

Becoming 'Healthier and Greener' with RWN

■ DAN DOONER

'A Healthier and Greener You' is a six-week programme run by Roscommon Women's Network in conjunction with GRETB and Roscommon County Council. The programme, which covers subjects such as cookery, horticulture, biodiversity and healthier and more sustainable living, has proven extremely popular among participants in Castlereagh and Monksland and has since been extended to Roscommon town (RSG Derrane), Strokestown and Boyle.

Strokestown woman Hannah Mole, who runs EarthCare, a permaculture consultancy firm which promotes sustainability, led the Monksland class through six modules including shopping tips, seasonal, local food, zero waste composting and recycling, biodiversity, personal household products and adapting to climate change.

Hannah said that while programmes such as this only scratch the surface on what needs to be done in terms of climate change and the environment, the students welcomed the chance to discuss such important issues.

"They wanted to talk about it and they seemed to be attentive and receptive to what we were discussing. Hopefully they will now go home and discuss what they've learned with their families and friends and that it can reach younger generations too," she said.

Roscommon Women's Network manager, Nora Fahy, said the course came about following consultation with various RWN members throughout the county and is also supported by the Roscommon Environment Network and the Brothers of Charity, who continue to provide the use of their premises in Monksland for RWN's outreach work.

"We were doing our planning for our strategic plan at the end of 2017, and we went out and met up with a lot of the groups. We were surprised that we were getting a lot of questions on the environment from 'we need to be something ourselves', to groups asking if the Roscommon Women's Network as an organisation felt that there was a problem," she said.

The network decided to reach out the Roscommon County Council Environmental Officer Suzanne Dempsey for further guidance on how best to address these concerns. The RWN also contacted GRETB, and the then Minister Denis Naughten.

"We circled the wagons and got people together who we thought might provide funding or work with us and by June the other organisations and stakeholders like Roscommon County Council agreed that it was time to pilot a programme".

The other stakeholders asked the RWN what they thought such a programme should look like and the result was a six-week long educational course called 'A Healthier and Greener You'.

"The flier which came out in August asked 'Would you like to learn about horticulture, cookery, nature?' It's about learning how to develop routines and changing to everyday routines that might help the environment and our planet while also making ourselves healthier. We wanted to make it user-friendly so people could relate to it," Nora said.

Nora described tutor Hannah Mole as "a godsend" and said her knowledge of a variety of subjects has proven invaluable to participants.

"Hannah, myself and some of the women and the GRETB sat down and wrote the modules from scratch. We then looked around the country and we couldn't see anything like it anywhere



Pictured on the last day of Roscommon Women's Network's 'A Healthier, Greener You' course in Monksland were participants studying plant identification. Pic: Michelle Hughes Walsh

else so it's unique.

"I'd like to thank the Brothers of Charity for the use of their excellent space and for the use of their office so that our development worker Maria Harris can chat to people about their needs every Wednesday from 10 am to 1 pm. The GRETB have also been very supportive and I'd like to thank Community Education Facilitator, Dolores McSharry for her help".

Due to demand countywide, the GRETB have decided to fund further programmes in Strokestown and Boyle. The programme has really captured the imagination of people right across Co. Roscommon according to Nora and she reiterated that while it

was facilitated by the Roscommon Women's Network, it was open to everyone.

There was more positive news for Roscommon Women's Network recently as manager Nora Fahy announced that the organisation had been successful in its application for Agenda 21 Environmental Protection programme funding and that it had been awarded €7,600.

The funding will be used to carry out a feasibility study in order to build on the 'Healthier, Greener You' course and to start an upcycling project in the county based on the Ballymun Rediscovery Centre. The hope is to create a flagship project in the county.

Tommy's view

Tommy Harrison attended the Monksland group with his wife and he said it was a very informative and enjoyable six weeks.

"It was well presented and made easy to understand and it made us all more aware of our environment and how we can play our part. In the end all we can do is play our part."

"When it comes to climate change and the environment we'll (his generation) be okay but it's the younger generations that will need to learn what we've learned through this course," he said.

Tommy added that he would highly recommend the course and said that it provided a social outlet as well as advice on how to live a greener, healthier life.

Among the other participants were newcomers to the area who agreed that the course was a vital way of meeting new people and integrating into the community as well as a valuable educational experience.

Those in attendance received tips on how to shop healthier and greener as well as information on how to turn baking soda, white vinegar, coconut oil and chestnuts into household cleaning products. Each of the participants was looking forward to joining with the other groups at a seminar and presentation of their work in the New Year.



Pictured are participants on the recent 'A Healthier, Greener You' course which took place in Monksland in conjunction with Roscommon Women's Network. Pic: Michelle Hughes Walsh