



**Kildare
Volunteer Centre**

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Cill Dara



19th Annual Report 2023

Volunteering in Action.

*Celebrating the Impact of Volunteers
and Volunteering in our Community*



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Chairperson's Introduction

In April 2022, 711,379 people reported that they regularly engaged in helping or voluntary work without pay in one or more of five different activities (CSO 2023). There is no simple way to categorise the range of activities volunteers engage in which could be from informal litter picking, animal rescue, hosting & befriending refugees to running a not-for-profit organisation as board trustee.

Not only that, but volunteers are also generally engaged in charitable, or altruistic work which is a net contributor to positive social and environment, whereas some purely economic activities contribute to GDP at the expense of social and economic goals in the form of social disconnect and emissions.

Research carried out for the Charities Regulator in 2022 found that a significant proportion of charities operate on a purely voluntary basis with no paid employees whatsoever. While we appreciate volunteers and volunteers led organisations who leverage time given freely for work, it also highlights how much our entire society, environment as well as our economy, rely on volunteers to function.

Volunteering has been proven to have a positive impact on a person's overall health and well-being. Mental health benefits, social inclusion, and empowerment benefits to the individual. These are matched with labour and expertise which benefit the organisation or community they support, and additional benefits in terms essential service provision benefit vulnerable populations.

Delivering services, operating programmes, and employing staff on short term minimum budgets is completely at odds with both the contribution of the sector to sustainable development goals, the true costs of operations costs, and the quality standards in service delivery and governance that have become the norm. It is against a complex set of external factors that the future of volunteering and volunteer centres in Ireland will need be positioned to contribute to social cohesion, wellbeing and a vibrant community and voluntary sector.



On that note, it remains now only to extend our sincere thanks and best wishes to our own volunteers, our own board members who have retired during 2023, Anne Crowe, (Secretary) Syl Merrins, John Masterson (Treasurer). Each of you have made an extraordinary contribution to the organisation and you will be missed. I also extend a warm welcome to our newly appointed members, Ronan Kierans (Treasurer), Martha Whyte (Secretary), Luiz Pinto and Bernie Morley, who have already settled in and round us out, ready for the next chapter.

Helen Mulhall
Chairperson



Kildare Volunteer Centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Cill Dara



Our Vision is of a society where volunteering is promoted, valued, facilitated and supported so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities



Our Mission is to promote the value of volunteering and increase the range and quality of volunteering in Kildare



Our Objectives

Increase the visibility of volunteering and ensure recognition for all those involved in creating cohesive and vibrant local communities

Increase opportunities and engagement in volunteering
Continue to build effective support structures for VIOs in order to deliver on the national volunteering strategy and our local strategy

Support the continual development of good governance



1.0 Company Details

Legal Status

Kildare Volunteer Centre is incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Directors

Helen Mulhall	Chairperson
Anne Crowe ¹	Secretary
John Masterson ²	Treasurer
Syl Merrins ³	Director
Tanya Brennan	Director
Ian Russell	Director
Martha Whyte ⁴	Director
Luiz Pinto ⁵	Director
Bernie Morley ⁶	Director
Ronan Kierans ⁷	Director/Treasurer from Dec 23

The Board met seven times during the year. Board meetings are in person meetings with the occasional hybrid meeting also occurring when necessary.

Auditors: McMahon and Co, 9 Academy Street, Kildare Town, Kildare

CHY: 22760

RCN: 20200083

Charities Governance Code submitted October 2022

¹ Resigned January 2024

² Resigned December 2023

³ Resigned December 2023

⁴ Appointed March 2023

⁵ Appointed March 2023

⁶ Appointed October 2023

⁷ Appointed October 2023



Office

Kildare Community Development Centre

Meadow Road

Kildare

R51 RF88

Tel: 045-449156

Website: www.volunteerkildare.ie e-mail: info@volunteerkildare.ie

Staff

There were two fulltime staff during the year, a Manager and Participation Officer/Development officer. The Centre also employed two part-time staff, a Community Volunteer Coordinator, and a Ukrainian Support worker. We are also supported by our long-time placement volunteer Victor Purcell and a Graphic Design Volunteer Matheus Gomes

Area Served

The Centre serves all of Co. Kildare with an area of 1,693km² and a population of 247,774 (CSO 2022)

1.1 2022 Census Results

While the census was carried out in 2022, results which affect the operations of our Centre were only available in 2023.

These results state that Kildare's population has grown by 11% between 2016 and 2022. Kildare's population is growing at a faster rate than the national average of 8%. The results indicate Kildare's population at 247,774, it has shown one of the largest population growths in the country

The most populated towns in Kildare are:

- 1) Naas 26,180
- 2) Newbridge 24,366



- 3) Celbridge 20,601
- 4) Maynooth 17,259
- 5) Leixlip 16,733
- 6) Athy 11,035
- 7) Kildare 10,302

There are another 19 towns with between 1,000 and 10,000 living in them and a further 19 towns with between 196 and 999 people living in them.

The census also indicated that the number of people aged 65 and older in Kildare is much higher than the national average. This age group increased by 35% to 29,270 compared to the average national increase of 22%.

1.2 Census Results on Volunteering

For the first time since 2006, the 2022 census asked a question to gauge how many people volunteer in their community.

More than 700,000 people nationally stated that they regularly engage in volunteering, 14% of the population. The largest number of volunteers stated that they were involved in sport, with volunteering in the community the next most common form of volunteering. Males were more likely to be involved in sport and females in their community.

Nationally, the data shows that volunteering levels are similar across ethnic groups, with 14.8% of those with a white background volunteering and 15.8% of ethnic minorities volunteering. While the Census data doesn't distinguish between Irish ethnic minorities and ethnic minority migrants, this would indicate that volunteering plays a significant role in integration of new arrivals.

The data also shows that almost 25% of people who work from home for some part of the week volunteer. Time is often identified as the most common reason people don't



volunteer and this data indicates that people who have more time are more likely to volunteer.

Kildare was very much in line with the national statistics with 13% of the county's population stating they were involved in volunteering

The most popular voluntary activity was in a sporting organisation, where almost 14,100 Kildare people were volunteering. More than 9,600 people volunteered in their community while over 8,700 were involved in social or charitable organisations. Nearly 5,600 people were volunteering in a religious or church group while there were 640 volunteers in political organisations. Almost 4,500 people were volunteering in more than one group or activity.

Looking at broad age groups, the largest group of volunteers were among people aged 45–64 where there were 12,967 people volunteering. A further 10,053 people aged 25–44 were also involved in voluntary activities. There were 4,947 volunteers aged 65 and over. More than 1,400 children (under 15 years old) and nearly 3,600 people aged 15–24 were also volunteering.

This is vital information for our Centre as for the first time since our inaugural year there is now national statistical evidence to demonstrate the prevalence and importance of volunteering in communities. It will also help shape our work and plans going forward.



2.0 Settling into New Surroundings.

2023 saw Kildare Volunteer Centre move to Kildare Community Development Centre, in Kildare Town. It is the first time the centre has located outside of Newbridge. The office was officially opened by Minister Joe O'Brien in April 2023.

Kildare Volunteer Centre became the first tenants of the refurbished Convent operated and run by County Kildare Leader Partnership. The board and manager of Kildare Volunteer Centre took the strategic decision to re-locate here in the expectation that this will become a central hub for community development organisations in Kildare. It is also a premises that is fully accessible, fitting in with our belief that volunteering should be accessible to everyone.

2023 witnessed a large influx of new communities into Kildare with a significant increase in those seeking international protection locating in the county. This resulted in a record number of new volunteers registering as a volunteer. This is encouraging as the role volunteering plays in helping people settle into new communities is being acknowledged. However, this placed significant strain on our services in coping with such an increase in numbers.

It also placed significant strain on local Volunteering Involving Organisations as even with all the best will to welcome new arrivals, the scale of new people arriving into communities meant not everybody could be placed in a volunteering role. This led to Kildare Volunteer Centre, by proxy, becoming the Volunteer Involving Organisation on a number of occasions. We did this by hosting events that welcomed existing and new members of communities to come together in an activity that benefits their shared community.

The continued growth and establishment of Kildare Community Volunteers across County Kildare continued throughout 2023. The programme continues to grow from strength to strength and is allowing volunteers to become involved in community events that are



convenient to them. 2023 is the first year where the training to become a community volunteer is being delivered in house by Kildare Volunteer Centre.

Finally, the organisation continued to put a renewed focus on governance, not just to be compliant but be working towards a best-in-class model. We welcomed four new board members in 2023 and said goodbye to three longstanding board members.



Kildare Volunteer Centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Cill Dara

2023 in Numbers

731

New Registered
Volunteers

168

Repeat Callers
(already registered and
applied for another
opportunity)

95

Active
Opportunities

33

New organisations

15,055

Volunteer Hours
Recorded



3.0 Our Volunteers

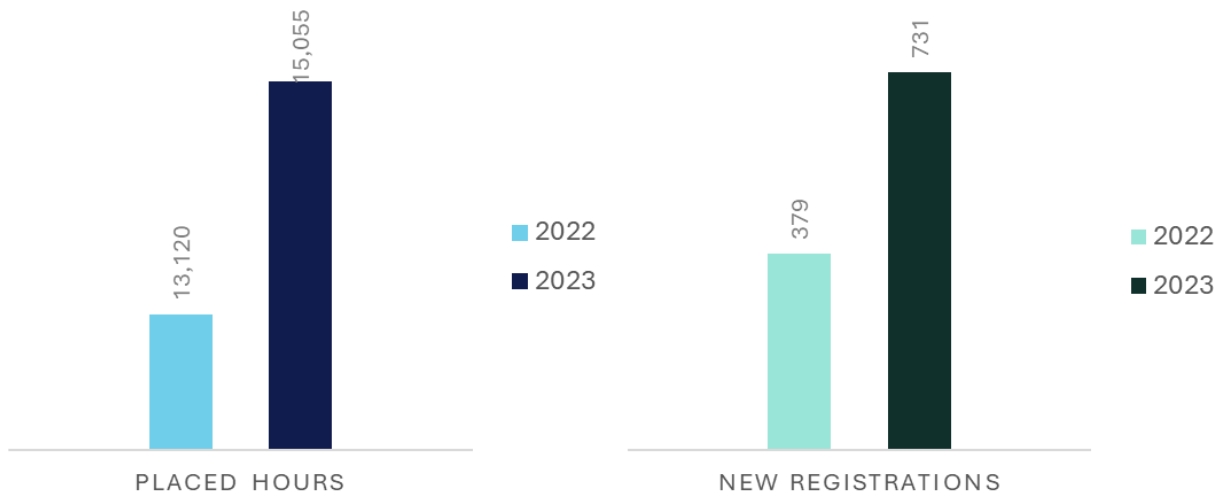
731 New Volunteers registered with the organisation in 2023. This is an increase of 98.5% on the previous year (379 in 2022). While part of this dramatic increase is attributable to a renewed effort by Kildare Volunteer centre to increase its exposure in communities and create brand awareness in Kildare, there is no doubt that the large influx of new communities seeking international protection in Kildare played a key role in this increase.

There was almost a 50/50 split between Volunteers who identified as Irish and volunteers who identified as another nationality. The largest alternative nationality was Ukrainian representing 7% of total volunteers and then Nigerian representing 6% of volunteers. There was in total more than 15 different nationalities registering as volunteers.

In addition to 731 new volunteers, we also saw 168 repeat volunteers. This is an important figure for the centre as it represents volunteers who found a previous placement with us, were happy with the service offered and looked for another volunteering opportunity.

Females represent 66% of all our registered volunteers which is the same as 2023. Once again 25–34 was our most represented age bracket, representing 41% of all registered volunteers. 50–64 was again our least represented age bracket representing 14 % of all registered volunteers. This contrasts with the 50 plus age group in community volunteers where 37% of all fully trained and active community volunteers are aged 50 plus. This would indicate that offering traditional volunteer roles, i.e., set shift patterns, to the 50 plus age group does not appeal to this age bracket, however the community volunteer programme and offering sporadic, opt in event volunteering, seems to be attractive.

Overall Kildare Volunteer Centre recorded 15,055 placed volunteer hours from volunteers in Kildare (up from 13,120 in 2022). This is a 2000 increase on 2022 figures. The Living wage in Ireland is €14.80 p/hour. Therefore, the monetary equivalent of these volunteer hours being in paid employment at the living wage rate would be €222,814 excluding PRSI.





3.1 Community Volunteers

2023 was the first full year of the Community Volunteers programme in Kildare. While there was no emergency response required from the Community Volunteers in 2023, the team were still busy supporting community events throughout the county.

Some of the events/organisations supported by Kildare Community Volunteers in 2023 include Bridget 1500, CKLP, Newbridge Family Resource Centre, Kildare Sports Partnership, Naas Colour Run, Bealtaine Festival, June Fest and Sláinte Care

“Once again thank you for providing a magnificent group of volunteers for Kildare Sports Ability Day 2023. A wonderful team of personable, good humoured, and helpful people who contributed hugely to our event. I would like to extend my gratitude to you John for coordinating, and to all those who gave up their time on a Saturday to help us out” Kildare Sports Partnership

In total for 2023 Community Volunteers registered an additional 2218 volunteer hours for community events in Kildare. There are now 84 fully trained and active community volunteers, an increase of 21 on the year before. As previously highlighted in this report the Community Volunteer Programme is appealing to the 50 plus age group, however it is also appealing to new communities coming into Kildare. 29% of our Community Volunteers identified as non-Irish. Once trained as a Community Volunteer in one county in Ireland, you can take that training with you and become a member of the Community Volunteer programme in any county you move to. This is a particular benefit to anybody seeking international protection as they may be moved from county to county on multiple occasion

“A very big thank you from myself and the Festival Committee for all your support for our community festival again this year. Staging public events around the town, and in particular the Family Fun Day Event on the Main Street, creates a lot of



challenges. Without the involvement of Kildare Volunteer Centre, we would not be able to run our events so safely and so smoothly. Your group's interaction and willingness to respond to any request for help went a very long way to create a positive community atmosphere "June Fest"

A highlight of the year for our Community Volunteers and the Centre in general happened in November when we received an invite to Arás an Uachtárain for lunch and a tour in recognition of the Community Volunteers contribution to their communities in Kildare. Despite having a full diary on the day President Higgins also came out to greet the volunteers and take some photographs. It was very encouraging to see the high esteem volunteering is held in within the highest office in Ireland





3.2 2023 Kildare Volunteer Centre Awards

In March 2023 we were delighted to host our annual awards celebrating volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in Kildare. The awards were held In Kildare Council Chambers. The council were represented at the awards by Director of Services Joe Boland and Senior Executive Officer for Community Paula O'Brien. The Ceremony was mcd by Kildare Volunteer Centre Manager David Hand and An Cathaoirleach of Kildare Fintan Brett presented all the award winners with their trophies.

Our Full List of Winners from the 2023 Kildare Volunteer Centre Awards were;



Volunteer Involving Organisation of the Year: Leixlip Arch Club



Volunteer of the Year: Bernie Morley



**Volunteer Led Response of the Year:
Maynooth Ukrainian Response Team
including Maynooth University, Irish Red
Cross, Helping Irish Hosts and Kildare
Community Volunteers**





Special Recognition Award: Victor Purcell



Community Volunteer of the Year: Arthur Voight and Terri Coyne (joint winners)



4.0 Operations

4.1 Policies and Procedures

The Board, Staff and Manager have undertaken to complete a thorough review of all Policies and Procedures which continued in 2023. During the year a Board Handbook was also drafted, reviewed and adopted by the board of Kildare Volunteer Centre

4.2 Staff Development

There was a renewed focus during the year in staff development, to equip the staff with the skills needed to develop the centre. The manager completed a CQI certified course in change management during the first quarter of 2023. All Staff underwent JAM Card training throughout the year, with the end result being that Kildare Volunteer Centre is now fully recognised as JAM Card friendly. This fits in with our ethos of making volunteering accessible for everybody. Kildare Volunteer Centre also coordinated the delivery of a course in making safe spaces for LGBTQ people at work for the Southeast Network of Volunteer Centres. Staff also completed a course in Psychological First Aid to equip themselves with the skills required to communicate with people who may be dealing with trauma after fleeing their home country.

4.3 National Volunteer Week

National Volunteer week in 2023 took place between the 15th and 21st of May was a busy week for the centre. We welcomed minister Joe O'Brien to officially open our new office and meet some inspiring Kildare Volunteers. We also then spent a day with some local organisations who rely on volunteers to deliver their services to the community. After that we spent a day in Whitewater shopping centre, handing out leaflets and bookmarks and talking to potential volunteers about what Kildare Volunteer Centre does and how to get involved. We also held a craft day in Newbridge and invited everybody to come along and learn some embroidery from some





Ukrainian volunteers who had recently arrived in Newbridge. Finally, we rounded out the week by doing what we do best, supporting volunteers providing their time and expertise to local events at the Naas Colour Run and LÁ Sláinte Bhríde at the Curragh Racecourse

4.4 New Board Members

Kildare Volunteer Centre welcomed 4 new board members throughout 2023, each coming on board having been identified as holding either skills that were currently lacking or to skills that would be required due to upcoming retirements on the current board. Board members were recruited through Boardmatch and Ivol. At the end of 2023, 2 long serving board members retired from the board having served their term.

4.4 Funding

Core funding was received through the Department of Rural and Community Development. Funding towards the running of the Volunteer Centre is also received from Kildare County Council. There was additional funding received from the DRCD allocated to support specific projects relating to the integration of displaced people. Additional Income is generated by the centre through Garda Vetting.

4.5 Garda Vetting

Kildare Volunteer Centre continued to function as a liaison office for any not-for-profit groups in Kildare that require Garda Vetting. Almost 400 volunteers were Garda vetted through Kildare Volunteer Centre for 47 separate organisations. Four online training courses were also delivered for new vetting officers in not for profits in Kildare in 2022 for 35 people. This course is provided free of charge to registered organisations



"A very well prepared and informative brief that was professionally delivered by a knowledgeable facilitator". Garda Vetting Training Participant

4.6 Collaboration

Kildare Volunteer Centre is represented on the following local, regional, and national working groups:

Volunteer Centres Manager Network

Volunteer Centres Chairs Panel

Full Community Volunteers Steering Group

Volunteer Centres National Forum Working Group

Participation Officer Network

IPAS Support Worker Network

South Leinster Regional Volunteer Centre network

Kildare Community Response Forum

Kildare Integration Strategy

Kildare Social Inclusion Week



5.0 Creating the Opportunity for Integration

5.1 The problem

2023 saw a large influx of new communities into Kildare due to the large increase in people seeking international protection in Ireland.

The benefits of volunteering for those seeking international protection in their new communities are well documented and includes language development, skill development, networking, occupational engagement, positive mental health, increased confidence and access to resources. Most importantly though it provides space and opportunity for community integration and cultural exchange. It provides an opportunity for existing communities to interact and form bonds with new communities over a common goal, it allows both sides to learn about each other's customs and traditions and become comfortable in each other's company.

However, the sheer scale of new communities arriving into small local areas has made it difficult for volunteering to effectively act as a vehicle for achieving this goal. For example, 2023 saw almost one thousand international protection applicants arrive into Maynooth University in the Summer for a 3 month period. This resulted in a massive surge of applications through our Ivol system for Volunteering opportunities in Maynooth, especially for the local Tidy Towns and Chairity shops. A volunteer involving organisations do not have the capacity to take on fifty plus volunteers all at once, especially just to loose them again in three months. This is especially true when dealing with very small local organisations like tidy towns. The result is that all the benefits of volunteering are then denied to the new communities as the system is overloaded.



5.2 Becoming the VIO

Having witnessed this problem, the team at Kildare Volunteer Centre went about trying to find a solution. It was a problem that had been identified nationwide and has also been discussed nationally between Volunteer Centres.

One solution identified was for the Volunteer Centre to consciously move away from being the link organisation between Volunteer Involving Organisation and Volunteers and for this purpose become the Volunteer Involving Organisation. We could create short term volunteering opportunities for volunteers from existing communities and volunteers from new communities to come together in an activity that benefits the community as a whole.

This will create the opportunity for all the benefits of volunteering to occur. The parameters that we placed around any volunteering opportunities we would create were that they must be;

1. A meaningful activity with a community benefit
2. Open to all displaced people living in Kildare
3. Be open to all existing and local communities in Kildare

5.3 Case Study. Christmas Robin Workshop

An example of this is our Christmas Robin workshop. In this workshop, Christmas Robins were handmade by volunteers, which is a Ukrainian tradition. These Robins were then given to the Kildare Wildlife Rescue, a local charity in Kildare Town to sell in order to raise funds for their operations in the run up to Christmas. The workshops were facilitated by a Ukrainian volunteer over three different dates in the lead up to Christmas. The workshops were facilitated at Kildare Community Development Centre where KVC is situated.





The fact that this activity was supporting a well-known local charity encouraged increased participation from the local Kildare communities. There was an excellent attendance at these workshops which included displaced people, the existing Kildare community and volunteers from within Kildare Wildlife Rescue. The space the activity created allowed everyone to share their own experiences about life in Ireland.

A total of 187 robins were donated to Kildare Wildlife Rescue by these volunteers. In November Kildare Volunteer Centre was able to visit Arás an Uachtaráin and present one of these Robins to President Higgins while explaining the integration work currently underway in Kildare.



5.3 Case Study. 1 Million Stars Project.

The One Million Stars is an inclusive community arts project connecting communities across Ireland. Each eight-point star represents lights, hope and solidarity against violence. Stars are curated into the “HOPE” installation in county Kildare.

The goal is to make a million stars around Ireland and this has become a project that many VCs are involved in nationwide as a vehicle for integration.

This project was spearheaded by our support worker. Displaced women, men and kids took part in weaving stars for this project. The pilot phase of this project was initially



in conjunction with the Leixlip Community Centre. During the initial two weeks in Leixlip with this



project, we welcomed displaced people as well as people from the local community. This created the space for displaced



people to meet with and integrate with the existing community in Leixlip while creating awareness about domestic violence in our communities.

Support for this project also came from Teach Tearmainn, a women's refuge centre in Kildare Town., Teach Tearmainn provided support with ribbons and instructions on how to weave stars along with step-by-step guidance in the Ukrainian language.

Since the initial pilot phase further workshops have been held in Leixlip, Ballymore Eustace, Kill, Kildare and Monasterevin and all are well attended with existing communities and displaced people taking part.

" Good day! I want to tell you about my acquaintance with Ivanna. I arrived in Ireland on September 26, 2023. At the beginning of October, Ivanna came to the guesthouse (The Moto, Ballymore Eustace). She spoke about the volunteer centre, about the work of volunteers, about the importance of each person in the life of Ireland, about cooperation and help. That day we all made stars together for the special project "Million Stars". At that time, I had only left the occupied territory for a month, so this kind of human care, sincerity and cooperation was exactly what was needed."

Displaced Ukrainian National

5.4 Community Volunteers: A Space for Integration

We have also identified the Community Volunteers program as a suitable avenue for including displaced people in volunteering. The benefits here are that once a displaced person is trained as a Community Volunteer, they can become a community volunteer in whichever county they may be moved to, i.e., it is a transferable skill and they are not starting from zero when relocating.

This is an opportunity identified by Kildare Volunteer Centre and currently 29% of all our fully trained community volunteers identify as non-Irish. This provides these volunteers with an opportunity to volunteer in a close-knit team of volunteers including long term residents of local communities. It also provides a platform where these volunteers are



visibly supporting and contributing to the staging of local events for the benefit of the community. However, there may be a gap between events which may not be ideal for integration purposes.

Our support worker has translated the in-person training for becoming a community volunteer into Ukrainian, to allow the course be delivered in a more accessible way to displaced Ukrainians. This has been shared with the national network.

6.0 Financials

In 2023, Kildare Volunteer Centre made a concerted effort to recover from the previous year's deficit, which was achieved. However, additional funding was temporary and ad-hoc, and was not sufficiently reliable to address identified risks areas, such as increasing operating costs due to energy costs, inflation, and centre growth, provision for redundancy payments, cost of living increases, or buffer for unexpected events/emergencies. The need to put by adequate reserves was prioritised as a risk mitigation measure, to ensure financial stability as a going concern in an unpredictable environment.

Total Comprehensive income improved from a deficit of €16,281 in FY22 to a surplus of €37,961 in FY23 resulting in an increase in year-end reserves from €30,355 to €68,316. This was driven by a 27% increase in revenue YoY from €170,083 in FY22 to €215,492 in FY23 and a decrease in expenditure from €186,364 in FY22 to €177,531 in FY23.

Total Comprehensive income improved from a deficit of €16,281 in FY22 to a surplus of €37,961 in FY23 resulting in an increase in year-end reserves from €30,355 to €68,316. This was driven by a 27% increase in revenue YoY from €170,083 in FY22 to €215,492 in FY23 and a decrease in expenditure from €186,364 in FY22 to €177,531 in FY23.

7.0 Summary

2023 saw a strong performance by Kildare Volunteer Centre across multiple key performance indicators such as New Volunteers registered, repeat callers and opportunities available.



The dramatic increase in new volunteers registered in 2023 can partially be attributed to displaced people arriving into our communities and seeking volunteering opportunities in order to help them integrate into their new communities. While it is encouraging to see the messaging about the benefits of volunteering in aiding integration clearly reaching new arrivals it does naturally place a strain on the Centres already stretched resources. A part-time Integration worker position is not sufficient as for the Human Resources needed to adequately cover a near 100% increase in registered volunteers most of whom have additional needs due to language and translation difficulties.

2023 also saw an increase in our front-line work in volunteering through the ever growing Community Volunteers Programme and our integration workshops.

Looking ahead Kildare Volunteer Centre will soon be approaching it's 20th Anniversary. As well as looking back on the successes of our Volunteer Centre in the past, it is also an appropriate time to look ahead and decide what our Volunteering Centre will look like in the future. The first step will be a process of stakeholder engagement to shape our new strategic plan.