



National Volunteer Management Conference

Wednesday 30 April 2025

**Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street
Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 D953**



**Volunteer
Ireland**

Obair Dheonach Éireann

Conference programme

09:00 Informal yoga and wake up session **Kristín Kristjánsdóttir** (*optional*)

09:30 Registration opens: Informal networking

10:00 Ignite & Inspire: Conference & programme essentials **Stuart Garland**

Morning plenary

10:10 Opening address **Nina Arwitz**

10:20 Volunteer infrastructure and support update
Department of Rural and Community Development (TBC)

10:35 Keynote: How does volunteering succeed and fail in promoting solidarity?
Dr. Stuart Fox

11:00 Thriving through learning: A path to success **Stuart Garland**

11:10 **Mid-morning tea and coffee break** Chat & connect with your peers

11:30 **Morning Masterclasses** (*select one*)

- Challenges with identifying the effects of volunteering **Dr. Stuart Fox**
- Bias and the bystander **Emma Balfe**
- Revitalising engagement: making volunteering dynamic and flexible **Zsé Varga**
- Highlighting the stories of our volunteers **Claire McGowran**
- Exploring the digital volunteering toolkit **Chris Martin**

12:30 **Lunch** Informal networking

13:15 Transforming volunteer management at Children in Hospital (*optional*)
Elizabeth Morrin (CHI) and **James Colclough** (Volunteero)

13:45 AI, its impact and use in our volunteer programmes **John Kilroy**

14:15 **Afternoon Masterclasses** (*select one*)

- Involving persons with disabilities as volunteers **Tenna Sørensen Jochumsen**
- European funding opportunities for capacity building **Jemma Lee**
- Effective engagement of younger volunteers **Dave Kavanagh**
- Leveraging corporate volunteering **Terri O'Brien & Amy McBride**

15:15 **Afternoon comfort break** Chat & connect with your peers

15:30 **Afternoon Plenary**

Investing in Volunteers Awards **Denise Hayward & Nina Arwitz**

Legal protections for volunteers **Patricia Munatsi**

Panel discussion with **Amy Woods**: Volunteering reimagined, candid conversations on volunteer engagement

16:30 Closing remarks

Conference Ends

Welcome

A warm welcome to Volunteer Ireland's annual conference. With a mix of national and international speakers, nine master classes and networking over the course of the day, we look forward to engaging with you at the premiere event for Leaders of Volunteers.

Visit the Volunteering Village

Drop in early, join us for some networking with colleagues and visit some of our exhibitors' stands during the day.

- **Better Impact**
- **Comhlámh**
- **Computershare Entity Solutions**
- **Léargas**
- **StudentVolunteer.ie**
- **TeamKinetic**
- **Volunteero**
- **We Act**

Relax with our Yoga Session

Rushing to the conference and feeling frazzled? Join Kristín Kristjánsdóttir for a gentle session of stretches, movement, and breath awareness to reconnect with your body. We'll end with a short meditation to find stillness before your busy day. No experience needed—just come as you are! Put your phone aside, take a break, and tune in to tune out.

This free yoga session is beginner-friendly.

Speaker Biographies



Nina Arwitz (She/Her), Volunteer Ireland

Nina's background is in the environmental non-profit sector where she focused on social inclusion, engaging new audiences and volunteering; as well as fundraising, campaigning and strategic development. Nina is responsible for the overall strategic direction of Volunteer Ireland and ensuring that we deliver our mission to promote, support and advocate for excellent, accessible and inclusive volunteering in Ireland.



Emma Balfe (They/Them), Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire

Emma works in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Unit and Human Resources at IADT, focusing on institutional culture change through training and policy development. They hold an MA in Gender Studies (UCD), a BA in Visual Culture (NCAD), and Postgraduate Certificates in Consent, Sexual Violence & Harassment (NUIG), Assessment & Evaluation (IADT), and Learning & Teaching (IADT).



Dr. Stuart Fox, University of Exeter

Stuart, a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Exeter, specialises in political behaviour and youth engagement. His research examines how volunteering influences civic participation, particularly among disadvantaged youth. Committed to bridging academia and practice, he collaborates with organisations like the Centre for European Volunteering, SALTO, and NCVO. Previously, he lectured at Brunel University London after earning his PhD from Nottingham in 2015.



Stuart Garland (He/Him), Volunteer Ireland

Stuart is the Learning and Capacity Building Manager at Volunteer Ireland, with over 30 years of experience in the third sector and youth work. He specialises in volunteer management, inclusive engagement, and capacity building, collaborating with national and European organisations. A lead trainer in volunteer impact assessment and quality standards, he has delivered training and consultancy globally. He holds advanced qualifications in volunteer leadership, human resources, and organisational management.



David Kavanagh (He/Him), Jigsaw The National Centre for Youth Mental Health

Dave is a strategic leader committed to social change through community collaboration. As Youth Voice & Engagement Manager at Jigsaw, he ensures young people's voices shape services. With experience in mental health, social housing, and homelessness, he has led organisational change and service design. Passionate about equity and inclusion, Dave works to create impactful, rights-based engagement that empowers individuals and strengthens communities.



Jemma Lee, Léargas

Jemma is a youth and community worker with a passion for youth empowerment and gender equality. She believes in the value of volunteering and lifelong learning for building resilient and equal societies. An Applied Social Studies graduate with a passion for youth empowerment and gender equality, and a belief in the value of volunteering and lifelong learning for building resilient and equal societies.



Chris Martin, TeamKinetic

Chris is the founder and CEO of TeamKinetic, a leading volunteer management software provider. With over 20 years of experience, he has guided the platform's growth from the beginning. Passionate about improving volunteer management, he contributes to the Sports Volunteer Research Network and recently launched the 'Digital in Volunteering' community of practice. He holds degrees in Sport Science and Human Movement Studies from Leeds Metropolitan University.

Speaker Biographies



Amy McBride, Volunteer Ireland

Amy is Volunteer Ireland's Corporate Programmes Officer, supporting corporate employees in large-scale volunteering projects that connect businesses with non-profits for impactful one-off initiatives. With over a decade in the non-profit sector, she previously led a team in a busy community centre and continues to volunteer with her local youth club. Amy is passionate about volunteering's vital role in strengthening grassroots community organisations.



Claire McGowran (She/Her), WeAct Campaign

Claire is the Campaign Manager for We Act, a national campaign to celebrate charities and community groups in Ireland. Claire has over 15 years in print and digital media and has written for the Irish Times and Irish Independent. She worked on the #HomeToVote campaign and a UNICEF campaign to end child marriage.



Patricia Munatsi, Volunteer Ireland

Patricia joined Volunteer Ireland in February 2024 as the Public Affairs Manager. Patricia is an international human rights lawyer with expertise in public policy, strategic engagements, lobbying and advocacy. She is also a keynote speaker, diversity, equality and inclusion advocate and an anti-racism trainer. Patricia's education includes an LLM in International Human Rights Law from University College Dublin and a Bachelor of Laws Honors Degree from the University of Zimbabwe.



Terri O'Brien, Volunteer Ireland

Terri leads Volunteer Ireland's corporate volunteering programme, managing partnerships and helping companies create impactful initiatives. As part of the leadership team, she shapes strategy and advances volunteering nationwide. A member of the Points of Light global network, she stays connected to corporate volunteering innovations. Passionate about high-quality programmes, she builds meaningful partnerships that strengthen communities and drive lasting impact.



Tenna Sørensen Jochumsen (She/Her), Centre for European Volunteering

Tenna is from Denmark but based in Brussels, Belgium where she works as Project Officer for Centre for European Volunteering (CEV). For several years, Tenna has engaged herself in the civil society sector mainly focusing on volunteering and creating inclusive activities for young people and marginalised groups. She has done so both as a volunteer herself and through previous roles in Danish and International Non-Governmental Organisations.



Amy Woods, Volunteer Ireland

Amy joined Volunteer Ireland in August 2015. In July 2023, Amy took on the role of Head of Advocacy and Engagement. Amy's role involves overseeing Volunteer Ireland's internal and external communications; advocacy and research outputs; and the Community Volunteers programme. Amy acts as primary spokesperson for the organisation and represents Volunteer Ireland on a number of fora. Managing a small team, Amy strives to set a culture in line our values.



Zsé Varga (She/Her), Volunteer Ireland

Zsé drives innovation in volunteering, focusing on flexibility, diversity, and meaningful engagement. She leads initiatives to empower leaders and has a background in volunteer management training and consultancy across Ireland, Hungary, and Europe. With expertise in flexible volunteer roles, she is shaping the future of engagement. Zsé is a Blood Bikes East volunteer.

Morning master classes (11:30 to 12:30)



Challenges with identifying the effects of volunteering, Dr. Stuart Fox (*Red*)

Assessing volunteering's impact is challenging, as data collection is complex, costly, and time-consuming. However, demand—especially from funders—continues to grow. Stuart explores the need to evaluate both positive and negative impacts, key challenges, and practical solutions. Participants will share insights and strategies to improve how volunteering's benefits are measured and communicated effectively.



Bias and the bystander, Emma Balfe (*Yellow*)

This workshop explores how unconscious bias influences Bystander Intervention. Participants will learn about unconscious bias, the Bystander Effect, and the pyramid of violence while developing effective intervention strategies. With an anti-racist perspective, the session helps participants recognise their biases and apply practical techniques to create safer, more inclusive environments. Through discussion and practice, they will gain confidence in using informed Bystander Intervention strategies.



Revitalising engagement: making volunteering dynamic & flexible, Zsé Varga (*Light blue*)

Struggling to engage volunteers? The gap between volunteer expectations and organisational offerings is growing—but it doesn't have to. Join this session to explore flexible approaches, real-life examples, and strategies for creating roles that meet today's needs and align with organisational goals. Let's go beyond "getting volunteers back" and discover new ways to energise and diversify our programmes!



Highlighting the stories of our volunteers, Claire McGowran (*Purple*)

Storytelling is essential for recruiting and retaining volunteers by showcasing their impact. This session teaches you how to share volunteer stories, regardless of resources. Learn how to find stories within your volunteer pool and present them for fundraising, events, social media, and onboarding. Gain simple tools for capturing and sharing your volunteers' experiences and impact with supporters to inspire engagement and support.



Exploring the Digital in Volunteering Toolkit, Chris Martin (*Brown*)

The Digital in Volunteering Toolkit helps leaders of volunteers make informed tech choices. Created by Gethyn Williams, TeamKinetic, and the Association of Volunteer Managers, it offers practical advice, diagnostic tools, and real-world insights. It also introduces a Community of Practice, connecting professionals to share experiences. Designed to make digital work for volunteering, the toolkit supports smarter, more effective tech use in the sector.

The Volunteer Charter

Welcoming All, Growing Together

Volunteers bring passion, dedication, and energy to every organisation. But for volunteering to thrive, there must be trust, respect, and clear expectations. That's where The Volunteer Charter comes in!

This two-way commitment outlines what volunteers and organisations can expect from each other, creating a positive and rewarding experience for all.

Why does it matter?

- **Clarity & Confidence** – Everyone knows what to expect.
- **Stronger Relationships** – Built on trust and respect.
- **Better Experiences** – Motivated and engaged volunteers make a bigger impact.

The Volunteer Charter helps VIOs show their commitment to to build a thriving, inclusive environment.

Networking

Today is about meeting with and networking with your peers, chat to colleagues but also take the opportunity to connect with leaders of volunteers you haven't met before.

Afternoon master classes (14:15 to 15:15)



Involving persons with disabilities as volunteers, Tenna Sørensen Jochumsen (Orange)

When thinking about volunteering and people with disabilities, too often the role of people with disabilities is limited to recipients of help while failing to fully recognise the huge potential impact that a person with disabilities can make as a volunteer, as a giver of help rather than receiver. In our workshop, we want to address this trend through discussions on how best to engage people with disabilities as volunteers with a focus on existing barriers for participation and potential solutions to these.



European funding opportunities for capacity building, Jemma Lee & Suzanne Keating (Pink)

Find out how European funding can support you to upskill your volunteers and volunteer managers, develop your organisation and make an impact in your community. Léargas manage exchange programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training. Léargas are the National Agency for Erasmus+ in Adult Education, School Education, Vocational Education and Training, Youth and Sport.



Engaging and empowering young volunteers, Dave Kavanagh (Green)

This master class offers a unique opportunity to reflect on youth volunteer engagement, emphasising the importance of listening to young people and adopting a rights-based approach to volunteerism. Drawing from Jigsaw's experience with their Youth Advocate volunteers nationwide, participants will reflect on and learn practical strategies for engaging, involving, and retaining these volunteers, and consider how to implement these practices within their own volunteer involving organisations



Leveraging corporate volunteering, Terri O'Brien & Amy McBride (Blue)

Do you feel like the impact and value volunteers bring to your organisation isn't fully understood? Do you feel like you're constantly negotiating for more resources or even buy-in from senior stakeholders? Are you tired of repeating the same messages, and getting the same results?

Influencing in order to advocate is a skill much needed by volunteer managers and leaders. It is more than just saying the right words. This workshop will help you start to understand where and how you can influence others in order to better advocate for your volunteer programme - and yourself.



Thank you to volunteers from **Midlands Polish Community** and **MPC TV** who are recording the event and to **Leah Carroll** our event photographer.



Presentation of Investing in Volunteers Awards

Investing in Volunteers is the UK and Ireland Quality Standard that helps assess and improve the quality of your volunteer management and involvement.

Achieving the standard shows your current, and potential, volunteers how much they are valued and gives them confidence in your ability to provide an outstanding volunteer experience.

Presentations will be made at the conference to the most recent achievers.

Details of 2025 awardees confirmed closer to the presentation date

To find out more about Investing in Volunteers visit [The Quality and Impact pages on our web site](#)

Event and venue information

Is the venue wheelchair accessible?

Yes, the hotel is fully wheelchair accessible. There are lifts to all floors from the underground car park, which also has designated EU Parking Card spaces. Service dogs are welcome. The venue has step-free access throughout.

I use a JAM Card / Sunflower Hidden Disabilities lanyard

We welcome people with invisible disabilities. Volunteer Ireland team members have completed [JAM Card](#) training. Check in with us at registration if you have any questions or need support.

What if I have additional support needs?

Contact Stuart Garland at stuart@volunteer.ie or call (087) 696 4020 in advance of the conference. If you have a carer or assistant, they can attend with you and will only need to pay for refreshments.

Can I get a scholarship?

A limited number of reduced-cost and subsidised tickets are available for those with limited resources. To apply, email stuart@volunteer.ie explaining how attending would benefit you and why you need a scholarship.

Diversity and Inclusion

We recognise that attendees come from diverse and inclusive backgrounds. Our conference is a place where everyone is valued, respected, and celebrated. We are committed to creating a welcoming space where all attendees can engage, learn, and connect in a positive and supportive environment. By being part of this conference, you join a community that champions respect, equality, and kindness – ensuring that everyone feels safe, heard, and empowered. Together we can inspire change.

How can I show if I want to network or not?

We offer three wristbands to help with social interaction: **Red** – Prefer to keep your distance, **Orange** – Okay to chat but no physical contact, **Green** – Comfortable with handshakes and high-fives. Wristbands are available at registration.

What is the full address of the venue?

Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street, Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 D953.

Can I travel by train to the conference?

Yes, trains arrive in Athlone Train station from Westport/Ballina at 09:04, Galway at 10:03 and Dublin Heuston at 09:06. Trains depart at 16:12 for all three destinations. It's best to reserve a seat at www.irishrail.ie. The conference venue is a 6 minute walk from the Athlone train station.

Can I travel by bus to the conference?

Yes, Bus Éireann operates services to Athlone bus station. Visit www.buseireann.ie for details. [CityLink Service 763](#) runs between Dublin Airport, Dublin City, and Galway, with the nearest stop at B&Q Arcadia Retail Centre, Athlone (a 25-minute walk from the venue). The conference venue is a 6 minute walk from Athlone bus station.

How easy is it to access the venue by car?

The venue is: a 3-minute drive from Exit 10 on the M6 Dublin-Galway Motorway, a one-hour drive from the M50 and a 50-minute drive from Galway. There is an indoor car park at the venue.

Where in the hotel is the conference?

- Car park: **Level -1**
- Reception: **Level 0**
- Main plenary (Hoey Suite 1, 2 & 3): **Level 1**
- Breakout rooms (Masterclasses):
 - **Level 2:** Burke 1, Burke 2, Grace 3
 - **Level -1:** De Gray Suite
- Quiet spaces: **Level 2** (Siege Suite & an area outside Grace 1 & 2)
- Outdoor area: **Level 2** (accessible from Siege Suite)

Lifts and stairs provide access to all floors. Toilets and baby-changing facilities are available on each level. Lunch is in La Provence Restaurant on **Level 1**.

Are there electric car charging points?

Yes, charging stations are on Level A of the underground car park.

Join the conversation
on social media with the
hashtag #NVMC2025

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Ireland**

Obair Dheonach Éireann



To reduce our impact we have reduced the amount of materials we print, if you have a requirement to have a hard copy of this programme please ask at the registration desk.

V3 March 2025