



Annual Report 2016

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Introduction

Established in 1997, VOICE is a registered charity supported by public membership, donations and bequests.

Patrons

Darina Allen
Pauline Bewick
Don Conroy
Christy Moore
John Feehan
Brendan Kennelly
Sr. Mary Minehan

Directors

Dr. Ruth McGrath (Chair)
Gay Brabazon
Gary Clare
Ken Kilbride
Michael O'Dwyer

Vision:

Promoting the wise use of natural resources for a sustainable future.

Mission Statement

VOICE promotes a respectful relationship with the Earth by encouraging a way of life in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it.

Objectives

VOICE strives to achieve this mission by:

- Informing the public on environmental policy/issues
- Empowering individuals and local communities to become environmentally active to protect Ireland's resources.
- Advocating on behalf of our members to influence policy and practice with government and other stakeholders.

An Overview of 2016

VOICE's work on food waste continued successfully primarily through our Food Rescue events. This year we had four events, two in Kildare and two in Wexford. Each event has been different according to the local champions and the resources devoted to it. We have had full meals, tastings, cooking demonstrations, composting demonstrations/information, school involvement, talks, screenings, vegetable seed planting and ugly food give-aways. The common theme was to educate about the enormous impact food waste has on the environment and on our society and to have a fun event around this public awareness. The size of the events ranged from 25-250 people attending, but the message was well received and we signed up many new supporters to receive our newsletters.

We also focused on other waste initiatives. We developed Creative Consumption Cashel after securing funding from Limerick to run five events in Cashel, Co. Tipperary during the October, which was national Reuse Month. We were also successful in attracting funds from the Department of the Environment and EPA to pursue our Towards Zero Waste Cashel 18-month pilot.

Our work in the water arena has been mostly limited to my role as vice-chair of SWAN and VOICE's membership of SWAN. However, water continues to be a hot topic, both in the development of the River Basin Management Plans and identifying Significant Water Management Issues. Irish Water continues to be controversial and VOICE has been an active member of the Public Water Forum.

Staffing:

Azarah Minihan continues as our part-time bookkeeper (on contract) and we hired Lorraine Bull as a part-time social media guru and project manager to organise our food rescue and other events. However, she only stayed with us for three months as she was offered a full time position elsewhere. We have been fortunate that we were able to find another superb candidate, Meaghan Carmody, who will start in January 2016. She works part-time with Friends of the Earth as well.

Our volunteers for the year include:

Niamh Madden: Newsletter
Collins Mittochi: Campaigns and Research
Jonathan Forsythe: Accounts
Dave Brooks, Food Rescue

We manned a table at the Dublin Volunteer's Day to find new volunteers. We took around 20 names of interested people.

Governance:

We are in compliance with the governance code, have registered as lobbyists and have registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority. All our filings are up to date.

Funding:

Irish Environmental Network/Environmental Pillar:

VOICE received funding from the IEN in various forms:

Core funding	€13,355
Meetings attended in 2016	Will be paid in 2017
Resource Efficiency working group	€840
Submissions 2015	Will be paid in 2017
Green Economy working group	Will be paid in 2017
Total to date:	€14,195

Local Agenda 21:

We received €5,205 for Food Rescue events for 2015/16.

Membership:

Our membership numbers continue to reduce slightly each year. However, we received €8,051 from our members both in membership and in donations.

Donations:

We received a large bequest as well as moneys from the An Post survey. The total in donations received is €15,686.

Corporate Donation:

We received €3,000 from HSBC for a school food rescue event in the city centre

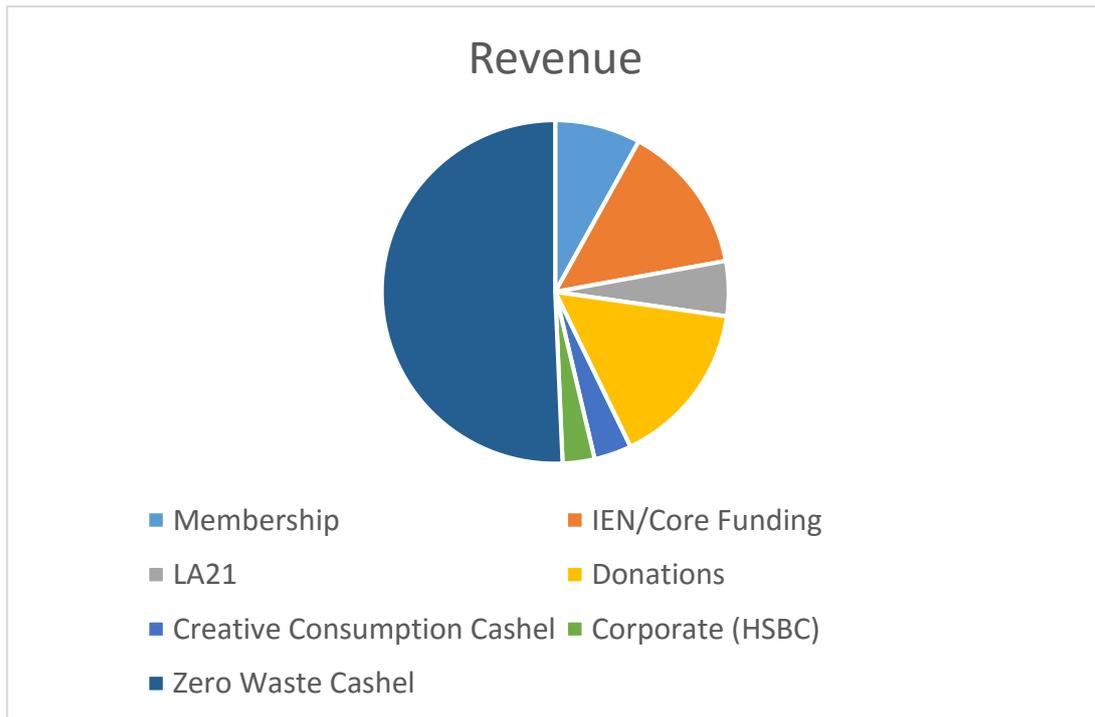
Creative Consumption Cashel:

We received €3,500 from Limerick County Council for this month-long initiative.

Towards Zero Waste Cashel:

We received a total of €41,000 from both the Department of the Environment and EPA for our Cashel pilot

Total Funding 2016: €90,637



Campaigns:

Food Waste:

Education and Presentations:

We also made a food waste presentation at the Waste Not Want Not workshop in the Ballybough Resource Centre through LYCS.

Our coordinator attended the Citibank Green Day where she manned an information desk and made a food waste presentation.

Food Rescue:

In Kildare, we met with 8 Tidy Towns groups in one meeting in Naas and received great feedback and a commitment from the groups to engage more in environmental initiatives. Our first event took place in Maynooth where the Tidy Towns group held an event with a local chef conducting a cooking demonstration. They had around 25 attending and they were very pleased with the outcome. They also received some press coverage in the local papers. Celbridge Tidy Towns group had its event on the 17th May during the first annual Taste of Celbridge. It was hugely successful with a large amount of people coming to the stand.

Wexford hosted two events as well. We went down to Kilrane and made a food waste presentation during an ICA meeting where they all made dishes from surplus food. We had around 30 people there. We had a stand during the Wexford Food and Wine Festival where we worked with the local Castlebridge Community Gardens group. Eugene Rockett and his assistant chefs from D'Lush Cafe conducted a cooking demo at his café and we had a master composter there as well. It took place at the end of May and we had many people coming to the stand to sample the food and to talk about food waste.

Waste:

Presentations:

Our Coordinator has made a presentation about plastic and disposable waste in the Donahies Secondary School for their world earth day.

Waste Prevention Advisory Committee:

Mindy O'Brien is the environmental representative on this committee. Thus far this committee receives information from the government on the successful measures and actions taken on waste prevention. We suggested that more be done to tap into the expertise of the committee in terms of policy proposals. This is in the works at the moment and Mindy sits on the steering committee.

Zero Waste Community Pilot:

Cashel has been selected as the zero waste community and we have been there several times meeting with the southern region waste management officer, the Lions Club, Tidy Towns, county officials, the chamber of commerce, waste management company, home composting company and green schools. VOICE took a table at the Cashel Bank of Ireland's community gathering. We received €11,000 from the Department for this project and we were approved for funding of €60,000 under EPA's Green Enterprise Grant programme for an 18 month pilot programme. So far the feedback from the community has been very positive.

Creative Consumption Cashel:

Instead of buying something new or something only used once, we provided the tools to help consumers think outside the box. For the duration of October, we asked people to make a pledge to consume creatively. We engaged with charity shops, FreeTrade.ie, the tidy towns, national school, a local bike shop, Baby Market, library and resource center to set up skill sharing and upcycling workshops to empower people to avoid buying new items when they can be more resourceful with what they already own. We created an on-line resource which highlighted our events, www.facebook.com/creativeconsumptioncashel, and promoted the events through local papers, radio stations and IrelandTV.

The idea of this campaign is that it challenges participants to examine their consumption patterns to evaluate if they really need everything that they buy, and if they do need something whether they can attain it second-hand or by swapping instead. It is hoped that this experience will teach people to be more resourceful with what they already have, will lead to the establishment of local sharing and reusing networks and promote the concept of reuse wherever possible.

We put together a number of workshops and events to provide people with the skills needed to replace new purchases with alternatives.

We organised five events:

Second-Hand Bicycle Repair and Bike Sale:

We worked closely with St. John the Baptist primary school principal to set up this event. It was promoted through social media, the radio and press, texts and letters sent to parents through the school and posters throughout the town. We brought in a local bike shop owner and mechanic, PJ Collins from Collins Cycle Centre, to repair the bikes either to get the bikes back on the road or to get them ready for resale.

Results:

PJ repaired eight bicycles for their owners and repaired another four for resale. We received around fifteen bikes to sell and sold five. The remaining bicycles that were too damaged to be repaired were sent to Rebike, a Waterford charity that reuses bicycle parts to create new serviceable bicycles. We had many parents ask whether we would be back again as they forgot their old bikes. We noticed that many people dropped off small bikes and were searching for larger bikes; so there was interest but no supply of larger bikes. We recommend that if future second hand bike sales were organised that it should be done in conjunction with the secondary school and local preschools to get all sizes donated. This was a good introduction and one that could be repeated with better results in the future.

Upcycle your Child's Halloween Costume:

We identified a local facilitator, Winnie Looby, who works in the local resource centre, Spafield, teaching sewing and crafts skills. She had six mothers who attended and made scary headpieces from old tights, hangers, and other items from home. We promoted this event on our facebook page, twitter, leaflets and posters throughout the town, radio and local papers and word of mouth. It was featured extensively on Ireland TV.

Results:

We demonstrated that wonderful costumes can be easily made from old castoff items that are more original than store-bought ones. Our mothers really enjoyed the experience.

Trash from Treasure Art Workshop:

We identified another local woman, Berna Hannigan, to work with children to create art creations from trash from home. We had twenty children attend a class at the local library. All had fun using old materials to create works of art.

Results:

Attending children and their parents appreciated that items that we believe are bound for the rubbish bin can have additional purpose. We hope that we can conduct such workshops again.

Baby Market:

We enlisted the talents of Angie Nangle, who has been running Baby Markets throughout the country. These events link parents wishing to sell outgrown children clothes and equipment

to other parents looking for quality items without paying a fortune. She organised the event at Halle na Feile.

Results:

She sent out leaflets to all Montessori and playschools, did a general leaflet drop and put posters around the town. She also featured it on her facebook page, which has a huge following, over 16,000 likes. We also promoted it through posters, word of mouth and through our various media outlets. She had 24 stalls booked and over 150 people attended. We believe that it was well received and another market has been scheduled for the 12th Feb 2017. Angie suggested that we may want to organise this locally and not as a business as she felt guilty asking people to pay for admission and stalls for this local initiative.

Charity Shop Fashion Show:

We enlisted the help from NCBI and Second Chance Charity Shops to run a fashion show featuring outfits that could be put together for less than €25. We asked that instead of a door fee that attendees bring clean unwanted clothes to be sold on the night. The two charity shops set up their own stall in Halle na Feile as well.

Results:

We had around 75 people attend who watched the show and bought second hand items. We served wine and nibbles and there was a great buzz. Each charity brought in around €250 from sales and were delighted with the event. They are now thinking that they will work together in the future to hold a fashion show annually as their fundraiser and will investigate how they can improve the event to bring in more money. They had eight models each and the local bingo caller was the compere. Many items both from the charity stalls and the clothes brought in were sold on the night.

EEB:

VOICE continues to be an active member of the waste working group within the EEB. We have not been active in the water working group. We have participated in an incineration webinar and a deposit refund scheme e-conference. Our coordinator attended the November waste working group meeting in Brussels. The work is mostly focused on the EU's Circular Economy Package and Action Plan. Most communications are done through email.

Water:

Irish Water Stakeholders Forum/Public Water Forum:

VOICE was a vocal participant in the Stakeholder's Forum, which has representatives from all sectors. We were there as a SWAN member. The forum is fairly toothless and may just tick the public participation box. We have stepped off this Forum and now sit on the statutorily established Public Water Forum to review and make recommendations on the functions of Irish Water. We have meetings nearly every 6 weeks. We have also met with Irish Water on the proposed water extraction from the Shannon River and with the Expert Commission that investigated the pricing structure of Irish Water. Our Coordinator made a presentation with the PWF before the Expert Commission.

Our coordinator is on SWAN's Fracking Subcommittee and had a day long workshop. SWAN's fracking report is complete and was presented to the government. It was used as an expert reference during the Dail debate on the fracking ban bill.

We also participated and our coordinator spoke at the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI) workshop at Farmleigh House, which was organised by the Department and EPA. We also attended EPA's Water Conference in Galway.

Our coordinator continues to be quite active with SWAN and sits as the Vice Chair.

Meetings:

- EEB: attended the EEB waste working group meeting in Brussels in January and November and have been in contact with them as the circular economy package is moving through the EU.
- We are on the government's circular economy working group and the waste prevention advisory council and are feeding into the government's submission to the EU on the package.
- Our coordinator continues to meet with the Eastern Midlands Regional Waste Prevention Officer and with Community Reuse Network Coordinator on waste issues.
- We have met with the manager of WEEE Ireland about our zero waste pilot.
- We met with employees from HSBC bank about funding a school food rescue event.
- Our coordinator attended the National Economic Dialogue forum as a member of the Pillar.
- Our coordinator attended the National Waste Prevention Committee as a Pillar representative.
- We have attended SWAN's board and plenary meetings.
- We participated in SWAN's working session on water pricing with Nellie Montblanc.
- attended eight Public Water Forum meetings as well as a meeting with Irish Water.

Conferences, government meetings:

Mindy O'Brien attended the Water Conference in Galway, EPA environmental conference in Croke Park, the Community Reuse Network Ireland Conference at Farmleigh. She met Ministers Naughten, Coveney, Mitchell-O'Connor at the National Economic Dialogue and with Minister Naughten in an IEN meeting. We also met with EPA with the IEN.

Environmental Pillar:

Mindy has stepped off the Pillar Steering committee, but continues to be active in the Pillar. She heads up the Greening the Budget working group and as such attended a Budget Process workshop with Persuasion Republic and drafted a document on effective economic instruments to affect behavioural change.

She attended a high level government stakeholders meeting discussing 'Our Sustainable Future' and attended the 2-day think-in review of the Environmental Pillar.

Irish Environmental Network:

Our Coordinator has rotated onto the board of the IEN and has attended the funding meeting with Minister Naughten. She is active in the internal issues of the IEN and attends the board meetings.

Social Media, Newsletters, Website and Messaging:

We have posted 13 blogs, sent out 2 e-newsletters and sent out our Summer and Winter 2016 newsletters. We are active on Twitter and have increased our followers from 1,800 to 2,245 and a little less so on Facebook, although we have 1,160 likes.

We also created a facebook page, creativeconsumptioncashel, which has 198 likes and featured all our events during the month of October.

We have shared news and other actions from other environmental organisations through our mailchimp and email accounts. We were also involved in the Uplift campaign urging the government to put 'Environment' back into a ministerial department. This campaign was successful.

We have hired Meaghan Carmody to handle our social media and communications in the future.

Press and Media:

Mindy was interviewed by Near FM about food waste and by Prime Time about Irish Water. Mindy was interviewed by TippFM about zero waste Cashel and Creative Consumption Cashel (which was also featured in IrelandTV and other news outlets).

Mindy was also on Newstalk with George Hook speaking about waste.

Training:

- I attended a Twitter training course organised by SWAN
- I attended a three day programme on Affecting Behavioural Change

Friends of the Earth Proposed Merger:

We have investigated the possibility of merging with Friends of the Earth Ireland as we have many commonalities and could benefit from potential synergies. Our boards have met and we have received legal advice. Work on this is on-going.