

Creative Places, Edenderry

Empower and Embed

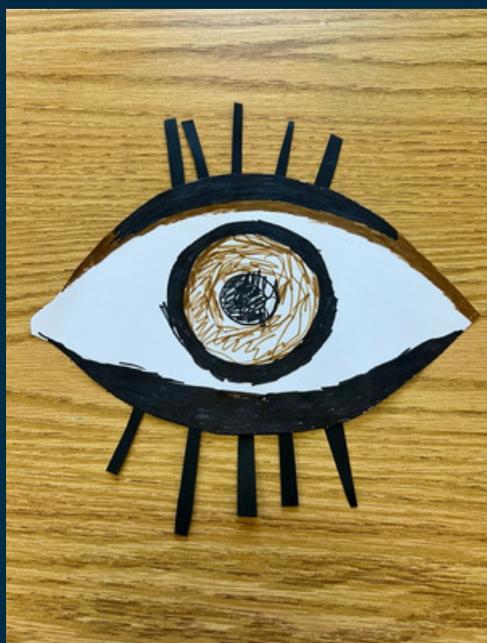
Year four report, 2024-25



Launch of Wooden Fish installation at the Grand Canal. Photo credit: Mark Forde

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A piece of work from the Visual Arts Group, for and by people who identify as disabled. Photo credit: Eleanor Farrelly



About Edenderry

Edenderry is Co. Offaly's second largest town, with a population of 8,000 people at the last census. It is a commuter town with many people travelling to Dublin and the surrounding areas for work, school and further education.

Creative Places, Edenderry was established in September 2021, supported by Arts Council of Ireland/An Comhairle Ealaíon (as part of the national Creative Places programme) and led by Creative Lives, in partnership with Offaly County Council's Arts Office and the Municipal District of Edenderry.

The ambition of the project is to facilitate the emergence of a strong cultural identity for the area, and support sustainable networks and opportunities for cultural engagement and participation. Creative Places, Edenderry is working to achieve this through open, collaborative methods, rooted in socially engaged art and community development principles.



Alternative Evaluation Exhibition. Photo credit: Sandra Lewis

Creative Places, Edenderry

This report reflects on year four of the Creative Places, Edenderry project, the theme of which was *Empower and Embed*.

Creative Places, Edenderry is an all inclusive and accessible project working with people of all ages and backgrounds to create a richer, more cohesive creative community in the town and surrounding areas. Throughout year four of the project (July 2024 - July 2025), there have been creative opportunities and collaborations for and with community groups, individuals, professional and non-professional artists.

This project is being developed collaboratively with the people of Edenderry. Community ownership and sustainability is at the heart of what we do together.



The Bog, The Grand Canal and other Magical Places. Photo credit: Mark Forde

Executive Summary

Throughout year four of the project we have:

- **Built** confidence in the community
- **Created** connections between community groups, artists/facilitators, volunteers and community members
- **Strengthened** the local cultural and creative landscape

The following examples are highlights of the Empower and Embed phase of the project:

Project, event or performance	How it empowered and embedded
<p>Artist Commission: The Bog, The Grand Canal and other Magical Places - awarded to Sara Walmsley and Elizabeth Drwal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brought together many different community groups, organisations, venues, individual artists and community members in an innovative way. • Participants were invited to take part in a way which suited them best, and challenge themselves if they wanted to. • The final open performance involved audience members and required a new level of improvisation from the musicians, dancers and actors.
<p>Installation of wooden fish and a mural at the Grand Canal wall. Part of a biodiversity project run by Creative Places, Edenderry. Co. Down artist Sharon Regan initiated the project with the local community. Local artist Jenny Bergin extended and continued the piece.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interesting extension of the biodiversity project in year three, with the work now firmly rooted in the community and developed by a local artist. • Local people took great pride in the art work - including the Blundell Wood Residents Association and over 60 children and young people. • The intergenerational aspect of the project was clear to see at the launch event, attended by local councillors, the then Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, along with 50 local residents.

Project, event or performance	How it empowered and embedded
<p>Healthy Offaly - Creative Movement project funded by Healthy Ireland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaboration with Healthy Offaly - opening up new connections and opportunities. • The Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator sat on the Healthy Offaly sub-committee, which meant Creative Places, Edenderry gained county-wide recognition. • Over an extended period of time, we worked with three dance and creative movement facilitators from Edenderry and one from Belfast - providing over 1,000 hours of workshops in the community.
<p>Creative Lives Awards shortlisted and winning groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community Social was shortlisted for a Creative Lives Award. • The Monday Music group was awarded Runner-up for Ireland. • Six members of the Monday Music Group attended the Creative Lives Awards ceremony in London.
<p>Hullabaloo collaboration - The Community Forum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offaly County Council's Arts Office asked us to coordinate the annual Hullabaloo Children's Art Festival. • This was a great opportunity for our Community Forum to deliver a piece of work as a team. • We appointed an Artist Liaison for the festival and a team of volunteers who supported the artists/facilitators, young people and the library staff.
<p>Artists Collective - Successful applications for funding supported by Creative Places, Edenderry</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Artists Collective was established to give artists an opportunity to meet, discuss ideas and network. They meet every other month. • Two of the Artists Collective are the lead artists on projects as part of Culture Night 2025. • One member of the Artists Collective successfully applied for external funding with the support of Creative Places, Edenderry.

Project, event or performance	How it empowered and embedded
<p>Mother Bog - Seed Funding project awarded to Angi Ward and the Monday Music Group/Acoustic Hearts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspired by The Bog, The Grand Canal and other Magical Places, Angi Ward wrote an original script, Mother Bog. • Angi Ward received Seed Funding from Creative Places, Edenderry to produce the theatre piece. • Mother Bog was attended by over 100 people and has gone on to tour county-wide.
<p>Festival in a Van collaboration - Halloween</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival in a Van approached us about working together again at Halloween, building on the success of the collaboration in year three. • The surge in confidence of the bands, performers and artists between year three and year four was amazing to witness. • The attendance at the event tripled, with 200 people joining in throughout the day.
<p>Martin O'Donoghue - Play Strategist workshop days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We invited Play Strategist, Martin O'Donoghue to deliver two workshop days in Edenderry after meeting him at Creative Places, West Cork Islands. • Martin facilitated some really innovative sessions which encouraged attendees to 'think big' and not feel restricted by funding or funders. • The report written by Martin has helped to shape our planning for the next two years of the project.
<p>Invitation to Áras an Uachtaráin from President Michael D. Higgins for 'Samhlaíocht agus An Náisiún: Imagination and The Nation, Celebrating the Contribution of Community Arts to Inclusion and Creativity' to mark St. Patrick's Day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator was invited to attend Áras an Uachtaráin by President Michael D. Higgins. • It was a privilege to attend and a real celebration of grassroots community arts workers from across Ireland. • President Michael D. Higgins underlined the vital importance of place based work in communities across Ireland and breaking down barriers to the arts.

Empower and Embed has been a fitting theme for year four of Creative Places, Edenderry.

- We witnessed many more creative ideas come to fruition, and several of the artists/facilitators we worked with have started to become more independent from Creative Places, Edenderry
- The Halloween-themed Festival in a Van event, as part of Hullabaloo Children's Art festival, had a great atmosphere, attracted the biggest crowd so far, and the musicians, artists and facilitators had all grown in confidence between October 2023 and October 2024.
- We identified a gap in provision of creative activities that are accessible for young people in Edenderry with Down Syndrome, learning disabilities and other sensory needs. With our successful application to Healthy Offaly, we were able to design a range of bespoke dance workshops facilitated by Belfast-based dance artist Charmaine McMeekin.
- In March 2025, the Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator was invited to a reception at Áras an Uachtaráin by President Michael D. Higgins. It was amazing that for President Higgins' last St. Patrick's Day celebrations in post, he wanted to celebrate socially engaged art and amplify grassroots community development work.

We have strived to include a wider range of community voices in decision making. So far we have had 10 different community members involved in the panels which selected the recipients of micro-grants and artist commissions. We have also been facilitating monthly Community Forum meetings which have engaged 16 community members so far.

We established an Artist Collective in year four, which has engaged 10 artists to date. Referring to the 'Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership' model which is scored 0 - 5, we are at 4.5 which is 'Collaborate' leading to 'Defer.' We aim to have progressed fully to the 'Defer' point by July 2026, and for the community in Edenderry to be working fully independently from Creative Places, Edenderry and utilising Creative Lives for training and further mentorship and development.

[Film about year 4 by our project photographer/videographer, Mark Forde](#)

Year 4 in numbers

4,175 adults and 878 children have attended activities

277 community workshops

56 artists and facilitators

12 community consultations, information and network sessions

4 information and support sessions on funding applications

6 Governance Team meetings

13 Community Forum meetings

6 Artists Collective meetings

4 large-scale events

6 Seed Funding grants

4 Artist Commissions

13 community training sessions

Breakdown of figures

Adult attendees

Female	2,983
Male	1,187
Transgender	5
Total	4,175

Children attendees

Girls	882
Boys	758
Total	1,640

4%

Global majority participants

24

Number of venues

20

Partner organisations

23%

Participants who identify as disabled

23

Community leads

Festival in a Van. Photo credit: Community member



Breakdown of last year

In July 2024, we were excited to begin year four of Creative Places, Edenderry and build on the previous three years of the project. With the theme of Empower and Embed, we set out to support the projects already up and running in Edenderry, and encourage them to become more independent, sustainable and connected to the wider network of creative groups in the area.

See below a visual representation of our year four plan:



We began to implement this plan by putting together a monthly training programme, gathering ideas, questions and suggestions along the way which created the content for our Community Toolkits. We have published four, which are all available to read and download from the Creative Places, Edenderry website:

- [Artist/Facilitator Glossary](#)
- [How to Plan, Design and Deliver an Arts-based Workshop](#)
- [Arts Administration](#)
- [Looking after the Artist/Facilitator](#)

We also printed physical copies which are available in Edenderry Library.

We continued to support the four weekly ‘pillars’ of Creative Places, Edenderry in terms of weekly groups and engagement:

- The Monday Music Group with Angi Ward
- ActiviTEA Women’s Group with Jenny Bergin
- Visual Art Group for people who identify as disabled with Eleanor Farrelly
- Community Social with Nesrin Elazaly

These groups continue to go from strength to strength and provide vital social engagement, fun, relaxation and creativity in safe, positive environments.



Visual Art Group. Photo Credit: Eleanor Farrelly

“I so look forward to our Monday sessions with our very special group, it makes me happy. Thanks to each and every one of you. We have music, songs, poems, stories, laughter, tea, coffee, biscuits and chat - thank you!”

Monday Music Group member

“It’s a great way to relax and leave your troubles for an hour or two. Thank you.”

ActiviTEA participant



ActiviTEA. Photo credit: Jenny Bergin

Wings of Edenderry launch

In year three of Creative Places, Edenderry, glass artist Michelle O'Donnell was awarded an Artist Commission for Wings of Edenderry. It resulted in a beautiful glass sculpture of wings which was displayed in Edenderry Library in August 2024. The project celebrated the rich tapestry of the Edenderry community, sharing stories, photographs, memories, cultures and ideas which were all represented on the wings.

There was a launch event in Edenderry Library, with photographs and a short video created by Mark Forde.



Wings of Edenderry launch event. Photo credit: Mark Forde

Dr. Phillip Brady delivered a speech, and Dr. Sally O'Leary, Seonaid Murray and Michelle O'Donnell also said a few words.

“This large-scale glass photography piece is filled with images of local people, places, stories, and shared history - all arranged and drawn over in a sensitive and creative way to symbolise the shape of wings. The interactive element invites viewers to stand within the wings themselves, offering a moment to feel the embrace of the community.”

Michelle O'Donnell

Creative Lives Awards

The Creative Lives Awards celebrate the creative groups that enhance people's lives in villages, towns, and cities across the UK and Ireland. Since 2010, we've invited community-led groups to share their activities and achievements, so that we can give them a well-deserved moment in the spotlight.

Our Award winners all use creativity to bring people together. Groups might take part in singing, dancing, painting, crafting, performing, playing music, or any other creative activity. They provide vital opportunities for people to express their creativity, make friends, learn new skills, boost their wellbeing and have fun.

Our most recent winners were announced at an inspirational ceremony in London on Thursday 26 September 2024.

The Community Social Group was shortlisted for a Creative Lives Award, and the Monday Music Group/Acoustic Hearts won the Ireland Runner-up Award. Congratulations to both groups on this huge achievement.

Members of the Monday Music Group/Acoustic Hearts travelled to London for the ceremony, and back home in Edenderry we celebrated both groups by having a party with cake from the Colourful Butterfly Bakery.



Creative Lives Awards. Photo Credit: Mark Forde

“The Monday sessions are the highlight of my week. I have made friendships which I enjoy, and going to the Awards ceremony in London was fantastic. Acoustic Hearts winning Runner-up for Ireland is all down to Angi and her vision for the group. Thank you!”

Acoustic Hearts/Monday Music group member

“I have known Angi for many years and she often told me of her dream to form a music group for people who would benefit from a social outlet that involved music, song and storytelling. I think we can all agree that dream has become a reality. Acoustic Hearts are a truly lovely bunch of people. Well done Angi and all of the amazing Monday Music Group - keep on rockin’!”

Acoustic Hearts/Monday Music Group member

“I was greatly surprised when we were shortlisted for, and subsequently won, a Creative Lives Awards. It was a great acknowledgement and an honour, and I was delighted for the members of Acoustic Hearts, which was born out of the Monday Music Group. There was great excitement as we organised our trip to London and it was with great pride that I accepted the prize on behalf of the group.”

Angi Ward, Monday Music Group founder and facilitator

Mark Forde, Creative Places, Edenderry’s photographer/videographer was invited to London to photograph the Creative Lives Awards. Here’s what he had to say about the experience: *“Being the photographer for the Creative Lives Awards was a joy and a privilege. Cecil Sharp House in London was a beautiful venue to shoot in, and spending the day learning about people’s stories while capturing their emotions made it all the better. A definite highlight was seeing the Acoustic Hearts group up on stage - it made me extremely proud to be a part of the Creative Places, Edenderry project.”*

Acoustic Hearts was celebrated in the local newspapers and around the county. Offaly County Council also shared the news in their newsletter: <https://www.offalyindependent.ie/2024/09/27/edenderry-group-wins-major-creative-award-in-london/>

Biodiversity Project Launch

In year three of Creative Places, Edenderry we worked on a biodiversity project, with the aim of linking the Cabin to the Grand Canal, and encouraging more collaborative working between groups in the town. Co. Down-based artist Sharon Regan worked with groups that utilise the Cabin, and the surrounding community, to create a beautiful mural on the Cabin. She also began to design a piece for the Grand Canal wall which would connect the two spaces. There was a consultation process with the Blundell Wood Residents Association and a shoal of wooden fish was created. Offaly Local Development Company supported us to install the piece.



Wooden Fish workshop. Photo credit: Jenny Bergin

This first iteration included 35 wooden fish, but it was soon clear that the Blundell Wood Residents Association and the wider community wanted to expand the piece. Local artist Jenny Bergin ran a series of workshops, during which people were invited to paint a fish to contribute to the piece - and there are now 130 wooden fish! Jenny also painted a mural on the Grand Canal wall with river-themed images. The finished piece was celebrated by the whole community, with a launch of both the Cabin mural and Grand Canal wall installation in September 2024.

The then Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett attended, along with Councillor Claire Murray to cut the ribbon. We also had cake beautifully decorated with a fish theme by the Colourful Butterfly Bakery.

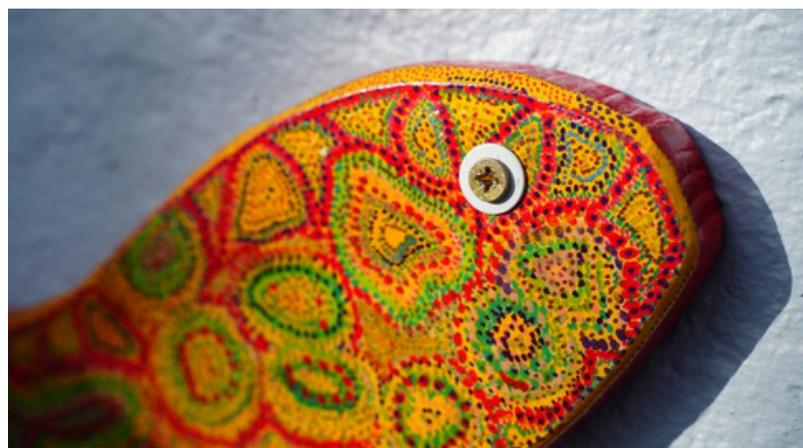


Wooden Fish. Photo credit: Jenny Bergin

It is testament to the project, the community and the artists that there has been minimal graffiti or vandalism to either piece. Jenny has worked with us to keep both the Cabin mural and the Grand Canal installation well maintained, clean and regularly checked. The collaborative nature of the biodiversity project has meant that the local community feels ownership over the art work. There is a strong sense of pride, inclusion and determination to keep the area bright and welcoming for all.

“A shoal of 130 wooden fish were handpainted at numerous public workshops by men, women and children of all ages. From a baby's handprint to one by a 93-year-old lady, they are a mass of colour and amazingness! I drilled, sanded and undercoated each fish, and then once they had been painted, I meticulously sealed them numerous times on both sides against the elements. The fish were then attached to a freshly painted wall with a handpainted mural. The finished piece is outstanding, if I may say so myself, and it brightens the harbour on a dreary day. This is a project I will continue to care for and be proud of, and the community feedback and gratitude for this project in Edenderry has also been outstanding.”

Jenny Bergin, Local Artist



Wooden Fish. Photo credits: Jenny Bergin & Mark Forde

Edenderry Tidy Towns has suggested supporting Jenny to extend the installation at the Grand Canal wall, and we look forward to seeing the results!

The Blundell Wood Residents Association approached us about painting an old electric box at the Grand Canal wall - something similar to the mural at the Cabin. There was a request for a duck painting to reflect the local residents on the Grand Canal! Sharon Regan painted a vibrant image and local residents asked if it could be named 'Ducksey' after the late Donal Byrne.

"The mural on the harbour is absolutely fabulous. What a difference it makes to our harbour. Thank you so much to Creative Places, Edenderry. I love it!"

"My husband's name was 'Ducksey' and he passed away six years ago. I think it would be a brilliant name. Everyone in the estate knew him by his nickname. My girls are very excited by this suggestion."

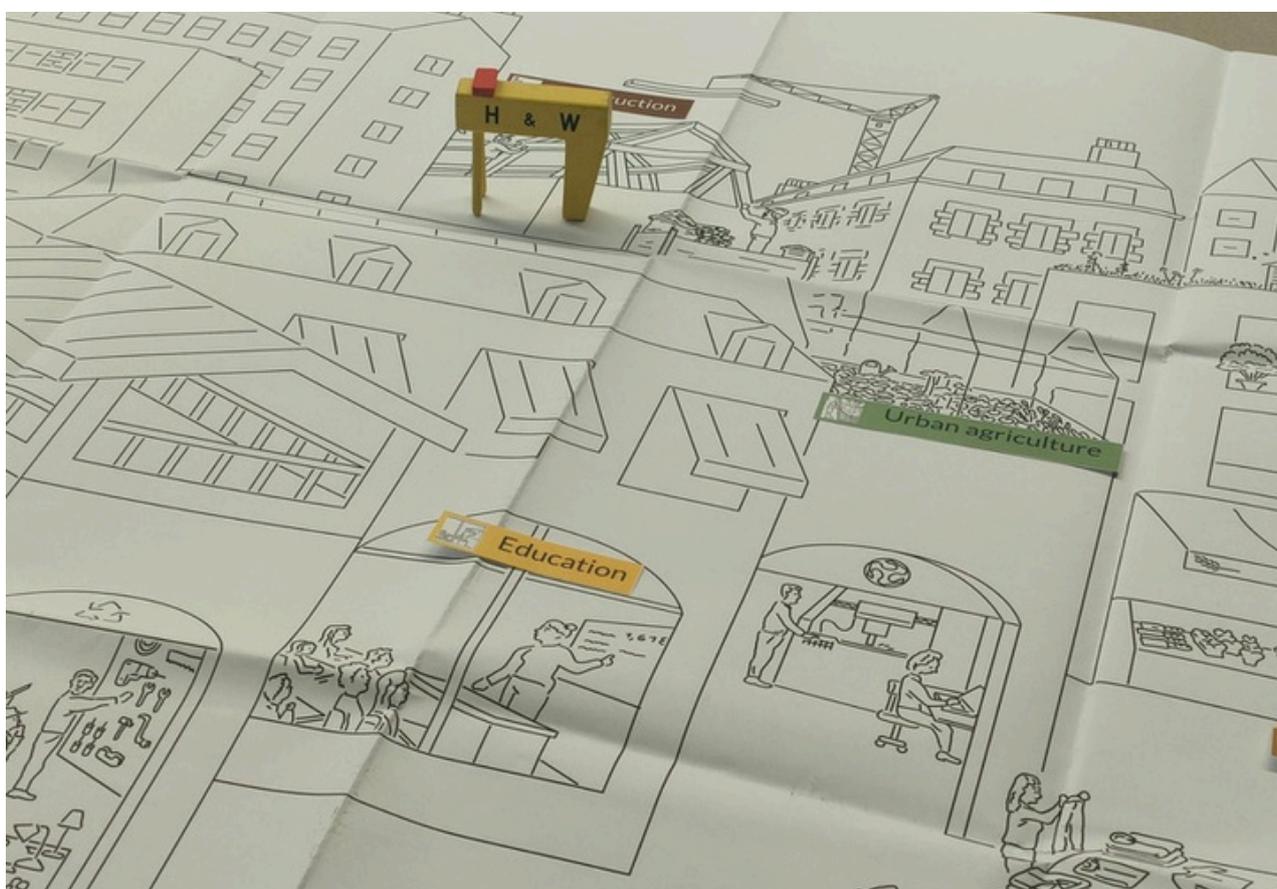


Ducksey. Photo credit: Seonaid Murray

IN SITU Summer School in Croatia

In September 2024, Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator Seonaid Murray applied to be part of the IN SITU Summer School on the island of Zlarin, Croatia. The title and theme was ‘Place-based Creative Solutions for Cultivating Caring and Sustainable Communities’.

There were workshops and discussions which addressed local development through creative solutions. We also explored which tools are required when working on place-based innovations, and how to apply them within our local contexts.

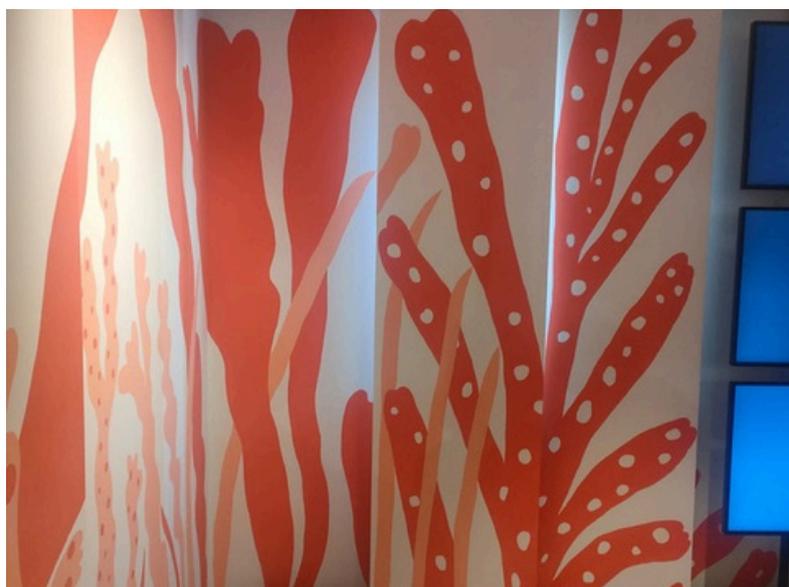


Ecological Renaissance Workshop. Photo credit: Seonaid Murray

Thoughts and reflections from Seonaid:

“Visiting Zlarin was an amazing experience and a unique opportunity to spend concentrated time with some of the other Creative Places Coordinators, learning, sharing creative ideas, and discussing different approaches. We met people from Canada, Bosnia, South Africa, Italy, Germany, USA, Israel, England, Ireland and Croatia. There were lots of interesting talks, lectures, site visits and debates, including: A Visit to the Croatian Coral Centre, How did Zlarin become a Plastic Free Island?, Cultural and Creative Industries in Rural and Non-Urban Contexts, Communities as Centres of Sustainability, Regenerative Tourism, Culture and Sustainability of Non-Urban Areas, Fixing the Local in a Nebulous World, Ecological Renaissance Workshop and more. I delivered a presentation on Creative Places, Edenderry, focussing on the recently completed biodiversity project. I also brought along postcards showing the images of the mural on the Cabin in Edenderry.

“I came away with renewed enthusiasm for place-based work and lots of new ideas for potential projects and work in Edenderry. This included ideas for creating community toolkits as a set of connected booklets designed for and by the community. I also began to think about how best to connect Edenderry with some of the other Creative Places. We will begin to implement this by inviting more guest facilitators, artists and representatives from other projects to Edenderry. We will also plan more outreach visits and creative learning events for artists, facilitators and members of the Edenderry community to take part in.”



Workshops in Zlarin, Croatia. Photo credit: Seonaid Murray

Hullabaloo / Festival in a Van

Offaly Arts Office approached us about coordinating the Edenderry events as part of the Hullabaloo Children's Art Festival in October/November 2024. We discussed this as a team and agreed it would be a good opportunity for the Community Forum to plan, design and deliver a project.

We created a new freelance role of 'Artist Liaison' as part of the festival, which meant we had a person 'on the ground' to coordinate activities. The workshops took place in the library and enabled us to work with a wide range of new artists. We also put a team of volunteers in place to support the artist liaison and facilitating artists.



Festival in a Van. Photo credit: Mark Forde

Festival in a Van approached us about working together again and we invited them back as part of the Hullabaloo Festival. We curated a Halloween-themed day which included music performances, a dance showcase, arts and crafts activities, catering from Wild Plates, and lots of very impressive Halloween Costumes! We also included a showcase of our Healthy Offaly funded, Step it Up! Creative Movement Project. Retox Dance choreographed several dances, and Eleanor Farrelly facilitated an exercise and balance session. There were 200 people in attendance, 75 adults and 125 children.

“I am so thrilled to see all the wonderful pictures from the day out in Edenderry, and to hear from the lads that it went so well.”

Festival in a Van director

“The lantern workshops went really well in the library and everyone was so nice and helpful. It was such a pleasure to host these workshops and lovely to meet everyone. Absolutely do get in touch if you would like to host lantern making or carnival/parade arts workshops in the future.”

Selene Murphy, artist

“Thanks to all the organisers, the fab crew of Festival in a Van, and especially Seonaid Murray and Creative Places, Edenderry for organising this happy event for our community! Big shout out to all the parents and carers that brought their children down to perform, sing, dance and watch - you were all legends and we had a great day!”

Danna Davis Daly, performer, Festival in a Van event

[Festival in a Van video by Mark Forde](#)



Festival in a Van. Photo credit: Mark Forde

Step it Up! Creative Movement Project funded by Healthy Offaly

We successfully applied for funding from Healthy Offaly, Healthy Ireland to deliver the Step it Up!, Creative Movement Project themed around dance and movement.

This was an intergenerational project in which we worked with four dance and movement facilitators to deliver workshops for 94 adults and 26 children and young people. In total, we ran 128 Dance and Creative Movement workshops and classes, including: Pilates, Yoga for Men, Latin Dance for Adults, Teens Commercial Dance, Barre Class, Hip Hop Dance for Adults, Creative Movement sessions for families, Health and Well-being dance workshops for children with sensory needs and adults who identify as disabled, as well as several workshops for residents at Ofalia House care home.

There was a Healthy Offaly Celebration event at Mucklagh Community Centre in June, which our Creative Places, Edenderry coordinator attended along with Yolanda Rodriguez from Retox Dance and four of her students. It was a really interesting morning with reflections from the different projects, live music and a presentation of the evaluation report from Dr. Diane Cooper, CEO of EduFit, Clinical Exercise Physiologist and Health Researcher.



Retox Dance students at Mucklagh Community Centre. Photo credit: Yolanda Rodriguez

“We just want to say a big thank you for organising our Creative Movement sessions with Charmaine. She was so motivating yet patient with our residents and we are sorry our sessions have come to an end. The residents thoroughly enjoyed each one and we would love to be included in more sessions in the near future if possible.”

Alice Connolly, Activity Coordinator, Ofalia House care home

“I would like to say a very big thank you to Charmaine. My little boy loved the class, he got so involved and loved all the free movement and props. Charmaine is an amazing lady who is so gentle and kind - please email me if she returns again.”

Participant’s mother



Dance workshop at Retox Dance. Photo credit: Charmaine McMeekin

Purple Hearts Project

In March, the ActiviTEA group took part in the ‘Purple Heart’ project. They crocheted over 100 purple hearts which were delivered to Emma O’Sullivan, the Bereavement Clinical Nurse Specialist at Mullingar Hospital. One heart is left with the deceased, and the matching heart is given in a memory box to the person’s loved-ones as a keepsake offering support during their grieving process. This was a very meaningful project which the ActiviTEA group undertook with great care. Afterwards, the hospital wrote us a letter of thanks:

“I just wanted to send a huge thank you to each and every one of you for your beautiful purple crochet hearts which were very kindly received. They are perfect and we appreciate your generosity so much. Your hearts have been delivered to our ICU, ED and Medical wards and will be shared with our bereaved families over the coming months. This project means so much to our bereaved families but it wouldn’t be possible for us to extend this act of kindness without our fabulous volunteers, so on behalf of all of the staff here in Regional Hospital Mullingar I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts. The time and kindness you put into making these crochet hearts means so much to us and they provide great comfort to bereaved families during their most difficult days.”

Emma O’Sullivan, Mullingar Hospital

The ActiviTEA group have expressed that they would like to undertake more projects like this which connect with other community groups and associations in Offaly and beyond.

Photo credit: Seonaid Murray & Jenny Bergin



St. Patrick's Day with the President

In March, the Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator was invited by President Michael D. Higgins and Sabina Higgins to Áras an Uachtaráin to mark St. Patrick's Day. The event was called, 'Samhlaíocht agus An Náisiún - Imagination and The Nation'. This was a huge honour and Seonaid Murray reflects: "It was amazing to be invited to Áras an Uachtaráin. President Higgins' speech was inspiring and his reflections on everyday grassroots creativity were thoughtful, insightful, witty and encouraging."

The event celebrated the vital contribution of community arts to inclusion and creativity across Ireland. President Higgins spoke passionately about creativity as essential to human fulfillment, reflecting on his own involvement with community arts since the 1980s. He spoke about the significance of community-led creative activity and emphasised the transformative power of creativity in communities, observing that "when ideas are being shared and when the joy of something is being shared" we create stronger, more connected societies.



President Michael D. Higgins, Photo credit Áras an Uachtaráin

President Higgins also highlighted the fundamental role of public spaces in enabling creative expression saying that "what happens in the public space is incredibly important" and that we must protect these spaces for community creativity to flourish.

The reception brought together community arts practitioners from across Ireland, and the President's words reinforced the vital importance of everyday creativity in building inclusive, vibrant communities. The President concluded by thanking community arts practitioners: "I am so grateful to all of you for all of the work that you're doing ... I think that with the kind of work you're doing... it creates a critical consciousness among the people that has secondary benefits."

[Watch the President's speech here.](#)



Creative Places Coordinators
Photo credit: Seonaid Murray



President Michael D. Higgins
Photo credit: Áras an Uachtaráin

Good governance



Members of the Community Forum. Photo credit: Mark Forde

The Governance Team meets every other month and is made up of representatives from Offaly Arts, Offaly County Council, Municipal District Edenderry, the library service, Offaly Local Development Company, the Community Forum and the Creative Places Edenderry Coordinator. The Community Forum has a rotating seat on the Governance Team, which gives the opportunity for a different member of the Community Forum to attend each time.

The Community Forum group continues to meet every month, and to date 16 members of the community have been involved with this group.

The Artists Collective began to meet in August 2024. They get together every other month, and to date nine local artists have interacted with this group.

Alternative Evaluation Exhibitions



“This piece represents what Creative Places, Edenderry means to me”
Monika Cerna

“My favourite memory from the last year of Creative Places, Edenderry was the Play Strategy session with Martin O’Donoghue. It was very different, and not a side of yourself you get to indulge every day. I really enjoyed it and it was a very positive experience.”

Sandra Lewis, Manager, Edenderry Library and member of the Creative Places, Edenderry Governance Team

We hosted two Alternative Evaluation Exhibitions in year four, in September 2024 and June 2025. At the launch of the first exhibition, we hosted an open conversation with the community and some of the artists about their work and what the project meant to them, which was co-facilitated by our Coordinator and the Project Evaluator, Conor O’Leary.

At the launch of the second exhibition in June we invited Aleksandra Rosiak, Assistant Arts Officer at Offaly County Council, and our Evaluator Conor to attend. Once again we hosted an open conversation with the contributing artists and community members. We discussed their work and what Creative Places, Edenderry has meant to them over the past year.

In the most recent exhibition we asked ‘Do you have a favourite memory from the past year (July 2024 - June 2025) which was part of Creative Places, Edenderry? It could be a workshop, one-off event, performance, photograph, meeting someone or simply a creative moment that you enjoyed!’

Evaluation

We continued to work with external evaluator, Conor O’Leary in year four, and he wrote a midway report and final report. Throughout the year Conor attended workshops, sessions, performances, meetings and events, as well as meeting group attendees, artists/facilitators and volunteers, and carrying out a series of surveys.

Training

We ran monthly training sessions for and by the local community. These sessions included topics such as First Aid, How to Plan, Design and Deliver an Arts-based Workshop, Arts Administration, An Introduction to Adult Literacy, Looking after the Artist/Facilitator and more. We also welcomed visiting facilitators such as the Creative Places, Tuam Coordinator Carolann Courtney.

Play Strategy session

We invited Play Strategist Martin O’Donoghue to facilitate two workshops, during which he explored different ways of working together, and encouraged the group to ‘think big’ and be as imaginative as possible. Martin created a summary report which included:

“I really love the energy and creativity that you have enabled in Edenderry. Creative Places has real worth and after living in rural Ireland for four years, I know the dearth of opportunity for creative expression that exists, where individuals or institutions are not anchoring it there. This is a strategy to help to build on the energy and momentum of the highly successful Creative Places, Edenderry programme.

“By any metrics, the impact and personal and community level of this programme is impressive. There exists now solid foundations from which future creative endeavours are possible. The programme has nurtured and inspired a diverse range of creative energies, across the full spectrum of artistic paths, from hobbyists to emerging artists through to established professional artists. There are definitely some dedicated and creative people in Edenderry who are invested in continuing the legacy of your work.

One possible solution for a sustainable continuation of this community could be the establishment of a forum for exchange of support, ideas and cross pollination of practices.”

And some feedback from a participant:

“I really enjoyed it. It was a total switch-off from what has been a stressful time. It was a couple of hours of much needed escapism.”



Play Strategy workshops. Photo credit: Mark Forde

Developments and off-shoots

It has been really interesting to witness and encourage the off-shoots of creative activity that have developed in the community, including:

- The establishment of ‘Acoustic Hearts’ as a local music group, which came out of the Monday Music Group with Angi Ward.
- In years two and three, we supported Offaly Pride by running an ‘Acoustic Picnic’ event at the Old Station House and a drama workshop facilitated by a young person from the LGBTQIA+ community. In year four, Edenderry Pride was established to run an event as part of Offaly Pride. We supported this event by providing catering and a Pride flag. It was really encouraging to see this new group being established independently of Creative Places, Edenderry and they are already planning next year’s events.
- A new weekly activity group at the Cabin called ‘The Witches Circle’, inspired by the weekly Community Social group with Nesrin Elazaly.
- After receiving Seed Funding from Creative Places, Edenderry to deliver a Sensory and Music Playgroup for children of all abilities, Danna Davis Daly was inspired to start (with a grant from Offaly Childcare Committee) a playgroup in Edenderry and funded buggy walks along the Grand Canal.
- The Community Forum ran a fundraiser for baby Ricardo who was very unwell this year. This is the first time it has supported an event that was collecting donations. They raised €434, and it was good practice for future sessions when the community will begin to charge for workshops and events.

- Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator Seonaid Murray has been supporting local artists and groups with funding applications, and writing letters of support when requested. Helen Keenan successfully applied for a Commemoration Grant from the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport for a project called ‘The Land we Claimed’, which will explore themes of land, memory and identity through art, movement and storytelling. Helen’s experience of working with Creative Places, Edenderry was discussed during the interview process and the panel was happy to know that we supported her application.
- Nesrin Elazaly successfully applied to be part of Culture Night 2025 independently of Creative Places, Edenderry for the first time.
- Creative Places, Edenderry successfully applied to Creative Ireland to run ‘Eden Fresco’ in 2025, an exploration of Edenderry’s rich heritage through innovative multidisciplinary art partnerships.



Festival in a Van. Photo credit: Mark Forde

“I have many wonderful memories of Edenderry and the creative energies generously shared by the communities I worked with during the project. The workshops touched many people's lives, from adults to children, and incorporated various art forms, including spoken word, music composition, singing and dance. If I had to select one memory, it would be of the two solo dancers who created a beautiful duet inspired by their friendship. They attended every session, rain or shine, without fail, despite being so shy at our first meeting that they could only smile at everyone. Their transformation from timid participants to confident performers was genuinely inspiring. Their joy in dancing, strong friendship, and love for Edenderry shone through on stage, serving as a testament to their growth and bravery.”

Elizabeth Drwal, director and choreographer of ‘The Bog, The Grand Canal and Other Magical Places.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover. Accept people for who they are.”

John Dempsey, Community Member



Community Doodle
Laura Phillips

“I created this piece to represent how mindful doodling has brought members of the community together. Through the support of funding from Creative Places, Edenderry I have been able to begin my journey of hosting workshops with confidence, and I have made many special friendships as a result. Thank you Creative Places, Edenderry”

Laura Phillips, Local artist

“I have really enjoyed connecting with people and becoming a part of the community.”

Community member

Time to reflect

“This is an upcycled clock, including words to represent all of the workshops facilitated over the last year.”

Ailish Moran, Local artist



“Myself, JJ and the group collaged their artwork from the last few weeks and created a spiral design to represent the journey we were on like a clock moving in time.” Eleanor Farrelly, Local artist and facilitator of the Visual Arts group for and by people who identify as disabled

Time, and the image of a clock face, came up a few times in meetings, at showcase events and as part of our Alternative Evaluation Exhibitions. The concept of time in the Creative Places, Edenderry project has been described as follows:

- The value and importance of **spending time** together
- **Making time** for creativity for each other and oneself
- **Holding time** and supporting the community to interact and engage with Creative Places, Edenderry at a time which suits them best
- **Giving time** for open conversations and explaining projects, applications, ideas, motivations and reasoning behind ideas in a variety of different ways and formats
- **Time to listen** and make sure that **all community voices can be heard**

Year four of Creative Places, Edenderry has strengthened creative networks in the town and we have worked on more collaborations with outside partners than any other year, including Hullabaloo, Culture Night, Festival in a Van, the Public Participation Network and Healthy Offaly.

Project collaborators have approached us more and more as our reputation has grown in Edenderry and across the county. We have been asked for advice when community groups are looking for artists or facilitators to work with, and our project Coordinator has been asked to join panels, discussions and meeting groups when other Creative Places projects are planning micro-grants, artists commissions and more.

Key needs identified

Throughout the first four years of Creative Places, Edenderry we have identified several key needs that should be explored, developed and workshopped through community training sessions, ‘Think In’s’ and events:

- Securing Public Liability Insurance as a group or individual
- Applying for a Tax Clearance Number
- How to form a Constituted Group
- Ongoing support with safeguarding, planning, designing and implementing arts-based workshops
- Accessing local venues
- Accessing and understanding how to apply for local funding opportunities

While facilitating community focus groups and training sessions, we have also identified three key areas that we feel the community requires more training and support in:

1. Inclusion & Outreach - Supporting Equality, Monitoring and Inclusion Policies for grassroots groups, and enabling groups to reach out further into the local community and beyond in order to sustain work with as wide a demographic as possible.
2. Advocacy - There is still a need for Creative Places, Edenderry to advocate on the community’s behalf, to ensure that infrastructure such as funding, transport and communication with local authorities are all fully up and running before the end of June 2026.
3. Confidence - While there has been a huge increase in confidence amongst the local artists, group attendees and volunteers currently engaging with the project, there is still work to do to sustain long-term confidence in a creative infrastructure within Edenderry.

We have decided to work on all of the above in three stages:

Stage 1: Training and 'Think In' sessions and events

Stage 2: A series of Open Support Meetings hosted by the Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator, complemented by the monthly Community Forum Meetings and Artists Collective which meets every other month

Stage 3: Advocacy



Amplify Programme. Photo credit: Maura Kearny

Grants and Commissions

Seed Funding Grants 2025

- Helen Keenan - €1,000 for *Until We Meet Again*, a four-week arts and craft, movement and poetry workshop at the Youth Cafe in Edenderry, centred on using creativity to normalise conversations around death, dying, grief and loss for young people.
- Angi Ward - €1,000 for *Mother Bog*, an original play written and performed by Angi Ward inspired by her father who was a 'Bog Man'.
- Jenny Bergin - €1,000 for a set of eight air-dry clay bird workshops at Ofalia House care home.
- Maura Kearney - €1,000 for Youthwork Midlands' *Amplify* programme at the Acorn Project
- Danna Davis Daly - €1,000 for a *Sensory and Music Playgroup for children of all abilities*
- Ailish Moran - €1,000 for *Upcycling and Recycling* project at The Cabin

Artist Commissions 2025

- Sara Walmsley and Elizabeth Drwal - €12,000 for *Reflections and Resonance*, an intergenerational performance project using music, movement and storytelling to respond to key themes identified by the local community. The final interactive piece was called, *The Bog, The Grand Canal and Other Magical Places* - here are some links to the audio pieces created: <https://creativeplacesedenderry.ie/the-bog-the-grand-canal-and-other-magical-places/>
- John Maguire - €6,000 for *The Witch Had it Coming* Halloween pantomime at St. Mary's Primary School.
- Laura Philips - €3,000 for a *Community Doodle Mural* with children and teenagers.
- Eden FM - €3,000 for *Echoes of Edenderry, Embracing Diversity through Shared Stories*.

Testimonials from across the project

“Joining Acoustic Hearts has made my heart sing. The encouragement from Angi and the rest of the group gives me the confidence to express myself through song. Thank you to everyone in the group.”

Monday Music Group member

“I like mixing with other women and the chat.”

ActiviTEA participant

“It passes the morning with lots of laughs.”

ActiviTEA participant

“Creative Places, Edenderry is so easy to work with. The Coordinator is so understanding of the needs and abilities of all the groups running in town. Community Forum meetings and sitting in on other meetings, being included in decision making and feeling that your opinion matters is so important. The inclusion of so many facilitators in every workshop and festival and project is outstanding and the Coordinator is always just a call away with support and direction. I feel I am making a difference in my community and have met so many new people, artists, crafters, musicians, writers. And we, in turn, have created networks and support systems and became aware of exactly what our little town has to offer in all areas of the arts.”

Jenny Bergin, Local artist

“Congrats on the Hullabaloo programme and delivery – the town was buzzing!”

Offaly County Council’s Assistant Arts Officer, Aleksandra Rosiak
commenting on the Festival in a Van Event

“I didn’t expect to be making and taking away a piece of art like this!”

Lantern making workshop participant

“Lovely community event enjoyed by all.”

Eleanor Farrelly commenting on the Festival in a Van event

“We went to the dance yoga and I just wanted to say that we really enjoyed it, both kids and adults. Helen was brilliant, thanks!”

Family dance workshop participant

“I was approached by friends and asked if I would be interested in giving a class in jewellery making. I was nervous at first but even with my disability, I was welcomed as a facilitator. I had been housebound for a long time, and when I heard about Creative Places, Edenderry I jumped at the chance to get out as I had a place to go. My picture of the butterfly represents my journey from being in a dark place both mentally and physically. The chrysalis represents the cocoon I had made for myself and the butterfly represents the fact that Creative Places, Edenderry has helped me spread my wings again as an artist and hobbyist. Thank you.”

Sabrina Kenny, community member and artist

“Dance ignites the spirit to move in a way that captures the joy of feeling free to fly, to be who we truly are in our hearts. I feel that our dance and creative movement sessions with the lovely folk of Edenderry captured the pure joy in moving one’s body to music. May we continue to dance to the beat of our own drum.”

Charmaine McMeekin, Dance Facilitator, Step it up! Creative Movement, Healthy Ireland project.



Nesrin Elazaly art piece

“We created ‘A Family of Threads and Love’ - a three-dimensional artwork which captures the warmth of family through handmade dolls. Together, we complete each other and inspire one another - and, for me, this family is exactly the same as our Community Social weekly group. It symbolises the heart of our weekly gatherings - the cosy treehouse represents a safe, welcoming space where everyone is free to be themselves. Each handcrafted figure stands for the diversity in our group, people of different ages, cultures and walks of life, coming together in harmony. The vibrant yarn and fabric textures evoke creativity, comfort and togetherness. Music, crafts and friendships fill our Fridays, and this artwork captures that joyful spirit we share each week.”

Nesrin Elazaly, Community Lead Volunteer, The Community Social Group

“Excellent work everyone. Loving every minute of Creative Places, Edenderry.”

Community member and artist

“This programme was yet again extremely worthwhile for the young people involved. They all had the opportunity to dive into the world of podcasting and grow their skills and abilities in this area. The real key element of the programme is that young people were given the creativity to focus on any area that was of interest to them. We saw many groups completing podcasts on sports, animals and TV shows. It was remarkable to see their confidence shine as the days progressed, all getting a chance to record their piece and have such fun along the way. It allowed them to develop key skills such as communication, teamwork and develop their imagination through the world of interactive media.”

Education Coordinator, Youthwork Ireland Midlands, The Acorn Project



Creative Lives

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www.facebook.com/cpedenderry

www.instagram.com/cpedenderry

creativeplacesedenderry.ie

Links to our Sound Cloud pages with audio & interviews from different projects throughout the year:

soundcloud.com/seonaid-murray

soundcloud.com/creative-places-edenderry

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