

UKRAINIANS AND NEW COMMUNITIES FUND ANNUAL REPORT 2024



**Waterford
Volunteer Centre**
Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Port Lairge



INTRODUCTION

In early 2024, Waterford Volunteer Centre expanded its work to support a broader range of migrants. While we continued our engagement with the Ukrainian community, our efforts grew to include refugees, asylum seekers, and members of new communities. This shift reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering inclusion and responding to the evolving needs of our community.

Volunteering plays a vital role in helping migrants integrate into their new environment, serving as a bridge to local society through meaningful interactions, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding. To support this, we organised outreach and community events, shared information about volunteering, continued our existing projects, and introduced new collaborations.

Throughout this work, we encountered challenges such as language barriers, difficulties in reaching migrant communities in rural areas, and the uncertainty and stress caused by the relocation of refugee centres. We sought to address these challenges through enhanced collaboration, increased visibility, and a strong focus on support, information, and integration initiatives.

By adapting our approach and strengthening partnerships, Waterford Volunteer Centre continues to create opportunities for migrants to engage, contribute, and feel a sense of belonging in their new home.

NUMBERS

- 1 Migrant outreach worker – 28 hours/ week
- Volunteers from **45 Nationalities**
- **202 new volunteers** from members of New communities
- **Weekly 2 Drop-in event** to enhance accessibility
- **1 booklet** (500 printed and 1 online version)
- 1 Booklet **launch event**
- **85** Volunteer opportunities with basic/intermediate English
- **404 volunteer applications** by refugees and IPAS
- More than **100** Art & Community **workshops**

NETWORKING

We worked closely with Waterford Area Partnership, the SICAP team, LAIT, and the Volunteer Centres Network to support integration efforts. Our team actively participated in the Waterford Migrant Integrated Services Network, the IAWG Single Males Working Group (coordinated by LAIT), and the Welcoming New Communities Conference on 15th July in Dublin, reinforcing our commitment to inclusive communities.

We had regular online meetings with support workers from other Volunteer Centres. In 2024 we had a face-to-face meeting hosted by Dublin Volunteer Centre. This gathering allowed us to exchange insights, share successes, and explore future collaboration opportunities. Strengthening these connections was invaluable, and we plan to continue holding such meetings annually.

Waterford Volunteer Centre also hosted a regional meeting of Volunteer Centres, bringing together teams to discuss challenges, share best practices, and enhance collaboration. The meeting improved communication and strengthened the partnerships to provide better support to migrant and refugee communities.

We collaborated with volunteer-involving organisations to support them in hosting volunteers with basic English and explored opportunities to create more suitable roles. Together, we worked to introduce new volunteer opportunities tailored to individuals with limited English proficiency, ensuring greater accessibility and inclusion.



VISIBILITY AND OUTREACH

As part of our outreach efforts, Waterford Volunteer Centre actively participated in community events with information stands and organised pop-up info stands to share details about volunteering and support services. To ensure accessibility, we provided leaflets in Ukrainian, prepared information in basic English for easier understanding, and used translation apps when needed. Additionally, our Migrant Outreach Worker was available to offer information in Ukrainian.



Connecting Communities Roadshows

From February to May 2024, we took part in the Connecting Communities Roadshows, a series of free community events held across Waterford County:

- Lismore Heritage Centre – February 7th
- The Park Hotel, Dungarvan – February 21st
- Rainbow Hall, Kilmacthomas – March 6th
- Community Hall, Ballymacarbry – March 20th
- The Haven Hotel, Dunmore East – April 3rd
- Cill Barra Sports Hall, Ballybeg – April 17th
- Tramore GAA Community Hall – May 8th

These roadshows provided local communities with opportunities to engage with the Local Authority and its partners, gaining insight into setting up community groups, sourcing funding for initiatives, and fostering a more inclusive and vibrant society.

The initiative was led by Healthy Waterford and Waterford PPN, in collaboration with key organisations such as the Community Safety Partnership, Waterford LEADER Partnership, Waterford Area Partnership, Creative Waterford, HSE, Emergency Services, and Waterford Sport Partnership, among others.

Beyond providing information, the events facilitated valuable networking opportunities, strengthening connections between organisations and communities. As a result, awareness of volunteering increased, and more individuals were encouraged to get involved.

New Communities Network



Waterford Volunteer Centre collaborated with the New Communities Network on their key events which promoted cultural integration, allowing over 30 volunteers to share their heritage, learn from others, and strengthen community ties. We supported the events with volunteers, promotion and info-stand about our services and volunteering.

- One People, One Waterford (May 6, People's Park) – A family-friendly event celebrating cultural diversity through music, sports, and activities
- A Slice of Culture – Multicultural Festival (Sept 7, Wyse Park) – A community festival featuring music, dance, food, and art from different cultures, providing a platform for migrant groups to share their traditions.
- Thriving Together: Employment and Entrepreneurship in a Diverse Waterford (Oct 23, City Hall) – A networking event bringing together employers, migrant job seekers, and service providers to discuss workplace diversity, migrant entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities.

Outreach with Waterford Area Partnership

In collaboration with the Waterford Area Partnership, we organised regular visits to towns in Waterford County, such as Dungarvan, Lismore, Mount Malleray and Tallow. These visits included information sessions on volunteering opportunities and the importance of voting in local elections. We also held star weaving workshops to help engage more people in these areas by offering them a unique way to get involved in volunteering.

During these visits, volunteers took the materials home and returned with the woven stars at the following meetings, which greatly contributed to the success of the Star Weaving project. This initiative not only attracted new volunteers, but also helped us achieve our ambitious goals by reaching people in more remote areas who might not otherwise have known about the opportunities.

Volunteer Fair at SETU



Organised by Waterford Volunteer Centre, the SETU fair brought together numerous organisations looking for volunteers. The event was targeted at the younger generation, engaging students and encouraging them to consider volunteering in their community. Our Migrant Outreach Worker was present at the event, providing information about volunteering and networking with organisations to create volunteer opportunities with basic English.



We invited the Sanctuary Runners, New Communities Network, and New Communities Women's Shed to the event, providing students with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by refugees. This also created a space for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds to connect with these groups, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging participation in community life. The fair highlighted the role of volunteering in building inclusive communities.

Communication

We actively used social media to reach out to new arrivals, regularly posting volunteer opportunities with visual elements and icons to indicate when only basic English was required. We also ran campaigns for National Volunteer Day and International Volunteer Day, as well as shared important information about voting in the elections.

To raise awareness and engage the public, we created short videos, including:

- "One Word" About Volunteering: Volunteers described what volunteering means to them using just one word. This video showcased the unifying power of volunteering and provided a simple yet impactful way to express its significance.
- A Visit to the Liberty Charity Shop: Anna volunteered at the Liberty Charity Shop and shared her experience on social media, emphasizing opportunities for those with limited English skills. This initiative highlighted Liberty Charity Shop as a welcoming place for migrants seeking volunteer roles. It was an insightful and valuable experience, offering a deeper look into the world of volunteering.



Connecting Communities Booklet

We have launched a touching booklet containing inspiring stories of migrants who have become volunteers. These stories highlight how volunteering has changed their lives and inspired others.

Creating the booklet was an overarching project. We reached out to volunteers with migrant and refugee backgrounds across the county, inviting them to share their volunteering journeys. Through interviews, we gathered personal stories that showcase the power of volunteering and the immense value new arrivals bring to our communities. As a final result, this booklet was created to celebrate their contributions and encourage others to get involved.



The official presentation took place at the Marina Hotel, attended by our active volunteers and representatives of the organisations we collaborate with to recruit volunteers. For us, this booklet is a source of inspiration, demonstrating how volunteering can open doors to new opportunities, environments, and cultures. The booklet was distributed at our outreach events and is also available in libraries across the county. You can download the online version here: <https://volunteerwaterford.ie/volunteer-stories/#>.



CONNECTED BY ARTS

Art workshops

This project began in the summer of 2023 and continued to flourish throughout 2024. The art workshops are run by a Ukrainian woman who worked as an art teacher in Ukraine before the war. Forced to leave her country and profession, she now shares her skills and experience with our community. Her enthusiasm and dedication have made these workshops an invaluable resource for emotional well-being and personal growth, both for her and the participants. This year, we held 28 workshops with over 50 participants from a wide range of backgrounds. Initially designed for Ukrainian participants, these sessions have expanded to welcome people from different cultures. Through creative activities participants not only develop their creative skills but also find a safe space to share their stories, exchange cultural experiences and practice English.

People of different nationalities now come together, using art to bridge differences and promote mutual understanding. These classes provide more than just a creative space – they offer a platform to introduce participants to volunteer opportunities, raise awareness of our centre and encourage active participation in community life.

Pysanky (Easter egg decorating) workshops

We organised two workshops on the traditional Ukrainian art of Easter egg making as a way to celebrate Easter. A total of 24 participants, many of whom were first-time visitors to our centre, learnt this intricate craft using wax and dyes.

These workshops not only brought a festive mood, but also raised awareness of our centre, encouraging further participation in volunteer activities.



Christmas Card initiative

We launched a heartwarming initiative to spread holiday cheer by organising the creation of Christmas cards for 281 residents of three nursing homes. Our volunteers were involved in the project and worked on making the cards. Workshops were held in Dungarvan, Lismore and Mount Malleray in collaboration with Waterford Area Partnership. These workshops provided an opportunity for community members to come together and contribute to the project.

In addition to the cards made during these workshops, members of the local community also generously shared their own creations, further increasing the number of cards. These heartfelt cards were sent to nursing homes where they were eagerly awaited by the elderly residents.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our volunteers, as well as the support of local residents and the Waterford Area Partnership, we were able to successfully achieve our goal and make the festive season brighter for many.

Star Weaving project

Our participation in the Weaving Stars project began last year and continued into 2024. We created 35,000 stars and held around 500 Workshops over the project. This initiative has been a fantastic way to bring people together for a shared purpose, with its simplicity and accessibility allowing anyone to take part, regardless of their background or language level. The weekly workshops, held on a rotating basis at the Waterford Volunteer Centre and Waterford Art Gallery, have drawn more than 40 active volunteers. The project offered various ways to get involved, from weaving stars to preparing materials, ensuring that everyone could contribute in their own way.



We created 35,000 stars and held around 500 Workshops over the project. Participants often share that weaving stars brings them a sense of peace and harmony, while also fostering belonging and purpose.

Beyond star weaving, volunteers played a key role in assembling the LOVE installation and took part in community events and exhibitions, spreading the message of unity and hope.



SETU Cork Road Campus: Volunteers attended the opening of the LOVE installation, where their contribution was acknowledged with gratitude. Together, they proudly added more stars to the installation, leaving them with a deep sense of appreciation and ownership of the wider initiative.



EPIC Museum, Dublin: The Star Weaver volunteer group represented Waterford at the LOVE installation exhibition as part of Ireland's Million Stars project. This event brought together volunteer groups from across the country. Our volunteers received heartfelt recognition for their efforts and were given access to the museum—a particularly touching gesture, as many attendees had personal experiences of migration.

The Star Weaving project continues to highlight the power of community, creativity, and inclusion, proving that small actions, when woven together, can create something truly meaningful.