

# SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR SLIGO'S VOLUNTEERS

As Sligo's year-long tenure as European Volunteering Capital (EVC) 2017 draws to a close, Dorothy Clarke, Director of Services at Sligo County Council, reflects on what the high-profile EU award has meant for the northwest county. Report by Elaine O'Regan.

The EVC 2017 designation was a major coup for Sligo following, as it did, the major European cities of Barcelona (2014), Lisbon (2015) and London (2016) in being chosen as this year's European Volunteering Capital (EVC) winner. The competition is organised by the European Volunteer Center (CEV) and co-funded by the Europe for Citizens programme.

CEV is a network of over 80 national, regional and local volunteer centres and volunteer support agencies across Europe. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, CEV promotes and supports volunteering through advocacy, knowledge sharing and capacity building and training.

The EVC award is chosen by an international jury connected with volunteering, representing civil society, the private sector and EU institutions. Its aim is to promote volunteering at a local level by recognising EU municipalities that support and strengthen partnerships with volunteer centres and organisations involving volunteers.

"Ireland is very much to the fore in terms of the structures we have in place to support volunteering," Clarke told Council Review.

"The benefit of volunteering is understood at a national level as well as locally, in areas such as social care where you have hugely valuable initiatives like Meals on Wheels, Tidy Towns and various sports recreation services. Without volunteers, these things would not happen."

## SPIRIT OF SLIGO CELEBRATION

The designation of EVC 2017 was formally bestowed on the



Pictured at London's City Hall after the handover of European Volunteering Capital 2017 to Sligo in December 2016 (l-r): Ciaran Hayes, Chief Executive, Sligo County Council, Ciara Herity, Sligo Volunteer Centre, Cllr Hubert Keaney, Cathaoirleach, Sligo County Council, Andy Rogers, Sligo Business Network, London, and Marian Harkin MEP.

county of Sligo at an event held in London's City Hall last December and the county marked the designation the following month with a civic and gala event at IT Sligo's Knocknarea Arena.

The Spirit of Sligo celebration featured performances by Niamh Crowley, Kieran Quinn, Sligo Gospel Choir and the Sligo Academy of Sinfonietta Orchestra. Acclaimed musician Michael Rooney performed specially composed pieces at the event, which also featured a selection of inspiring volunteer stories from around the county.

Speaking at the event, Ciarán Hayes, chief executive of Sligo County Council, praised the efforts of those involved in securing the county's EVC 2017 title. "It's a recognition and celebration of all of those who give back to their community - the silent majority who contribute so much to Sligo and who make us what we are," Hayes said at the time.



Western Development Commission CEO Ian Brannigan with Ciara Herity Manager Sligo Volunteer Centre launched a dedicated digital Volunteer Clock last August, to help voluntary organisations and volunteers calculate the number of voluntary hours they contribute, estimated to be worth more than €3.3 million to the local economy each year.

“The range and extent of volunteering and generosity of volunteers in this county is breath-taking. It’s a special and remarkable place to live and I’m delighted that we can now bring those stories to life and bring the real Sligo to the fore,” noted Hayes.

### PROMOTING VOLUNTARY EFFORTS

“Winning the title was really a coup for Sligo on foot of the big European cities that had held the title in the three years since its 2014 launch,” said Clarke.

“We had heard about the award initially through our own MEP Marian Harkin, who has worked long and hard with her EU counterparts to promote voluntary efforts and community development, highlighting the good work volunteers do the length and breadth of Europe.”

The decision to apply for the title was prompted by the close relationship Sligo County Council has forged with Sligo Volunteer Centre over the years. An affiliate of Volunteer Ireland, Sligo Volunteer Centre is one of 20 volunteer centres throughout Ireland.

Situated in on Abbeyville Terrace in Sligo Town, it links people interested in volunteering with non-profit groups looking for volunteers. The centre advertises for volunteers through channels including its website ([volunteersligo.ie](http://volunteersligo.ie)), on behalf of more than 300 non-profit groups operating in Sligo, referring interested people to these groups.

“We set up the centre, contribute funding and act as the conduit for funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development,” said Clarke, who is a member of the board of directors of Sligo Volunteer Centre.

### CLOSING CEREMONY

“A lot of work went into securing the EVC title and we are now preparing for the closing ceremony in December where we will be handing over the title to the new host, the city of Aarhus in Denmark.”

The winner from the three municipalities chosen to compete for the 2019 designation – Augsburg in Germany, Cascais in Portugal and Slovakia’s Kosice – will also be announced at the event.

The ceremony will mark the end of a busy year for Sligo County Council and Sligo Volunteer Centre, which saw the successful roll-out of an impressive calendar of events and initiatives under the EVC programme involving volunteers, volunteering organisations and businesses throughout the county.

These included a raft of volunteer recruitment drives and open days, festivals, fair days and volunteer recognition events. Events included Volunteer Voices, a series of monthly meet-ups where volunteers have the opportunity to share their stories and discuss volunteer opportunities. A Volunteer Managers Appreciation Day Recognition Event will be held on 5 November.

### ADOPT A CHARITY SCHEME

The EVC Adopt a Charity programme sought to partner local businesses with the charities and non-profit organisations most in need of their employees’ skills and resources, and saw med-tech giant Abbott announce an official partnership with the EVC



Pictured at the €10,000 funding announcement by the WDC to EVC2017 in April were (l-r) Marie Casserly, Sligo Mayor and representative of the EVC Steering Committee; Ciara Herity, Manager of Sligo Volunteer Centre; WDC’s CEO Ian Brannigan and Karen Sweeney, Regional Development Executive.



The opening ceremony for EVC 2017 was held at IT Sligo's Knocknarea Arena on 29 January 2017.

Programme in January 2017.

The healthcare giant has worked closely throughout the year with Sligo County Council and Sligo Volunteer Centre on a range of initiatives designed to showcase the positive impact of volunteering. These include an expansion of the volunteering programmes and raising awareness of the importance of volunteering.

Abbott was among numerous other local companies that took part in Headstart – a one-day volunteering expo held last May as part of the EVC Adopt a Charity initiative.

These companies included Bank of Ireland, GSK, Stripe Marketing, Gilroy Gannon, OSD, Wobego and StoryLab. The Western Development Commission (WDC) also committed €10,000 in funding to the EVC 2017 programme.

Meanwhile, a dedicated digital Volunteer Clock was launched on the EVC Sligo 2017 website ([www.evcsligo.eu](http://www.evcsligo.eu)) last August to help voluntary organisations and volunteers calculate the number of voluntary hours they contribute, estimated to be worth more than €3.3 million to the local economy each year.

### LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Later this month, Sligo Public Participation Network (PPN), in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, will host the first National PPN Conference on Thursday October 19 at Clayton Hotel Sligo (see side panel).

"The PPN is at an early stage of its development nationally, but it is another example of Ireland's position as a leader of national policy and of development and support for local community development and volunteerism in recognising and supporting the work of volunteers," said Clarke.

The Volunteer Ireland National Awards Ceremony will also be held on 1 December at Radisson Hotel Sligo and will coincide with the civic event set to mark the official closing of the year in Sligo, before they hand over to Aarhus in Denmark for 2018.

"Speaking as a volunteer myself," Clarke noted in conclusion "our hope is that the work done over the course of this year has really benefited volunteers and voluntary groups in the county and beyond, in recognising and supporting the very important work they do."

For more information visit [www.evcsligo.eu](http://www.evcsligo.eu)

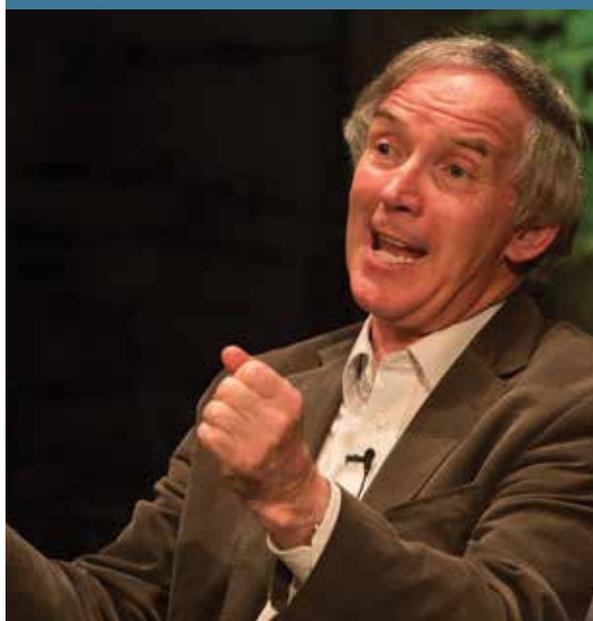
### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK CONFERENCE

Sligo's Public Participation Network (PPN), in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), will host the first National PPN Conference on Thursday 19 October at Clayton Hotel Sligo.

One way councils and local authorities nurture volunteering and fold it into their business and activities is by establishing Public Participation Networks. (PPNs). This conference is targeted at PPN secretariats and members, resource workers, volunteers and volunteer leaders and managers, elected members, local authority staff supporting the PPN structure, partnership/local development companies (LDCs).

It will provide an opportunity for PPNs to come together to look at the development of PPNs, consider policies, and provide an excellent opportunity to review and overview the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats encountered to date.

There will be input from the DRCD, break-out sessions giving voice to individual input on issues around social, economic, democratic and environmental themes and an overview of PPN models of best practice. Guest speakers will include John Lonergan, Former Mountjoy Prison Governor and management expert, alongside Michael Ewing, Co-ordinator of the Environmental Pillar.



John Lonergan, Former Mountjoy Prison Governor and management expert, will be a guest speaker at the PPN Conference on 19 October in Sligo.