

# Engage & Educate Fund

IMPACT REPORT 2021-2024



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# INTRODUCTION

**The Engage & Educate Fund is a €1.2 million three-year fund created by Rethink Ireland in partnership with Mason Hayes & Curran LLP and the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund.<sup>1</sup>**

The objective of the fund was to support innovative projects that empower young people and adults through education, enabling people from marginalised communities to access game-changing education programmes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the gap in educational opportunities between different socio-economic classes, and has deepened the negative impact on young people and adults who have left the education system early or are at risk of doing so.

This fund is a continuation of three previous Engage & Educate funds (2017, 2018 and 2019).

These funds, supported by Mason Hayes & Curran since 2017, worked with 14 projects that sought to empower people through education to achieve their full potential and to contribute to the community.

There was a particular focus on tackling the disabling effects on human potential of disadvantage, disability or migrant status in the 2019 iteration of the fund. Many awardees of these funds have since gone on to receive further funding from Rethink Ireland and other philanthropic donors.

It is important to note that this iteration of the fund (2021-2024) was the first to introduce the multi-year funding model. The fund awarded €150,000 in cash grants over three years to each of the four projects. In addition, up to €30,000 in non-financial supports (NFS) was granted to each awardee over this period.

## FUND AWARDEES<sup>2</sup>:

- Care After Prison: Post-Release Community Reintegration Project
- Cultúr Migrants Centre: Cultúr UpSkilling Project Phase 2
- Galway Traveller Movement: Educate to Empower Project
- Youth Horizons: Youth Horizons Project



<sup>1</sup> The funding covers awardee activities from December 2021 to December 2024, though this report covers activities up to the end of October 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Blossom Ireland was originally selected as a fifth awardee of the fund and received €50,000 in funding and non-financial support to develop a strategic plan and Theory of Change. However, due to circumstances outside of the control of the fund, Blossom Ireland wound down operations at the end of 2022. The remaining funding will be redistributed to the four awardees on the fund to support the exit of the projects from the fund.



# AWARDEE OVERVIEW

ORGANISATION: **Care After Prison**

LOCATION: **Nationwide**

PROJECT: **Post-Release Community Reintegration**

The Care After Prison (CAP) Post-Release Community Reintegration project provides pathways and support to education, training and employment for those with lived experience of incarceration.

This project develops individual bespoke plans with the person and guides and supports them each step of the way as they resettlement. Part of the service is peer-to-peer support, which is a powerful and inspiring connection with a significant long-lasting impact.

ORGANISATION: **Cultúr Migrants Centre**

LOCATION: **Cavan, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Westmeath**

PROJECT: **Cultúr UpSkilling Project Phase 2**

Cultúr Migrant Centre is a midlands-based community organisation working with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, focusing on the provision of equal rights and education opportunities.

This migrant-led initiative works to address a host of social issues, such as social exclusion, risk of poverty, isolated communities and language barriers.

The Cultúr UpSkilling Project Phase 2 responds to high levels of demand on the current accredited upskilling training to empower 180 migrants through education and promote employability skills for three years.

ORGANISATION: **Youth Horizons**

LOCATION: **Dublin**

PROJECT: **Youth Horizons**

Youth Horizons is situated in West Tallaght and has been responding to the expressed needs of the community since 1988. At present, early school leaving is a defining social issue in the local community.

Youth Horizons works with young people who have struggled in mainstream education offering them a second chance to complete the Leaving Certificate.

They provide a space for young people to achieve academically by removing any barrier that is put in their way.

Activity-based, experiential learning exposes students to new interests, strengthening their ability to function in a team, and allowing talented individuals to express themselves.

ORGANISATION: **Galway Traveller Movement**

LOCATION: **Galway**

PROJECT: **Educate to Empower**

The Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) Educate to Empower project is a peer-led education programme.

The peer-led model helps to promote cultural identity that nurtures young people's health, wellbeing and creativity, with the goal of improving educational outcomes.

Taking a coordinated inter-agency approach to address educational disadvantage for young people in Galway's Traveller community, the programme identifies areas of priority for action and transformational change.

This is done by developing a system to enable Traveller families to engage in afterschool supports through a network of volunteer tutors and technology. The project develops creative and culturally-specific workshops in consultation with Traveller youth, that build self-esteem and belonging.



**EDUCATION  
FOR ALL**



# Statement from Will Carmody

## - Managing Partner, Mason Hayes & Curran

At Mason Hayes & Curran, we are proud to partner with Rethink Ireland and the Government of Ireland on the Engage & Educate Fund 2021–2024.

Over €1.2 million has been made available through this fund, to support four transformative projects that empower individuals from marginalised communities to overcome barriers to education.

In the past three years, over 600 people have been positively impacted by these efforts. The initiatives provide life-changing opportunities, helping people re-enter education, access language classes, secure meaningful employment, and rebuild lives after challenging circumstances.

Education creates a multiplier effect: When one person improves their circumstances, it inspires and uplifts those around them. At Mason Hayes & Curran, we are deeply committed to being part of this change, helping to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Many of us at Mason Hayes & Curran have had the privilege of accessing advanced education opportunities, which has profoundly shaped our perspective on its transformative power. We recognise how vital education is, especially for individuals who have faced significant barriers, and how it can open doors to new possibilities and brighter futures.

Education is a cornerstone of personal and societal progress. It empowers individuals to realise their potential, gain independence, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. When access to education becomes more equitable, it doesn't just change lives – it helps build a fairer and more just society for everyone.

Supporting the Engage & Educate Fund aligns with our commitment to social impact and innovation in education. We are inspired by the incredible work of these four organisations and are honoured to play a role in their mission to create lasting change.

### **Will Carmody**

Managing Partner, Mason Hayes & Curran





# ENGAGE & EDUCATE FUND - KEY RESULTS

**672** people supported through the fund,  
including:

**35**

students who  
previously left  
the education  
system supported  
to continue their  
studies.

**143**

people with lived  
experience of incarceration  
supported to reintegrate  
back into society, including  
65 mentors trained to deliver  
a Post-Release Community  
Reintegration Programme.

**260**

migrants helped to identify  
courses, training and  
employment opportunities.

**234**

students from  
minority backgrounds,  
including the Traveller  
community, supported  
educationally and  
emotionally through a  
school-based Diversity  
Hub in Galway.

**4**

awardee  
organisations  
supported





# THE RETHINK IRELAND PACKAGE

Rethink Ireland is committed to supporting the best social innovations to scale and maximise their impact. This is done by using a venture philanthropy model – a funding method that uses the tools of venture capital investing alongside grants to support long-term social and environmental impact.

Cash grant payments are tied to a number of targets and goals associated with programme delivery, as well as strategic areas of growth. It is the process of treating a philanthropic donation in the same way as a venture capital investment, with the main performance metric being social impact.

Through the Engage & Educate Fund, Rethink Ireland supported four awardees with cash grants and tailored capacity building support to suit the needs of each organisation.

## CASH GRANTS

The overall cash grant investment amounted to €750,000 between December 2021 and December 2024. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding from Mason Hayes & Curran LLP and government funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund.

## CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORTS

Capacity-building supports are aimed at strengthening awardee organisations through tailored consultancy support on key strategic areas and participation in our Accelerator Programme. A total package of support amounting to €150,000 was provided.

## CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORTS: RETHINK IRELAND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Awardees on the fund benefitted from a series of capacity-building supports provided by consultants and Rethink Ireland's Accelerator Programme, with the aim of strengthening the organisational capacity of awardees in a number of strategic areas.

The Engage and Educate capacity-building supports focused on the following key areas:

- **Theory of Change and Strategic Planning:** A detailed Theory of Change and strategy that sets out their journey to scale over the coming years.
- **Communications, Storytelling & Pitching:** Support in developing a communications plan that identified key audiences and communication channels, as well as an opportunity to develop branded communication assets and refine pitching and storytelling skills.
- **Impact Measurement and Management:** A deeper understanding of social impact and the use of an Impact Management Framework to capture and measure impact metrics in a consistent manner.
- **Governance support:** Support in the area of the organisation's governance and compliance.
- **Communication assets:** Developing an impact video and photography assets for awardees highlighting the value and impact of their work for multiple audiences.

Based on awardees' feedback regarding the capacity-building supports, key developments for awardees included:

- For **Care After Prison**, the strategic planning support and communications advice in particular has helped the incoming Executive Director re-evaluate the organisation and its direction.
- **Cultúr Migrants Centre** was able to develop strategic and communications plans that the organisation is successfully implementing while also addressing other organisational capacity constraints.
- **Galway Traveller Movement** said the fund's support allowed for the development of both a communications plan and a strategic plan as well as impact measurement and management advice.
- For **Youth Horizons**, the strategic planning support, governance support, and impact measurement and management advice has put the organisation in a strong position to manage the succession of its leader and co-founder who is retiring.
- All awardees have been provided with communications collateral, namely a video highlighting the value of their work through the voices of the people they support.

## CASH GRANT INVESTMENT

The cash grants have supported the awardees to reach more participants and, in turn, increase their social impact:

- Care After Prison was able to create a dedicated team for its Post-Release Community Reintegration service and to develop and implement a new approach to assessing the outcomes of their work using a tool called the Outcomes Star. Throughout the course of the fund, 143 people with lived experience of incarceration have been supported to reintegrate back into society and 65 mentors have been trained to deliver the Post-Release Community Reintegration Programme.
- Cultúr Migrants Centre was able to successfully launch the second phase of the

- Cultúr UpSkillng Project allowing them to support 260 migrants to identify courses, training and employment opportunities.
- Galway Traveller Movement has implemented a school-based Diversity Hub in Galway Community College which has supported over 234 students from the Traveller community and other minority backgrounds. They have collected very positive feedback on the Educate to Empower Project and the school-based Diversity Hub from students, parents, and staff.
  - Youth Horizons was able to support 35 students along their education pathway, including 21 students who were supported to sit their Leaving Certificate exams and were enabled to increase their subject choices, for example music and nutrition classes.





# ■ FUND IMPACT





# Care After Prison: Post-Release Community Reintegration Project

## FUNDING AMOUNT: €150,000

## PROJECT OVERVIEW:

The Care After Prison (CAP) Post-Release Community Reintegration Project provides pathways and support to education, training and employment for those with lived experience of incarceration. This project develops individual bespoke plans with the person and guides and supports them each step of the way as they resettle.

## AIM OF INVESTMENT:

Care After Prison has supported current and former prisoners for approximately 15 years. This is done partly through peer support. The main purpose of this funding was to create a dedicated team for its Post-Release Community Reintegration service.

This service includes, but is not limited to, training people to become peer mentors to other prisoners and helping them access education and training. Care After Prison also used the fund's resources to start implementing a new system (the Outcomes Star framework) for assessing the impact of their work on individuals.

## SCALING IMPACT:

- The project was delayed by approximately 12 months due to a change in the leadership at Care After Prison. During this period, the fund's resources were used to identify and train peer mentors as well as provide support to former prisoners. Hence, after being set up in early 2022, the programme has only been running as intended for approximately 18 months.
- The fund enabled the project to support 143 people with lived experience of incarceration. This includes training 65 mentors and supporting 42 mentees to date.
- Care After Prison has developed and started to implement a new system, the Outcomes Star framework<sup>3</sup>, for assessing the impact of their work on individuals and allowing mentees to track their progress as they reintegrate into society. To date, 17 mentees have completed the first cycle of the outcome star.
- In addition, the Outcomes Star will further allow Care After Prison to collect data and further build an evidence of the journey of change for mentees.

## IMPACT OVERVIEW<sup>4</sup>:

- **143 people with lived experience of incarceration** were supported to reintegrate back into society.
- **65 mentors were trained** to deliver the Post-Release Community Reintegration mentorship.
- **42 mentees were supported** through the Post-Release Community Reintegration mentorship.
- **Five staff were trained** on delivering the mentorship training tool (Outcomes Star framework).

N.B. Impact overview numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the awardees.

## VOICES FROM THE PROJECT

*"Our Post-Release Community Reintegration project is a project that really supports individuals with peer-to-peer support."*

*"There is nothing like having a peer to support you, because they have walked the walk, talked the talk. They have experienced prison. So we train up mentors. It is an accredited course. It equips individuals to be able to support their mentee. [...]"*

*"Part of the process of peer mentoring, [is that] we do develop a plan for the individuals, and that plan, because it is structured, actually gives structure to the individual. And it also gives goals that they can actually aim for and see how they are achieving their goals."*

**MICHELE KERRIGAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CARE AFTER PRISON**

*"It has a massive impact on people's lives when they come out to have a service here. [...] I know the hardship of being in prison and being caught up in addiction and all that stuff. I have been there."*

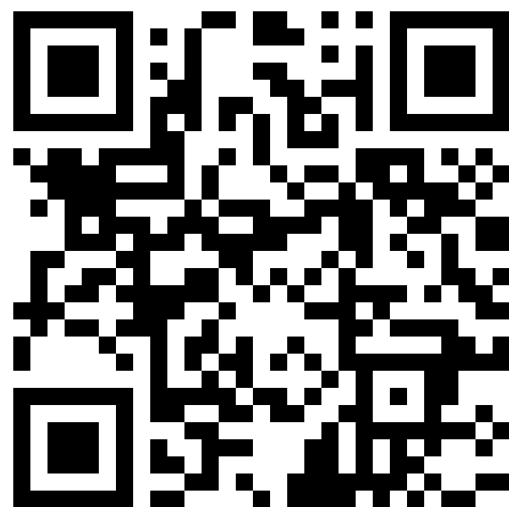
*"I've lived that life and there is a way forward. It builds your confidence and it builds your self-esteem. People coming out of prison don't have confidence. They don't have self-esteem. All they know is a life of criminality. And then to come out of that circle and even come into the working environment, it can be very daunting for someone that's been in for a long time. And to be able to integrate back into society and be a productive member of society gives you that confidence and gives you that little joy of something to get up in the morning for."*

**PROJECT PARTICIPANT, POST-RELEASE COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION PROJECT**

<sup>3</sup> Outcomes Stars are tools grounded in evidence, aimed at fostering positive change and enhancing wellbeing. The Star offers a structured approach for dialogue between the client and support worker, facilitating reflection on the strengths and challenges that exist. The process of finalising a Star and subsequently developing an action plan is consistently repeated at regular intervals as part of keywork and one-on-one support, which includes reviewing previous Stars.

<sup>4</sup> Achievements to date – The funding covers awardee activities from December 2021 to December 2024, though this report covers activities up to the end of October 2024.





Watch a video about Care After Prison by scanning the QR code.

Or alternatively, [click on this link](#).

## ROLE OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CARE AFTER PRISON - STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, BRANDING AND COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

For any new Executive Director, it is necessary to decide what to change and what to keep in the organisation they now lead. This was the situation Michele Kerrigan faced when she joined Care After Prison (CAP). Making these decisions were facilitated by the process of conducting the Organisational Health Assessment (OHA)<sup>5</sup> that Rethink Ireland requires awardees to carry out, and then taking up the offer of non-financial supports.

The OHA allowed Michele to take a step back and look at the organisation's greatest needs. She decided that the priorities were to update the strategic plan and to refresh the branding and communications. Michele felt a new strategic plan was necessary to give direction to the organisation as well as to demonstrate to funders and other stakeholders, such as potential board members, that Care After Prison was an organisation worthy of support.

The support from the consultant provided by Rethink Ireland was 'powerful'. The new strategy covers the next five years and focuses on supporting reintegration back into the family and the community through Care After Prison's peer

mentoring support (funded by Rethink Ireland) and their Family Support Programme provided through a different funding stream.

The communications plan and rebranding are complementary to the strategic plan. According to Michele, the consultant was really helpful in providing support ranging from proposing colour palettes to developing a communications plan which offers an overview on what kind of media, including social media, to use to communicate with different stakeholders. The website includes a new short video describing what Care After Prison does and its value.

They are currently working on a book of testimonies that tells the story of how Care After Prison's work has helped change lives. Since the rebranding and communications strategy, CAP has seen increased social media engagement.

Michele recognises that such support from funders is uncommon and the impact they achieved would not have been possible for the organisation without Rethink Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> An Organisational Health Assessment (OHA) is conducted with each awardee at the beginning of a fund to identify both strengths and areas for improvement within each organisation. The OHA is conducted subsequently at different stages throughout the fund to track progress and assess emerging needs. This assessment is a fundamental component of Rethink Ireland's venture philanthropy model and guides the grantmaking and capacity-building strategy for each awardee on the fund.





# Cultúr Migrant Centre: Cultúr UpSkilling Project Phase 2

## FUNDING AMOUNT: €150,000

### PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Cultúr Migrants Centre is a Meath-based community organisation working with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, focused on the provision of equal rights and education opportunities.

Their aim is to address key social issues faced by migrants and asylum seekers, such as social exclusion and community isolation, language barriers and socio-economic issues.

To address the latter, Cultúr developed the Cultúr UpSkilling Project in 2021 (funded by Rethink Ireland as part of the Innovate Together Fund). The Cultúr UpSkilling Program Phase 2 aims to support the integration of migrants into Irish society by providing them with the skills and tools they need to secure employment.

### AIM OF INVESTMENT:

Cultúr sought to use support from the Engage & Educate Fund to launch the second phase of the oversubscribed Upskilling Project<sup>6</sup>, aiming to re-orientate learners from former employment roles to new employment opportunities and support migrants to kickstart their careers and build their resilience in Ireland.

The project provides the opportunity to develop specific skills that meet current demands in the employment market in relation to accreditation and industry standards. This includes accredited training, non-accredited training, soft skill training, CV/interview skills, and English for beginners.

Additionally, Cultúr provides networking opportunities with service providers and employers to support migrants to access employment.

### SCALING IMPACT:

- Cultúr Migrants Centre has been able to scale their reach, resulting in 260 migrants being supported to identify courses, training and employment opportunities.
- Cultúr Migrants Centre was supported to develop a theory of change, strategic plan, a communications plan and communication assets. Cultúr is continuing to repurpose the outputs from the communication support to tell their impact story to different audiences.

### IMPACT OVERVIEW<sup>7</sup>:

- **260 migrants were helped** to identify courses, training and employment opportunities.
- **42 migrants participated** in English language classes in 2024.
- **179 migrants participated** in accredited and non-accredited training in 2022.
- **76 migrants were supported** into part-time or full-time employment.
- **37 migrants were supported** into volunteering roles.

N.B. Impact overview numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the awardees.

### VOICES FROM THE PROJECT

*“For me personally, they make a lot of difference, because I never believed I would be able to sit down for the Cambridge English [Certificate]. My husband has been participating with Cultúr Migrants Centre in security [training] and forklifts [training] and so many people I know in my centre have been doing that. I am really happy to be part of Cultúr Migrant Centre.”*

**MULIKAT AKINWUNMI, PROJECT PARTICIPANT, CULTÚR UPSKILLING PROJECT PHASE 2**

*“Before Cultúr, I often felt isolated, unsure of my place in this new country. I learned new skills. It’s very important for me and for my career. It’s empowering to know I am growing professionally and personally.”*

**LUDMILA SMUCERE, PROJECT PARTICIPANT AND CURRENT PROJECT OFFICER, CULTÚR MIGRANTS CENTRE**

*“The Engage & Educate Fund has supported over 200 participants, and within these 200 participants, we now have people that work, it has educated them, they have gotten accreditation. The impact is so huge because it’s gone very deep and it builds people’s confidence. Now they’re applying for jobs. They are joining the CV clinic, they can talk about themselves, and we are just so happy. This project is unique in its own way and it’s also growing every day and making a positive impact.”*

**TINU ACHIYO, CEO, CULTÚR MIGRANTS CENTRE**

<sup>6</sup> Cultúr initially developed the Cultúr UpSkilling Project in 2021 and was funded by Rethink Ireland as part of the Innovate Together Fund.

<sup>7</sup> Achievements to date – The funding covers awardee activities from December 2021 to December 2024 though this report covers activities up to the end of October 2024.



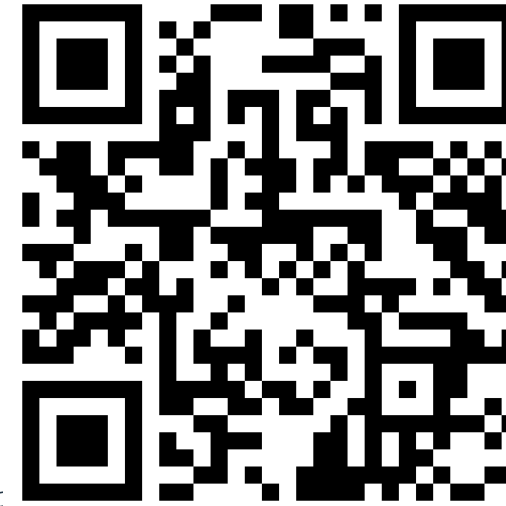
**ROLE OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CULTÚR MIGRANTS CENTRE –  
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION SUPPORT**

Cultúr Migrants Centre has worked with immigrants, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees across County Meath for over 20 years. Over that time, the migration context in Ireland has changed drastically with Ireland experiencing net positive migration over the past few years, along with an increasing demand for services.

At the same time, Cultúr was undergoing a shift in leadership. The support from Rethink Ireland helped Cultúr navigate this transition and develop organisational capacity in two key ways:

Tinu, Cultúr’s CEO, recognised the benefits of the Organisational Health Assessment process and decided to expand it to the whole organisation. In doing so, Cultúr is actively strengthening their whole service offering through ongoing target setting and evaluation.

Tinu also reported that, outside of the financial support provided, the communication support that was created (including a video highlighting testimonials from participants), as well as the output of the pitching workshop, have been used multiple times by Cultúr, allowing them to powerfully tell their impact story to new audiences.



Watch a video about Cultúr Migrants Centre by scanning the QR code.

Or alternatively, [click on this link](#).





# Galway Traveller Movement: Educate to Empower Project

## FUNDING AMOUNT: €150,000

### PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Galway Traveller Movement is a community development organisation dedicated to realising full equality, social justice and human rights for members of the Traveller community in Galway. In doing so, they are empowering Travellers to meaningfully participate in social, economic, political and cultural life.

One way that it seeks to address these challenges is through the development of new and innovative models of service delivery for the Traveller community that can act as best practice examples for other communities across Ireland.

Galway Traveller Movement developed the Educate to Empower Project to address educational disadvantage for young Travellers through peer-led support delivered to Traveller children in an effort to decrease barriers to their participation in school.

### AIM OF INVESTMENT:

The Educate to Empower Project set up a Diversity Hub within Galway Community College, operated by a dedicated peer-led worker who engages with the students.

This engagement includes literacy support, educational and exam support, and wellbeing support. They also collaborate with an outreach worker, who directly supports parents and guardians using community engagement practices and facilitates dedicated events aimed at building stronger relationships between Traveller families and the education system. Galway Traveller Movement sought funding for the Educate to Empower Project to allow this project to become operational and to run it for a sustained period of time in order to assess and present findings.

### SCALING IMPACT:

- A school-based Diversity Hub has been set up in Galway Community College, operated by a dedicated peer-led worker, to support young Traveller students to receive literacy support, educational and exam support, wellbeing support, and other educational resources, with the aim of increasing Traveller retention in the school and reducing the number of Traveller students on Reduced School Hours<sup>\*</sup> plans.
- To date, the Diversity Hub has supported over 234 students from Traveller and minority backgrounds.
- The fund has allowed the Educate to Empower project to produce a number of new resource materials. These include 'Turning the Tide on Racism' information packs to raise awareness of identity, racism and discrimination within the wider community, and an education toolkit produced for parents with steps on how to advocate on behalf of their children within the school.
- Galway Traveller Movement was supported to develop a Theory of Change, strategic plan, communications strategy, communication assets and an Impact Management Framework. Galway Traveller Movement found that the communications assets which were developed as part of the communications support had a far-reaching benefit to the organisation and are confident that they can be repurposed to be used in other campaigns.

### IMPACT OVERVIEW:

- One school-based Diversity Hub was set up in Galway Community College.
- 234 Traveller students and students from minority backgrounds were supported educationally and emotionally through the school-based Diversity Hub.
- Approximately 80 parents were engaged through home visits, phone calls and mail outs in 2024.
- 100% of participating students felt the Educate to Empower Project gave them the confidence to complete their Junior Certificate.\*
- 81% of participating students felt the Educate to Empower Project gave them the confidence to complete their Leaving Certificate.\*
- 98% of parents said that the Educate to Empower Project promoted the benefits of education on their child's future.\*\*
- 100% of parents said that the Educate to Empower Project provided them with skills to support and advocate on behalf of their child/children in educational settings.\*\*

N.B. Impact overview numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the awardees.

\*Survey conducted with 51 student respondents in 2024

\*\*Survey conducted with 54 parent respondents in 2024

### VOICES FROM THE PROJECT

*"Having the Diversity Hub based in the school, it hugely benefits the students. The students have a sense of belonging and we've seen levels of retention increase. We've found a lot of kids come to the Diversity Hub, even just for a ten minute time out, just to have a chat with Norika and then they're more relaxed and they're able to return to their classroom."*

*"Whereas, previous to this, the time out would be going out to the front door and leaving and not coming back that day – or maybe any day."*

**JANE WARD, EDUCATION WORKER, GALWAY TRAVELLER MOVEMENT**

<sup>\*</sup> A reduced school hours plan is when the school decides that a student arrives to school after the usual starting time, leaves before the end of the school day or does not attend the full five days each week. Galway Traveller Movement have identified that a disproportionate amount of young Traveller children are on Reduced School Hours plans.



*“My two sons, they’re in Galway Community College and the Diversity Hub for the boys is very good. They get taken out of class for whatever period of time, they get extra help because the resources are there to help bring them up to speed, and it is a great space for the boys to express themselves with Norika because she’s also a Traveller and she can relate to the boys so much [...]*

*“She can talk to them and the boys feel so safe in that space. So for me, the boys love going to secondary school. I thought I’d have an issue keeping them in, but really and truly the Diversity Hub was the best thing that ever happened for the children. For whatever space they need [...] if they need a breather during school hours, and when they come back they’re talking about their experience all that day and for the next day afterwards, and they are sharing it with the rest of the young lads. So it’s then bringing them onboard and they’re on their best behaviour, and it is a great way to keep Traveller children in school.”*

**ANGELA, PARENT OF TWO GALWAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS**



Watch a video about Galway Traveller Movement by scanning the QR code.

Or alternatively, [click on this link.](#)

## **ROLE OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR GALWAY TRAVELLER MOVEMENT – COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT**

Galway Traveller Movement has worked for more than two decades to challenge and respond to the structural inequalities experienced by the Traveller community. Galway Traveller Movement is committed to the promotion of equality, the prevention of discrimination, and the protection of the human rights of members of the Traveller Community at local, regional and national levels.

Margaret, one of Galway Traveller Movement’s coordinators, stated that both the financial and non-financial supports provided by the fund were invaluable to them.

As the programme was a pilot project, it was crucial to understand the impact of the programme, and simultaneously communicate it widely. Galway Traveller Movement was able to collect data from participants and education stakeholders to form part of their communications collateral, including video testimonials. This collateral has been used widely by Galway Traveller Movement and has allowed them to ‘rethink’ their education work and complement their other work streams.





# Youth Horizons: Youth Horizons Project

## FUNDING AMOUNT: €150,000

### PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Youth Horizons has been providing educational support services to young people in West Tallaght who have exited the education system early for over 35 years. They aim to provide their participants with an alternative education system that is vetted by the Department of Education and help them obtain their Leaving Certificate. Furthermore, teenage parents can avail of an on-site creche which offers care and preschool education for their children, thus overcoming the difficulties with childcare that can prevent young mothers continuing their education.

### AIM OF INVESTMENT:

The purpose of the funding was to expand services to vulnerable young people that require individual tuition and create a structured support system to ensure students are equipped for the transition to third level and individual learning. In addition, the funding aimed to support Youth Horizons to make organisational changes to ensure its sustainability and capabilities to plan for the succession of its founder.

### SCALING IMPACT:

- Through the fund, Youth Horizons was able to assign a dedicated project lead to coordinate the project and to lead on the capacity-building supports for the organisation.
- The fund enabled the project to support 35 students along their educational pathway (5th year and 6th year students) and 21 students to sit the Leaving Certificate exams.
- The fund enabled Youth Horizons to provide activity-based experiential learning (including nutrition and wellbeing strategies), allowing 30 students to enhance their life skills through experiential learning and wellbeing education.
- The financial support empowered Youth Horizons to provide activity-based experiential learning, such as in nutrition and music (which are not supported by government funding).
- Non-financial supports were used to provide the awardee with strategic planning support, governance support and impact measurement. This was key in supporting the organisation to prepare for the succession of its leader and co-founder who is retiring. Youth Horizons would not have been able to make these improvements without access to the expertise provided by the fund.
- Youth Horizons specifically noted that their experience on the fund led them to realise the importance of impact measurement. As a result, they are now reaching out to past students to develop a wider picture of their impact.

### IMPACT OVERVIEW<sup>9</sup>:

- 35 students** who left the education system prematurely were **supported to continue their studies**.
- 21 students** were supported to **sit the Leaving Certificate exams**.
- 30 students** benefitted from experiential wellbeing and life skills learning.
- Seven graduates** were supported as they **transitioned into third level education**, including three participants who are enrolled in Maynooth University.

N.B. Impact overview numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the awardees.

### VOICES FROM THE PROJECT

*"A lot of our kids would not have the network of support in the families or beyond that. The majority of the students [...] in Ireland would have that support. [...] It might seem very simple, like exam numbers, CAO numbers, applying for courses, knowing what is available to them. If no one in the family has been to third level education before, how would they know about it? We kind of step in there I suppose, and we are that support. We can be that network."*

**PAUL GAFFEY, PRINCIPAL, YOUTH HORIZONS**

*"I feel like when it comes to education a lot of it does kind of fall back on confidence. If you have the ability to believe in yourself. In mainstream school that wouldn't have been the case. I wouldn't have spoken up. So at that stage in my life, I wouldn't have ever pictured myself going to college. Nevermind university. When you are comfortable in an environment and you are able to express that side of yourself, you definitely can show your best ability."*

**LEENA, FORMER YOUTH HORIZONS STUDENT AND CURRENT STUDENT AT MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY**

*"Ben came here for fifth and sixth year. Prior to that, he'd attended two different secondary schools. Ben and school don't gel very well. Up until that point, we just didn't know how things were going to go."*

*"The options were getting narrower and narrower as things were getting harder in school, and when he came here – and I've spoken to Paul about it before – we could just breathe because we knew that there was a structure and a place for him. Because there's people there that want the absolute best for him. It's a game changer. And he's gone on to do accountancy and finance in Tallaght. So for him it was just fantastic."*

**VICKY, PARENT OF FORMER YOUTH HORIZONS STUDENT**

<sup>9</sup> Achievements to date: The funding covers awardee activities from December 2021 to December 2024 though this report covers activities up to the end of October 2024.



**ROLE OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUTH HORIZONS –  
GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING SUPPORT**

Youth Horizons was able to work effectively for decades, largely due to the passion, commitment, reputation and skills of Sister Mairead Hughes, one of their founding members.

Mairead has lived in Jobstown for more than 40 years and, while keeping a relatively low profile, is known and trusted by many – not least by funders and supporters.

However, like many other founder-led charities, Youth Horizons realised it needed to establish succession plans for when it could no longer rely on the reputation and relationships of its founder.

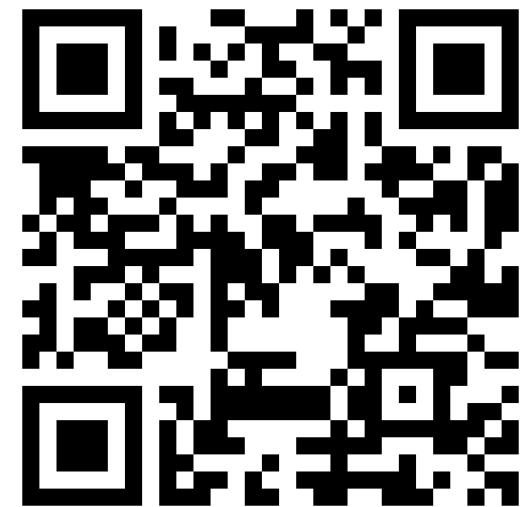
The combination of financial and non-financial support that the Educate & Engage Fund provided came at the right time.

Filling out the Organisational Health Assessment and partaking in the accompanying discussions with the fund manager raised issues for the organisation. This included ensuring the right structures were in place for providing strategic direction and funding. Rethink Ireland provided support for both a strategy consultant and an expert in charity governance.

These gave Youth Horizons immediate access to expert knowledge and an external perspective on what the organisation needed. This support included updating their governing processes.

In parallel, the strategic advisor worked with Youth Horizons to develop a vision and strategic plan for the future, while also formalising relationships with key funders. Moreover, they developed a plan to collect and report data on Youth Horizon’s impact to ensure its accountability. The advisor also supported the recruitment of a new board chairperson and new board members with relevant experience.

The leadership of Youth Horizons was emphatic that this support has been critical in placing the organisation in a good position to continue operating effectively. Moreover, having Rethink Ireland provide access to these experts saved Youth Horizons the time and effort it would have taken to access this expertise themselves.



Watch a video about Youth Horizons by scanning the QR code.

Or alternatively, [click on this link](#).





# ■ LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**SVT Group was engaged by Rethink Ireland in the summer 2024 to assess the experience of the awardees on the fund and to make recommendations for future funds. Their work addressed activities fully or partially funded by the fund for each of the four awardees. Below are the key findings and recommendations that they highlighted, which will inform Rethink Ireland's future work.**

## ■ EXPERIENCE OF AWARDEES:

Each awardee experienced the fund in different ways but several key cross-cutting themes emerged. These are:

- The challenges that small community-based organisations face in developing organisational capacity, and in particular their vulnerability to changes in staffing and leadership;
- The value of the non-financial supports to the organisations in helping build their organisational capacity and access expertise that would otherwise not be available to them.
- The ease of working with Rethink Ireland and the positive relationship with the fund team.

## ■ KEY FINDINGS AND LEARNINGS:

1. The non-financial supports helped the awardees make specific improvements in their organisational capacity.
2. The fund helped awardees become more effective by allowing them to reach more people (scale of impact) than they otherwise would have without the financial support. It is unclear if the awardees increased how effective they were in achieving outcomes for people they serve (depth of impact).
3. All awardees experienced a change in leadership and key staff during the award period but adapted to these changes with support from the fund.
4. Awardees experienced challenges common to community-based organisations such as underinvestment in data management and uncertainty of organisational sustainability.
5. The fund seemed to be less successful to date in helping some awardees achieve ongoing funding for their projects<sup>10</sup>. This is not surprising as the level of support and timeframe were both limited. There is also a time lag between increased organisational capacity and measurable effects of that increase.

## ■ RECOMMENDATIONS :

1. Make the purpose of the non-financial supports clearer for awardees and potential applicants so it is viewed as an opportunity to strengthen their organisations and not only seen as a requirement imposed by Rethink Ireland.
2. Examine the results of different funds – including the results of Organisational Health Assessment scores – to assess what has been effective in finding sustainable sources of funding and achieving organisational sustainability.
3. Adapt the Organisational Health Assessments and provision of non-financial supports more directly to what helps awardees become more sustainable.
4. Review how best to integrate and sequence non-financial support providers in a way that maximizes its value and minimizes the risk that the end of the fund is disruptive to awardees.
5. Consider having experts (such as Rethink Ireland's consultants) comment on the Organisational Health Assessments rather than having them completed by the organisation itself with advice from Rethink Ireland. This should increase the rigour and value of the analyses.
6. Develop a guide for awardees on basic and advanced impact measurement and management practices so they can develop their own understanding of how to improve these. The guide can draw on extensive research of good practices and hierarchies of strong evidence and could include a minimum set of expectations for awardees' impact data.
7. Review what different funds have found is needed for making small community-based organisations 'investment-ready' and whether the type of non-financial supports provided and the funding timespan is sufficient to bring about notable changes.

<sup>10</sup> Data collection and interviews were conducted by SVT Group with awardees during the summer of 2024. These findings do not take into account any additional funds that could have been obtained for the project after August 2024. All four projects will continue to run (some in a more limited capacity) up until June 2024 having received an additional cash grant from Rethink Ireland.



# ■ CONCLUSION & THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

We started out on an incredible journey with Mason Hayes & Curran in 2017 as part of a shared commitment to fairer access to education.

The Engage & Educate Fund 2021-2024 marks the first time we've worked with Mason Hayes & Curran and the Government of Ireland on a multi-year, strategic partnership focused on the four incredible awardees highlighted in this report.

Each organisation has a powerful story to tell, from former prisoners receiving peer-to-peer mentoring support, to migrants being given the tools to take up employment and training opportunities, and students struggling in mainstream education completing their Leaving Certificate against the odds.

The impact is very clear, with the fund supporting over 672 individuals in a myriad of ways and a variety of settings including schools, offices and directly within local communities.

We look forward to extending our partnership with Mason Hayes & Curran as they continue to show real leadership in the area of impactful philanthropy, and in creating a more just and equal society for us all.

**Deirdre Mortell**  
CEO, Rethink Ireland

