

Not For Profit

Non-profit sector reaches into people's lives in ways they don't always recognise

The charity and community sector provide essential public services and supports in all areas of society, but don't get adequately resourced, writes **Caroline Allen**

The role and breadth of Ireland's not-for-profit sector is not widely understood, according to Colette Bennett, director of advocacy and research at The Wheel, Ireland's national association of charities. While the sector tends to be associated with disability services and alleviation of poverty, it also includes sports and youth clubs, arts organisations and Tidy Towns committees, and reaches into people's lives in ways they don't always recognise, she said.

The Wheel has over 2,400 members across the country, and Bennett wants to make their impact known. "About 35,000 organisations make up the voluntary, charity, and social enterprise sector, with 12,000 of those being charities. About 5,000 are educational charities. They are providing essential public services and supports in all areas of society."

Obtaining the necessary resources, however, is a constant struggle for the sector. The absence of a real plan to sustain the community and voluntary sector into the future is fuelling a severe recruitment and retention crisis, according to Bennett. "We know that government departments value the sector but when it comes to the actual funding and big strategy thinking, we haven't seen the necessary whole of government response."

The Wheel held its annual conference, 'The Summit', on May 29, where the organisation celebrated its 25th

anniversary. At the conference, presenters and attendees reflected on the past and future of the not-for-profit sector, focusing particularly on societal changes over the

“
The voluntary sector plays a key role in promoting the type of society we want in the future

Colette Bennett, director of advocacy and research at The Wheel: 'We in The Wheel understand the context in which our members work'



The Wheel, Ireland's national association of charities, hosted its National Charity Summit on May 29 at Croke Park. The event was attended by representatives of over 500 charities, community groups and social enterprises. Pictured at the event are (from left to right) Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel, with speakers Noeline Blackwell, a human rights lawyer, Dr Larry O'Connell, director of the National Economic and Social Council, Colette Bennett and Derek Walker, future generations commissioner for Wales
Maxwell Photography

last 25 years and the effects of living in a time of increased polarisation and social isolation.

Dr Larry O'Connell, director of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) reflected on the social and economic change that Ireland has experienced in the recent past and how the sector has been a key player in advocating for,

and informing, that change.

Derek Walker, future generations commissioner for Wales, highlighted the need to think beyond current challenges and to look to the kind of society we wanted to preserve for future generations. Here again, the community and voluntary sector which plays a key role in promoting the type of society we want in the future, in driving local environmental action, and actively engaging with, and advocating for, a fairer future, Bennett said.

Noeline Blackwell, human rights lawyer, and former chief executive of the Rape Crisis Centre, tied the discussion together by highlighting the role of the sector in driving key social and economic changes and the importance of the sector's advocacy work in the future.

Closing the event, chief executive of The Wheel, Ivan Cooper, referenced the sector's willingness to step up to address the many challenges facing Ireland today. Ireland is the loneliest country in the EU, with 20 per cent of respondents to an EC survey reporting feeling lonely 'most or all of the time'. The community and voluntary sector provides interventions to support people across the life cycle.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in over 100,000 people coming to Ireland seeking our help, in addition to the 20,000 international protection applicants in direct provision. Again the sector stepped up to source accommodation, childcare supports, interpretation services, and social care and to foster a sense of community and inclusion, Bennett said.

The sector gives a voice to the most marginalised. Through local and national dialogue, it was a key driver in the development of the values and principles for collaboration to support meaningful engagement across local and national government with the community and voluntary sector, the director of advocacy and research at The Wheel said.

More than 900,000 people living in enforced deprivation and going without basic necessities are supported by organisations specifically established to alleviate poverty,



Vincent Keenan, chairman of The Wheel, Emily Burke, campaigns and advocacy manager at The Wheel, Joe O'Brien, minister of state for community development and Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel

The sector is a key delivery partner for health and social care, in everything from disability supports and personal assistance to mental health care, from family supports to palliative care, Bennett said. Approved housing bodies in the sector are a key delivery partner for social housing, and sector organisations support the almost 14,000 people accessing emergency homeless

accommodation, and the estimated 30,000 more hidden homeless. It also strives to keep people in their homes through the provision of tenancy sustainment and tenant protection services.

Childcare, child development supports, and opportunities for youth engagement and participation are provided by the sector, and it acts as 'community connectors' to build a more sustainable world.

"The sector is supporting 321,000 employees, directly and indirectly and contributes €32 billion in expenditure to the exchequer. And we do all of this with budgets that haven't fully recovered since the crash of 2008," said Bennett.

"We in The Wheel understand the context in which our members work. And we feel immensely privileged to have supported our members over the past 25 years. As we look now to Budget 2025, we call on government to prioritise the sector, to develop multi-annual funding and provide additional funding to organisations to cover core costs," she said.

"In addressing the recruitment and retention crisis facing the sector, we also need to see pay parity for staff providing frontline public services with their public sector peers

doing similar, if not identical work. A whole of government strategy, under the auspices of the department of An Taoiseach, is needed to ensure the sustainability of the sector."

25 the wheel Stronger Charities. Stronger Communities.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

Join The Wheel and become part of Ireland's largest and most influential community of charities, community organisations, and social enterprises.

For over two decades, The Wheel has been a strong and trusted voice for our sector. Together with our community of members, we work to ensure that the contribution of charities, community organisations, and social enterprises is recognised and respected, adequately resourced, and appropriately regulated.

With a host of strategic and practical services and supports at your disposal, you will be empowered to make the greatest impact you can for the communities you serve.

Apply now at www.wheel.ie/membership

The Wheel
48 Fleet Street, Dublin 2
D02 T883
T: +353 (0) 1 454 8727
E: info@wheel.ie

Registered Charity Number: 20040963
Company Number: 302282
CHY Number: 13288

“
A whole of government strategy is needed to ensure the sustainability of the sector

IoD Institute of Directors Ireland

Leading a Digital and Innovation Strategy from the Boardroom

IoD Programme | October - November 2024

[Book your place](#)

www.iodireland.ie

Not For Profit

Irish generosity adds up as iDonate surpasses €100m raised for charities

The fundraising platform, which works with over 5,000 charities, has a mission of making giving easier. It is currently in recruitment mode, planning to expand its current team of 12, writes **Caroline Allen**

Ireland's leading fundraising platform, iDonate.ie, kicked off 2024 by reaching over €100m raised for Irish causes. This milestone not only reflects the platform's success but, more importantly, underscores the profound impact of everyday individuals who believe in creating a positive change for their communities, according to CEO, Alan Coyne.

Coyne who set up the Guaranteed Irish company with his father, Paddy, in 2011, with the mission of making giving easier, said the achievement is not just about numbers. "It is a testament to the unwavering generosity of the Irish people, and those who have chosen to make a positive impact on the lives of others."

The father and son founded a web development business, Western Webs in 1998, which provided the building blocks

iDonate
Founded: 2011
Number of employees: 12
Why it's in the news: Over €100m milestone raised for Irish causes

for iDonate. In 2011 they set up a free fundraising system to help five local causes in Galway which evolved into iDonate.ie. The company currently works with over 5,000 Irish charities.

"The platform's success is a tribute to the countless stories of ordinary people making extraordinary contributions and the compassionate spirit of donors who have consistently embraced the plat-

form's advanced technology," the CEO said.

As part of its commitment to supporting charities, iDonate's 0 per cent platform fee model ensures that causes on the platform not only enjoy 0 per cent platform fees, but also benefit from higher conversion rates compared to other fee models, guaranteeing that charities raise more. The only charge that applies is a small transaction fee of 1.95 per cent, which is one per cent lower than other leading platforms, Coyne said.

The impact of the Irish people's efforts can be seen across various sectors, with over €33m raised for individuals facing health or medical conditions. Charities dedicated to children have received €12m, while sports initiatives in this country have benefitted from over €6m in donations. Over €5m has been directed towards mental health and

support, with another €5m aiding homelessness and housing needs.

"When the pandemic hit, we saw a phenomenal growth in fundraising. Suddenly there were lots of people out of work and restricted to a 2km radius and so they had the free time to raise money for different causes," Coyne said.

"Ireland continues to rank as one of the world's most generous countries, according to the Charities Aid World Giving Index. We have seen firsthand how generous the Irish people were throughout the pandemic, and this didn't cease. The public have adapted to the idea of donating and fundraising online. Not only have they continued to do this post-pandemic, their usage of the iDonate platform has increased, and their willingness to employ new technology is very exciting," he said.

2024 marks another sig-



Paddy Coyne and his son Alan, who set up iDonate.ie in 2011

nificant chapter in iDonate's growth story, with plans to expand the headcount of 12 in the future. "This year we have added to our team, with more experience now in operations,

digital marketing and project management," said Coyne.

"iDonate extends a heartfelt gratitude to every donor, champion, and supporter who has played a role in this

journey, because without them, this remarkable milestone would not have been possible," he said. "We as a company remain committed to fostering a culture of giving

here in Ireland and ensuring that the stories of those making a difference are at the forefront of our company's mission."

www.idonate.ie

Speed dating for board members

CAROLINE ALLEN

Boardmatch was incorporated in 2005 with a straightforward yet impactful mission: to facilitate connections between individuals eager to volunteer on boards and the charity boards themselves, according to Eva Gurn, chief executive. "The goal was to demystify the process of joining a board and dismantle the perception of boardrooms as exclusive clubs," she said.

"This simple concept has evolved from just a basic board-matching website into a broader initiative aimed at engaging a diverse range of people across Ireland," the chief executive said.

"Boardmatch strives to communicate that board participation is accessible to all. This inclusive approach has led to innovative events like trustee speed dating which have yielded remarkable results such as 44 board appointments from a single two-hour networking event."

"As we expand our outreach to new audiences, there has been a notable increase in awareness regarding board volunteering. While finding the perfect board role is important and fulfilling, Boardmatch emphasises the



Eva Gurn, chief executive, Boardmatch: inclusive approach

necessity of education for all new trustees.

"Regardless of one's professional expertise, serving as a trustee requires specific knowledge and understanding of responsibilities and duties. Boardmatch insists on the importance of trustee training, akin to the training a candidate would undergo for a promotion or new responsibilities in the workplace," Gurn said.

The aim is to ensure that individuals joining boards are well prepared and understand their roles, the distinction between management and board duties, and the value they bring to the charity. For charities, recruiting

careful consideration of skills alignment, passion, cultural fit, and motivation. Individuals who have never served on a board need to understand the process involved and recognise the breadth of opportunities within the sector," she said.

"There is a suitable charity for everyone, but finding the right fit requires time and patience. If you are genuinely passionate about contributing strategically at the board level, it is crucial to prepare yourself by undergoing relevant training and gaining knowledge about the sector."

"This preparation demonstrates to charities that you are genuinely committed and passionate about the role, giving you a competitive edge. As with any endeavour, standing out and excelling beyond your peers is essential," said Gurn.

Charities now have no excuse for not refreshing their boards, bringing in more diversity or acquiring the necessary skills, she contended. "The candidates are ready and waiting."

"In addition to our charity trustee speed dating initiative, we have launched the future leaders programme in partnership with The Leadership Academy to further encourage diversity at board level," Gurn said.

"This programme, now in its second year after a highly successful pilot in 2023, aims to amplify under-represented voices on charity boards and improve trustee diversity. It provides an opportunity to introduce new perspectives to charity boards through an assisted board placement programme designed for individuals without prior board experience. The programme supports these individuals in finding suitable board roles and helps charities recruit beyond their existing networks."

For charities seeking to improve their board, and candidates looking to find a board role, Boardmatch has announced the return of its Dublin speed dating event in October.

"Over the years candidates have praised charities for their openness and transparency at this event, offering a refreshing way to meet potential new board members," said Gurn.

Boardmatch
When founded: 2005
Number of employees: 8
Why it is in the news: 2023 was a record year for charity board appointments with 444 placements and an increase in candidates undergoing training before joining a board, and activity is on track for surpassing those statistics this year.

'board-ready' candidates from Boardmatch simplifies the induction process for new trustees.

In 2023, Boardmatch saw a 40 per cent increase in training participation compared to the previous year. More candidates joining the website had completed training, signalling their commitment and preparedness for board roles. "This training not only enhances the candidates' profiles but also demonstrates their dedication to understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities, giving them a competitive edge in the selection process," the chief executive said.

As charities become more transparent about their board recruitment plans and candidates are better prepared, joining a board has become increasingly competitive, according to Gurn. "It is no longer simply about the first person to volunteer. Effective board matching now requires

PROFILE iDonate

COMMERCIAL CONTENT

iDonate's new contactless payment app makes giving easier

The integration of technology and philanthropy will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of business, according to iDonate CEO, **Alan Coyne**

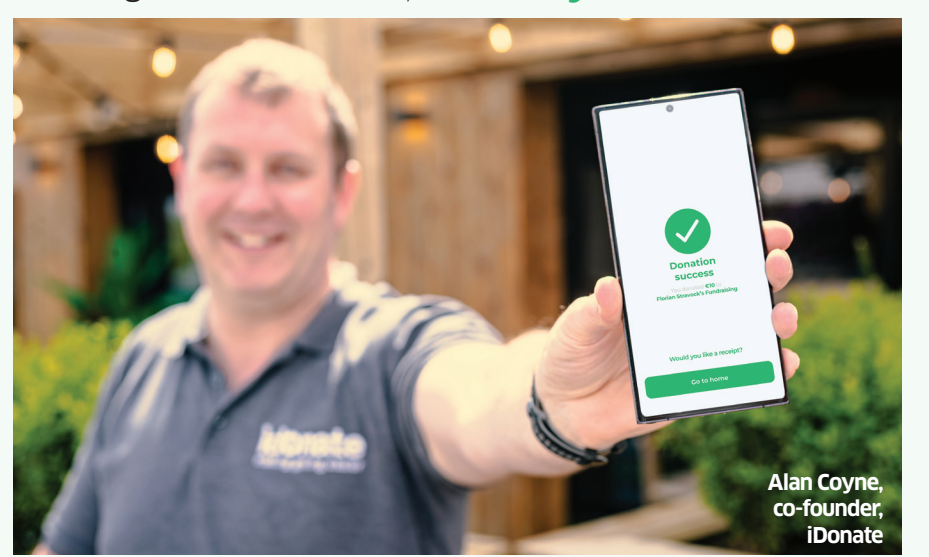
iDonate Tap app, iDonate's newly reimagined and redesigned contactless payment app, enhances efficiency and reduces administrative and hardware costs, allowing charities to allocate resources more effectively, said Alan Coyne, CEO of the Galway-based company.

"For charities, that means seamlessly carrying out fundraising anytime, anywhere with no additional hardware required," he said. "iDonate allows charities and fundraisers to collect donations using just their phone, eliminating the need for cash donations or cash collections. The app is free to download on the Google Play store, with availability on iOS coming soon. Payment processing within the app is powered by Stripe, the world's largest payment processor which means the money is transferred securely by industry-leading encryption."

"Working with non-profits for many years, iDonate recognises how important data is to causes. That is why we have inbuilt extensive data collection in our iDonate Tap app," the CEO said.

"Version one of the app was developed in 2023 and went through significant Beta testing with charities and focus groups. Based on the feedback, our local development team redesigned the app and added new features, making it more user friendly for the donor," Coyne said.

Version two launched recently and was successfully used in Pieta's Darkness Into Light events nationwide, he said. "The fast movement in AI technology is having a huge impact as people adapt to it in their daily lives. The charity sector is ready to embrace these new capabilities



Alan Coyne, co-founder, iDonate

and iDonate plan to integrate some features in the coming months. As a digital company, we are always open to introducing new technological advances."

The iDonate Tap app is not just a tool for processing donations. It is a gateway to a more strategic, data-driven approach to charitable giving, according to Coyne. By leveraging the power of data, charities can enhance donor engagement, refine their fundraising strategies, improve operational efficiency, and build greater trust with their supporters. In a world where data is king, iDonate Tap equips charities with the insights they need to amplify their impact and create lasting change."

As charities continue to navigate the complexities of the modern fundraising landscape, tools like iDonate Tap are essential in ensuring that they can meet their goals and continue their vital work, said the CEO. "The integration of data collection and analysis into the donation process is a game-changer, offering a new level of insight and capability

that will undoubtedly shape the future of charitable giving.

"A trend we are seeing is the advancement of donor stewardship and technology trends evolving together to enhance how charities engage with their supporters and optimise fundraising efforts. We understand the need for charities to connect with their donors. This includes segmentation of donor databases, journey mapping, impact reporting and recognition," Coyne said.

"The company has a number of features including donation webforms, personalised messaging and reporting to increase their fundraising potential in these areas. We provide a number of features for charities and corporates to move towards leveraging technology and make giving easier, more accessible and engaging," he said.

Corporate fundraising is a key focus. "We understand corporate fundraising is a huge source of support for causes. Corporate success has been redefined, with environmental, social and

ethical elements now being central to business sustainability, driving growth and stakeholder value.

"That is why iDonate.ie provides multiple features to create standout corporate fundraising campaigns. "We have designed customisable features to aid corporates with their social responsibility goals, including custom microsites, branded event pages, team fundraising pages and raffles," Coyne said.

"As the corporate world continues to evolve, the integration of technology and philanthropy will play an increasingly vital role in shaping the future of business. iDonate's platform is at the forefront of this movement, providing companies with the tools they need to engage employees, enhance their brand and drive social change."

idonate
making giving easier
T: +353 (0) 93 52467
E: info@idonate.ie
W: idonate.ie

BOARD MATCH WWW.BOARDMATCH.IE

SUPPORTING YOUR CHARITY & NOT-FOR-PROFIT BOARD NEEDS

TRAINING & CONNECTING SKILLED, ENTHUSIASTIC VOLUNTEERS WITH CHARITY & NOT-FOR-PROFIT BOARDS

SIGN UP AND FIND YOUR PERFECT BOARD MATCH

OVER 1,200 BOARD PLACEMENTS IN LAST 3 YEARS

OVER 1,500 BOARD MEMBERS TRAINED IN LAST 3 YEARS

Boardmatch Ireland CLG (400151) is a registered Irish charity (RCN 2005956)