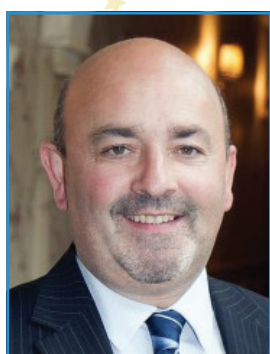




Celebrating Learning



Dr Christy Duffy
Chief Executive,
LWETB

In everyday conversation you rarely hear people speak about celebrating learning. We associate learning with other words. Boring. Hard work. Painful. But celebrating learning are two words that you rarely hear spoken together.

Yet celebrating learning is what we are all about in LWETB. We may not always use those words or indeed maybe we do not use them often enough. Goal 2 of our LWETB Strategy Statement 2017-2022 is to 'Enhance the learning experiences and outcomes for learners'. Everything we do is centred around how we can improve the learning experience of our learners and improve their options and widen their choices in life.

In LWETB we have a huge range of learners, from apprentices starting their trades to adults returning to learning and from young people grappling with their learning needs to those exploring their university or career options. Learning does not primarily happen when learners, whether young people or adults, are sitting quietly in a classroom with their heads down. Learning takes place in a variety of settings and situations and celebrating learning can even happen at an airport, as you can read about later on.

Celebrating learning does not mean that learning is always enjoyable or easy. Some of the best lessons in life are learned from or in the hardest and

most difficult circumstances. Celebrating learning does not mean we are always smiling and having fun. But if we cannot celebrate learning or find joy in learning then we have to ask, is any real learning taking place? Real learning must, at its core, be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience, otherwise there will never be an appetite or thirst for learning and lifelong learning will never be advanced or become a reality.

This edition of the newsletter tries to give a snapshot of how this is happening in LWETB. Every day, in many ways, we celebrate learning in LWETB. Let us not be shy about it or afraid of it. It is what we do best. Let's celebrate learning.

Final Meeting of the LWETB Board of 2014-2019

As its five-year term winds to a close, the LWETB Board held its final meeting at the Mullingar Park hotel on Wednesday the 27th of March.

Front Row L – R: Fr. Paul Connell, Cllr. Tom Farrell, Cllr. Seamus Butler, Cllr. Frankie Keena (Chairperson), Cllr. Una D'Arcy, Ms. Denise Watkins, Cllr. Emily Wallace, Ms. Liz Lavery (Director of Schools)

Back Row L – R: Mr. Charlie Mitchell (Director of Organisation Support and Development), Ms. Geraldine Lee (Corporate Services), Cllr. Liam McDaniel, Cllr. Pat O'Toole, Ms. Elaine Farrelly (Corporate Services), Ms. Pauline Smyth,



Ms. Tess Murphy, Ms. Celine Kearney Medforth, Cllr. Michael Dollard, Cllr. Sorca Clarke, Mr. Declan Flanagan, Cllr. Ken Glynn, Dr. Christy Duffy (Chief Executive), Ms. Antonine Healy (Director of Further Education & Training)

Missing from Picture: Mr. Mark Murphy, Cllr. Peggy Nolan, Mr. Pat O'Rourke, Cllr. Mae Sexton

“It’s easier for your brain to operate on autopilot when the days are shorter” Aspiring astronauts give account of Columba College trip to Brussels

It was pitch dark when my alarm went off at 2am on Friday the 22nd of March. But on this particular morning, I didn’t mind. Because although I was going to Columba Killucan, I wouldn’t be going into the school. I’d be getting on a bus bound for Dublin airport for our 6.30am flight to Belgium.

Although it was early, there was a real feeling of excitement on the bus. Even the teachers seemed excited. Maybe they were happy to be out of the classroom too.....

We were staying at the Euro Space Center, an hour and a half outside Brussels, and although we took many trips during our 4-day visit, this was to be our base.

A man called Bastian (whose accent was hard to understand) welcomed us and told us what we were about to experience at the Space Center. On day one, we’d learn what it was like to walk on the moon. Then on day two, we’d learn how to create and launch model electronic rockets. On the last day, we’d be split into space crews where we’d do



Group photo of Columba College students

a simulated mission to space.

It can be hard sometimes to see how the things we learn in Maths and Science class in Columba Killucan are related to things we might have to do in real life. But in the Euro Space Centre, we saw that for astronauts, knowledge of Maths and Science could be the difference between life and death.

The spaceships they travel in have been designed using calculus and algebra. Through mathematical formulas, the engineers can predict how the spacecraft will react to certain conditions in space, and the astronauts need knowledge of physics to understand the orbiting of planets and stars in the atmosphere.

Some of my classmates already knew quite a lot about astronomy, and in the space mission simulation teams, they were great leaders. But it didn’t mean that others in the team were less useful. I found that some people were better at following the commands than others, while others had positive personality types that were really good for team spirit when the team was struggling.

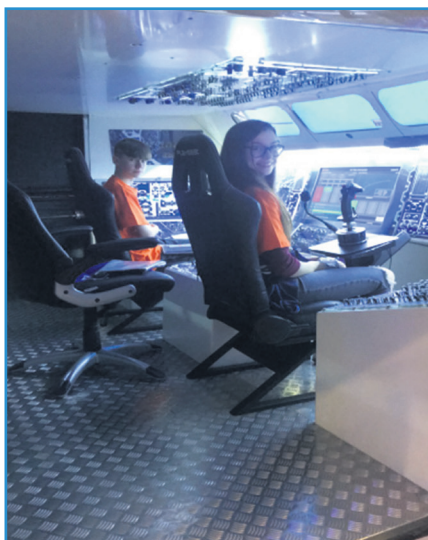
Our teachers seemed really impressed with us.

We weren’t in the Space Center the entire time though and every day brought a new adventure. We crossed the border into the Netherlands and went shopping in the beautiful city of Maastricht, we went to an indoor Waterpark, and on the last day (my favourite of all), we went to a theme park where my friends and I went on just about every ride possible.

Somebody once told me that when you’re experiencing new things, days can seem much longer because your brain is working hard to collect all the unfamiliar information. In normal life, because everything is the same, it’s easy for your brain to operate on autopilot and the days seem shorter.

This whole trip definitely felt this way for me. When I was in bed at night thinking about all the things we had done that day, it always seemed like that morning had happened ages ago.

On the way to the airport for our flight home, the bus was really quiet. It felt like everybody was really deflated that the trip was coming to an end. It



Columba College students at the Space Centre in Brussels

didn't help when we discovered that our flight was going to be delayed for 4 hours....But we weren't finished just yet!

For some reason, there was a piano in the departures area, and two of my classmates got up and performed some pieces for all the people in the waiting

area, which really helped to pass the time. Word spread to the pilot too and he thanked us for the music through the intercom on board the flight.

It was after midnight when I finally got back into my bed. It felt like so much had happened since my alarm shook me awake 4 days before.

Columba College students entertain frustrated passengers at Brussels airport



Castlepollard's technological revolution

"Has this new technology made it easier for you to do schoolwork compared to before?"

3 seconds of silence.....

"....it's....eh....it's just always been this way."

And even though I'm having this conversation over the phone, I can almost see Matthew O Reilly look at his classmate Aaron Fagan and roll his eyes.

These are two second year students from Castlepollard Community College (CCC), and I'm talking to them about the latest technologies that have been introduced to the school.

Asking people who can't remember a time before the electronics revolution about the benefits of technological progress, can be a tricky business. With nothing to compare it against, they expect and even demand high standards in technology; a demand CCC are managing to meet.

At the beginning of Matthew and Aaron's Junior Cycle, the school obliged every student in the year to buy an iPad.

Using this, they would have access to OneNote, an online cloud storage application similar to Google Drive, which allows teachers and students to post and share schoolwork.

I quickly realise that my trite line of questioning will need some adjustment.

"If you no longer had access to OneNote and your iPads were taken off you, how would this affect your work?"

Aaron takes this one.

"Well, we have access to all our school textbooks in digital format through OneNote, so it would mean that we'd have to start bringing in our big heavy text books again every day, rushing around in the morning looking for them and all that, and...."

Matthew interrupts. Now we're getting places.

"And if we didn't have the iPads or OneNote, we wouldn't be able to keep up with what's going on if we're out sick. With OneNote, the teacher shares the notes from class. And we have an online group where we can ask questions if we don't understand something..."

Back to Aaron.

"Without the iPads, we'd have to take handwritten notes. They can sometimes be hard to read later on and it's harder to concentrate in class when you're writing down notes."

And just like that, I have all the information I need, the advantages of this new technology implicit.



Matthew O Reilly and Aaron Fagan

These things might seem trivial in isolation. But take away these norms to which they are accustomed, and the accumulated effect tells you how much more fluid their learning day has become.

PPPs AND APPLE TVs

The new Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) model at Junior Cycle level means students are graded on regular PowerPoint Presentations (PPP) made to the class in Maths, English and Science.

Where until recently, a student would have to rely on a physical sheet of notes (and their own charisma) to keep their fellow classmates engaged, now they can use audiovisual props in tandem with the new Apple TV system to develop their presentation skills.

Aaron explains.

"My English presentation is about my interest in hurling. So if I want to talk about a certain skill, I can use a video to show the class what I mean. It just makes it more interesting and entertaining for them, and easier for me to explain. You know sometimes if you're talking to a friend about something they don't really care about it, it can help if you show them a photograph so they can picture it."

The Apple TVs have also done away with the stereotypical image we have of a lone individual, pacing anxiously back and forth in front of the class.

"We can just do the presentations from our seats now," Aaron explains.

"With the presentations on our iPads, we can just sync this to the whiteboard in front of the class with the Apple TV and control PowerPoint from there. So it also means loads of time is saved because there's no disruption and moving around between presentations and...."

"A second year student actively looking to avoid disruptions in class?," I interrupt, genuinely bemused.

"Well Mrs Coyle (Castlepollard Principal) is here beside me, and you see we have this online system now called S-Wave, where teachers can record our behavior, and if you get a certain score, you get a prize, so...."

And away they go again, explaining another new technology, blissfully ignorant of the inexorable progress that has taken place since the days when the only reward for good behavior, was not being caned!

"WHO KNEW FRENCH COULD BE FUN?"



Laura Delaney

"Une chambre, une cuisine, une salle de bain, le salon...."

Try as I might to catch Laura Delaney (First year, Castlepollard Community College) out on rooms of the house in French, I cannot. One by one, she boldly reels them off.

If you ask her how she has attained this level of fluency, she'll tell you all about Quizlet and Cahoot, two online gaming applications that help students learn languages.

"The apps work a bit like any normal quiz, where you choose a certain topic like food, or sports, or items of clothing.

They take you through the French words and then you test yourself to see how much you've learned. You can then compete against your classmates and that kind of adds a bit of excitement to the learning as well."

This type of classroom activity is facilitated once again by the iPads and offers an intriguing alternative to the traditional textbook format.

Laura, by her own admission, is competitive, her temperament suited to this type of learning. But she is also aware of others in her class who prefer a gentler approach.

"I'm lucky because I seem to be able to learn languages quite easily. I've been to France a few times when I was younger which probably helped me absorb the sounds. But for people who are less confident, you can also use the apps to work together in teams, rather than against each other, which is a way of making sure everyone feels they're making progress."

One of the big changes in the new Junior Cycle is that Laura and her classmates will now be rewarded for digital work. They are developing 'e-portfolios' which will feature a range of online, iPad-based work on which they will be graded.

This allows the younger generation to benefit from skills natural to them.

"For example, we had to create an online profile of our families for the e-portfolio and write about them in French. But we were able to use photographs and audiovisual aids to help tell our stories. We would be quite used to doing this kind of stuff anyway through just generally using computers and smartphones, so it's nice to be able to get marks for that."

Compared to the recent past where any deviation from standard textbook learning was viewed as somewhat whimsical, incorporating elements of design, photography and audiovisuals into a subject like French allows students

to be creative about their approach, and to explore more modern ways of learning.

"WE'RE VERY ATTACHED TO THE NEW 3D PRINTER"



Breffni Moore and Cillian Smith

When we get used to using a certain technology, it can become very difficult to imagine life without it. If it breaks down, or if we lose it, it feels like your life has suddenly become unlivable.

The enthusiasm with which 5th year Breffni Moore and 6th year Cillian Smith talk about Castlepollard's newly acquired 3D Laser Printer, makes me fear for their wellbeing should anything happen to it.

"So I'm studying Engineering for the Leaving, and before the printer, I'd have to be cutting and carving identical models by hand, trying to be as precise as possible with measurements to make sure they were the same. But now I can just do one, and duplicate it digitally in a matter of minutes with the printer. The amount of time this saves me is unreal," says Cillian. "It just means I can spend loads of time focusing on other important aspects of the project."

Cillian's vision for his future is clear. He'll apply to the National Marine College of Cork to do Marine Engineering, and if he's successful, will already have a significant head start given that they use very similar technologies there.

Like many of his compatriots, Cillian has humility in abundance. Asked whether he uses what he has learned with the new technology for any other work outside of school, he says he hasn't. But following a prompt from his principal Mary Coyle, it turns out that,

well, he was lying.

"Oh yeah, well I did actually design and make a load of wooden Christmas decorations last year which I sold in the school around Christmas time."

"....And??....." goads Mary.

He laughs nervously.

"Well, they were very popular here and sold out within a couple of days"

Meanwhile Breffni Moore, who studies Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) has been using Solidworks, a powerful software that

enables him to digitally design buildings and other structures.

"I want to study architecture in college, so using Solidworks gives me a fair idea of how actual architects go about their work. It's fairly complex software and I'm still getting to grips with it but kind of excited as well about getting deeper into it as I go on."

With a general move away from analogue towards digital, some lament how manual ability and knowledge of the functioning of tangible structures

as essential skills, are receding. No such fear with Breffni.

"Ah no, my family are welders so I'd be well used to manual work as well. I'd do a good bit work now at home, building sheds and stuff like that so I have decent knowledge of both worlds. Digital isn't necessarily replacing analogue. When you use it properly, it actually just makes the manual work easier, generating mathematical formulas and algorithms without having to get the abacus and the scales out."

Happy buildings make happy people; Ardscoil Phádraig and its new ASD Unit

There are two ways to look at a building.

You can take a practical approach and look at it as nothing more than bricks and mortar, tiles and carpets, walls and tables; all anodyne objects within a functional structure that has a specific purpose.

Or you can look at it as something that makes us feel; where the colour of the walls, the texture of the carpets, the choice of furniture, are all things that have an impact on how content we can be within it.

Fifth year Joshua Feeney (or Josh as he's known to friends and staff) is one of eighteen students in the new Autism Unit at Ardscoil Phádraig in Granard, and it's clear that he, along with the rest of his classmates, subscribes to this philosophy.

This is obvious after only two minutes with Josh, who is charming, and completely at ease here. He moves slowly and carefully, his smile unwavering, as he proudly leads me on a tour of the building, beginning in his own classroom, Cluain Eala.

Like the other two classrooms, it's a large, spacey, bright room. Each student has his or her own desktop

space which are very personal and specific to the student. A glance at each offers an insight into that student's personality, their hobbies and their learning capabilities.

When we reach his desk (pictured), Josh talks me through it.

"This," he says pointing to the mobile phone number cello-taped to the desk, *"is Mammy's mobile phone number. Yesterday I learned it off by heart and now I can say it without looking at it."*

I give him a quick test and his story checks out.

"I love colouring. I did that," he replies when I ask him about the

immaculately-coloured, *"JOSH 2019"*.

Mary Sharkey, Assistant Principal and head of the unit, is with us, and interjects, *"Josh would colour and draw all day long if we let him. Wouldn't you Josh??"*

He laughs heartily before responding sheepishly... *"Yes"*

Chaos, to some degree or another, is an inevitable part of an autistic person's life.

Everything they do here, every single day, is geared towards minimising the potential for chaos in their lives.

"We'd bring them into Granard a lot, and get them to order their own food and drink in the restaurant, so that when they leave here, they'll be able to do this on their own. I assign SNAs to each student in the unit and they would



Josh Feeney in the ASD Unit

become very close. But even though it's really hard for both the students and the SNAs, I purposely split them up after a few months and assign them to new students," Mary explains.

The idea, is to prepare the kids for the reality of what awaits them after school, where they'll have to get used to change and dealing with the concept of people coming and going from their lives.

"We recently learned that too many voices, tiny interruptions that don't even register for mainstream kids, can be harmful for kids in the unit. For example, if I come in to the classroom to deliver a message to a teacher or an SNA, even something like this can cause distress. We're constantly trying to learn how to make their lives as comfortable as possible."

The tour moves forward, Josh ever-present by my side.

"Then there's the chill-out room. It's where we go to calm down if we're feeling upset or angry....and this is the sensory room, where we can relax and take it easy..."

The sensory room is really something. A warm, quiet, dimly lit room with a huge comfortable bean bag in one corner, an aquarium bubbling in the other, and soft toys and cushions spread across the floor.

For a few seconds, we both ignore the fact that there is another student fast asleep on the bean bag, looking as comfortable as is possible for a human being to be, before Josh says, *"Oh...this is Conor,"* and lets out another huge infectious laugh.

I've never been in an ASD unit before, and I'm genuinely taken aback by how progressive it all seems, and by how understanding the staff are of their needs.

However, before the new unit was built, things were not so straightforward.

There are numerous myths and

stereotypes about autistic people. But one thing that is consistent is the need for routine and structure in their day.

When this gets interrupted, Mary explains, it can cause them huge distress.

"Before the new unit was opened, we didn't have an integrated space. The classrooms, the resources, were scattered throughout the school and the rooms were tight and overcrowded. So transitioning between classes and activities could be really difficult for the students and could trigger all sorts of distressing behaviour that would throw their entire day completely off kilter. It's an absolute dream to have this space now."

Put simply, they could not focus on the details that create the productive environment for the students were it not for the new space.

"It's the foundation upon which everything else is built."

The tour winds to a close, and we finish up in the living area, before I wave goodbye to Josh.

With only one more year left in the school, it's hard to know what challenges await him and his classmates beyond their days at Ardscoil Phádraig.

But I'm certain of one thing as I watch him return to his classroom, flanked by two friends, a smiling SNA and teacher standing at the door, to his personal desktop space where his art, his mother's mobile phone number, and Thomas the Tank Engine will welcome him; As long as he's in this space, things will be ok.

Josh Feeney went through great effort to write a piece for us about his life in Ardscoil Phádraig, which you can read below.



Josh Feeney in the ASD Unit

A day in the life in Ardscoil Phádraig

Hi I'm a 5th year student in Ardscoil Phádraig. I study subjects like Art, Computers, Woodwork, Music, Home Economics, PE, Metalwork and Social Education. My favourite subject is Woodwork because my grandad was a carpenter and I want to follow in his footsteps. I really enjoy sports day at school because I like running, playing football and playing with my friends.

Some of my friends enjoy going to the sensory room and water play. I have gone on many trips while in this school. I have been to Tayto Park, Bord Gais Energy Theatre, Glendeer Pet Farm, Cinema trips, Kiernan Milling, Pat the Baker and Butlers Chocolate Factory to name a few.

While I was in TY, I enjoyed learning to drive a car, swimming, Lough Key Forest Park and horse riding. I also learn meditation, life skills like going shopping and cooking.

I love PE class where I play football, basketball, dance, tennis, badminton and dodge ball. I also play pool, go on our swing and enjoy our walks. I have even taken part in a Panto!

I love the Discovery Building because we have more space here. The class rooms are bright and have more equipment in them. I go to the mainstream classes like Maths, Home Economics and PE. I am delighted that I came to this school because I have made some great friends.

Athlone win war of words at inaugural LWETB debating competition

What separates the people at the top from all the rest?

It's a question that Barack Obama's speechwriter Ben Rhodes can answer in one nifty sentence; *'Ability to work under pressure'*

When Obama's administration came to an end, Rhodes wrote a book about his time in the White House and in it, he says that there are thousands of people who, on any normal stress-free day, could have done his job.

But imagine a day where the media discover something very sensitive about The President. Journalists flock to The White House and are demanding a comment. Everybody in your office is panicking and it's your job to write something in the President's name that will make the problem go away. The world is watching.

People at the very top, he explains, are the ones that can keep calm in these types of situations.

It's Tuesday April 30th and I'm in the Mullingar Park Hotel.

Ben Rhodes' words are on my mind as I watch the debating teams of Lanesboro (managed by Fergal Mcelgunn) and Athlone (managed by Hazel Dooley) Community Colleges take their seats for the final of the first

LWETB Debating Competition.

The four students on each team are second years, and I wonder whether this is the first time they've experienced such pressure. Their speeches might have sounded great on their own in front of the bedroom mirror last night, but this is another level.

We're in a large, sterile, intimidating room, ornate chandeliers adorn the ceiling. The crowd is full of students and teachers who are staring up at them. A table of judges, including our own Director of Schools Liz Lavery and Athlone students Eve Conway and Emily Dillon, are sat in front of them, pen and paper at the ready, watching their every move.

They'll step up to the podium and hear the unfamiliar sound of their own voice fill the room through a set of speakers.

On top of all that, they'll have to remember the lines they've learned off, to speak slowly and clearly, and to look out at the judges and the crowd as they speak.

It all seemed so much easier in front of the bedroom mirror. No matter what happens now, this will be a worthwhile learning experience for these students.

First up to the podium is Lanesboro

captain Carla Farrell, whose team are in favour of the motion 'It's time to abolish the Internet'.

She sets out a compelling case for her team. *"We need to live in the moment,"* she bellows, a reference to people who insist on filming and photographing everything for online self-promotion.

Athlone's captain Molly Mulvihill Wilkins is next and starts by asking an uncomfortable question of her Lanesboro rivals, *"How many of you,"* she says, turning towards the opposition, *"used the internet when researching points for this very debate??"*

Lanesboro's Callum Gordon highlights the decline of towns and villages because of online shopping. As he speaks, the Athlone girls write furiously, having perhaps anticipated his points, and now preparing a dreaded rebuttal.

Athlone's Nikka Campbell quickly delivers it, *"Lanesboro,"* she says calmly, *"You talk about the damage that online shopping does to retailers, and this is true. But this often brings out the best in businesses, who adapt and improve to confront new challenges."*

Eoin Murray of Lanesboro then tackles the minefield that is Social Media, providing sobering statistics that highlight the link between teen suicide rates, and cyberbullying.

Róisín Kenny of Athlone bites back with a point about the lives that have been saved, not lost, because of the internet, by talking about Shauntelle Tynan, the young woman whose online *Go Fund Me* campaign helped pay for her life-saving treatment in the US.

Last up for Lanesboro is Patrick Lane, and concerns around privacy form the basis of his argument, citing the misuse of data by Facebook in the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

The final speaker for Athlone is Johanna Hughes, who compared the internet to a library. *"You might not like*



Athlone Community College team

L-R: Liz Lavery (LWETB Director of Schools), Molly Mulvihill Wilkins (Capt), Nikka Campbell, Róisín Kenny, Johanna Hughes, Hazel Dooley (Teacher)

every book on every shelf, but do we burn it down as a result? Of course we don't."

A tense ten minutes of deliberation follows, before Liz Lavery, acknowledging how difficult a decision it was, announced Athlone Community College as the winners.

If you win the lottery, you were poor, but now you're rich. However, the obvious cause and effect in this case is the exception rather than the rule.

The impact that life events have on us tend to be a lot subtler.

People like Ben Rhodes didn't wake up one day with an ability to withstand pressure. It was by continuously putting himself in pressure situations over a long period of time that allowed him to develop this ability.



Lanesboro Community College team

L-R: Fergal McElgunn (Teacher), Patrick Lane, Callum Gordon, Eoin Murray, Carla Farrell (Capt), Liz Lavery (LWETB Director of Schools)

These eight students have not banished the notion of pressure from their lives and we won't be seeing them on the plinth at Áras an Uachtaráin next year. But events like this are

unquantifiably valuable for these students, their impact hovering like a wraith in their subconscious, until they're ready to reveal themselves to the world.

Diversity of Learner Experiences in Mullingar Community College

My experience of sixth year – Shannon

The leaving cert is very important to me because my mother never sat it. She has regretted this every day of her life. However, she did something about it and in her 40s she went back to education and graduated from Trinity College with a degree. The leaving cert is very difficult and it is the most stressful thing I have ever done in my life. I understand why people drop out before the exams in Leaving Cert. To stay focused and on task in your leaving cert year, you need to do the following three things:

1. Start working in fifth year and DO



Shannon Byrne

NOT leave all the work until sixth year.

2. I hate saying it but I know it to be true!! You HAVE to study.

3. Get the projects, practicals and tasks done as EARLY as possible.

My experience of LCA – Lee

I did the Leaving Cert Applied programme because I wanted work experience. I wanted this experience in fifth and sixth year so as when I left school, I would have more advantages than the other boys that did the established Leaving Cert. I actually love the LCA because it is so practical. I have a class every week in Maths and Business and we look at how to do our taxes so as when I have my own garage, I will have the knowledge to work with my accountant. I have spent my year doing presentations and interviews and I am very ready for the world of work. For me, I am an excellent athlete and believe in health, fitness and healthy eating. As the LCA has no exams and tasks that



Lee Ryan

can be done quickly, I spent a lot of my time getting involved in school sports like rugby, GAA, soccer and running. I have learned that being in school can be fantastic in LCA. You have time for work experience, sport, trips outside of school, and learning skills that you will need in years to come. Things like homework and exams become very unimportant in LCA and are replaced with things that the student enjoys and does well in.

My experience of joining a new school in fifth year – Barbara

I decided to come to Mullingar Community College in fifth year because I did not want to do transition year in my old school and because I was young,

Mullingar students turn the lens on Ireland's vulnerable newcomers

Refugees and Asylum seekers in Ireland

Written by Eoin Durkan, 3rd year, Mullingar Community College

It's becoming harder to ignore the fact that there's a world outside of Ireland, and a world outside of Mullingar.

The ethnic diversity in our classrooms is one sign of this, but there are more sinister signs too, with Direct Provision centres popping up all over the country.

By focusing our C.S.P.E project on refugees and asylum seekers here, we wanted to raise awareness of their plight.

We didn't need to look any further than our own school corridors to find the perfect starting point. We asked our Syrian classmate, who arrived in Ireland as a refugee to escape the Civil War in his own country, to speak to us about what

he experienced from the beginning of his journey in war-torn Syria, to his journey halfway across the world, to his new life in Mullingar.

It was really sobering to hear his story, and to be honest, made us all grateful about how easy we have it here in Ireland.

But we wanted to convert that feeling of gratitude into action, and the next part of the project reflected this.

We spent 3-4 weeks organising a 5k walk, followed by a coffee morning, where a guest speaker came to talk to the crowd about the struggles faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

Now that we've completed the project, and that I've had time to reflect, there is one quote that comes to mind; *"The road to hell is paved with good intentions."*

It's one thing to talk about doing something good for people, but actually bringing an idea to fruition is something else entirely, and having had to go through the process of organising an event like this, I can see why so many ideas are never completed.

We had to decide what we actually wanted to do, then we had to arrange food and drinks, we had to book the speaker, we had to promote the event to students, friends and family, we had to make sure we had the right sound equipment, enough seating, and there were various health and safety issues we had to look into as well.

Finally, I think it's important to remember when you're getting bogged down in these details, the fundamental reason you're doing it in the first place, and all I needed to do was think of my Syrian classmate and others like him, to get my motivation back.

teachers kept recommending it for me. When I joined Senior Cycle in this school, I had friends here already which made the transition much easier. The school is closer to home and I walk to and from school every day. I have never been as healthy or fit in all my life!! Leaving my old school was the best thing I ever did for me. I absolutely hated it and now I am happy, I am sitting my leaving cert and I have got my place in PLC college. I know that if you do not like school, you are at risk of dropping out and regardless of what the school is like, if you like it, you will do well. A good school has nothing to do with money, good reputation, loads of subjects or a snazzy uniform. For me, a good school is all about the people in it, the friends you make, the teachers that speak to you about things outside of school and classes that are taught in a fun environment. For me, joining a new school has been the most positive thing in my life and I am so happy that this new school accepted me and made me feel welcome.



Jan Koluch



Gerard Nevin

First year SPHE Class- our experiences – Johnny (Jan) and Gerard

After a year in SPHE, we have learned three very important things. We learned that bullying is wrong on every level and the advice given by our teacher was to

tell an adult. Secondly, if anyone in first year has a problem there is someone in the school there to talk to them about it. There has to be no fear about this. Staff – teachers and SNAs in MCC are all there to listen and help us. Thirdly, smoking is not the only problem now for teenagers as vaping has become very popular. We learned that vaping is now dangerous and has chemicals and is bad for your lungs. We learned so much about how to deal with life and be more aware of ourselves in SPHE.



L-R: Juanita Coyne (Guidance Counsellor), Jan Koluch, Gerard Nevin, Shannon Byrne, Lee Ryan

“Taking ‘Care’ of Business; Maintenance Caretaker Jack Walsh on student life in Mullingar Community College

Everybody knows the unsatisfying feeling that comes with a disappointing experience at a restaurant. The only available seats were near the entrance, a loud stag party at the next table guffawed their way obnoxiously through the evening between audible mouthfuls of beef, and the waiters seemed more focused on avoiding eye contact than on the six plates of food they were carrying.

We then do everything we can to “get even”. We leave no tip, tell the waiter what we think of them, and vow to spend the rest of our days badmouthing the restaurant to anybody who’ll listen.

“Compare that,” says Jack Walsh, “to a lovely experience. Where the music was nice, the seats were comfortable, the food was good, the staff were friendly. You leave feeling delighted. That’s the kind of atmosphere I try to create for students in the school.”

Jack is the Maintenance Caretaker at Mullingar Community College, and he sees the school as one giant restaurant, where his aim every day is to keep 350 students happy.

“What you certainly don’t want,” he says with a deadly serious expression, “is 350 students trying to get even.”

Originally from Waterford, Jack is an electrician by trade, but his life could have taken a different path. Though he got the points to go to university, his parents couldn’t afford to send him so he took an apprenticeship instead, work that brought him from multinational American factories, to the meat industry, to self-employment, and for the last 14 years, to Mullingar Community College.

He concedes that his ‘treat people how you want to be treated’ philosophy is easy to talk about, less easy to put into practice, and is only something that can be made solid through a lifetime of experience.



Jack Walsh in the school canteen

“For example, I’d often be doing a job around the school, fixing a door lock or something. And I’d have a drill with me. A young lad would pass by and he’d say, ‘What’s that’??”

Jack stares at me, playing the role of the abrupt student, pointing to an imaginary drill on the floor.

“What’s that??” he repeats.

“Now if a young lad had said that to me 20 years ago, I’d have snapped back and told him to mind his own business. But now when that happens, I answer the question. I tell him what I’m doing. I invite him to sit down. I’ll even let him drill a hole for me if he wants to. And I get to know them that way. They’re not being rude these lads, this is just the way they talk, and once you speak to them with respect, you can develop a great rapport.”

Jack’s patient manner with students is just one of the many details he focuses on to ensure the students go home feeling good. He tells a story of an old factory manager of his to illustrate.

“When he came to work, this man would make a beeline for the public areas; the toilets, the reception, the place out the front where the bins were kept. He’d be making sure that if a stranger came to visit the place, they’d know by how well these areas were kept that it was a productive place, a welcoming place.”

In Jack’s daily work, this means making sure the toilets are clean, that the taps are functioning, that door handles are working, that the classrooms are

freshly painted, that there’s no graffiti on the walls.

But it also means looking out for children who might be feeling low, or who might need a cup of tea, or who might be hungry.

Being in school is hard at the best of times, and trying to minimise student stress in every possible way is always a priority for school staff. Looking after all these details can put a smile on a student’s face, even though they might not necessarily always know why they’re smiling. And this, Jack says, gives him satisfaction.

The role of Maintenance Caretaker is unique. Free of the responsibility of having to dish out homework and exams, they can play a more avuncular role. Though this can sometimes put Jack in an uncomfortable position.

“You’d be out doing a job in some backwater of the school, and you’d come across a group having a fag. They’d look up at you and go, ‘Are you going to rat us out?’...what they’re really saying is, ‘are you one of us or one of them?’”

“And do you rat them out?” I ask.

“No comment,” comes the reply.



LWETB school secretaries during a training day at Head Office in Marlinstown

Jack Walsh was one of the many staff members who participated in some of LWETB’s training days for our school secretaries and maintenance staff this year. They visited our head office, discussed their daily challenges with LWETB management and partook in ICT and other training, as part of the initiative.

Setting teachers on fire in the name of science; Ballymahon's Leadership Cluster starts with a bang

Primary and secondary school students in Longford gathered in the gym at Ballymahon Vocational School (BVS) on Friday the 3rd of May, for the opening event of the 'Excellence Through Collaborative Leadership' programme.



Nathan Creagh, Darren Farrell and Cian Monaghan enjoying day 1 of the Leadership Cluster at Ballymahon

The Leadership Cluster, as it's known, brings BVS together with primary schools, third level institutions and businesses in the local area, in order to help students from primary school upwards, make connections between their education and the working world that awaits them.

The setup featured three distinct partitions. Behind each partition were representatives from local scientific institutions (Midlands Science, Athlone Institute of Technology and Abbott Ireland) who demonstrated, in wonderfully creative ways, the work they do and how it relates to subjects like Maths and Science.

In a process redolent of musical chairs, the students sit for 20-30 minutes at each exhibition before moving en masse to the next one.

They watch in delight as the scientists conduct an array of weird and wonderful experiments that include setting fire to a teacher's hand, playing 'Twinkle Twinkle' with a series of different-sized tubes and creating the sound of thunder from a hollow box.

The idea is to expose the students to

the possibilities in the local area, to draw their attention to professions in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects, and to show them real-life application of Science and Maths as subjects.

The students are so absorbed that Ballymahon 2nd years Cian Monaghan, Nathan Creagh and Darren Farrell sigh in unison when their teacher removes them from the exhibition to speak to me for 5 minutes.

"I won't keep ye long lads," I promise them apologetically. "I'll get straight to the point. Does a day like this help you to make connections between your Junior Cert subjects and the working world?"

"Yeah definitely," says Darren. "We only rarely do experiments in class so it's really cool to see stuff like this in real life."

Being somewhat constrained by having to cover the curriculum before the exams, teachers can't always take the time to conduct complicated experiments, so a day like this helps the students see much of the theory they learn put into practice.

"I don't think I want to leave Longford after I finish in school. I like that I know loads of people here and I like the quiet, so it's good to see as well that it might be possible to get a job with one of these companies later on," Cian tells me.

It's fitting then, that one of the main



Hold your fire!

goals of the project is to highlight to local students, the possibilities that exist in the midlands, with the long-term aim of stemming the flow of outward migration from the area.

"And what about you?", I ask Nathan. "Do you want to stay in the area as well?"

"No I want to go to Spain. The weather is much better over there and there's beaches and all", he replies wistfully.

The programme covers a lot, but one thing it certainly can't control, is the Irish weather.



Students getting into the swing of things

With the first event complete, project organisers Sinéad Healy and BVS Deputy Principal Siobhán Cullen breathe a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

"It's really nice to see all the theory put into action. The kids were absolutely buzzing going back to class so I think it's safe to say that it was a huge success," Sinéad says.

The next event will see representatives from Fáilte Ireland and Center Parcs deliver similar workshops to students, with the aim of alerting them to local heritage and to potential careers in the tourism industry.

Research shows that progressive school reform is most successful when students are included in the process. That means that they get to help shape and control the teaching, learning and teacher-student relationships in their own school.

Ballymahon staff and students work together in the name of positive reform



The Green Platform at Ballymahon Vocational School

Research shows that progressive school reform is most successful when students are included in the process. That means that they get to help shape and control the teaching, learning and teacher-student relationships in their own school.

'The Green Platform', recently introduced at Ballymahon Vocational School (BVs), champions this philosophy, and the entire staff this

year participated in training provided by Declan Coyle, a prominent Green Platform advocate.

The progressive system encourages teachers to reward positive behaviours and student achievements, the eventual aim of which is to help students make more positive life choices. With this in mind, BVS established a Green Platform noticeboard (pictured), which publicly showcases student achievement.

Termly check-ins, celebrations and small prizes celebrating good behaviour currently feature as components of BVS's Positive Behaviour Strategy

A new points system was also set up to monitor both positive and negative student behaviour.

These decisions were not taken unilaterally. In keeping with the collaborative philosophy, both students and parents were consulted on the new system.

Some key points emerged from consultation with students;

- that the distribution of positive points to those students in most need is critical, so these students feel that all is not lost.
- the chance to redeem oneself through the reinforcement of positive behaviours is seen as positive
- suggestions for new types of positive behaviours that could be rewarded

These points were reiterated at staff meetings, but also during a workshop with parents where potential improvements to the Code of Behaviour were discussed.

Jill Kelly Greene is back to the books at Templemichael

On leaving school, I originally studied Travel and Tourism before going on to work with Ryanair. After a short time with them, I realised that a change of career was on the cards.

The Beauty Therapy course was into its second year running at Templemichael College when I heard about it.

I successfully completed both beauty and body therapy in Templemichael and went on to Blackrock College to further my studies.

I opened my own salon which led to me getting my first years teaching in Templemichael College back in 2005.

In 2014, we were nominated for 2 international awards by our Confederation of International Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology (CIBTAC) examiner Lynn Gregory; CIBTAC Center of the Year and CIBTAC Tutor of the Year.

We were thrilled that Temple Michael won Center of the year 2014, especially being up against international schools from Bali, Hong Kong and Spain. The

department continued to thrive and we followed up by winning CIBTAC Tutor of the Year the following year.

The department has gone from strength to strength and we are proud of its solid reputation, with some of Irelands top spas and salons.

The Department now offers CIBTAC, ITEC and QQI qualifications in Aesthetics, Photographic and Fashion Make up, Body Therapy, Indian Head Massage, Electrical epilation, and IPL/ Laser and Microdermabrasion.

'Willkommen Frau Botschafterin' German ambassador inspires Lanesboro students

Written by Adam Kingi

Being able to make a speech when the German Ambassador Deike Potzel came to my school is an experience that I will never forget. The fact that I was able to play a part in this important day is something that fills me with pride. Ambassadors, and everything about them, remind me of a topic I take keen interest in; politics.

Politics shapes our lives in many unique ways, regardless of whether



Students getting into the swing of things



Students wait their turn to address the ambassador

you stay informed or not. I strongly feel that the youth should actively pursue an interest in politics, and that was the basis of my speech. I thoroughly enjoyed playing an active role in the German Ambassador's visit, and I will never forget that eventful day.

The German Ambassador's speech was one I felt very grateful to have been there to hear. My classmates and I gained a brilliant insight into life in East Germany. I was fascinated at how similar, yet so

different life was under communism. For example, I learned about how difficult it was to leave East Germany, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and how West and East Germany were two completely different places, even using a different style of clock!

I was also reminded at how important it is to learn German. Germany, in terms of population, is the largest country in the EU and German is among the most widely spoken languages in the world. Therefore, it is hugely beneficial for my future to have German as one of the languages I speak.

Thanks to the German Ambassador's visit, my communication skills were greatly improved. My self-worth and self-esteem were massively enhanced in ways I cannot describe. I really feel I brought out my inner potential I never knew I had. The time, energy and passion I put into my speech has given me renewed confidence in myself. Never would I have considered making a speech - now I can't wait to do it again!

Music Generation making sweet melodies in Athlone Community College

Athlone Community College has been participating in Music Generation Offaly Westmeath (MGOW) since 2014. Under the tutorage of Andrew Yau, who himself is a past pupil of ACC, students are offered group lessons in flute, voice and piano.

Currently there are 20 students participating in these lessons which are held every Friday in the instrument room and are run on a rotational basis, meaning students don't miss the same subject each week.

Andrew gives the students the opportunity to explore their interests in music by tailoring lessons to suit their interests and needs. He introduces the lesson by way of warm up exercise, whether it be on flute, voice or piano. These exercises are fun and help make

the students comfortable performing in front of their peers. Students also use instruments from the collection in ACC to aid their lessons and performance.

Transition year student Lia Deverux has been taking vocal lessons for two years and has an extremely positive experience from it *'I enjoy taking vocal lessons as Andrew makes sure to include everyone in the lesson and he incorporates his own songs with our songs which is fun. As I have an interest in singing, I now know how to warm up my voice properly before I sing which is extremely important'*



Athlone students playing piano

Corey Greene is a 3rd Year student who took up vocal lessons for the first time in September *'I had an interest in music for a while but was never given the proper chance to explore my interest. I like these lessons, it's a great experience and we get to enjoy time with fellow pupils who share the same interests as me. I also have made new friends through these lessons'*

Lessons are subsidized by MGOW and cost €100 for the year. Students sign up for the lessons at the end of August and they begin mid-September and run until mid-May.



Rockstars in the making at Athlone's Music Generation classes

LWETB works with schools to help deliver new Distributed Leadership model

A 2018 Department of Education and Skills (DES) circular has been heralded by many in the education sector as a watershed in Leadership and Management for Post-Primary schools.

By setting out the development of an enhanced middle-management structure, this circular provides a framework for LWETB schools to further enhance the high quality of its education provision, thereby enhancing student welfare, and helping them reach their academic potential.

These new Assistant Principal 1 and Assistant Principal 2 (AP1 and AP2) positions, will support Principals and Deputy Principals, through the formalization of specific areas of responsibility, and provide innovation and development of leadership opportunities for staff assuming the new roles.

Across the eight LWETB schools, there were 36 AP1/AP2s positions, most of which have been filled at this point.

In line with the circular, schools have spent considerable time identifying their needs and priorities. These priorities will be delivered by a '*distributed leadership*' model, where clearly identified areas of responsibility will be distributed across the management structure in our schools.

In real terms, this means that school's senior leadership can share the managerial and administrative burden with the new appointees, freeing them up to focus more on vision, strategic planning and enhancing quality education provision.

What we will see at the other end are happier classroom environments, the fundamental goal of these structural changes and indeed, LWETB!



LWETB school principals listen closely to Mary Rafferty during a day of training on leadership culture

However, for LWETB and its schools, it wasn't just a case of filling the positions.

As part of that process, schools had to identify specific areas in the school structures that required attention, so that APs were being assigned to the places that needed it most, and so that once appointed, they would understand exactly what needed to be done.

Now that this stage of the process is almost complete, attention turns to helping the new leaders, who may be in leadership positions for the first time, prepare for the challenges that await.

With this in mind, the LWETB organized five days of bespoke training aimed at school leaders and newly appointed AP's.

It began with three sessions for Principals and Deputy Principals, which will be followed by two days in May for

new and existing AP1 and AP2 staff in schools. The training was delivered jointly by Education Leadership Expert Mary Rafferty and the Director of Schools Liz Lavery.

Each day the sessions focused on a specific aspect of leadership, with the overall aim of equipping staff to deal with changes in leadership culture and to help make the transition for newly appointed as seamless as possible.

Although it's early days, the signs are positive as LWETB schools look forward to implementing the circular for the benefit of all members of the school community.

LWETB schools aim to provide the best possible learning experiences for all its students. This is delivered every day by our dedicated teaching staff and school leaders and it is hoped that this new era of leadership and management will enhance this as we go into the future.

"I felt like a failure, but Kilbeggan Youthreach got me back on my feet" Hayleigh Keogh celebrates learning.

As a student of Kilbeggan Youthreach, I can safely say that life is a busy one. Being a student here has given me so many opportunities to do things that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to do before. While there are always tough times, the hard work is worth it to be able to hold your head high and be proud of the things you have accomplished. I am writing this piece to celebrate the learning that takes place here, whether that be academically or otherwise.

Students in Kilbeggan Youthreach are held to a high standard. Staff here always encourage you to reach your full potential and do your best. While academic learning is key to getting where you want to go, it is not the only important thing in life. I've learned so many different life skills in the short time I've been here, and these things will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Whilst here, I have learned how to cook, how to make a presentation, how to work in a team and how to save a life. I have re-discovered how nice it feels to be kind in a world that needs better, I have gone back to a time where it doesn't feel silly to ask simple questions and I have travelled back to 1916 while wandering the halls of Kilmainham Gaol, wondering how Countess Markievicz felt, stuck behind the bars of her tiny prison cell.

I have learned these things and more and yet the learning never stops. It feels great to look forward to learning. When I was in school, I liked learning, but the constant overwhelming pressure ruined that for me in the end and I eventually dropped out. Devastated because I had "failed" and doing nothing because I simply had nothing to



Hayleigh Keogh and classmates at the Garda Youth Awards

do, I was left in a rut. I am so glad I found Youthreach when I did, so that made me wonder, did my fellow students feel the same? I decided to find out and found almost the same response from everyone I had asked, that Youthreach was one of the best decisions they had ever made.

I am also proud of what we have all achieved, individually and as a collective. The staff here are so supportive and motivate us to constantly strive to be better. Recently, our group was nominated at the Garda Youth Awards and we were announced as winners. Going up on that stage to be rewarded for our hard work in the community was shocking as I don't think I've ever won something that major before and I was not expecting it in the slightest.

I asked fellow winner Cillian what he thought of the whole experience and he said to me, "The Garda Youth Awards, that was definitely a bit weird. I wasn't really sure what it meant

at the start but when we got there and seen how much of a big thing it was and when I thought back to the various things I had done in previous years, it really put into perspective what we had been doing and what still are doing, it was fantastic, good".

It is things like this that make life in Youthreach so rewarding, to know that while working steadily away to complete your folders, there are people out there appreciating what you do. Even in your own little piece of the world, tucked away behind motorways and backroads, some small collective can make a difference. You can learn to make a difference and learn to make the world a better place, even while stressing out about algebra questions.

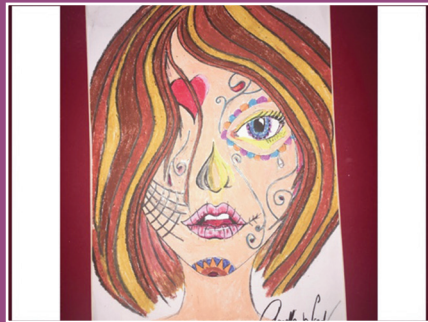
In short, you learn something new every day and I hope you've learned a little something by reading this. Be proud of your work no matter how small as you could make a big difference someday. Live life learning!

***"I always dreamed of becoming a teacher"* Chanelle Ward on how Longford Youthreach helped her back to education**

My name is Chanelle Ward. I am 20 years old and attended Longford Youthreach from September 2015 until June 2016.

As a member of the Travelling community, I followed the traditions and got engaged at a young age of 17, just after completing transition year in Mean Scoil Mhuire Longford. I always loved school and dreamed of becoming a teacher from an early age but leaving school early was one of the sacrifices I was willing to make upon beginning a new chapter in life. All the fuss from the wedding kept me occupied until after I was married, when I realised there was more to life than staying at home being a housewife and that I could continue with my education.

I found out about Youthreach from a relative who was already a student there and after contacting Sean, the Youthreach coordinator, and explaining my situation to him, he was more than happy to offer me a position on the programme. From the first day I started Youthreach I knew I had made the right choice. I loved all the subjects the course had to offer, especially Art which I had always a great passion for and practicing this in Youthreach helped me to improve greatly and learn new artistic techniques which I had not known before.



A sample of Chanelle's artwork

I gained and improved on so many useful skills such as teamwork, IT and communication skills during my time in Youthreach. While attending Youthreach I had the opportunity to participate in the Leap Foroige Youth Bank group where we worked as a team to distribute funds to local youth committees and present them with cheques. I also completed two weeks work experience with Leap Foroige which was very beneficial and gave me an insight to what it is like working with young people.

The guidance counselling programme in Youthreach was a great help for me. In the first year of married life, I found it hard to adjust to and all the changes such as moving out from home, struggling to be financially independent and leaving mainstream education which I had great passion for, had put a lot of

stress on me but having the guidance counsellor to talk to on a regular basis brought a huge relief to me as I was given great advice and guided in the right direction.

Overall, Youthreach has been a great experience for me. I made so many new friends throughout my time there, gained a lot of skills and it has brought many wonderful opportunities as completing the course has helped me get back on track with my education and helped me advance onto a level 5 course. I am now studying Tourism and Business which I hope to continue and achieve a career in the Tourism Industry. I have had the pleasure to participate in the Erasmus+ Programme and work in a busy tourist office in Tenerife for 3 weeks in February of this year, this could not have been possible if I had not completed QQI Level 4 in Youthreach.

I would highly recommend the Youthreach programme to young people looking to get back into education and gain many skills beneficial to the world of work. I had an amazing time and enjoyed every minute of the Youthreach programme and I hope it will bring as many wonderful opportunities to current and future students as it has brought to me.

Young men from Direct Provision enjoy trip to the Aviva with Longford Youth Service

A youth group from a County Longford Youth Service recently went on a trip to the Aviva stadium to cheer Ireland on in the European Qualifiers against Georgia. This is a newly formed group which was set up earlier this year.

The group of young men, who are all from the direct provision centre in Longford, and who all come from

different countries, are keen soccer players and have a passion for football.

This was a very enjoyable trip for them to cheer on their newly adopted country, from the trip up on the bus to toting out in the Ireland colours. The atmosphere was electric and it was great for them to see Ireland come out with a great win in the end.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs



How Longford Youthreach helped Noel Ward gain full-time employment

My name is Noel Ward and I attended Longford Youthreach from 2014-2016 after leaving mainstream school.

Youthreach was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. During my time in Youthreach I achieved my QQI level 3 and level 4 certificates, with distinctions in nearly all subjects. Sean and the staff worked out a plan to suit the student individual needs, they helped us work out our strengths and weaknesses while maintaining a friendly environment.

The teachers would take me out of class a couple of times a month for career guidance to help me get a better understanding of what I wanted to do with my future. One day during woodwork class the instructor said that I should try get into a carpentry and joinery apprenticeship. I've always had an interest in woodwork, so I said I would give it a try.

I gained an understanding of what employers liked to see in an employee, how to make a good c.v, good communication skills and good general work practice. Sean had mock interviews with me to give me a rough idea what to expect from potential employers and how

to handle it.

After a good few months and a couple of interviews, I landed an apprenticeship with one of Ireland's leading carpentry and joinery companies (Gem Construction). I am due to start college to get my qualification. The staff at Longford Youthreach helped me gain full-time employment and I don't think I would have done it without their help and I am very grateful to them.

I have many happy memories from Youthreach. I was goalkeeper on the winning team of the All-Ireland football championship, I went to Liverpool for three days to visit some historical sites, watch a football match and get a tour of Anfield. I climbed Croagh Patrick and saw a show in the Gaiety Theatre. The teachers ensured that we got at least two double sessions a week in the gym or on the football pitch and got to go on a trip once a month.

We learned how to cook and look after our physical and mental health.

One time we got an invitation from the President of Ireland for a 1916 memorial on Croke Park, where we received an Irish



Noel's award-winning photograph

flag and a copy of Poblacht Na hÉireann.

Now I am in full-time employment and I'm glad I got the chance to attend Longford Youthreach.



Youthreach is part supported by the Irish government and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020

The changing face of our learning habits

As retirement approaches, I am now reflecting on my twenty plus years working as a VTOS tutor. Overall, I have to say it has been a very enjoyable experience. I have met wonderful people - students from all over the world and my work colleagues made it even more enjoyable.

My main subject was Communications in which we discussed Interview and Presentation skills. We had much fun and laughter in the classroom. This, I believe, is integral to creating a positive learning environment.

As most students were in the "mature"

category, the approach was quite different to Secondary school teaching, which I had done in my pre-VTOS days.

I am quite confident that I learned as much from the students as they did from me. Punctuation and grammar was taught in a light-hearted way, but I hope all students improved!

I have seen many changes in my VTOS years, especially in the use of computers. These have become a large part of the students' learning and facilities in the centre have improved greatly over the years. We now have four rooms equipped



Marian Daly, Mullingar VTOS Tutor

with up-to-date computers and ICT Technology. Students are well prepared for the world of work when leaving VTOS. It gives me great pleasure to meet some of our former students who are now in full-time employment and to listen to positive feedback on their VTOS experience.

"This doesn't feel like school at all!" Opportunities abound for adult learners during Aontas Festival

Hundreds of prospective adult learners in Longford and Westmeath were shown the range of educational opportunities open to them, during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival in March.

The aim of the festival is to encourage and attract adults and early school-leavers back to education by running events that give people an insight into new career options, and to allow them ask questions of course tutors.

For example, LWETB's Further Education and Training Centre in Mullingar organised a visit to Belvedere's Community Garden for those interested in a career in Horticulture, a Hairdressing demonstration for prospective Hairdressers and a "drop-in day" at the Mullingar VTOS to highlight training courses available to adult jobseekers.

If you had attended any of these events, you would have been certain to hear two sentences repeated, time and time again;

"This doesn't feel like school at all!" and "I never knew these courses existed!"

For many prospective adult learners whose schooldays ended prematurely, education can represent something hostile and impenetrable, so to discover that there's a welcoming pathway back can come as quite a pleasant surprise.

Speaking to me at the Hairdressing demonstration, LWETB Adult Education Officer Shauna Doherty outlines the profile of the people they want to attract, *"The people who come to these events are generally people who for many reasons, left school early. They might not have had a strong support system at home when they were young, or they might have had a different style*



Adult learners at the hairdressing exhibition for the Aontas festival

of learning that was not recognized in their school days. They are people who may have spent their entire lives in jobs that were unsuited to them and who believed that promotions were for other people."

Events like this also provide an opportunity to show prospective learners in very real terms, the potential that going back to education offers.

"It's one thing hearing about courses from a friend or reading about courses online. But when you can actually go and see exactly what's involved and speak to people who have done the course, and who are now in full-time employment, you can see how the possibilities begin to dawn on people. And that's really satisfying to witness," Shauna explains.

Attending events like this can be daunting for adults who are considering a return to education. Deprived of the confidence and self-assurance enjoyed by those with second and third-level education, they can feel vulnerable and

exposed in an unfamiliar environment.

Interestingly, the more talkative attendees turn out to be current FET students, already benefiting in confidence from their return to education.

But as the day goes on, even the newcomers are won over by the warm and welcoming atmosphere. Their silence gives way to questions, comments, laughter, and by the end, full on conversations with tutors and current students.

"This festival and these events are a really valuable recruitment and branding opportunity for us, and many people here today who have discovered the opportunities we provide, will be back here studying with us at the start of term," Shauna says.

For new adult learners, events like this are not just another day in the calendar. They are days that could turn out to be a first step on a new path that leads to opportunities they never thought possible.

What people said about VTOS this year



"We entered as strangers and leave as friends"

-Josie

"Returning to Education is the best thing I've ever done, VTOS Centre and Staff are brilliant and I would recommend it to young and old"

-Catherine

"No Regrets, I have learned so much and made amazing friends"

-Michelle

"I came, I saw, I learned"

-Sean

"I never got the chance to do Art before coming to VTOS"

-Yvonne

"Time flies when you are enjoying yourself"

-Michelle

"Delighted to get the opportunity to learn something new"

-Thomas

"After 36 years out of education! If I can do it anyone can"

-Paraic

"It gave me the space to de-stress"

-Seamus

"Very Enjoyable Creatively"

-Veronica

"I have found my year in VTOS to be very interesting with learning new things, meeting new people and helping them if they needed it"

-Darren

"Great supportive, encouraging atmosphere in the centre"

-Caroline R

"VTOS has improved my learning ability and I've enjoyed the path of life I am on to further my education, while meeting other people on their journey too"

-Monica



SOLAS Generation Apprenticeship

The Athlone Training Centre were one of the nine finalists attending the 2019 SOLAS Generation Apprenticeship Competition Awards Ceremony in Clayton Hotel, Dublin on the 11th March last. Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O' Connor and ESB CEO, Pat O' Doherty announced and presented the awards on the night to finalists. Athlone Training Centre were honoured on the night with an award for an outstanding example of "problem solving" and all apprentices participating in the competition received their "Alfie" (Oscar) award.

The Athlone Training Centre have been very busy over the past few months with their participation in the Generation Apprenticeship Competition. The competition which is in its second year, challenges apprentices to design and create a 1.8 meter, 3-dimensional letter "A" sculpture which showcases the skills/materials/equipment of their chosen trade. The aim of the competition is to highlight the importance and value of apprenticeships as a route to skills development in 21st Century Ireland.

The sculpture also needed to

demonstrate 4 key areas in teamwork, leadership, creativity and problem-solving.

Work commenced on the project in the early weeks of January 2019 with a team of 12 Carpentry & Joinery and 2 Electrical apprentices who were completing their Phase 2 training here in the Athlone Training Centre, with the addition of a student from the VTOS Arts & Design course also based in Garrycastle. They were also assisted by their Instructors and additional help from various members of the Training Centre Staff.

The first stage of the build was to decide on an idea to showcase their apprenticeship. After much deliberation and many changes along the way the apprentices came up with a fantastic idea to create a wooden "A" sculpture to demonstrate the "growth" of the apprentice throughout their training/career. This was demonstrated by using a large acorn as the centre piece of the sculpture. To enhance this concept a light was incorporated into the acorn. The words "From the small acorn, the mighty oak grows" (ón dearcán beag, fassan an darach ollmhór) Also, to acknowledge the

quality of apprenticeship here in Ireland it was important to use Irish timber to build the 3-dimensional "A"; oak, larch and birch.

To give the design a link to Athlone and the Shannon the apprentices wanted to also incorporate the shape of a boat into the design. This is clearly seen from the end of the piece and the use of oak and larch wood compliments this. The use of the birch plywood symbolises the layers of learning through their apprenticeship.

While the work on the "A" sculpture has created a lot of talk and interest around the Centre over the past months, it was put on display with the other finalists in the National College of Ireland, Dublin where judges, Dermot Bannon, Noreen O' Hare and Charlie Dolan made their final selections

Congratulations to everyone involved in the competition. This project was a fantastic example and acknowledgment of the skills that our apprentices have and the future of apprenticeship here in Ireland.



Back L to R; Luke Lowry, Bennett & Kelly Const. Adrian Feeney, Namloc Const. Jamie Grassi, Group Design Woodworking. Gerard Buckley, James Foley Const. Kevin Murphy, Coolsivna Const. Ronan Lynch, ESB Networks, David Mulleady, Conefrey Electrical, Shane Stephenson, McArdle Carpentry. Joshua Drew, John Sisk & Son. Front L to R; Kyle Geoghegan, John Conneely Const. Ciaran McKeon, T&S McKeon Homes. Nigel Cunningham, PJ Duggan Carpentry. Owen Jordan, Liscooney Building Contractors. Kevin Moran, John Sisk & Son. Missing is Pat Tiernan, VTOS Arts & Design



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills



An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanaí agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority



QQI AWARD