

FRI, 24 NOV, 2023 - 12:55

## Roscommon Women's Network launches new Intercultural Art Project



Pictured at the launch of Roscommon's Women's Network Intercultural Art Project, as part of Roscommon Social Inclusion Week 2023, at Aras an Chontae, were Masuma Mohadi and Latifi Niaz, Roscommon Town. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin



JAMES FOGARTY

A new Roscommon Women's Network Intercultural Art Project will highlight how people of all backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities can work together to celebrate and achieve, the project launch was told.

The project was launched at Aras An Chontae, Roscommon where the ceremony was opened and closed with singing by the hugely talented Winnie Christina McDonagh. There was also a talk on the Umayyad Mosque in Syria by Abeer Alhamoud, who is based in the Ballaghaderreen EROC and spoke in English and Irish during her presentation.



Winnie Christina McDonagh, Una Ní Chuinn, Roscommon County Council; Nora Fahy, RWN; Cllr John Cummins, Leas Cathaoirleach, Roscommon County Council; Abeer Alhamoud; Áine Treanor, Project Co-Ordinator, RWN and Janice O'Brien, Social Inclusion Officer, Roscommon County Council. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

As part of the launch, Nai Lemoshira, who is originally from Kenya, explained to the gathering the importance of the project and how it represented the embrace of "beautiful diversity".

"I came to Ireland 15 years ago to study, and after that I left," she said. "And six years later, I returned. I love it here. I felt welcome." She said her local community gave her a place to showcase her traditions and her culture.



Mary McDonagh, Janice O'Brien, Social Inclusion Officer, Roscommon County Council; Temhope Adenigba, Princess Moyosade Oyinloye and Winnie Christina McDonagh (all Ballaghaderreen). Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

She said that Ireland had given her opportunities and “a safe place to raise our children”. She said that wherever Irish people had emigrated to they brought their culture, enriching their new home.

“They have influenced those countries with their music and culture,” Ms Lemoshira said. “Through this project I met amazing women from different parts of the world. I have learned something from each of them, their history, their traditions, their beliefs and values. That’s what makes a community, where everyone is included, where everyone’s perspective is expressed, giving us the opportunity to connect and integrate in Irish society. And we appreciate you welcoming our perspective.” Manager of Roscommon Women’s Network and MC for the event, Nora Fahy welcomed everyone, saying the occasion was about celebrating cultural diversity and supporting cultural integration throughout the county.



Florrie Finan, Lorraine Campbell and Mary Frances Loftus, RWN. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

“Our launch tonight also marks ‘County Roscommon Social Inclusion Week 2023’,” she said. “‘Social Inclusion Awareness Week’ provides the opportunity to promote and highlight the very positive work that the voluntary and community sectors do throughout County Roscommon on a day to day basis to promote equality, diversity and social inclusion.” She said that the new project was taking the RWN back to its root. The very first group activity as a community development project in 2007/8 was the creation of the Roscommon Intercultural Quilt and a few of the women who planned and delivered the Intercultural Quilt, which went on to be displayed in European parliament during 2008 Intercultural conference, were present.

The RWN is a community development project supporting women and families throughout the county. Its office and training centre is based in Castlerea and it has a Textile Upcycling Social Enterprise, called CycleUp, based in the Riverside Centre, Athleague.

"We provide many supports and services for women and we also outreach around the county through our hard working part time Development worker, Aíne Treanor who is also coordinating this intercultural/integration project," Ms Fahy said.

She noted that in April 2018, many of the people at the event were present launching the RWN's last intercultural project.

"And due to the success of that and other previous integration projects we have led over the years, RWN was motivated by the need and desire expressed by women to regroup and work again together. Working across cultures has proven to be a truly enriching experience for all involved in our previous intercultural work , allowing all of us to learn about perspectives and traditions from around the world, women working together bonding over similarities and differences, helping to abandon prejudices something that is increasingly valuable in today's world." She added that this need expressed by the RWN members and the women it worked with, motivated the network to secure funding earlier this year through The Communities Integration Fund 2023.

"Our project aims to support the women living in the county from all background to gather together once again, supporting new members to join, to get to know each other, have fun and share their stories while learning and working together towards a common goal.

"We were delighted when Janice O'Brien and Úna Ní Chuinn, Community and Enterprise Section, Roscommon County Council came on board in July to support the project and we greatly appreciate their financial support and the use of the foyer here this evening and most of all we appreciate their enthusiasm and encouragement for our work. We have recently also received some financial support for this project through the Roscommon Leader Partnership SICAP fund." She told the launch that according to the 2022 census there were 7,728 non-Irish citizens living in County Roscommon, representing 11% of the county's population. This was an increase of 1,132 on the 2016 Census.



Carol Delaney and Tracy McCarthy, Castlerea. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

"The number of dual-Irish citizens, which is when you are a citizen of two countries at the same time, in the county increased from 1,152 in 2016 to 2,043 in 2022," Ms Fahy said.

“There are 565 Travellers in Roscommon, according to Census 2022, compared with 516 in 2016.” Aine Treanor of the RWN said it was a great honour to coordinate the project with the RWN “and to meet all of the wonderful women that I have over the past two months”.



“As I am new in the post, this project was a great opportunity to travel throughout Roscommon and to meet different communities throughout the county,” she said.

“The project began with the first meet up on September 13th in the Cycle Up training centre and retail space in Athleague. Twenty four women joined us from ten different nationalities including Traveller women and settled Irish women. We had three mother and daughter duos and the youngest of the group was just five months old.” The group sat under the intercultural quilt, made as part of the first intercultural project, she explained.

“Our second meet up took place in Monksland Community Centre and was the first session with our project artist, Thais Muniz. At this session we learnt about how to do the applique technique using textile waste and started to think about the theme for the shared art piece. But the highlight of this session was of course the multicultural lunch provided by the women involved in the project based in Monksland, we had dishes from Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe,” said Ms Treanor.



Fairouz Novl, Ibtissam Tizaoui, Samba Taif, Frenchpark and Jennifer Payne, Cycleup. Pic. Gerard O'Loughlin

“Our third and final meet up so far took place in the EROC in Ballaghaderreen and at this workshop women began working on their applique pieces using their national plants and mythological figures as patterns. Again, we had an amazing lunch prepared by the Pakistani women based in Ballaghaderreen, followed by a talk by Tina Abagun on personal development and community leadership.” In the first three meet ups of this project, 48 women from seventeen cultures based in County Roscommon, including Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Africa, Germany, Ukraine, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, India, Slovakia, Scotland, Algeria, Morocco, Palestine, settled Irish, and Traveller women, were involved.

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“This alone demonstrates the diversity within this county and the need for more projects that bring communities together,” she said.

“Over the next six months, we’ll continue to meet and to create our shared art piece focused on the theme of mythology and nature. We’ll continue to share traditional dishes, to travel to different locations throughout the county and to build relationships and community across cultures. And at the end of this, we’ll showcase all that was created together with a final launch event in May.” The project is also still open for women of any community in County Roscommon, and they are advised to get in touch with the RWN on social media or through its website, [www.RWN.ie](http://www.RWN.ie).

Úna Ní Chuinn, Roscommon County Council, complimented everyone involved in the project and said she was looking forward to seeing what the group produced.

“I would like to invite you back to Áras An Chontae next May to show us what you produce,” she said. “The way that you work together is an absolute credit to you.” She also said that she was very impressed with the use of Gaeilge at the launch.

Leas Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Cummins, who was standing in for Cathaoirleach Cllr John Keogh, who was unable to attend, said that the launch coincided with Roscommon Social Inclusion Week 2023, “which aims to shine a light on the importance of social inclusion, irrespective of people’s colour, race or creed”.

“Tonight’s launch of your inter-cultural project is important. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to create an arts instillation that will be launched later next May,” Cllr Cummins said.

“This feature, when complete, will feature the creativity, inspiration and energy of women of many backgrounds and cultures. It will be a feature that can be enjoyed and appreciated by many.

“But just as important, it will be an artwork that will bring women together to share their skills, share their experience and tell their stories that are mutually beneficial to each other and to women at large.” He highlighted that one of the RWN’s first projects was the creation of an inter-generational ‘quilt’ which was very favourably received and was subsequently exhibited in Brussels.

“Since then, your members have created an upcycling social enterprise whereby women have creatively used old and recycled materials to make bags, scarves and other accessories, many of which are sold from your premises in Castlereagh.

Similarly to that project, the new art instillation you are planning to create will have a particular focus on upcycling. This is consistent with your members’ strong environmental awareness,” he said. He wished the project well and commended the role of his female colleagues on Roscommon County Council who have supported the work of Roscommon Women’s Network and its manager, Ms Fahy, “whose vision, passion and commitment inspires all of you to support each other”.