



WOMEN'S COMMUNITY PROJECTS MULLINGAR

EMPOWERING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY SINCE 1985



Women's
Collective
Ireland
Mullingar



Story Telling Through The Years Gone By



SOLAS
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WOMEN'S COMMUNITY PROJECTS MULLINGAR HISTORY

Women's Community Projects (WCP) Mullingar is a registered charity that started in 1985. We have proudly supported the local community for 40 years, especially women and their families.

Our founder, Sr. Finbarr Breslin, began her work in Mullingar in 1982. She created a safe, welcoming space where women could meet, build confidence, and learn basic home and craft skills. With the help of local women who volunteered their time, they developed the idea for a women's project that would break down barriers women faced at the time and support them through training opportunities. They also quickly realised that childcare was needed in order for women to take part in training, so childcare became a core part of the service. Community education has been central to WCP from the very beginning and still is today.

Over the years, WCP Mullingar has grown and adapted to meet the changing needs of the community. Today, we offer a wide range of support services to people in Mullingar and the surrounding areas. We have a large training and development centre and run one of the biggest childcare facilities in the county. We are also the main sponsor of the Community Employment (CE) Childcare Training and Employment Programme in Westmeath and Offaly. In addition, we provide the Mullingar Community Counselling Service, which specialises in supporting people who have experienced domestic abuse, gender-based violence, or sexual assault.

As the organisation grew, it partnered with Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) in 2011, whose remit closely aligns with that of the Women's Community Projects Mullingar. WCI have 17 projects across the country, including WCI Mullingar

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community education refers to learning for adults that takes place outside the formal school or college system. It can include workshops, short courses, and other learning spaces that support everything from basic life skills to professional development. Community education is known for being open, accessible, and welcoming to everyone especially people who may have been out of work or education for a long time or who had negative experiences in traditional learning settings.

AONTAS, the national voice for adult learning, describes community education as:

“Helping people return to learning when they may not feel confident or able to start in a formal setting. It is rooted in equality, justice and empowerment. It gives a voice to those furthest from education. It is shaped by what people need and driven by communities.”

Community education programmes are usually group-based and aim to build confidence, support personal growth, and strengthen communities. They offer a person-centred, holistic approach where participants are involved as equal partners in identifying needs, designing and implementing programmes and adapting them on an ongoing basis. They promote inclusion, create social support networks, and encourage awareness of wider issues such as the environment and wellbeing.

Overall, community education supports both individual development and community strength, especially in marginalised areas. It is widely recognised as an important part of a healthy, democratic society. While focusing on each learner’s personal journey, it also encourages participation, connection, and action within the community. As a result, community education leads to many positive outcomes greater confidence, personal growth, increased community involvement, social justice, and pathways into further education or employment.

“STORY TELLING THROUGH THE YEARS GONE BY” PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Storytelling Through the Years Gone By programme was created to give participants the chance to build a range of skills in a fun, creative learning environment. These skills included writing, communication and public speaking, organisation and project management, digital skills, numeracy, and basic advertising/media skills. This was the first time WCP Mullingar and Mullingar Library worked together on a programme like this. As part of the project, participants visited the library to learn about its services and were encouraged along with their families to join and make use of what the library offers. The programme set out to produce a booklet, a showcase event, and a podcast.

The original idea for the booklet was to create a historical record of women in the local area, both past and present. The aim was to capture their stories and contributions, creating an archive for future generations to look back on and compare how women’s lives and roles have changed over time.

In true community-education style, the project evolved based on the ideas and input of the participants. They felt that culture, poetry, and food have played a huge role in women’s lives and local history. Because of this, the final publication includes a collection of stories, poems, and traditional recipes especially older recipes that might otherwise be forgotten.

The programme was funded by SOLAS through the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) initiative. ALL is a 10-year, whole-of-government strategy launched in 2021 to improve literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across society.

According to the SOLAS Community Education Framework (2024), the ALL strategy supports both formal and informal learning, with a strong focus on reaching people and communities who are often excluded from education. It highlights community education as a key part of literacy support because it helps people re-engage with learning and promotes a literacy-friendly society. As the framework states, “literacy is not only a human right, but a shared responsibility across society.”

THE STORIES



MIDLANDS IRELAND: MIRRORS OF CHILDHOOD AND ADULthood

BY BETTY MULLINS

In a recent interview, I had the privilege of speaking with two women who each experienced life within the care system in the 50s-70s in the Midlands of Ireland. One as a child in care, and the other as a young woman working in a care centre. Their reflections offered deeply personal insights into a system that shaped their early lives.

One of the women – who has requested to remain anonymous – entered care at the age of ten, alongside her nine siblings. Her story began with tragedy: their mother died during childbirth, leaving the family devastated. Although extended family members offered to take the children in separately, their father made the difficult but ultimately unifying decision to keep them all together in a single care home. She believes this decision helped maintain their strong family bond, something she remains incredibly grateful for.

As the eldest child and a girl, the responsibility of caring for her siblings often fell to her. Even before entering the care home, she had taken on the role of caregiver, a role that continued during their years in care. She recalls that they were treated relatively well in the home, especially compared to others, in part because their father was granted monthly visits.

Six years later, when their father remarried, the children returned home. Interestingly, her stepmother was only twelve years older than she was, and the two developed a more genuine friendship than a traditional mother-daughter relationship.

As she grew older, she shared fond memories of socialising and going out with her sister. They would cycle to local venues, her younger sister riding on the back of the bike. She laughed while recalling how once they lost a shoe on the way home, which got them into trouble. With money tight, they found creative solutions, she even used red ink from an Irish messenger leaflet as a makeshift blusher.

However, despite these lighter memories, she also reflected on the emotional burden of being a young carer. The weight of responsibility, both in childhood and later in life, left her struggling to separate her identity from the act of caring for others. She went on to work in psychiatric and general nursing, even spending some time in England, but found it difficult being away from home.

Eventually, she sought help to address this deeply ingrained need to constantly care for others. Learning to prioritise herself was a long and challenging journey, but an important one.

Her story is a moving reminder of the resilience of those women who grow up in care and the complex emotional landscape they often navigate—especially when caring becomes not just a role, but a way of life.

The second woman I spoke with, Margaret, offered a different but equally valuable perspective. This time as a young worker within the care system. At just 15 or 16 years old, she began working in a children's care home, looking after babies and young children. The staff consisted entirely of young women under the supervision of a matron. Despite the long hours, Margaret recalls being treated fairly and fed well, thanks to the home's rural setting where wholesome, home-grown food was part of daily life.

The staff lived in dormitories, and Margaret earned a weekly wage of £2.25. Though modest, this pay was typical for the time. After spending several years in the care home, she moved to Manchester, England, where she worked in a small, country cottage hospital. The hospital was entirely female-run, and she served as an auxiliary nurse. The work was demanding and physically tiring, but Margaret enjoyed the strong sense of camaraderie among the women. There was a shared purpose and mutual support that made the experience meaningful.

Eventually, Margaret returned to Ireland upon retirement, she found the transition to be an emotional and a cultural shock. She observed that Ireland, particularly in rural areas, hadn't progressed much in terms of women's rights or social attitudes. When she purchased her own home, she sensed a degree of resentment toward her status as a single woman buying property independently. It was an unwelcome reminder of the lingering traditional views about a woman's role and autonomy. Still, she acknowledged that some progress has been made. Women are now paid equally in most employment, their participation in numerous sports, such as the GAA, soccer, and golf is recognised and increasingly celebrated. Yet, in her own words, "things just still haven't moved on quite as much as you'd hope."

Though their roles were different one as a child in care, and the other as a young carer, the experiences of these two women reveal common threads: resilience, responsibility, and a deep commitment to others. Their stories shine a light on a system that shaped their lives in lasting ways, and on a society still evolving in how it values and supports women.



The types of institutes this care work would have been taken out.

Fig 1: National Library of Ireland on The Commons.



Fig 2: Annie Spratt at <https://unsplash.com/@anniespratt>.)



The resident of such an institution for caring for children

Fig 3: National Library of Ireland on The Commons.

40S-70S: WOMEN'S ROLES

BY MARGARET LYNCH

My reading of *The Irish Times* and the papers "Social Change in 20 Century Ireland" and "Women at Work: 40 Years of Change" inspired me to examine three key decades in women's development.

In the 1940s the Second World War was taking place around the world and the Emergency was taking place in Ireland. The war forced many men to enter the fight, leaving the women to raise families and do the men's work. There was a lot of poverty, especially in large families with children not having food, wearing shabby clothes, and the footwear was dreadful! There was discrimination for being lower class, with children being bullied at school and the women had to pick up the pieces.

Also in the 40s, men also discriminated against women. The men were thought to be the breadwinner and the women's place was in the home looking after the family. There was no electricity, or running water, and often cooking had to be done over an open fire. If she needed money she had to go to her husband, because as my aunt would say "Your own is the sweetest money you'll ever have, àlainn". If she worked outside the home, there was discrimination in wages between men and women.

In the 60s, it started to get a lot better for women, as they were able to find work outside the home. There were more jobs in factories, banking, law, and insurance. The time of servants working in the house was coming to an end – which was no harm as most were concerned. The money they received was between 20 euro and 40 euro a year.

In the 70s, there were more opportunities for women: there was better education and a greater variety of jobs they could apply for. If women got married in the 60s they would have to leave their job if they had one, now in the 70s they didn't: they had more autonomy. It was to be equal for all men and women to stay in jobs. Mary Harney was the first woman politician to be elected to Dáil Éireann. From my perspective, it's a point of pride to see a woman from Westmeath break down so many barriers.

It is hard to believe what went on in those three decades and what changes have taken place since the end of the 70s, it's very hard to picture it. It was great that by the end of the 70s women were having more rights and having more standing and place in the community. Still, things can always be better, and I feel we still have a long way to go.



Women from the past.

Fig 1: <https://unsplash.com/photos/a-woman-standing-in-a-doorway-of-a-house-qDuFAOpIIF8>.

Fig 2: <https://unsplash.com/photos/a-couple-of-people-standing-next-to-a-fence-fFBark6m11w>.)

Fig 3: <https://unsplash.com/photos/a-group-of-women-standing-next-to-each-other-QPd6ETE7M7w>.



A family from way back when (above) and my own family (below).
 Fig 4: <https://unsplash.com/photos/family-photo-TI7rJ6vSLHI>. Fig 5: My own photo.)

LOOKING BACK: 40 YEARS OF CHALLENGES AND WOMEN RISING TO THEM

BY MARIE MANGAN

Over the last forty years changes for women have been marked by advancements in education, career opportunities and legal rights. This has given many women the confidence to apply for courses and jobs which had previously been male-dominated. Although significant progress has been made in continued efforts to ease inequalities and challenges for women, there is a lot more to do. I conducted an interview with Teresa Doyle about the challenges that women have faced over the last 40 years in the surrounding area of Mullingar. She talked to me about these differences and similarities for women over this time period.

Teresa returned home to Ireland after being in America for 10 years. She started an Art program in the Women's Community Project. She spoke about the sense of community, comradery, understanding and trust among the group. She also spoke about the women's ability to support each other. She also referenced the differences in age in the group, which brought the enthusiasm of youth and the experience and wisdom of age to the group. She felt the purpose is very much the same for women, as women of any age can come and have a role in a safe and supportive environment. This environment provides not only education but companionship as well. Women at different stages of life can come and have possibly their first chance to go back into education, which can be a daunting prospect, but a huge boost to confidence. It can also be daunting because it puts pressure on working women and homemakers, but women will take this on because it's in their nature. They are strong and there's little they can't do.

Teresa stated she felt that women's needs and wants haven't really changed. She also felt that sexism and ageism against women were as plentiful as ever in society. When I thought about what she had said I realised: There are still challenges and possible discrimination that women must go up against, but their strength and resilience in the face of adversity has not changed, if anything they've only become stronger and wiser.

When you think about it, the main change has been the opportunities presented to women through education and job opportunities, which the Women's Community Project helps provide. Teresa also mentioned the legacy of Sister Finbar, the founder of the Women's Community Project. Because women like her provide opportunities and help to other women, the world is a better place for women everywhere. Specifically, regarding Sister Finbar, she would have started the education programs for women in the parish community, and support services, such as the counselling service and the creche to help the women who wished to pursue professional and educational opportunities.

Due to changes in opportunities for women, society has been enriched as a whole. Still, there is a lot of progress to come. It is imperative that positive changes continue to be made and sustained. The influence women have in society is of great value, of great importance, and makes them a core part of their communities. The Women's Parish Community Centre has played a vital role in supporting women in all areas of their lives. It has given the confidence to many to return to education in a supportive and safe environment. 40 years later, it's still a powerhouse in the surrounding areas of Mullingar!



Parish Community Centre, the host of the Women's Community Projects.



Art Piece by Teresa Doyle's art class from the 1980s, still hanging in the Parish Community Centre to this day.

THE POETRY



MY WESTIES WERE MY BESTIES BY GERALDINE FAGAN

Full of life, mischief and love
Bruce and Bruila up to all sorts of fun
Lost to us but never forgotten
Made a little easier by Nessy and Willow
Thinking of Kitty and knitting her pillows

ART & SCULPTURE BY MJ MCCORMACK

ART

A - Art so privileged to be an artist and exhibited for 50 years
R - Ready & Willing to paint when asked
T - Time Zone – Lost in time when painting

SCULPTURE

S – Set individual pieces of sculpture
C – Creativity
U – Unusual Pieces
L – Love of Wood
P – People love my very large pieces of sculpture
T – Time Zone – when sculpturing
U – useable wood
R – Relaxing
E - Enjoyment

MEMORIES AND INSPIRATION OF A WONDERFUL MOTHER

BY MARIE MANGAN

She is fun-loving, giving, encouraging and crafty
Full of foolery and laughter-y
As I incorporate these qualities into my crafting
I treasure these memories
So gratefully and heartfully

ARTS FROM THE PAST BY LIZ O'CONNOR

Class of Arts '88
Draw a line
Mine wasn't Straight
Oh No! – Outside the door
Am I a rebel?
There is a criteria
I didn't follow
Am I in trouble?
Now to tell the mother
Yes...I am a Rebel!

COSTA RICA'S BEAUTY BY CARMEL GARGAN

Iriria, the earth Goddess,
Calls me to Costa Rica.

A wild and green country,
A land where nature's wonders never end.

There's wildlife parks, only accessible by boat.
And Jungles where ancient trees grow.
And cloud mountains, covered by hazy mist.

There's birds with bright plumage
And sloths slow and serene.
And the rich smells of coffee farms,
Pura Vida, Pure Life, is calling me to Costa Rica.

LUMINOSITY BY HANAN ALDAKOURI

You are the meaning of the poetry
Like a full moon always with me
Your light Your soul are my life
Your love makes me feel alive

I love writing poetry, stories and songs. Which helps me to explain
my feelings or others' feelings. I love to write about love, sadness,
happiness and hope.

It's just a hobby that makes me feel that I am a creative person.

BECOMING

BY FIONA GLYNN

I started off as nobody's girl.
Lost on a sea of darkened love.
Alone, ignored and broken hearted.
Never feeling enough.
Believing the lies.
My perceived value....
A mirror for all my future relationships.
Changing faces, same end!
My light shone bright despite it all.
ENOUGH!
Healing began when I shone my light within.
I am not what happened to me.
I am BECOMING.
"To thine own self, be true"

TRUST

BY ELIZABETH MULLINS

Dedicated to my Mother Elizabeth

T – Trust yourself, have faith in oneself was her motto

R - Remembering all the skill in sewing, crafting and upcycling. She empowered me and I passed on to my daughters

U – Understanding others. She always said: never judge others, as you are not walking in their shoes.

S – Sewing was her love, she made fab clothes for us all, to include her wedding dress, mine and my sisters.

T – Treasured memories of the fun and loving time we had around the table with Mam. Crafting, sewing and listening to stories from past times with her mother and sister.

CUTE LITTLE BIRD

BY NÓIRÍN HENNELLY & CHILDREN

Oh Little bird up on a tree
Won't you sing a song for me
I see you almost every day
I hope that you won't fly away.

Nature Study with children on a preschool nature walk. Observing birds on a tree on a lovely spring day.

We saw a beautiful cute little bird on a tree and so this inspired us to make up a little poem using rhyming words with the children helping.

SWANS ON THE LAKE

BY NÓIRÍN HENNELLY & CHILDREN

I saw Mother Swan on the Lake today,
With her baby cygnets so cute and grey.
Her bright orange beak
And her neck so long,
Gracefully they glide along



LITTLE ROBIN RED BREAST

BY NÓIRÍN HENNELLY & CHILDREN

Little Robin Red Breast is out to day, I hope that he won't fly away,
Sitting on the garden bush,
Taking time to have some lunch,
With lots of berries to munch and crunch. Now little robin is on the tree,
Looking down at you and me.



Research has shown that children who have lots of early experience of rhymes find it easier to learn to read and spell later on.

I'M A LITTLE HEDGEHOG

BY NÓIRÍN HENNELLY & CHILDREN

Tune: "i'm a little teapot"

I'm a little hedgehog, All spikey and brown
Now that winter is here,
I have to lie down.
So if under a bed of leaves,
You decide to peep.
You will see me all cosy,
Fast asleep



These poems were originally created within our childcare centre and have since been lovingly passed down, shared, and taught to children and grandchildren across generations

THE RECIPES



MARJORIE'S BISCUIT CAKE

BY PEARL LAWRENCE

Ingredients:

4 oz margarine
6 oz cooking chocolate
Packet of Rich Tea biscuits
Can of condensed milk
4 oz cooking chocolate to decorate

Method:

- 1.Melt chocolate and margarine in saucepan
- 2.Crush up biscuits
- 3.Add condensed milk to saucepan
- 4.Line tin with cling film
- 5.Put mix into tin
- 6.Leave set overnight
- 7.Add melted chocolate to decorate as you wish!

BRIDIE'S BISCUIT CAKE

BY THERESE

Recipe:

2 packets of Marietta biscuits
Half pound margarine
Half pound caster sugar
1 egg. 6 tablespoons Drinking Chocolate

Method:

1. Break up biscuits.
2. Melt sugar and margarine in saucepan.
3. Beat egg
4. Add drinking chocolate.
5. Place in tin with parchment paper and
6. leave in fridge overnight. Enjoy!

VERY HEALTHY (NO ADDED SUGAR) TEA BRACK BY NÓIRÍN HENNELLY

My Mother Loved Baking. Creative Baking

Ingredients:

6 oz Sultanas
6 oz Mixed Fruit
8 oz Self Raising Flour
Few cherries if you like
Half tsp teaspoon cinnamon
Half teaspoon mixed spices
1 beaten egg
Mug of hot tea
Spoon of whiskey (optional)

Method:

- 1.Steep fruit overnight
- 2.Add all other ingredients
- 3.Bake at 150 for 1 hour
- 4.2 lb loaf tin
- 5.Lined with grease proof paper

TUSCAN CHICKEN

BY MAY HOURICAN

Dedicated to her daughter Sinead and their Friday recipes

Ingredients:

4 Chicken breasts
1 Tbs Olive Oil
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp dried basil
1 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp dried thyme
250ml chicken or vegetable stock
Jar of sundried tomatoes
50ml white wine
1 tsp Dijon mustard
4 garlic cloves
1 small onion
Small tub cream
2 tbsp mozzarella to taste

Method:

1. Marinate chicken with all the spices
2. Fry off in frying pan
3. Add all ingredients to slow cooker or pan
4. Cook for 3 hours
5. At the end add fresh cream and mozzarella cheese to your liking



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BY MINISTER MARIAN HARKIN,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR FURTHER & HIGHER
EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION & SCIENCE**



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