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Government of Ireland

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **134,811 PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY COVID-19 COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME**

Today, Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July, marks the end of the successful COVID-19 Community Outreach (CCO) Programme, a joint initiative by The Wheel, the national association of charities, and Irish Rural Link, the national network representing the interest of rural communities and funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Since the Government's announced the programme on the 27<sup>th</sup> March, 34 Local Community Champions across the country have worked tirelessly to link and support the work of community and voluntary organisations responding to meet the needs of those who were cocooning. The aim of the programme was to ensure no person would be left behind during the pandemic.

Over the last three months, the Community Champions helped to join the dots and link thousands of people who were cocooning into local services so their needs were fully met, linked volunteers to hundreds of community and voluntary organisations and vice versa and identified gaps in services and reported these back to their local authority forum meeting. They also dealt with a lot of social issues, such as loneliness among those cocooning, delivery of school meals and food parcels to families in need as well as helping people celebrate their birthdays when family were unable to celebrate with them.

Both The Wheel and Irish Rural Link are extremely grateful for the hard work and effort the Champions did in their local communities. They provided ongoing support to 134,811 people, 14,877 community and voluntary organisations and mobilised 36,821 volunteers and made the programme the success it was.

Deirdre Garvey, CEO of the Wheel and Seamus Boland, CEO Irish Rural Link said "We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the Champions for their tremendous work over the last few months in providing ongoing support to the people, community & voluntary organisations and volunteers in their communities and making the programme the success it was. They showed great leadership in their communities and by working together with their local authority, agencies and with community and voluntary organisations they ensured that the needs of every person were met".

Speaking about the ending of the CCO Programme, the Department of Rural and Community Development said “The Department was delighted to provide funding towards the COVID-19 Community Outreach Project. The Community Champions appointed across the country really sprang into action, helping to coordinate the local community response to the crisis. The DRCD works closely with the Community and Voluntary Sector and this project served to embed that relationship further. We look forward to continuing to work with the sector into the future to help our communities face the challenges of recovery”.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on peoples’ mental health and wellbeing will be felt for some time and the necessary supports must be available in communities to support these people.

People affected by COVID-19 will continue to receive support through the government’s Community Call initiative. More information on your local Community Call Helpline is available on <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1f06f7-covid-19-community-call-local-authority-helpline-numbers-and-email-a/>. The helpline is available from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Sunday.

-ENDS-

**Seamus Boland, CEO of Irish Rural Link and Deirdre Garvey, CEO of The Wheel are available for interview. Contact Louise Lennon on M:086 106 9244 or Gert Ackermann on M:086 176 9287.**

#### **About The Wheel**

The Wheel is Ireland’s national association of charities, community and voluntary organisations, and social enterprises. With over 1,700 members, it is the largest representative body for the sector. Visit [www.wheel.ie](http://www.wheel.ie) for more information.

#### **About Irish Rural Link**

Irish Rural Link is the national network for community groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas. It represents their interests by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, and sharing experiences and examples of good practice. Visit [www.irishrurallink.ie](http://www.irishrurallink.ie) for more information.