

Drumkeeran Youth Cafe

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AS CLUB SECRETARY thinking about how I would write an article relating to the youth club, I was eager to promote this wonderful organisation. We have so many photos that might help us depict some of what goes on in the club, but after looking through the photos I realised that none could do justice to the number of children/young adults who have passed through the doors of the club since it was established eight years ago. It would take an entire book to depict all the fun and frolics, hard work and dedication that has occurred to keep this organisation up and running, and going from strength to strength over the years. This would not be possible without the undaunted support of both the leaders, members of the club/cafe and the wider community. We are so proud of all that has been achieved.

As I reflect on the past eight years, back to November 2004 when a group of parents and people with an interest in supporting the younger members of our community got together to look at ways of setting up a social, recreational and educational outlet which would cater to their needs, I don't think I could ever have imagined that we would now have a Youth Cafe in Drumkeeran!

Representatives from North Connaught Youth Services (NCYS) attended public meetings and worked to get interested parties on board; set up a committee; give us the training required to work with young people aged between 9 to 16+ years; and assisted us in getting the club up and running. For this we are so grateful and have never looked back!

Between the junior club (for those aged 9+ and attending primary school) and the senior club for those attending post primary education, the activities we provide for our young members over the years have been broad and varied. They include: attending football tournaments; table quiz's; discos; talent shows; variety concerts; outdoor pursuit/orienteering events; zipit; sports days; art workshops; camping; soccer skills training; cinema & bowling outings; swimming; attending amusement parks; etc., None of this would be possible



Members of Drumkeeran Youth Club on a recent outing

without the undaunted support of *North Connaught Youth Services, Leitrim VEC, Leitrim Integrated Development Company, Leitrim County Council, AIB Better Ireland Award, ESB, The Wind Farm in Drumkeeran, The People In Need, Lough Allen Development, The HSE National Lottery Grants* and the support of the wider community during fundraising efforts.

The work that our young people have been involved in over the years includes raising €3000 for the "Friends of the Children of Chernobyl" by running a blind date and disco among other events in conjunction with Brendan McCawley, who ran the Dublin City Marathon. Our young members also raised €1000 for "People in Need" by hosting a human chain event outside Lough Allen College and running a jumble sale. They have worked in conjunction with *The John McKenna Traditional Society* and *The Tidy Towns Committee* and are always eager to get involved in new initiatives. Our members also participate in an annual "Secret Santa and Carol Singing Event" for the elderly each December. Sincere thanks to Martina McNiffe and all the staff and residents of Aras Breffni for accommodating us in relation to this event. Six past club members have attended Youth Leadership Training and we continue to provide this through North Connaught Youth Services to enable the club to function with the help of Junior Leaders on outings, during events, etc.

The club have taken on many initiatives including attending and hosting a youth exchange programme set up by North Connaught Youth Services during which 12 young members of our club along with 2 leaders and 2 members of North Connaught Youth Serv-

ices travelled to England for over a week in 2010 and then hosted a trip to Drumkeeran and surrounding areas for 11 members and 3 leaders from England. The group stayed in Lough Allen Adventure Centre. It was an amazing experience, one which we hope to repeat in the years to come.

We have had many achievements over the years including: getting recognition from *The Garda Youth Achievement Awards* in 2005 and receiving the *Presidents Award* in 2006 in relation to the work that our members had contributed to the *Stop-Suicide Awareness Campaign*, where so many of our members and Leaders walked through several towns in Connaught promoting awareness of the issue and the supports that are available.

One of our biggest achievements to date was hosting the first St Patrick's Day Parade in Drumkeeran since the 1960's. We began hosting the event in March 2005 and have continued to develop this event into what is now a "Family Fun Weekend & St Patrick's Night Parade" with the kind support of Leitrim Integrated Development Company and support from local sponsorship.

The club is hosted on Friday nights during term time from 7 to 9 pm, at the old Drumkeeran Court House, which we have renovated to meet the needs of our youth, with the junior & senior clubs taking place alternating weeks. We would like to thank everyone who has supported the Youth Cafe in any capacity over the years and hope that with your continued support the Cafe will be a valuable asset to the young people living within Drumkeeran and its hinterland for many years to come.