visitor receives a complimentary glass of Kilbeggan Irish Whiskey at the end of their tour! The facilities include the Pantry Restaurant and a whiskey bar.

The All-Ireland Pride of Place Awards recognises and rewards voluntary and community efforts. And this year Locke's Distillery



Kitty Flynn and Ursula Corcoran receiving National Award from Minister of Environment Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Dick Roche, TD.

Museum received the All-Ireland award for Industrial Heritage. The judges paid tribute to the voluntary committee which is still very much involved in the running of the Museum.

The future of the Museum looks very bright indeed. Next year it will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the licensing of the original distillery in Kilbeggan (1757 – 2007).

For further information, Locke's Distillery Museum may be contacted at 057 933 2134 or by e-mail: lockesmuseum@iol.ie; www.lockesdistillerymuseum.com

Ballinahown Community



Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council Cllr. Joe Flanagan presenting Helen Connolly, Ballinahown with Local Award.

Over the past decade, the parishioners of the Ballinahown area have subscribed generously to the renovation of the church and the adjacent parochial house. The house now includes a parish room which is often used for meetings of community groups.

Ballinahown Ladies Group

The Ballinahown Ladies Group was set up about 10 years ago to enhance the lives of women living around the area of Ballinahown.

Many classes and information evenings are held.

Ballinahown Ladies Group set up the Active Age Group, the After Funeral Hospitality Service and the Millennium Time Capsule. A time capsule was created depicting life in Ballinahown in the millennium year, 2000. The capsule is buried in the grounds of the church and it will be opened every 25 years.

Killucan Area Network of Community Groups



Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council Cllr. Joe Flanagan presenting Richard Dixon, Killucan with Local Award.

There are over twenty five community groups operating in the Killucan area, which covers three villages, Killucan, Rathwire and Raharney. This very active locality was short listed for an award in the Pride of Place competition.

Since 1992 the community groups, in addition to their own core work, have been involved in developing a range of facilities and provided many community services through collaboration and networking. This network model recognises that all groups have their own focus and independence but recognises that collaboration is required to achieve certain goals. The overall goal of the Killucan area community is to maintain the community ethos and the volunteer effort.



Members and friends of Killucan Golden Years Club.

Streete Pride of Place 2006



Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council Cllr. Joe Flanagan presenting Brian Nerney, Streete with Local Award.

St. Mary's Parish, Streete in North Westmeath was selected to take part in this year's Pride of Place Competition. Brian Nerney, Chairman of the Community Development Association prepared a presentation for the competition and the presentation was held in Streete Parish Park Community Centre.

Streete Parish Park Project started with the formation of a Committee in 1999. The building commenced in 2002 and the official opening of the centre was performed by Dr. Tom Moore, in March 2005. In that short time a complex worth approx. 1.3 million was completed catering for gaelic, soccer, rugby and all outdoor sports, as well as most indoor sports including an international basketball court with an electric scoreboard, state of the art kitchen etc.

The improvements to the parish were only possible with the input of the local committee and the massive fundraising as well as assistance and co-operation from local and national agencies such as Westmeath County Council, Westmeath Leader and the National Lottery. Thanks goes also to John White, Chairman of Streete Parish Park and the committee for their fullest co-operation.

Rochfortbridge – Pride of Place

Rochfortbridge has experienced a population boom in the past couple of years. The development of new housing estates, has seen the population increase, without any additional infrastructure to support the new residents.

The residents of Rochfortbridge decided to form the Rochfortbridge Focus Group. The focus group contacted all of the residents of Rochfortbridge and it's environs to invite them to participate in the "Renaissance".

Thanks to the people of the community and the support and guidance of the County Council, the hard work is beginning to bear fruit. Amenities and facilities are better supported.

This year, the people of Rochfortbridge came together to produce a twenty five page Development Plan Submission, where the people outlined what they expected in the development of their town.

The people of Rochfortbridge successfully lobbied the county council in supporting a restoration project for



Cathaoirleach, Westmeath County Council Cllr. Joe Flanagan presenting Ian O'Flynn, Rochfortbridge with Local Award.

their parish hall. A Grant of €300,000 from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, was awarded.

The Rochfortbridge Youth Club, GAA Club and Cub Scouts assist our young people in competing in events and putting Rochfortbridge back on the map for all of the right reasons.

Clonmellon Summerfest!

Clonmellon Community Council was formed in October 2005 by local residents led by Angela Dunne O'Toole, to address pressing issues and concerns of the community.

One of their concerns was the lack of facilities for young and not so young and the need for community development. With this in mind a funding application was made under the County Westmeath Community Action Scheme 2006. The application was successful and a grant was received amounting to €1,000, towards the cost of the first ever "Clonmellon Summerfest".

Children enjoyed two art workshops, which were held on the 19th of August in preparation for the Art Competition entitled "Our Community". Summerfest banners were made by the children and displayed in the village and in the community centre, this proved extremely popular with the children.

"Clonmellon Summerfest" found the quaint village of Clonmellon decorated in colourful ribbons and displays of art works by children, not to mention the

pride that was taken by residents and business' alike as they cut grass and held a "clean up day" for the village and estates in Clonmellon. Displays of window boxes, hanging baskets bursting with flowers, brought a cheerful atmosphere to the village and an air of expectancy and anticipation of the upcoming first Pride of Place competition in Clonmellon.

Sir John Nugent from Ballinlough Castle opened Summerfest on Saturday August 26th in St. Paul's football pitch. St. Paul's GFC kicked off the day with their annual sports and fun day. Children aged from five to fifteen, attempted to master Gaelic Football skills by scoring penalties in the Penalty Shoot Out.

The crew and animals from "Dunderry Fair" added to events. Silly Sally performed magic and mesmerized a captivated audience and then to add to the entertainment she produced animals from balloons. Face painting continued throughout the day as children queued patiently for their

turn.

The most popular event proved to be "Ur A Star" with 24 contestants including 13 duet or group acts. Talent was evident as music, song and dance echoed from the stage of Clonmellon Community Centre through Clonmellon village. Spot prizes were given out throughout the day to children and adults in attendance.

Congratulations to the winners and to all who participated on the day.

This competition proved a winner with the whole community uniting young and old, as prizes were awarded to residents and estates and a prize went to Mulvaney's Pub for best business shop front.

Clonmellon Community Council would like to sincerely thank Westmeath County Council for making these days possible through the awarding of funding in the Community Action Scheme and all the committee members who organised the events. We look forward to Clonmellon Summerfest 2007.



Westmeath Community Action Scheme 2006

Westmeath County Council provided funding in 2006 for Community Projects, which promoted the well being of communities in County Westmeath.

Projects in the following areas were considered for funding:

1. Community Involvement: Projects, which encourage local action and involvement in local decision-making.
2. Social Inclusion: Projects, which take account of and provide assistance for under-represented groups.
3. Promotion of Culture & Heritage: Projects, which celebrate the particular culture and heritage of a local community
4. Community Facilities/Amenities:

The following is a breakdown of the number of projects, which were successful in receiving a grant.

Area	Number of projects	Total grant for the area.
Mullingar	21	€22,000
Athlone	15	€17,750
Kilbeggan	4	€4,000
Coole	7	€6,250
County Remit	3	€5,000
Totals	50	€55,000

Improvement of local amenities, which are generally open to, or availed of by the community at large.

One of the fifty projects, Clonmellon Summerfest is highlighted above to give

an idea of the community activity supported by this grant scheme.

It is anticipated that the community action scheme will be advertised in January 2007.

The Life of Our Times

Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity "The Life of Our Times"- A Sports Strategy for Westmeath 2006-2009.

The Irish Sports Council has identified the Local Sports Partnership Initiative as the key mechanism to address their aim for increased mass participation in sport and recreation in Ireland.

Westmeath Sports Partnership has devised a strategic plan by consensus, to promote and develop sport throughout the county for the period 2006-2009. Westmeath Sports Partnership is made up of representatives of local agencies, statutory bodies, sporting and community groups reflecting the broad sports spectrum within the county. These partners have committed to effectively work together in all aspects of sports development and maximise the current sports provision. The plan reflects the mission of Westmeath Sports Partnership 'to provide equal opportunity and access to participate in sport, recreation and



physical activity in Westmeath'

The plan has identified five key strategic goals and details how each one will be tackled over the next year years. The strategic goals are:

1. A vibrant Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity sector, harnessing maximum Volunteer potential.
2. Increased participation at all levels of Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity and expanded opportunities for lifelong participation in regular physical activity, sport and recreation.
3. Accessible Sport, Recreation and

Physical Activity developments in Westmeath, carried out in a partnership approach.

4. Comprehensive communication policies and facilitated educational programmes.

5. A properly managed and effective Sports Partnership.

Westmeath Sports Partnership with the support of member agencies will lead the delivery of participation and training programmes. It recognises that establishing links with voluntary clubs, schools and local community groups is critical to achieving overall success. The partnership will strive to make Westmeath Sport 'The Life of Our Times' through effective planning, co-ordination, and effort by all the sporting community.

For more information, please contact Westmeath Sports Partnership at 044-9390208 or email info@westmeathsports.ie or visit www.westmeathsports.ie

Young Authors Sharpen Their Skills

Young People's Creative Writing Project, Offaly and Westmeath

Children's author Caroline Barry is currently facilitating a course for young writers in Offaly and Westmeath. Previously Caroline had run a long-term creative writing group for teenagers in Dublin. During that period two books were published, which attracted a lot of interest from both Irish and English publishing houses.

Michael O'Brien from O'Brien Press Publishing house began tracking the groups Caroline was working with, inviting the stronger writers to submit manuscripts to his editorial team. Michael's interest in these aspiring young writers was very encouraging and Caroline felt that a similar project could work as well in the Midlands. Two groups were established, one in Kilbeggan Library in Westmeath and one in The Heritage Centre in Tullamore. There are 15 committed young authors in both groups.

The aim of the year long project is to publish an anthology of selected short stories and novel extracts in December 2006. All members of the writing group will benefit from spending over nine months honing their creative talent, learning how to structure a novel, develop characters and explore pacing and tension. 'The most

important thing for any writer is to find their own voice,' Caroline says, 'it can take time. That's why this course is run for almost a year.'

There are many other benefits to participating in the group. Not only do the young writers learn how to critique, they get a chance to know a bit about the publishing industry. Both arts officers in Westmeath and Offaly have set up a scholarship for four young writers to attend a weekend workshop in Dingle with renowned authors Niall Matthews and Aubrey Flegg.

Stories from the Twisted Tree will be launched in Kilbeggan Library on Thursday December 7th at 7.30pm and everyone is welcome to come along.

Black Angel By Eva Burke will feature in the Anthology.



Smoke Alarms could save your life



Install smoke alarms today and ensure they are in good working order.

- Check the smoke alarm often by pressing the test button.
- Replace the batteries when they are not working and every year for the standard one-year smoke alarm.
- If you have the 10-year alarm, you need to replace the complete unit after ten years.
- At least two smoke alarms properly located, (one on each floor) should suit most homes.
- For maximum protection a smoke alarm should be fitted in every room. An optical smoke alarm and a heat detector are appropriate for the kitchen.
- Also remember you should never leave lit candles unattended and ensure candles are in proper holders.

Volunteers and Groups with Volunteers

In early 2006, Westmeath County Development Board were successful in securing grant aid from the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under the Cohesion/Volunteer fund to establish a volunteerism project in county Westmeath. In order to get the project up and running a steering committee was established, with Westmeath Community Development Ltd at its helm.

In May 2006, Mr. Ian O'Flynn joined the project as the volunteer co-ordinator. Over the summer months, the Steering Committee completed much of the groundwork in preparation for the establishment of a Westmeath Volunteer Centre.

A database of all groups and volunteers in Westmeath has been compiled and many volunteers have registered their availability.

Ian O'Flynn said "The response and feedback I have received so far has been fantastic but not very surprising as it is already quite obvious how many people volunteer their time in Westmeath. However, the centre is about more than just sourcing and placing volunteers, it's about sustaining their interest and helping groups prepare and grow in their interactions with volunteers".

On November 30th, The Volunteer Centre will be hosting a seminar on Volunteerism in Bloomfield House Hotel from 10am and if you feel you would like to come along or know more about this project, please contact Ian O'Flynn at 044-9348571.

Mullingar Mental Health Association

The Mullingar Mental Health Association was formed in the 1970's and is affiliated to Mental Health Ireland.

The Association aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers, by identifying their needs and advocating their rights.

The Association's educational activities include organising courses at local venues on various subjects relevant to good mental health, e.g. stress management, communication skills, parenting, carer's support, and stigma reduction. The Association also run a Public Speaking Competition for senior classes in Post-Primary Schools within the county. This helps focus the attention of young people on the benefits of positive mental health attitudes, at a time when they are coming under increasing pressure, often with serious consequences. In August this year the Association organised a very successful information day in Mullingar for voluntary groups on the Mental Health Act 2001.

Mullingar Mental Health Association's long association with St. Loman's Hospital continues with the Association annually providing funding to individual wards within the hospital for patients outings and day trips. It also contributes to the wards at Christmas/Easter in order that all patients may have a small gift at this time. Every person deserves a holiday and in this regard the Association is glad to make some contribution towards holidays for persons living in the hospital or in

residential care in the community. This supports their integration into community living and enhances their self-esteem. One of the Association's aims is to promote independent living and when possible assistance and financial support is available for persons wishing to move into their own accommodation.

The Association is delighted to work in partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE) on a number of projects and in this regard the assistance of many members of the staff of the HSE is invaluable.

Many projects would not get off the ground without the commitment of many people:

- organisation and funding of Table Quiz for service users, relatives, friends and staff;
- opening of a gym in a community residence in early 2006, with a grant received from People in Need Trust, in order to promote the benefits of exercise;
- with the assistance of a grant from Mullingar Credit Union, a Greenhouse Project was started at a community residence as a form of occupational therapy;
- a computer and programmes were purchased for use as a learning tool for Day Centre attendees;
- transport was hired and contributions made to expenses for holidays for residents;
- tickets for local concerts are made available for residents

For further information contact - Finola Colgan, MHI Development Officer 086-8353387, or Nodlaig Coffey, Secretary 044-9340191. Website: www.mullingarmha.ie

Volunteerism Seminar

**30th November 2006
Bloomfield House Hotel
at 10am.**

**Contact Ian O'Flynn
on 044 9348571
for further information.**

Huge Boost to Rural Childcare in Westmeath

Rural Childcare in Westmeath was a given a huge boost with the opening of two new childcare facilities in Collinstown and Multyfarnham. Both facilities strongly complement the existing childcare provision within rural areas of the county and promote access to quality affordable childcare.

Kids Aloud

Antoinette O'Neill was granted €50,790 capital funding under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 towards the cost of developing her childcare service and opened a new custom built facility 'Kids Aloud' on the 18th September 2006 in Collinstown village.

A native of the area, Antoinette had been working in the national school when she first saw the need for a childcare service in the locality. Her plans have now been realised with the development of a state of the art facility equipped to the highest standards and fully wheelchair accessible. Contained within the facility is a pre-school for children aged three to five, an after school room for five to twelve year olds, a toddler room, baby room, sleeping room, changing room, kitchen, staff room, office, toilets and outdoor play area. The childcare facility is a great addition to the village. Antoinette says that parents are very happy with the

flexibility and accessibility of the service. In addition to the pre-school, Kids Aloud offer Full Day Care and School Age Childcare. Both services are valued by the children and parents alike. Children from a wide catchment area attend the service and Antoinette hopes the facility will grow further in the years ahead.



Rathganny Pre-School

Madeline O'Neill has been working in childcare for twelve years. In February 2006 she opened a custom built childcare facility adjoining her home in Rathganny House, Multyfarnham. The facility which is fully wheelchair accessible and equipped to the highest standards consists of two large playrooms for preschool and toddlers, dining room, kitchen, toilets and secure outdoor play area. Madeline received funding of €50,790 under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme towards the cost of renovating and equipping this facility.

Currently Rathganny Preschool offers a sessional service catering for toddlers aged 18 months to three years and preschool children aged three to five years from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

The childcare service intends to expand into full day care in the near future and has been granted additional funding of €100,000 under the new National Childcare Investment Programme 2000-2006 towards the cost of further renovations and fitting out of the building for that purpose. Madeline has a good working relationship with the local school and has received excellent feedback from parents who value the quality of the service and its accessibility within the local community.

Strategic Plan

Westmeath County Childcare Committee is currently preparing a new Strategic Plan for 2007 to 2012. In order to produce the plan the Committee is undertaking a consultation process with various stakeholders in the county including the statutory and community agencies, service providers and parents. Anyone interested in participating in this process should contact the Westmeath County Childcare office at telephone 044-9335454.

What is the Junior County Council?

The Junior County Council is an elected Council of young people from the various Second Level Schools in the County. The Junior County Council formally convene on at least three occasions annually to discuss items of interest pertaining to the business of the Local Authority. Formal minutes are taken and placed on the Agenda for the full meeting of the County Council which provides feedback and input into Council decision making. Councillors and Officials attend meetings of the Junior County Council.

The Junior County Council adopts its own Standing Orders (rules and procedures for meetings) and determines its own agenda. Issues include the following:

- Environmental Protection and Promotion
- Road Safety
- Environmental Issues

- Youth Affairs
- Recreational & Amenity Facilities
- Higher Education Grant System

Why the formation of a Junior County Council?

The formation of a Junior County Council provides young people with a practical understanding and appreciation of the activities of the Council. The youth of today are our citizens of tomorrow and our future civic leaders. It also facilitates the Council engaging in genuine dialogue with young people and provides a greater understanding of their views and needs. Senior students from transition year upwards will be eligible for election to the Junior County Council and students from 2nd year upwards will be entitled to vote.

How will the elections be organised?

The Proportional Representation model i.e. a single transferable vote

will be used in each school for the Junior County Council.

Nominations will be sought from eligible candidates on a non-political basis. Council Officials will supervise elections in each school. The Junior County Council will mirror exactly the County Council in terms of members i.e. 23 members. The term of office will be for a duration of two years. Student numbers will determine the number of Councillors for each school. Co-option will apply in the event of the resignation of a Junior Councillor.

When will the Junior County Council be established?

Council Officials visited schools in October and nominations were invited from students. Elections will be held throughout November and the first meeting of the new Junior County Council will be held in December 2006.

Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum

The purpose of the Community and Voluntary Forum is to facilitate the representation of and participation by community and voluntary groups in matters relating to Westmeath County Development Board, Westmeath County Council and other relevant structures in the County. The Community and Voluntary Forum provides for an exchange of information between the County Development Board, the Strategic Policy Committees and the Area Committees of the Council. The Forum also provides a mechanism for nominating representatives to:

- Westmeath County Development Board,
- The Social Inclusions Measures (SIM) working group,
- and the Strategic Policy Committees.

In 2006 the Forum also nominated representatives to the Midland Regional Drugs Taskforce, Westmeath Sports Partnership and the Athlone Regional Sports Centre.

Structure of the Community and Voluntary Forum

Area Community and Voluntary Fora, mirror the four Area Committees of the County Council. To take account of groups that have a countywide remit (as

distinct from a specifically local remit), another countywide Area Forum was established.

Acknowledging the distribution of population in the county, each Area Forum will select representatives to the County Forum. The numbers of representatives are as follows:

- Coole Area 3
 - Athlone Area (Urban & Rural) 6
 - Kilbeggan Area 3
 - Mullingar Area (East & West) 6
 - County Remit 3
- Total 21

Area Fora and the County Forum meet at least three times per year.

Criteria for affiliation to the Community and Voluntary Forum

It is necessary to meet the following criteria in order to become a member of the Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum.

All Groups must:

1. Be able to demonstrate that they have been in existence for twelve months prior to completing the application form.
2. Have a listed membership of at least six people.
3. Hold an Annual General Meeting at

which Officers are elected.

4. Be an independent body, with its own decision-making powers, and not a sub-committee of any other group entitled to affiliate to the Forum.

5. Have a written constitution/statement of aims and objectives.

Affiliation forms and further details are available from Community & Enterprise Section, County Buildings, Mullingar or email: dce@westmeathcoco.ie.

Alternatively download from www.westmeathcoco.ie/cdb/forms.

Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum is recognised as an important cog in the decision making and policy formulation processes within Westmeath Local Authorities and it is also acknowledged that the Forum in Westmeath has evolved as a strong, willing and able contributor to the processes that have shaped and continue to shape the future of County Westmeath. In 2006 the Forum made a comprehensive submission to the review of the County Development Plan, and the Active Citizenship Taskforce. The Forum is also a strong supporter of the Volunteerism Project.

COMPETITION

Answer the following questions and be in with a chance to win one of three prizes of €75 (individual entries) or one of three prizes of €100 (group/organisation entries).

1. What is the title of the Westmeath Sports Partnership Strategy?
2. Which Westmeath entry won the All Ireland Pride of Place Industrial Heritage Award?
3. What is the Citizens Information Lo-Call telephone number?
4. How many Westmeath schools have reached Green Flag status.

Please submit your answers in number order, stating your name, address and contact telephone number. For groups/organisations please state the name of your group/organisation.

Entries should be sent to: Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum, c/o Community & Enterprise Section, Westmeath County Council, County Buildings Mullingar. Closing date for receipt of entries is Friday 26th January 2007.

This Newsletter is a publication by the Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum. The publication of this newsletter is in conjunction with the support of Westmeath County Council and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Contact Details : dce@westmeathcoco.ie or phone 044 9332137

Westmeath Community & Voluntary Forum

Newsletter Draw 24th May 2006

Group Winners: (each received €100)

- A. Delvin Friendship Club.
Killucan,
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
- B. Rochfortbridge Social Services
C/o Margaret Nolan,
Rochfortbridge,
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
- C. 3rd & 4th Class,
St. Mary's NS Raharney
Raharney, Co. Westmeath

Individual Winners: (received €75)

- A. Madeleine Nally,
Lissnascreen, Glasson.
- B. Mary Brady,
37 Derrgreenagh Park, Rochfortbridge.
- C. Danielle Allison,
188 River Village, Monksland, Athlone.