



Annual Report 2019

Registered in Ireland company no. 275127. Charity No. CHY13196, CRA 20040437

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Introduction

Established in 1997, VOICE is a registered charity supported by public membership, donations and bequests.

Patrons

Darina Allen
Pauline Bewick
Don Conroy
Christy Moore
John Feehan
Brendan Kennelly
Sr. Mary Minehan

Directors

Dr. Ruth McGrath (Chair)
Gay Brabazon
Gary Clare
Ken Kilbride
Brendan Keane
Suzie Cahn

Vision:

Promoting the wise use of natural resources for a sustainable future.

Mission Statement:

VOICE promotes a respectful relationship with the Earth by encouraging a way of life in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it.

Objectives:

VOICE strives to achieve this mission by:

- Informing the public on environmental policy/issues
- Empowering individuals and local communities to become environmentally active to protect Ireland's resources.
- Advocating on behalf of our members to influence policy and practice with government and other stakeholders.

An Overview of 2019

VOICE faced 2019 with a significant funding deficit following the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) decision to cease its funding of the Recycling Ambassador Programme, this was despite its significant success and VOICE exceeding all of the agreed targets. Other sources of funding were obtained from a variety of sources and our work on waste continued to expand with new campaigns and projects. Policy work on an EU and national level declined, but submissions drafted at the end of the year fed into the government policy on packaging levies, including the latte levy.

Our work in the water arena has been mostly limited to the Coordinator as vice-chair of SWAN and VOICE's membership of SWAN, as well as sitting on the National Water Forum. Due to work-load commitments, Mindy had to resign from the NWF mid-year to devote more time to waste issues. However, water continues to be a key topic, both in the development of the River Basin Management Plans and identifying Significant Water Management Issues.

Staffing:

Mindy O'Brien, Coordinator, VOICE

Jonathan Forsythe, Administrator (part-time)

Sorcha Kavanagh, Project Manager (part-time), Conscious Cup Campaign

Tad Kirakowski, Project Manager and Communications (responsible for REPAK apartment pilot and ReCircle Container pilot)

Aoife Brittan, Project Manager (Conscious Consumption Communities and DCC apartment pilot), resigned in December 2019

Abi O'Callaghan-Platt, Researcher, No Home for Plastic

In November, we had our first staff retreat to review our past work, make recommendations and brainstorm to strategize our approach and work schedule for 2020.

Our volunteers for the year include:

Angela Kenny, Researcher on Litter

Several Transition Year Students

Governance:

Voice is in compliance with the governance code, it has registered as a lobbyist and have registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority. All filings are up to date.

Jonathan met with Gina Acari to discuss governance and HR requirements. She is assisting with our staff handbook, contracts and compliance with employment regulations.

Funding:

Irish Environmental Network/Environmental Pillar:

VOICE received funding from the IEN in various forms:

Core funding €15,373

Other funding €2,974 (plastics working group and meetings attended on behalf of the Pillar)

Total Received in 2019: €18,347

Local Agenda 21:

We have received €3,875 for our Conscious Consumption Communities and for our new 'Ditch the Disposables' School workshops.

Membership:

Our membership numbers continue to reduce slightly each year. However, we received €7,045 from our members.

Donations:

We received €11,745 in donations.

Corporate Membership/lunch and learn:

We received a total of €22,627 from our lunch and learn workshops, waste audits and corporate memberships. We conducted three waste audits and one 90-day Challenge to activate corporate green teams. We have created three different corporate leaflets, including a Corporate Membership, Lunch and Learn and 90-Day Challenge offerings.

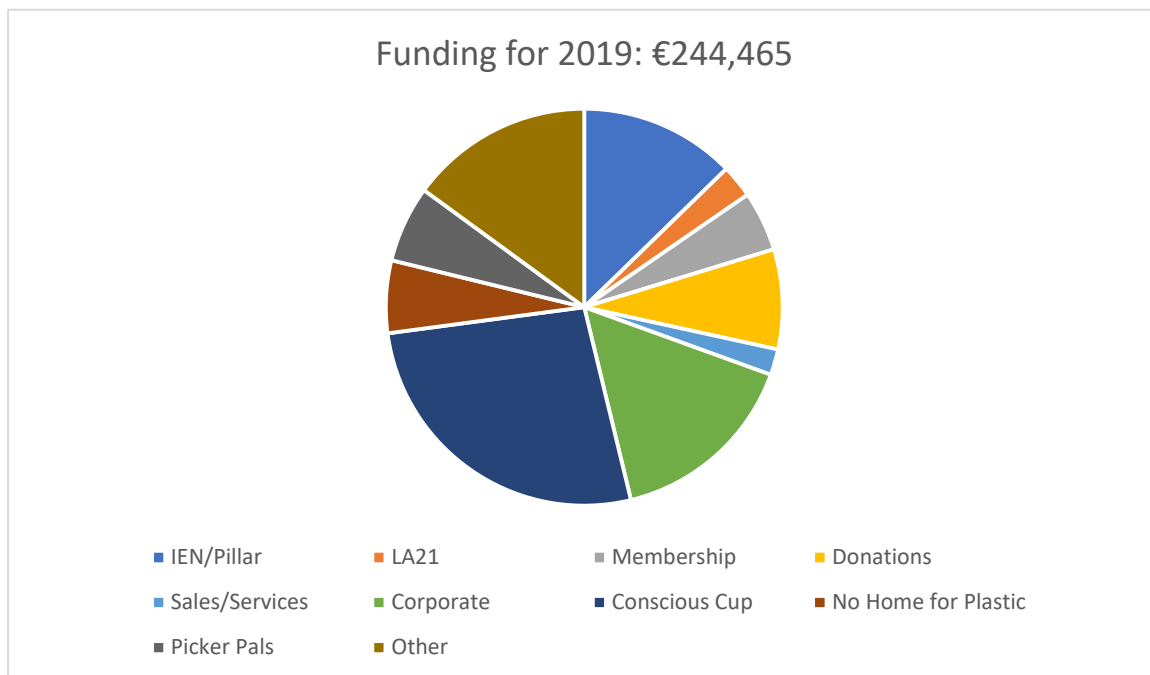
Conscious Cup Campaign:

We received €38,500 from the Eastern Midlands Waste Management Regional Office to run this campaign.

No Home for Plastic Research Project:

We received a €8,526 for our No Home for Plastic research project. We completed this project in December and anticipate receiving €45,000 in 2020 in back payment for the work completed in 2019

Total Funding Received in 2019:



VOICE campaigns

Conscious Cup Campaign:

This campaign has continued its success in encouraging more people to use reusable cups. We now have over 2,000 cafes/shops mapped on the website, however, this map requires an update. We are suggesting that a new interactive map could be financed by the Waste Regions.



Following up on our public awareness campaign about the non-recyclability of single use cups, two private cup schemes have been created to develop a deposit/refund scheme to encourage the use of reusable cups: RiCup and 2GoCup. Their service is growing among cafes and local communities.

Sorcha organised a 'conscious café' event in Galway, bringing together speakers in the food industry to encourage the take up of sustainable actions in cafes. At this first event, cafes were able to share their challenges and successes in reducing waste in the kitchen prep area as well as in the customer-facing aspect. This type of event was seen as very helpful by the participants and will continue in 2020.

CCC has also been in talks with WRAP Northern Ireland, which wants to extend this campaign into the North. It was agreed that CCC would share all its assets, but would not manage expansion into the new area.

Sorcha continues to bring in cafes to participate and has spoken and appeared at several events such as the All Together Now festival in Waterford, the Waste Summit, corporates and the Chef's event at Bord Bia.

Apartment Waste Segregation Pilots

We carried out two pilot schemes to assist apartment dwellers properly sort and manage their waste. Multi-resident buildings are notorious for poor waste management practices. Many only utilise a single bin for residual waste while those with recycling collection bins were significantly contaminated. Only a limited number had organic waste collection.

According to the 2016 Census, 9% or 414,000 individuals live in multi-dwelling buildings, so there is significant scope for improvement in waste management and segregation behaviour. As waste charges are lumped into general service charges many apartment dwellers have no incentive to change their waste management behaviour. Additionally, signage, space and location of bins vary hugely within apartment buildings, which amplifies the challenge.

VOICE was contacted by Dublin City Council (DCC) to run a waste management pilot scheme in a number of social housing units in inner city Dublin. DCC got agreement between the waste and housing divisions to undertake a trial and VOICE was the delivery partner. DCC painted existing 1100 litre waste bins green and designed and installed large recycling list signs. They also placed 120 litre brown bins to collect organic waste.

VOICE held 10 workshops for the residents of these buildings to educate on proper recycling behaviour and segregate organics. Unfortunately, these workshops were not well attended. We also provided recycling bags, compost kitchen caddies and compostable bags for all residents wishing to properly sort their waste. Despite less than desired attendance at the workshops, residents that attended have become much better in their waste management and all three bins are being used. We have no statistics yet about material separated and contamination rates, but DCC was very impressed with the programme.

We also received funding from REPAK to run a recycling pilot with 7 apartment buildings: 3 in Dublin, 2 in Cork and 1 in Galway and 1 in Limerick. The pilot is ongoing and will be



completed in March 2020. Tad identified and reached 7 buildings, which is no mean feat as many apartment management companies want to ignore their responsibilities to source segregate their waste. To start the project, he had to get the agreement from the property management company, residents associations, residents and the waste companies to participate. Tad had to visit and evaluate all the common bin stores, we printed recycling list signs for the bins which were placed on the walls, we conducted surveys and held workshops/manned informational stands. We also gave away reusable recycling bags to encourage residents to recycle. A waste characterization study was conducted at the beginning of the project and another one will be done at the end to evaluate progress. A full report will follow.

ReCircle Container Pilot in University College Cork:



Tad received funding from UCC Living Lab Programme to run a reusable container pilot within the cafes at UCC where take-away food customers could rent a reusable container for €5, this would be refunded when the container was returned. The cafes wash the container for further use. We purchased 200 containers, educated and trained café employees on how to use the system and are working with the catering company running the pilot. To date, uptake to use the containers is slow, but we have designed point

of sale posters to encourage their use and hope that the take-up will increase now that the new term has started. We purchased the reusable containers, designed by ReCircle in Switzerland, and launched the project in October 2019.

No Home for Plastic

VOICE obtained funding from EPA Research to conduct a citizen science/public awareness project to increase awareness about the amount of plastic in homes. Abi proposed this project and managed it throughout the year. She created an on-line survey for households to participate and a school pack for students to audit their plastic use. She identified 10 schools and 36 households to conduct a plastic audit in their home and actions to reduce their plastic use. Through this audit, individuals and families began to appreciate and understand the amount of plastic they used every day, and it inspired families to take our plastic pledge to reduce their plastic usage.

We set out suggestions on how to reduce avoidable plastic use and identified local shops that offered less plastic.

The project ended in December with a full report that was submitted to EPA. Abi will present her findings at the ENVIRO conference in 2020.

Conscious Consumption Communities:

Through our 2018 LA21 funding, Aoife has organised and run 2-hour workshops giving communities a menu of ideas to take on to minimise consumption. Such campaigns include reusable coffee cups, repair cafe, sharing communities, plastic free, etc. We had four communities taking apart in Kildare, 1 in Dublin, 1 in Tipperary and 4 in Donegal. We have completed the initial programme, and have now received additional funding from Patagonia of \$5,000 to reach out to more communities. We have identified 5 more communities and are working with them to identify actions they can take in their communities to reduce their consumption. As the 'zero waste' concept and lifestyle has become more accepted and understood, we hope to move this programme more towards 'zero waste communities' and are seeking funds to develop this type of approach.

Plastic Work:

Break Free From Plastic:

VOICE joined Break Free From Plastic, an international network of environmental groups lobbying for the reduction of plastic a few years ago. Mindy attended a conference in the Hague in June with groups from all over Europe and beyond. We discussed strategy on next steps since the passing the EU Single Use Plastic Directive and how to press our individual legislators to adopt ambitious plastic/waste policy. Mindy is still active in this group, attending Zoom meetings and webinars.

We also took part in the international Brand Audit, which took place summer 2019 to identify the most common plastic elements in litter and the associated brand. Internationally, Coke was the most ubiquitous brand.

Together with Friends of the Earth, we received a grant of €5,000 from Break Free From Plastic, to continue our work on plastic.

Sick of Plastic:

This campaign is a joint initiative between VOICE and Friends of the Earth. We have been lobbying supermarkets to reduce their plastic waste through an on-line petition and Uplift campaign and have spoken to all the major supermarkets. We continue to press for the adoption of a Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers and the government has commissioned a study to be completed by Eunomia about the costs/benefits and feasibility of running a DRS in Ireland. We await the findings of this study. On the 13th April, we urged shoppers to leave their unwanted plastic packaging behind in their supermarkets. We had actions throughout the country at around 100 shops with over 250 volunteers. Shoppers were asked to sign a petition with the following demands:

1. Offer more items without packaging, such as fruit and vegetables (without plastic trays, wrapping and nets).
2. Make their own-brand packaging easily compostable or recyclable, and use less plastic.

3. Demand, through their purchasing power, that other brands they carry have easily compostable or recyclable packaging, and use less plastic.
4. Blaze a trail in Ireland by implementing a plastic free aisle, as has been done in the Netherlands.
5. Provide items in bulk, where possible, to reduce packaging.
6. Allow shoppers use their own containers to buy dried goods, buying only what they need.

Mindy attended a DRS conference in London to share international experiences on successful DRS campaigns and she also had a meeting with Wellman International, a PET recycling company in Cavan. They are interested in forming a coalition with us to push the government to adopt such a scheme. Discussions are ongoing.

On the 6th November, VOICE and FOE also had a photo call at the Department on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment with activists and Flossie the Litter Picker demanding the DRS Report. We brought hundreds of bottles of plastic bottles that were strewn around the front of the building.



We will continue to lobby for ambitious transposition of the Single Use Plastic Directive and Circular Economy Package.

Picker Pals

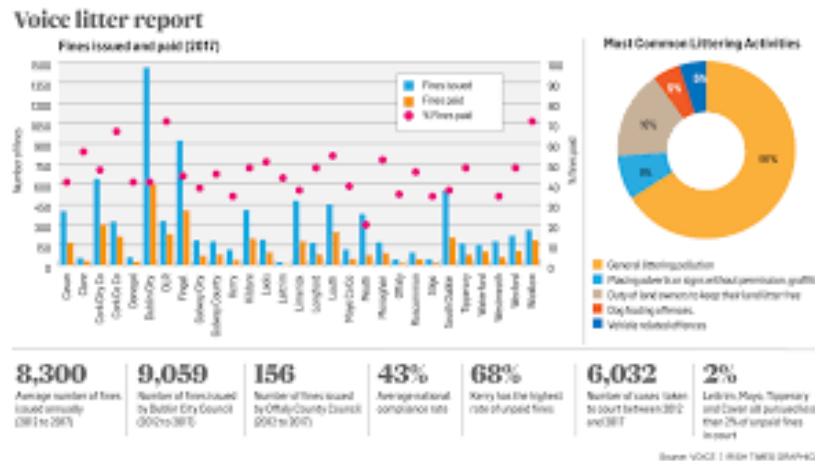


VOICE is working with Howth author and master litter picker, Patrick Jackson, who has written a funny and engaging book about litter collecting animals and their adventures and has also developed a fun workbook. Picker Pals is a fun environmental educational programme aimed at primary school children. Patrick attends schools, reads his book, sings a Picker Pals song and each child gets a book and funbook. Additionally, each class receives a 'picker pack' which contains 2 litter pickers (adult and child), two pairs of gloves, bags

and 2 hi-vis jackets. A selected child each week gets to take the pack home over the weekend to go litter picking with their parents. They report back to the classroom on Monday with stories about their litter pickup adventures. See our website [here](#) which describes the programme.

We received funding from Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Gallagher Quigley and Oxford Press to run this programme in 30 schools. This programme will commence in January 2020.

Litter Report



VOICE issued Freedom of Access under the Environment requests to all local authorities asking them about the costs of street cleaning, litter pickup and street bin collection, tonnage of such waste and litter fines. We gathered data from the various competent authorities which was

compiled into a comprehensive report written by our volunteer researcher, Angela Kenny. The Irish Times got exclusive publishing rights and published the results on the 17th of May. Mindy was interviewed extensively on many radio stations.

Presentations/Workshops:

Although the Recycling Ambassador Programme did not receive funding from the government in 2019, we continued to receive requests for workshops from communities. Unfortunately, we have had to charge a fee to cover our expenses. In 2019, we ran 18 such workshops.

Additionally, we spoke in several fora, including before UCD Students in February about food waste, before Trinity Environ Soc about waste and recycling, and at the Environ Conference in April about plastic and waste prevention. Tad also presented a research poster on our Recycling Ambassador Programme at the Environ conference.

Representation on Committees:

Waste Prevention Advisory Committee:

Mindy O'Brien is the environmental representative on this committee. Thus far this committee receives information from the government on the successful measures and actions taken on waste prevention. We suggested that more be done to tap into the expertise of the committee in terms of policy proposals. It met very infrequently in 2019.

National Water Forum:

We sit as an environmental representative on the National Water Forum which oversees all water issues and makes submissions on water policy. We have meetings nearly every 6 weeks, which has taken up a lot of time. Mindy in early 2019 has stepped off this committee as she couldn't devote enough time to it and it distracted from her work on waste issues.

Sustainable Water Network (SWAN):

Mindy is the Vice Chair of SWAN and sits on the Board.

Environmental Pillar:

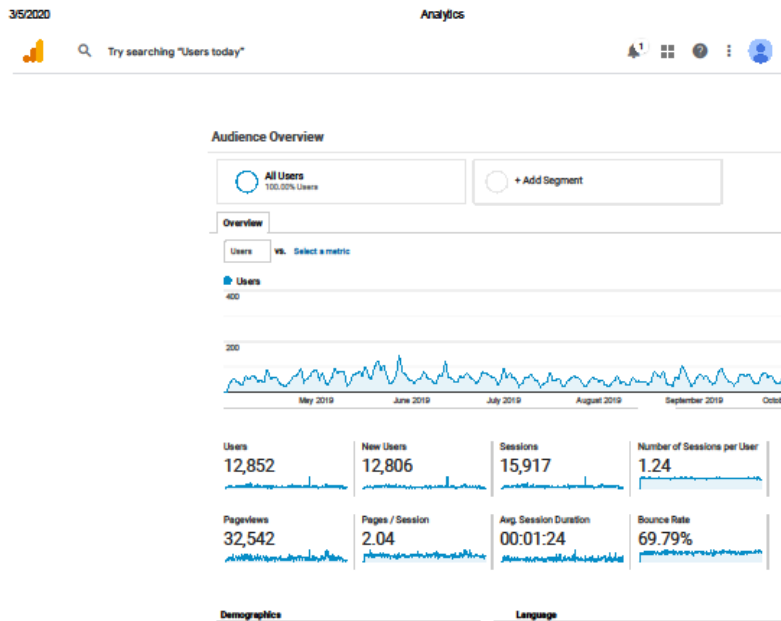
Mindy is on the Pillar Steering committee, and heads up the Sick of Plastic working group and as such attended meetings with Eamon Ryan and others.

Irish Environmental Network:

Our Coordinator is active in the Plenary meetings.

Social Media, Newsletters, Website and Messaging:

We have posted 8 blogs, sent out over 9 call to action emails, sent out 4 e-newsletters and sent out our 12-page Winter 2019 paper newsletter. We are active on Twitter and Facebook and have increased our followers from 3,885 to 4,477 and from 2,847 to 3,050 followers on Facebook. We also have a YouTube channel and an Instagram account with 177 posts and 1,064 followers. Our google analytics was not connected to our website until April 2019, but since then, we have the following measurements:



https://analytics.google.com/analytics/web/report/visitors-overview?_u.date00=20190401&_u.date01=20191231

1/1

Conscious Cup Campaign has an active Facebook page with around 3,092 followers and a twitter account which has 2,106 followers. Its Instagram account has 336 posts and 1,808 followers. The website is www.consciouscup.ie.

We have shared news and other actions from other environmental organisations through our mailchimp and email accounts. We also share the communications of Sick of Plastic with Friends of the Earth and it has 929 followers on Twitter and 1,303 followers on Instagram.

Press and Media:

We issued two press releases and our Coordinator interviewed with the following media outlets over the year with approximately 60 interviews on such topics as waste, DRS, compostable cups, recycling, plastic, litter and incineration. Between the whole VOICE team, we had around 60 radio interviews, around 12 newspaper articles and 5 TV appearances

Radio:

Newstalk Radio: fifteen times

RTE Radio: six times

Today FM: six times

Other Radio stations include: Eastcoast FM, Midlands Radio, Shannonside, KFM, Flirt FM Galway, Near FM, Southeast Radio, Classic Hits Radio, Beat 102/103, CRC Mayo, Tipp Midwest, Connemara FM, Galway Bay

TV:

Mindy appeared on the 6 pm RTE news three times, the Claire Byrne Show on how to reduce waste at Christmas and on PrimeTime on waste and compostables. She also featured on EcoEye on waste.

Newspapers:

We have appeared in numerous local papers for our workshops and for the No Home for Plastic project. Additionally, we have featured in the Irish Times five times for plastic work, the conscious cup, our litter report, sustainable people feature and our Green Awards win. We have also been in the Sunday Business post and the Evening Echo.

Awards:

VOICE won the 2019 Green Awards for Green NGO of the year and Zero Waste Cashel won the Silver Award at the Local Community Awards (LAMA).

15. **Green NGO of the Year / Sponsored by Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment**

Winner: Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment



Dr Sarah Miller, CEO, The Rediscovery Centre presents the Green NGO of the Year award to Mindy O'Brien, Sorcha Kavanagh & Tad Kirakowski, Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment.