

COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION CHAMPIONS TO GO LOCAL

A group of 'climate champions' who recently graduated from the first climate action course in Ireland will now become community-based environmental ambassadors. The eight-week pilot programme run by Laois County Council in partnership with Laois and Offaly Education & Training Board could now be rolled out on a nationwide basis.

The 'Community Climate Action Champions' will now go into their local areas to educate their peers on the steps they can take to combat the climate crisis. It is hoped the course can be replicated throughout Ireland, with some tutors also exploring a Cross-Border Transition Year climate project, pairing a school in the Republic with one in Northern Ireland.

"This course gently brings people along rather than lecturing them," said participant and retired teacher Catherine Donlon, who is also a member of Portlaoise Tidy Towns. "People will not accept it if you lecture them. It is a much softer and effective approach. It is peer-to-peer education where we talk to people around us.

"We were allowed to bring home a home energy kit which assessed where we were losing heat through our windows, doors and roofs and a couple of us discovered some of our appliances were not working efficiently."



Suzanne Dempsey, Laois County Council's Environmental Awareness Officer, pictured with climate course student Catherine Donlon and Laurence O'Reilly, SEAI Sustainable Energy Communities Mentor for Laois and Offaly, during the climate change course at Portlaoise Further Education and Training Centre.

The course – which included a session by TV presenter and environmentalist Duncan Stewart – was co-ordinated by Laois County Council and Laois and Offaly Education & Training Board.

SPREADING CLIMATE CHANGE MESSAGE

Run at Portlaoise Further Education and Training Centre, it was among several initiatives highlighted as part of 'Your Council Day' on Friday July 1. On this day, every year local authorities raise awareness about their work on climate action.

Once they graduate, participants have an opportunity to educate others on sustainability, tips to reduce energy and waste at home, food saving, fast fashion and herb planting.

They also receive a 'yellow belt' certification in lean management, which has educated them on waste

reduction and sustainable living. The adult learners can also rally neighbours to explore initiatives such as solar panels and order them as a collective rather than individually.

"These participants will go out into the community and essentially, spread the message about climate change, with the council's support," according to Suzanne Dempsey, Laois County Council's Environmental Awareness Officer.

"Even though the training is free, there is no financial reward for them, it is all about community spirit and goodwill. Because it is peer-based, they deliver the environmental message to people who know them and trust them," she added.

The second course starts this autumn. For further information contact centre manager Lisa McEvoy at 057-8661338 or call into Portlaoise Further Education Training Centre.



Suzanne Dempsey, Laois County Council's Environmental Awareness Officer, outlines one of the environmental initiatives.