



Annual Report 2011

**Voluntary
Service
International**
www.vsi.ie



THANKS: The National Committee would like to thank

- All our volunteers, activists and committee members
- Sponsoring and Co-operating organisations
- Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Youth In Action Programme / Leargas
- Grundtvig Programme/ Leargas
- Irish Aid
- FAS
- Howlin and O'Rourke –auditors
- HSE
- SCI Branches and the SCI International Secretariat.

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Programmes and Groups

International Volunteer Projects Programme (IVP) organises 25 – 30 short term projects of practical benefit to local communities and voluntary groups all over Ireland each year, bringing together volunteers from Ireland and overseas. We place volunteers from Ireland in similar projects in over 50 countries world-wide.

Development Education Programme enables people from Ireland to join in a two month programme of voluntary work in developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Teenage Programme enables young people from mainly inner-city areas to take part in voluntary work projects in Ireland and in other European countries. The participants are offered opportunities to learn new skills and meet people from different cultures and religions, the young people can learn to recognise and develop their own skills and talents.

Dublin Local Group volunteers help to paint and decorate homes of elderly and marginalised people living in poor housing conditions

Long Term Volunteering enables people to work from 3 -12 months on a variety of voluntary and community projects in Europe and North America.

Staff Team

Tom Ryder - Coordinator

Helen Walmsley - Development Officer,
International Volunteer Projects Programme

Grace Walsh - Teenage Programme Coordinator

Sara Conrotto - EVS Volunteer, Teenage Programme
Catherine Lawless - Administrator

VSI is the Irish Branch of Service Civil International (SCI), a worldwide movement working for peace, social justice and international understanding through voluntary service, international exchanges, education and awareness programmes. Registered as Seirbhis Deonach Idirnáisiúnta Teo. Company limited by guarantee. Registration No.: 14 05 20; Charity no.: CHY 9220

VSI is a member of the National Youth Council of Ireland

VSI is a member of Dochas, the network of NGO's in Development

VSI is a signatory to the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

VSI is a signatory to the Volunteering Options Code of Good Practice for Sending Organisations



Water supply project Malawi

National Committee

The 2010 AGM was held in Dublin in late November. Thirty five members were present at the meeting. In the afternoon we held a special seminar to coincide with 90 years of SCI called Seminar - 'A celebration of people working for a more just and peaceful world' with Senator David Norris, Jon Mc Court and Helen Honeyman.

The AGM elected a new National Committee (NC). They were - **Laura Ni Fhlairbhinn, Sarah Williams, Armin Krautgasser, Deirdre Treacy and Leanne Hyland**. We held a planning and development workshop in late February and identified several priorities for the coming years including developing a marketing strategy; financial sustainability; improving internal and external communication.

VSI in 2010

VSI has achieved a huge amount over the past year and there have been many highlights;

- The involvement of 110 volunteers from over 30 countries on our International Volunteer Projects Programme in Ireland
- The involvement of 60 young people with less opportunities on our Teenage Programme
- Placing 100 volunteers (including 10 long term volunteers) on projects in 50 countries worldwide including Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East

- The tremendous work of the Dublin Local Group with their painting and decorating projects for elderly people
- Promoting VSI at over 20 college and other volunteering fairs.
- The hosting of the SCI Youth and Unemployment Leader Training Seminar in Greystones in April with 30 people from 10 countries taking part.
- The start of two Life Long Learning Projects under the Grundtvig programme

A more detailed summary can be found in the reports which follow.

Staff

Tom Ryder (VSI Co-ordinator), Helen Walmsley (IVP Development Officer), Grace Walsh (Teenage Programme Co-ordinator), Catherine Lawless (Office Administrator), Sara Conrotto (Teenage programme Project Worker) are the current staff team. The National Committee would like to express gratitude to the staff team who over the year have approached their work in a professional and enthusiastic manner.

The NC would also like to acknowledge the effort that volunteers put into VSI and thank them for their time and energy in 2011.



Etienne and Linda VSI volunteers at an environmental project in Ecuador

International Volunteer Projects Programme

IVP Projects in Ireland

This year the International Volunteer Projects (IVP) programme hosted a total of 110 volunteers from 30 different countries, on 21 projects in Ireland (north and south). 18 volunteers from Ireland took part in the projects in Ireland. The highlight of the year was the two week summer activity programme for the children at the Mosney Accommodation Centre in Co. Meath. 16 volunteers from many different countries helped to organise a wide variety of interesting and fun activities for two weeks for the 100 children who took part.

IVP International Projects

Out of 20 different countries that volunteers travelled to this year, Iceland and Italy were the most popular destinations. The volunteers worked in a variety of areas including environment, work with children, people with disabilities and young people and arts and culture.

IVP Main Programme Events 2011

- We held a group planning meeting at Glebe House in Co. Down in February.
- We held several info days to promote our volunteer programmes in Irish Aid and other city venues together with the Development Education Group. Members also helped with college and volunteer fairs.
- We sent two people to the UNA Wales Leader Training Seminar in April
- We help a Preparation Workshop in May for outgoing volunteers

Any seeming criticism here was minor - the overall experience couldn't really have been better and the fact that I've been enthusiastically invited back next year is reward enough....I was also offered a permanent job there! Thank you so much for the opportunity....

Niki - volunteer to Turkey

- During the Summer months various members visited and met all the volunteers joining our 21 projects in Ireland.
- We held a joint Evaluation Workshop with the Development Education Group in October.

The volunteers of the International Volunteer Projects Committee (IVPC) run the programme together with the IVP Development and Placement Officers; the work they do includes giving presentations at Info Days, running stalls at fairs, running Preparation and Evaluation Days and travelling around the country visiting our Host organisations and volunteers to Open and Close IVP projects.

Thanks to:

- IVP Committee members in 2010: Laura Duggan, Diego Gallagher, Emmet Griffin Lorena Lampedecchia, Garrett Mullan.
- Emmet Griffin and Ben Murray who coordinated projects at Sonairte and the Mosney Accommodation Centre.
- The fantastic staff and volunteers of the Host organisations in Ireland; looking after the volunteers, supporting them in their work, making sure they have a good time and that they learn about Ireland.



Water buffalo project in Ukraine

Development Education

Africa, Asia, Latin America and Middle East Programme

In 2011 VSI enabled 24 volunteers to join our Development Education programme to International Volunteer Projects in **Africa** (Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia); **Asia** (Indonesia, Mongolia, Sri Lanka); **Middle East** (Jordan and Palestine). Many of the participants took part in 2 or more volunteer projects during their visit to a country/region.

The programme involved:

- **World Development Workshop** in Dublin in May
- A one day **Evaluation Workshop** in Dublin in October (held with the IVP group).

Incoming Volunteers

VSI hosted **Hilary Mlay** from Tanzania during August. He took part in the project at Sonairte and visited several NGO's during his 1 month stay.

Africa Working Group

VSI continues to play an active role in the SCI Africa Working Group. Tom Ryder attended the annual meeting in Italy in October, which was attended by several other SCI branches -Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, and four partner organisations from Tanzania, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

In addition to the Africa Working Group meeting we had several joint sessions with the SCI Latin America Group (Abya Yala), the SCI Middle East working group and the newly emerging Asia Working Group. A more detailed report of the meetings is available from the VSI office.

Networking

Tom Ryder represents VSI on the **Dochas Development Education Group**. Their main activities during 2011 were:

- Promoting the code of conduct for NGO's on Images and Development.
- Organising a one day seminar on development education in Dublin with 70 people attending
- Maintaining links to European and Irish networks
- Researching the use of new technologies in development education

Tom Ryder represents VSI on the **Comhlamh Volunteering Options Working Group**. This group has 2 main activities

- the development of a Volunteer Charter for all volunteers going to work in developing countries
- the development of a Code of Good Practice for sending organisations

The group has met several times during the year and has held workshops on issues of common concern e.g. Child protection, health and safety of volunteers; insurance; etc

The **VSI Development Education Group** members are; Annette Duffy, Anne Mc Kiernan, Sarah Quinn, Tom Ryder. Thanks also to Anna Landy in Limerick.

BLUE ROSE SCHOOL PROJECT , SCI, KANDY, SRI LANKA, 2011

The Blue Rose School is an essential amenity for special needs children, run by extraordinary people. The six teachers are paid a minimum amount to provide a much-needed service for the most vulnerable of their society, and without which there would be nowhere for them to turn. SCI runs projects all over Sri Lanka, for example in the eastern area where the problems of poverty and homelessness are almost overwhelming; this area has been devastated by the Tamil war, the Tsunami and flooding in the recent past. There are also affiliated projects they support, for example the Loving Mother Project and an environmental project in the Bamboo forest outside Kandy. Our visit to Kandy in Sri Lanka took place from 18th August to 5th September 2011. During our stay we had a number of goals

- *To offer assistance to the Blue Rose Special School in order to improve the conditions of the special needs children*
- *To help with SCI projects as appropriate or requested*
- *To experience Sri Lankan social lifestyle and cultural heritage.*

We painted the fencing in a project in Mampitiya

Hospital, Kandy for our first two days. We initiated a project to paint the handrails around the SCI office and Blue Rose School complex and paint the floors and outer wall of the school. We were helped by the teachers, parents, several of the special needs children and local volunteers. We funded the provision of safety gates for the children's protection. We helped with the Mushroom project at the school (supported by an Irish businessman), collecting, weighing and bagging the mushrooms for sale. They have a ready market with the local hotels prepared to pay for the packed mushrooms. We initiated a garden project with Mahanama, a local volunteer. We had brought seeds from Dublin (flowers and vegetables that would grow in this climate) and we weeded and cleared the garden in preparation for the planting of the seeds.

The SCI people looked after us extremely well, ensuring we visited all the areas of cultural and historic interest we wanted to see. We will never forget them and hope to be able to aid them into the future. We had a fantastic experience that far exceeded our expectations and we would highly encourage volunteers to volunteer in this area.

Geraldine Canavan + Marie O Connor

Long Term Volunteering

VSI enabled 10 volunteers to take part in long term voluntary service projects during 2011. Many of the projects came under the EU Youth Programme – European Voluntary Service (EVS) – which is open to 18-30 year olds and all costs are paid by the EU.

Doireann Cooney volunteered at a school for refugee children in Georgia.

Hannah Anderson volunteered at a special needs centre in Germany.

Kevin Sheedy volunteered at a special needs school in Germany

Kieran Mc Grane volunteered at a Youth Cultural centre in Barcelona.

Leigh San Juan volunteered at a community arts centre in Slovenia.

Tom Cresham volunteered at an environmental project in Arizona, USA

Fran Baker is volunteering at a disability centre in Armenia

Mark Moran is volunteering at a community organisation in Spain

Ruth Barrett is volunteering at a community project in Kosovo

Marissa Antunes is volunteering at a children's centre in Java, Indonesia

VSI will send four more EVS volunteers early in 2012 to the Czech Republic, Estonia, Macedonia and the Ukraine.



Doireann Cooney EVS Georgia

VSI was able to place 8 long-term volunteers from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy and Slovenia for 2 months at the Glebe House project in Northern Ireland during the summer.

VSI is a recognised sending organisation for the EVS programme. The Long Term Exchange Group of SCI publishes a vacancy list every two months (available from the VSI web pages) which gives details of projects in many European countries, North America and a smaller number in Africa, Asia or Latin America. There are many volunteer reports on the VSI web site from EVS volunteers.

My EVS in Georgia

In September 2010 VSI sent me as an EVS volunteer for a 12 month project in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Georgia is a former Soviet country, located in the South Caucasus, to the north-east of Turkey. It has a unique culture, a fascinating and often tragic history, and absolutely spectacular scenery from snow-capped mountains to tropical beaches. Having suffered several armed conflicts in the past 20 years (most recently in 2008), resulting in two breakaway regions and a huge crisis of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), Georgia has known its fair share of turmoil since the breakup of the Soviet Union, yet despite having gone through so much, the people are friendly, easy-going and very open towards foreigners. In fact the best thing about Georgia is its warm-hearted and generous people who made me feel at home straight away. My hosting organisation was a local youth organisation called Youth Association Droni. Through this organisation I came to work in a school located on the outskirts of Tbilisi beside the water reservoir known locally as the "Tbilisi Sea". The school was housed in a former army barracks which also was home to hundreds of families displaced due to ethnic conflict in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia in the early 90s. Growing up in semi derelict buildings, the fate of these children was similar to that of thousands of other Georgian children growing up in IDP settlements all over Georgia. Despite the bleak environment in which they lived the kids were full of energy and enthusiasm and were curious to know all about Ireland. I was supposed to help them learn English but I think they ended up teaching me more Georgian than I taught them English. I also had fun teaching them some Irish dancing and a cúpla focal as Gaeilge. We were lucky to be able to get funding from the Council of Europe to organise a summer camp for the kids in the Georgian mountains this year which was great fun. I learnt so much through my EVS in Georgia and will never forget the hospitality shown to me by the wonderful Georgian people.

Doireann Cooney

Dublin Local Group

The Dublin Local Group (DLG) of VSI undertakes to improve the living conditions of the elderly, disabled and marginalised living in Dublin. The work we undertake is normally referred to us by Vincent de Paul, Friends of the Elderly, Care Local and the Social Work Departments of Dublin City Council, the Health Service Executive and all hospitals in the Dublin City Area.

We mainly try to help out in situations where the living standard of a person or family has fallen well below the general standard and where they are unable to help themselves because of their physical or financial situation. The type of work involves painting, wall papering, cleaning and some small repairs.

We meet each Saturday morning to carry out our work. We have a meeting after every job to discuss current issues and to visit new projects. We have volunteers from all parts of the world in our group. We also have a healthy social programme with outings and other events.

There are currently around 14 active members in the DLG and we are pleased to say that we have reached last year's objective to have a second team leader with us. This has enabled us to split the group in two on numerous occasions and carry out two jobs at a time.

So far this year we have received 40 requests for assistance. We have assessed 27 and undertaken and completed 16. Since we had a good amount of active volunteers on a weekly basis and two team



Volunteers from the Dublin Local Group in action

leaders, we were able to double the number of jobs compared to year.

These projects have taken place all across the city and were very varied: it included work such as:

- Painting a cottage in Skerries,
- Small repairs on an elderly person's house in Crumlin,
- Brightening up someone kitchen wall in Kilmainham
- Painting the outside of a house in Drimnagh and filling up a skip of all the clutter the owner wanted to get rid of.

Our future objective for the group in 2012 is to recruit more volunteers in order to create two equal groups in numbers and possibly find a third team leader.

More details on the group can be found on our website www.dublinlocalgroup.org <http://www.dublinlocalgroup.org/> or you can email us at dlg@dublinlocalgroup.org.



Fionnuala and Lydia from the Dublin Local Group with the co volunteers at a project in Serbia

Teenage Programme

- The Teenage Programme had an active year, continuing to organise a peace and development education programme, and local and international volunteering projects for young people aged 16 – 25. This year's highlights included;
- Sending groups to 3 European Youth Exchanges in Spain, Belgium and Italy which explored marginalisation through the arts, personal development and leadership, and environmental awareness through social theatre;
- Hosting a European Youth Exchange for 25 young people from Slovenia, France, Italy, UK and Ireland on the theme of environmental and cultural diversity, in the Burren, Co Clare;
- Sending young adults on supported volunteering projects around Ireland including an intercultural summer camp for kids in Donegal, a cross-community summer project in Co Down and an environmental project in Co Meath;
- Coordinating and sending young people on Short-term European Voluntary Service (EVS) projects in France, Latvia and Ghana to work on organic farms, organise creative classes and educational classes for children, and promote volunteering among local youth and renovate a social centre;
- Organising a series of residential trainings for the young people leading the "Living in Dependence" Youth Initiative project, including a 3-day leadership skills training and a 5-day film making training, and supporting the young people in their plan to make a film about the experiences of young asylum seekers in Ireland;
- Continuing an on-going programme of development and peace education for young people with non- formal learning inputs on all our projects, as well as ongoing involvement in the Youth Advisory Group of the National Youth Council of Ireland, inputting into their One World Week Educational Resources, and supporting the participation of 3 young people in the Africa Centre's Training of Trainers in Development Education;
- Establishing new local partnerships with Youthreach centres in Meath, and organising two residential volunteering and learning weekends in March and May;
- Coordinating and hosting Steps to Inclusion, a 5-day training for 30 volunteer youth leaders from around Europe;
- Hosting delegates from around Europe for an annual meeting of the Youth Working Group of SCI (YUWG) to further develop knowledge and understanding of best practice in child protection and of risk awareness at a European level;
- Continuing to represent the interests of young people in our programme through a series of platforms and networks in the areas of interculturalism, equality, European youthwork and development education.



building a cob house at the youth exchange in Co. Clare



Messages of Peace





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