

# Volunteering hits unprecedented levels in Meath, says local centre

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MORE people are now looking to voluntary work to fill the gaping hole of unemployment and improve their skill-sets.

"We are seeing an increase in the number of volunteers who want to gain or improve their skills, which is linked to the fact that more unemployed workers see volunteering as a positive career move," according to Jeanette O'Reilly, placement officer at the Meath Volunteer Centre, who says registration numbers for 2012 reached unprecedented levels, with 523 registering their interest at the centre.

For former construction worker Richie Mealy (30) who found himself out of work in 2009, it was the only foreseeable way that he could start work in a new industry.

The married father-of-two turned his unemployed status into an opportunity to change direction in his life and looked at various career options. Richie subsequently began volunteering at Meath Youth Federation (MY Fed) working with young people and has since found a full-time job in the social care sector and is studying the subject part-time at a Dublin college.

The Navan man points to his volunteering experience as steering the way for this very positive change to happen as it gave him the step-up that he needed to pursue work and study in the area.

Holly Kinsella, who is studying maths at NUI Maynooth, volunteered to give maths grinds to Leaving Certificate students at the Meath Youth Café last year in order to establish if she wished to pursue a career in teaching.

Recovering drug addict and unemployed tattoo artist Daragh Cullen was at a crossroads in his life when he started to volunteer as a youth club leader with Meath Youth Federation.

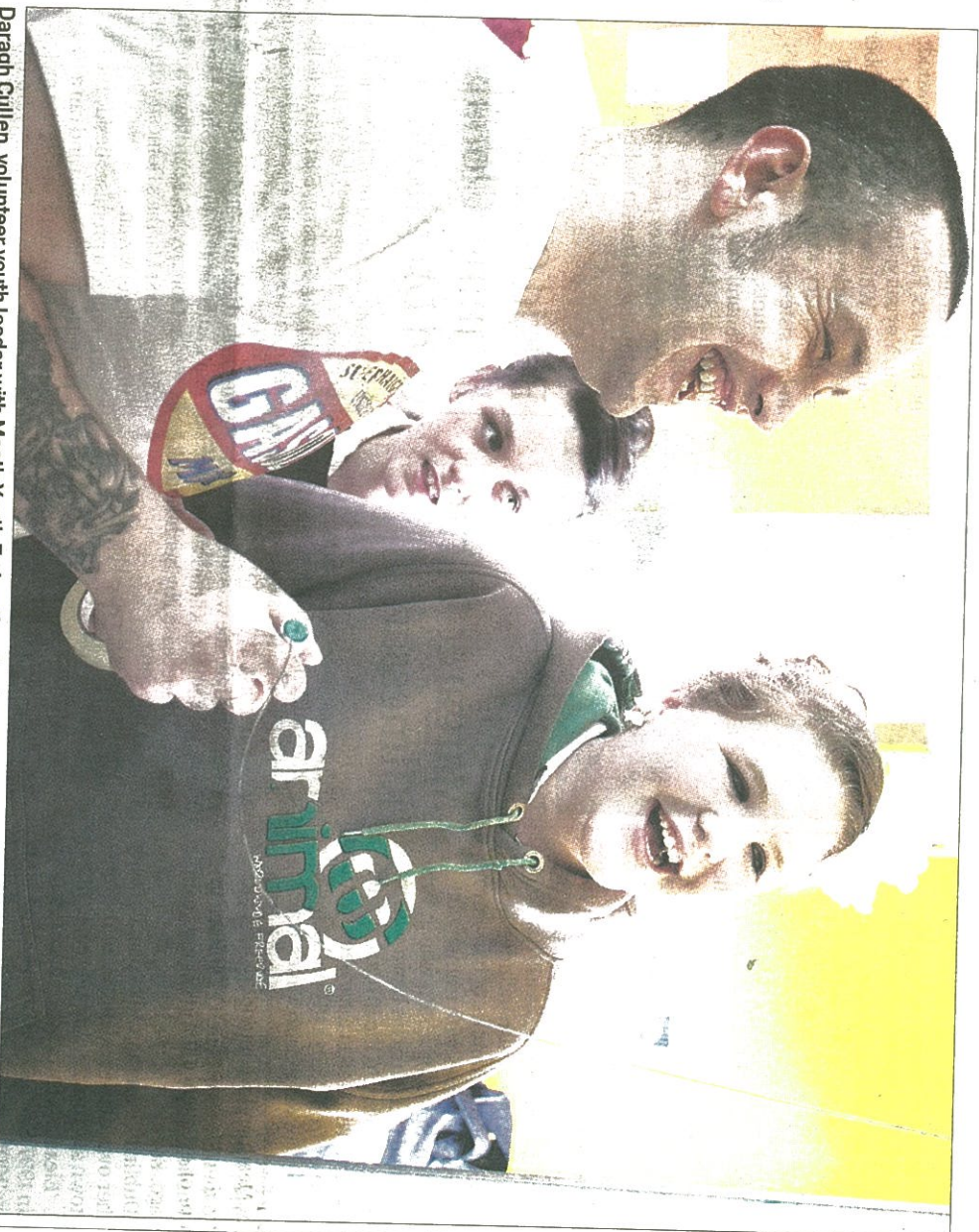
"I needed to do something different," he said, and liked the idea of working with young people who were in need of guidance and support.

Daragh, who lived in Navan for a long period before recently relocating to Virginia, says he really enjoys his work and although still unsure about his future, it has brought new meaning and direction to his life.

According to Jeanette O'Reilly from the Meath Volunteer Centre, there are lots of opportunities for volunteers out there.

"It has proven to bring wide-ranging positive effects to people's physical and mental health," she adds and is something that people shouldn't overlook as an option to get out and about and gain worthwhile experience.

Since the office opened in 2008, a total of 1,981 people have registered their interest to volunteer, according to Ms O'Reilly, with opportunities available that offer something different to everyone.



Daragh Cullen, volunteer youth leader with Meath Youth Federation, is pictured with Beth Barry and Clare O'Brien.