

Stories of women's lives celebrated

By Claire McGovern

The stories and fairy tales that have interwoven the lives of many women in Roscommon were celebrated in a unique art installation unveiled by Roscommon Women's Network last week.

Involving over 50 women from different nationalities living in the county, the unique piece, measuring 2.5 square metres took over nine months to make.

Roscommon Women's Network Intercultural Art project brings together women from diverse backgrounds living in County Roscommon and surrounding areas.

The women, who represented 17 different nationalities including Traveller women and settled Irish women, met up monthly to plan, work on their art piece together while chatting and getting to know each other.

Manager of RWN Nora Fahy explained that the original idea to create the art piece was first mooted back in 2002 and arose from a similar project which took place in previous years, the intercultural quilt.

Women from all over Roscommon had been anxious to come back together after lockdown due to Covid and around this time the RWN began its CycleUp programme. This is an environmental and training social enterprise which addresses the issue of textile waste through a community development approach to environmental protection, supporting the hardest to reach women and families to engage.

Textile tutors, with development worker Aine Treanor leading the programme, trained the women in the use of waste textiles to ensure that the end result was an environmentally friendly, fully sustainable art installation.



Pictured at the unveiling of the Women's Intercultural Textile Art project in the Abbey Hotel, Roscommon last Friday were (l-r) Arezo Hazan Zadeh, Jessamine O'Connor, Cathriona McCarthy, Shelia Coyle, Cllr John Keogh, Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council, Nora Fahy, Cllr Orla Leyden, Aine Treanor and Rita Kearney.

Each woman involved, there were an estimated 25-30 working on it consistently, drew inspiration from their own stories, the tales they grew up with and from stories from all around the world.

Last Friday saw the official unveiling of the colourful and decorative piece. The event was attended by Roscommon County Cathaoirleach Cllr John Keogh and a large audience with many women attending

in their native clothing and traditional costumes. Cllr Keogh stated: "No value can be put on the importance of a project such as this, giving women the confidence to express themselves creatively. It is a powerful tool that I'm sure can inspire and encourage other women to do so. We as a local society can learn so much from an initiative like this. The values of people working together, of tolerance, respect and understanding. This truly is a project that encapsulates all of these qualities."

Another highlight of the event saw Jessamine O'Connor, RWN Board member and award winning poet recite her poem "Welcome" which was also recited in Persian, Arabic, Urdu by some of the women in the intercultural group.

Many speakers also recalled their own stories and how they impact on their lives today.

Others spoke about what the project and the network means to them and the importance of having something so valuable in Roscommon. The piece, which is accompanied by a booklet featuring the folks stories from the different cultures and countries, while explaining the significance of the symbols on the piece, will now go on display at library branches through the county and, it is hoped, at Roscommon Arts Centre at a future date.

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This unique art installation was unveiled at a special launch last Friday.



Women from 17 nationalities were involved in creating the Women's Intercultural Textile Art project.



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