

Cranmore Community: Caroline & Lisa

HIGHLIGHT

The Cranmore Community Co-op proves that effective climate action begins by listening carefully to local residents. Instead of imposing pre-designed projects, the team visited roughly 400 homes to understand genuine local needs through surveys leading to direct conversations. The feedback directly shaped all future initiatives.

- **Step-by-Step Growth:** Start small, focus on local demands, and scale up gradually.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Young people led hands-on projects like building a pizza oven, painting murals, and organizing clean-ups to build local pride.
- **Open Communication:** Regular newsletters, public forums, and door-to-door visits kept everyone informed and engaged.
- **Strong Partnerships:** Dedicated volunteers drove the projects forward, while collaborations with local authorities boosted available resources.

Cranmore demonstrates how climate action succeeds when it is inclusive.

The **County Council** played a critical role—not by leading the community, but by providing funding, infrastructure, expertise and partnership that allowed community-led initiatives to flourish. Key examples include:

- **Core funding:** The Cranmore Community Co-op receives its core funding through the **Cranmore Regeneration Project**, managed by **Sligo County Council** under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This provided the stable foundation for community development work.
- **Technical expertise:** Council staff, including environmental officers, delivered workshops on topics such as recycling, composting and the use of brown bins, helping residents take practical climate action at home.

Summary: 700 words

Cranmore Community Co-op: Building Community-Led Climate Action

The Cranmore Community Co-op evolved from the Cranmore Regeneration Project, initiated by Sligo Borough Council in 2004 to ensure local residents had a voice in the regeneration of their neighbourhood. Originally established as a community platform, the organisation became a fully incorporated cooperative in 2007, developing into a community development and youth organisation serving both Cranmore and the wider Sligo East area.

A defining moment came in 2019 when the Co-op carried out a comprehensive **door-to-door Community Needs Analysis**, visiting approximately 400 households. Rather than assuming what people needed, community development workers spoke directly with residents, identifying priorities such as affordable social spaces, opportunities for children and young people, environmental initiatives, and places where neighbours could meet and connect.

Importantly, the Co-op communicated the survey findings back to residents and used them to shape future projects. This community-first approach created trust and ensured that new initiatives reflected local aspirations rather than externally imposed ideas.

In 2021, the Co-op took over an existing workshop and garden, transforming it into a vibrant community hub. Today it includes a community café, weekly restaurant, kitchen facilities for local enterprises, community gardens, orchard, biodiversity areas, workshop space and youth facilities. The site has become a welcoming place where climate action, education, wellbeing and community development are delivered together.

Council Support

Sligo County Council played a crucial enabling role throughout Cranmore's development. Rather than directing projects, the Council provided long-term support, resources and technical expertise while allowing the community to lead decision-making.

Core funding for the Co-op is provided through the Cranmore Regeneration Project under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, giving the organisation the stability needed to build long-term relationships and programmes.

The Council also partnered with the Co-op on a range of practical initiatives. Through the Local Authority Waters Programme, young people designed and created a mural promoting water conservation. The Co-op worked with Council staff on biodiversity education, climate awareness programmes, and practical environmental improvements including a pilot dog litter bin scheme requested by residents.

As part of Sligo's Decarbonisation Zone, the garden became a demonstration space where Council environmental officers delivered workshops on composting, recycling, brown bins and sustainable gardening. This partnership enabled expert advice to reach local people in an accessible community setting.

The interview illustrates an effective model of partnership: the Council provided funding, expertise and strategic support, while local residents identified priorities and shaped the projects themselves.

Achievements

Cranmore's greatest achievement has been creating a thriving community hub where climate action strengthens community life rather than existing as a separate agenda.

The community garden has become the centrepiece of this work. Volunteers grow vegetables, herbs, fruit and flowers using organic methods, while compost produced on-site is returned to the gardens or shared with residents. Produce is used in the community café, weekly restaurant and youth cooking activities, demonstrating sustainable local food systems in practice.

Young people play an active leadership role. They helped design and build a community pizza oven during the COVID-19 pandemic, transforming concerns about young people "hanging around" into a positive project that now benefits the whole community. Youth groups also participate in planting, harvesting, biodiversity activities, litter-picking campaigns, windowsill gardening projects and environmental education.

The Co-op has successfully combined environmental action with social inclusion. Gardening, café activities, workshops and community events bring together people of different ages, cultures and backgrounds, reducing isolation while building friendships and trust. More than twenty regular volunteers now contribute to maintaining the gardens and supporting community activities.

The garden has also become an outdoor classroom where residents learn practical climate actions including composting, biodiversity conservation, food growing, water conservation and waste reduction. Rather than focusing solely on climate change as a global challenge, the Co-op demonstrates simple actions that people can adopt in their own homes and neighbourhoods.

Perhaps most importantly, the organisation has helped build a strong sense of community ownership. Residents increasingly take pride in their neighbourhood, contribute ideas, volunteer their time and develop the confidence to shape future improvements.

Advice to Others Who Wish to Follow

The interview offers valuable lessons for communities wishing to establish similar initiatives.

The first recommendation is **listen before acting**. Conduct a community needs assessment through surveys, conversations or community forums to understand what local people genuinely want. Building projects around community priorities creates lasting engagement and ownership.

Secondly, **start small and grow gradually**. Cranmore began with achievable projects that addressed immediate needs before expanding into wider climate and biodiversity programmes. Early successes help build confidence, attract volunteers and demonstrate visible benefits.

Thirdly, **create welcoming spaces**. Community gardens, cafés and workshops provide informal places where relationships develop naturally. Climate conversations are often most successful when they happen through practical activities such as growing food, sharing meals or learning new skills together.

Another important lesson is to **communicate regularly**. Cranmore uses newsletters, community events, forums and face-to-face engagement to keep residents informed and involved. Closing the feedback loop by showing how community suggestions have influenced decisions helps build trust.

Finally, **build partnerships without losing community leadership**. Successful collaboration with local authorities, schools, environmental organisations and volunteers can provide funding, expertise and additional resources. However, the direction of projects should continue to come from the community itself.

Cranmore's experience demonstrates that successful climate action is fundamentally about people. When communities are empowered to identify their own priorities, supported by strong partnerships and encouraged to take ownership of local projects, environmental action becomes a natural part of building healthier, more connected and more resilient places to live.

Relevant Climate Connected Resources



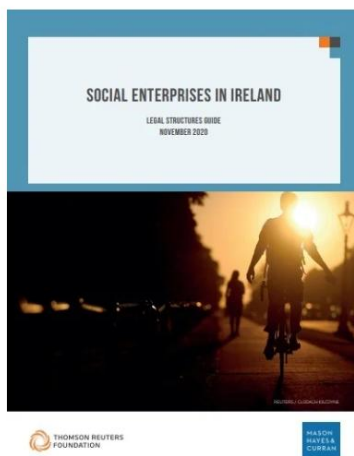
Community Needs Assessment & Stakeholder Mapping

Cranmore's biggest success factor was starting with a **door-to-door survey of 400 households** rather than deciding projects in advance. The Stakeholder Mapping tool helps identify residents, community groups, local authorities, schools, businesses and volunteers who should be involved from the beginning.



Dialogue and Community Engagement Hub

Cranmore continually engaged residents through community forums, newsletters, café conversations and workshops. The Dialogue and Engagement Hub provides practical methods for running inclusive meetings, encouraging participation, co-designing projects and ensuring everyone's voice is heard.



Building a Community Structure (Governance & Organisation)

Cranmore grew because it had a clear organisational structure, volunteers, and partnerships with Sligo County Council which helped define community development roles. The Community Structure resources explain how to build an effective committee, establish governance, allocate responsibilities and create a sustainable organisation.

Interview Transcript

Maeve Halpin: Welcome to this series of public-funded, climate-connected podcasts, where we talk to people involved in community climate action all around Ireland. Energy Cooperatives Ireland has worked with dozens of Irish sustainable communities and has established 5 fully operational energy cooperatives. Many of these communities have become innovators and promoters of the carbon-free society at the local level and in some cases at the national level.

Today we're talking to Caroline and Lisa from the Cranmore Community Co-op. Welcome ladies.

Caroline is a community development coordinator, and Lisa is a community development worker there at Cranmore.

So, Caroline, maybe you can tell me something about the origins of the co-op?

Caroline: Yes, actually, Lisa's going to start us off with just a little bit of that background. Is that okay, Maeve?

Maeve Halpin: Of course, Lisa, yes.

Lisa: So I suppose we're known locally as the Co-op, Cranmore Community Cooperative Society, and we're a charity that provides community development and youth services. and support for the local community and the communities of the Sligo East area. Sligo Borough Council initiated the Cranmore Regeneration Project in 2004. There was a community platform set up to local people in the area to have a voice in these visions that were going to be affecting their lives and surroundings through that regeneration process.

Then the organisation developed and became fully incorporated as a cooperative society in 2007 and they developed from an advocacy group into a community development and youth organisation with their own community development team. The core funding for the project is actually through the Cranmore Regeneration Project, like the County Council under the Department of Housing and Local Government and Heritage. That's just a little bit of the background into how we started.

Caroline: And then we could say as well, in 2021, the co-op took over an existing workshop and garden space that had been previously leased by the Abbey Quarter Men's Group. And from that, we've sort of made that our hub of activity and the work that we do with the community. The men's group still operates from the workshop, as we call it. And in addition to that, we have a community cafe space, a weekly restaurant evening.

We have a kitchen area where community is able to hire out the kitchen for their own enterprises and utilize for community events. There's a garden attached to it as well. We've

added extra garden beds, done work around the tree, a tree nursery there as well for apple and pear trees. And it's maintained by community members and volunteers with an active community garden group as well. So it's important, it's a social space, it's a well-being space for the community, a place that everyone can kind of feel ownership towards. It also aligns with the Climate Connected initiatives.

So our jobs are focused around community development and the ethos around that. So really working with community where they're at and helping them get to where they want to go. I think one thing we should mention is a community needs analysis that the co-op did with the community went door to door with the development worker at the time. That was in 2019. And then from that, we're able to get lots of different feedback and what was lacking and what people wanted to see in their neighbourhood, in their area. So one of the things or a few of the things that the garden space kind of addresses is the lack of social spaces that came out of that needs analysis. People needing or wanting to have areas, cafes that were local or restaurants that were nearby that were affordable, as well as sustainable environmental economies or opportunities. So the community wanted more social spaces that were inclusive for children as well, spaces and open areas to gather. I want to talk maybe a little bit about the swap shop.

Lisa: Yes, so I suppose some of the initiatives then that we did through our community development and our engagement with the community, we engaged with Sligo County Council and came up with some initiatives like we had a swap shop and things like that. Then we're heavily engaged as well with our local water development team there in Sligo County Council. So we would have a lot of programmes under the Local Authority Waters programme where actually some of our youth created a mural on our gate space there to show community members how not to waste water and trying to improve, I suppose, getting the picture out there of how we can conserve water in our community as well.

Maeve Halpin: So a very varied program that you've got going there. Can I just go back to that door to your survey for a moment, please, because that seems to me to be so fundamentally important when people are setting up local community hubs or services or centres, whatever it is you might be doing to know exactly what's needed in that particular area. Did you have particular expertise in that? Or did you need many people to undertake it? Because I think it's just the kind of thing that local people could do in their local community around the country in order to initiate something like this.

Caroline: Yes, so we were able to fund a paper copy of the survey. At the time, the idea was that the community development worker who had already established connection with the community focused on the Cranmore Estate. So the Cranmore Community Co-op works within Cranmore Estate, but as well as the Sligo East City. But this community needs analysis was really just focused on Cranmore. So approximately 400 houses were surveyed. And it was a door-to-door initiative because the idea was that the community

development worker would be able to have these face-to-face conversations with the community and maybe get more information from them that way than just sort of filling out a survey or a piece of paper. And then once the surveys were completed, there was a write-up done in terms of, the outcome of that survey.

Then we were very vocal in communicating back to the community that what we had taken from that learning, we would then be implementing in our work going forward as committee development, as a team of community development workers. So that's where the shift in terms of our focus on the social spaces, the garden, the biodiversity work, the climate action work, and including community spaces that were inclusive, that lend themselves to child-friendly activities. So our youth groups, for example, use the garden and the workshop space as a backdrop to all of their activities. A lot of work has been done around, you know, confidence building or two youth groups that run every week from that space. In addition to that, there's been a pizza oven initiative that was sort of led by the youth.

Lisa: The youth from the area, Yes. I suppose that happened during COVID times when there wasn't many social spaces available for young people in the area. So they actually brought us the idea where they'd like to have an outdoor pizza oven in their area where they could come and use the garden space. and they could congregate, I suppose, there in the garden and have the use of the oven if they wanted, to put on some food or that, with our help, of course.

I suppose at the time as well, there was a negative kind of feedback from people where youth were just hanging around in a particular area. The youth wanted to show people that they could actually do something for their community. So that Pizza Project, it actually became something that the whole community could use, even though the young people engaged in the process of actually the two week of the building of the pizza oven. They actually opened it up then for all community members to be able to use that going forward for other events.

Caroline: Yes. So it's just that is used for not just youth activities anymore, but also for community events.

Maeve Halpin: Fantastic initiative. I just want to go back to the initial survey because that's, I think, the starting point for other community groups who might want to undertake an initiative like this. Like you knocked on 400 doors out of how many in total?

Caroline: Well, approximately 400 doors. It's the housing estate in Cranmore has about that many homes.

Maeve Halpin: And then secondly, I wanted to ask you, how did you communicate your findings? Because that's always a big issue is people saying, oh, I never heard a word about this. How did you?

Lisa: So we have a lot of opportunity to engage community. We work directly in the area and then our community garden and cafe workshop is sort of a hub, a community hub. So we're able then to put on initiatives or workshops around some of the areas. areas that were highlighted from that survey, and then invite community in. In addition to that, we have a newsletter that goes out four times a year. So we're able to update the community in terms of what work has been done or what initiatives have taken place. So most recently, the co-op worked with the county council, the regeneration estate manager, in getting a pilot going for dog litter bins. So that was with our help order to find source funding for that and also work with the local community who were asking for that to exist within the estate because it's a problem in the area. And then we've also had the opportunity where we've had community forums and invited community in for a chat to talk about what their issues are, reflecting back to that initial survey from 2019, but then moving forward from that in terms of what are their current needs, have they been met, or how can we help in terms of at times it's as simple as helping them come together to form a residence association in terms of then them being able to avail local grants or just organizing themselves for events or community activities.

Maeve Halpin: And do you find you have good attendance at your community forums?

Caroline: I think it can be a challenge sometimes.

Lisa: Yes, it can be. I suppose, going back a number of years ago when the regeneration process started, the community forums were very well attended because obviously there was a lot of physical work going to happen within the estate. I suppose the community co-op were given the information there with the regeneration team those community forums at that time. So going back before all the physical works were completed, it was a space where people would get information about, well, there's new air to water systems going in and a lot of the houses as well. county council. So I suppose delivering that information to the community was very important. People wanted to know how these mechanisms would work. And there was a lot of other, I suppose, initiatives swelled down through where people had new guttering, new paintwork on their houses, and they wanted to find out about all these things. So those community forms would have been very well attended at those times, and a lot of information would have been given about the Cranmore Regeneration Project and ourselves.

Maeve Halpin: And can I ask, does your newsletter go out by e-mail or is it a hard copy?

Lisa: At the moment, it's a hard copy.

Maeve Halpin: That's great. And does somebody actually deliver that door to floor?

Caroline: Yes, so we work in partnership with the communities, another community centre in the area, and they have a large number of CE scheme workers. They help us deliver within Cranmore. And then the other areas that we deliver to are through volunteers or

community development workers. And when we go out and deliver them ourselves, it's an opportunity to knock on doors and to connect with the local people and ask those questions in terms of what needs they might feel are arriving or to let them know about programming, information about what we're doing and get their feedback as well.

Maeve Halpin: Yes, well, I think it's great that you're actually going out and delivering in person because I'm just want to give the listeners like a sense of the amount of work that's involved in this because... Yes. You need really a group, it's a really group effort, isn't it?

Lisa: Yes, it is. And we're a very small team. We have a team of six people here at the Cranmore Community Co-op.

Maeve Halpin: In terms of paid staff? Yes, So you're depending a lot on volunteers.

Caroline: We rely heavily on volunteers, Yes. And we've been very fortunate to actually have some long-term volunteers and then have volunteers throughout the years for the different programs and initiatives that we do.

Maeve Halpin: Okay, so important. And there's a great variety of what's going on there. It's aimed at different sections of the community as well, of course, and different age groups.

Caroline: Yes, in terms from that community development perspective. So we work with all community, all ages. It's intergenerational. Some of our programs are intergenerational. Some of them are more addressing maybe the needs of older citizens. or a woman's group or the garden group in that regard. But we do work with all ages.

Maeve Halpin:

Okay, that's so important, isn't it? It's fantastic to be able to draw in so many people. So for the listeners, ladies, what kind of hurdles did you find in the beginning or obstacles or difficulties? Because obviously, there's always going to be things that are a bit challenging in the beginning.

Caroline: Yes, I think that there are challenges for us in terms of funding. I think there's also challenges for us in getting awareness out to the community in terms of what is available to them at times, depending on what the program is, and then bringing people into the garden space. So, you know, we are part of the decarbonization zone for Sligo County Council. So we're sort of like right in the middle of that zone. And then our garden kind of fits into the work that we're trying to promote around that and the biodiversity and climate action initiatives.

So the garden is really sort of a focal point to try and bring community in through community education programming that we have or workshopped around climate action. We tie that in with food a lot of the time, so whether it's our pizza oven or we are showcasing vegetables that we're growing from our garden to try to create excitement and get people in the door. And then once that happens, we find people engage quite well with

the opportunities are available to them and they recognize the value of bringing what they've learned, maybe from a workshop or from a course back home with them. And then we find we get a lot of our volunteers that way when we have open community days where we put on an event for the community. It's to showcase what's available. It's an opportunity for them to give input around what they need as well. We find we pick up a lot of our volunteers that way.

What we do is multi-layered, like you're saying, like we have community education for adults in the community workshop as well. We also have a community cafe and restaurant. So our garden group is quite dedicated. They attend to the garden throughout the year. In the summer and spring and autumn, it's twice a year. In the winter, they'll meet once, sorry, twice a week. And then in the winter, they'll meet once a week. And a lot of what is grown in the garden is shared with the community. It's also an opportunity to source local vegetables for our restaurant program that happens on a Thursday, and the cafe as well. We really kind of tie in all of our community work around our workshop and garden at the moment. Yes. Use it in a way where we're able to communicate to people things that they can do, local things they can do, and feel like they have the ability to create sort of changes around some of the issues that we try to tackle around climate change. For example, most recently, we had a composting workshop. We created a three-bay composting system. Before that, we had composting units that weren't being- Functional. Yes, they weren't that functional, but we were able to get 2.5 tons of compost that went right back into the garden. And then it also went to people's homes if they were there on the day or if they wanted to come and pick up some compost. And then most recently, we created a leaf-mold cage. So collecting the leaves from the area, like around the workshop and garden, but also an initiative to sort of encourage people to bring in their leaves from the estate. What we're going to try to do is replicate that in different parts of the estate as well.

Maeve Halpin: Okay, that's marvellous. It's something everybody can participate in.

Caroline: Yes, definitely. Another challenge I'd say we thought is maybe like social inclusion.

Lisa: Or the cultural integration? definitely we do find that it has really built bridges on bringing. I suppose, a diverse people together from different ages, backgrounds and cultures that mightn't otherwise meet. And it creates trust and understanding with people as well. And it's also a good community hub, a welcome space to encourage casual interaction that helps with combating social isolation and in communities as well.

Maeve Halpin: You have people from other countries living in this state.

Lisa: Yes. There's a mix of people living in it in our area. I suppose the guidance space and I suppose with the work we do, it empowers local residents to take ownership of their own space and helping them build self-esteem and helping them advocate for broader community needs as well. Then there's also the health and wellbeing aspects. You know,

physical health provides gentle exercise for people and fresh produce, educates them on healthy eating, and mental health benefits as well, reduces stress and offers Yes. And it's the purpose and connection with nature. So, there's quite a lot, you know, there's a lot of benefits to having the space in our area.

Caroline: Are there anything else like it in our area? There's nothing that can replicate it at the moment anyway. There's a lot of green spaces in terms of, but there aren't established gardens. And at this point we have beds, established vegetable beds as well as a polytunnel. small, but thriving mini orchard area. So, we have apples and pears as well. And then we've also created a sort of a wetland area in order to encourage the understanding around biodiversity and the different landscapes that are within our reach here in Sligo East City, but bring it to a level where people can come and kind of learn about pollinators, for example, you know, beneficial plants and herbs, invasive species and things like that.

So often we work with community by bringing them into the garden and then taking them out to their local area, whether it's a river walk with a facilitator explaining all the different biodiversity and species of plants and animals that are in the area. Or we invite people in from other community gardens to sort of see what's happening in Cranmore, what's being grown, what kind of skills and sharing can happen that way, interaction around recipes and different foods from different parts of the world. Those conversations happen within those activities and events that we put together.

Maeve Halpin: Yes. Well, I'm sure you're familiar with the concept of social capital. It means interactions between people in the community that are not based on either family or work and lots of studies about social capital. And it shows that when there's higher social capital, there's less crime, there's more trust, there's better mental health, like social isolation and this kind of segregation is really damaging for people. So any initiatives that bring people together and give them opportunities to form those relationships with other people in their community has layers and layers of benefits that ripple out to everybody, actually.

Caroline: Yes definitely. And it is time. In terms of: it does happen over time. So, the fact that we're able to offer opportunities for that to occur throughout the week with the additional, you know, one-off events or special celebrations, et cetera. But the fact that we're there throughout the week, throughout the year, we're constantly sort of providing that venue, if you will, for social inclusion and interaction with the work of the community development workers on the ground. You know, they're able to do that, facilitate that, for the community. And then in addition, the environmental impact is huge.

So, it promotes sustainability, encourages organic practices. We don't use any kind of pesticides in the garden. We have loads of snails that, you know, people have to move gently out of the way. We're conscious that we're reducing the carbon footprint. So, we

have conversations around that in addition to conversations around SDG goals. You know, we grow our own local food and we're able to consume it right on site through the restaurant program or through the cafe or through the youth group's activities. When they're making pizzas, they're using what we're growing for the toppings, for example.

Lisa: So share it with our local community as well. We have, you know, extra produce left over. It's good. People can actually take home as well what they're going.

Caroline: Yes, so it helps increase, you know, food and food security, right? Providing fresh, healthy food to the community to share, revitalizing the space. Transforming an area that's sort of urban into more of a green area where people can enjoy and learn new skills and share skills between themselves. It's very empowering. It's a skill development. And then it really creates that sense of agency for the community. And that's really what our work focuses on. It's for the community to develop and to build on their skills and to build their resilience and their sense of agency.

Maeve Halpin: Yes. And I think that for young people too, it's great on their CV to be able to show that they've been involved at this level and has been contributing, volunteering, developing new skills and so on. It's enough. Yes.

Lisa: And even our younger youth groups, like we have two youth groups there and we have like a group for 7- to 11-year-olds and we also have another group for 12 plus years. Both of those groups actively engage as well. In everything we do in the garden, from planting to harvesting, they really enjoy being out in that space and getting the chance.

Maeve Halpin: Yes, well, especially in our new digital world now, where isolation is obviously far greater than it ever was, really, because people can stay in the room and live through their devices. And it's a huge problem, especially for young people who become isolated in that environment. It's easy to think you're having relationships with these people that you're talking to online, but it's not.

Caroline: No, it's not face to face. It's not real.

Maeve Halpin: It's very superficial.

Lisa: We actually created a lovely book. It was collaboration with [Kids Own Publishing](#) and it was called [Four Seasons in Our Garden](#). We were partnered with Kids Own Partnership. They led the project and we were the partner and it was an intergenerational project. The book was launched there last December and it gives a broad insight into all different areas of biodiversity and the four seasons within our own garden in the Belmore Community Garden. So it's a very nice book as well for anybody that would like a copy as well.

Maeve Halpin: Is that available online?

Lisa: It's available online, yes, and also we could post it out. anybody that would like a copy. It's also selling on [kids' own website](#).

Maeve Halpin: Can you give us the title of the book in case anybody would like to buy it?

Lisa: It's called *Four Seasons in Our Garden*.

Maeve Halpin: Okay, fantastic. *Four Seasons in Our Garden* by the Cranmore Community Group.

Lisa: Yes, and it's Kids Own Publishing, actually, the publisher.

Maeve Halpin: Kids Own Publisher. Yes, it's available online for 8 euros. That's very affordable. Okay.

Caroline: And another way that we engage youth as well, we will do activities around litter picking. So we'll go throughout the state and do litter pigs in the springtime, especially for our An Taisce.

Lisa: Spring cleaning. The young people at the area get heavily involved in that.

Maeve Halpin: Okay, you find there's good participation.

Caroline: Yes, we have very good participation around that. They get excited about, you know, cleaning up their estate and there's a lot of pride around them as well.

Lisa: Mr. Pickers.

Caroline: Yes, and their vests, yellow vests. And we walk around with them and engage in that as well. And then they take that information or that message back home to their parents or guardians. They take it back home to their school. So it's really kind of, Yes, it's inspiring to watch them get engaged in that and it builds pride in the community as well.

Maeve Halpin: Of course. And what age group children are we talking here?

Lisa: Both groups actually, the 7 to 11 year olds and also the 12 plus years in more secondary school.

Caroline: And another way though as well that we try to bring or to have people bring our work with the work that they do back home with them or to try initiatives at home. For example, we had a windowsill garden initiative that ran parallel to the Thursday dinner program. We had different varieties of lettuces, for example, that could be grown on your windowsill. Some people don't have space to grow outdoors, or they have confined spaces where they can have a garden. Container gardening, windowsill gardening, herbs, for example, grow well on your windowsill. And then when we have an excess of produce, for example, we had lots and lots of lovely cucumbers that we had gave to the community during the dinner program with a recipe that they could try different types of cucumber soup and cucumber salad, for example. It incentivizes people to eat locally to see that they can grow food themselves, even in small spaces.

Maeve Halpin: Okay, amazing. Yes, very accessible for everybody then. So there's an amazing range of different projects and initiatives that you're involved in there. It sounds fantastic. And would you say you've seen changes in the community since you've been doing this work?

Caroline: Yes, definitely. I've only been with Cranmore Quad since 2024. Yes, I could definitely say so. And I know Lisa, you've been working here longer.

Lisa: Yes. So I've been working here since 2021 and I've definitely seen some transformative change over the last number of years between both adults and young people from the area taking part more in I suppose biodiversity projects and initiatives that are being ran through our community garden. I know our previous community development worker, Connie Nelson, a lot of work there to get our garden up and run it with the Abbey Court Amends group. And it's continued and it's grown over the last number of years. It's great. It's great to see the people still have the interest and are still willing to get involved. Like we have over 20 volunteers in our garden group and it's just wonderful to see the people are taking and taking pride in their area as well.

Caroline: And also the interactions between people as well. It builds community and you can see that. So people that may have not spoken to each other, didn't know each other before, got to know one another. whether it was at the community cafe or the restaurant or the garden or one of our activities or workshops. And then you'll see them through, you know, greet one another or have that sense of community and they know one another. So it's lovely to see that as well.

Maeve Halpin: Connection, which is so fundamentally important to us all. Yes. And it's also a lot of raising awareness about the reality of climate from what you're saying to me as well, which I think is so fundamentally important.

Caroline: Yes, definitely. We tie a lot of our work into that conversation with community and then get sort of reaction from children as well. Like how do they feel about their environment? How do they feel about, you know, climate change? Like Lisa was mentioning, local children did a youth mural about the importance of water and conserving water. So we always have those conversations. Recycling's really important. We had the environmental officer, Anya Laughlin, come one time and speak to us about brown bins and where you can access or get them from and why they're important and what goes in them and stuff like that. So education around things that you can do locally or within your own home to get that conversation started for both youth and adults.

Lisa: Yes, and it's just simple steps, I suppose, within a community. as well, and just to keep building on those steps, you know, going forward.

Maeve Halpin: So I'm sure there's lots of communities around the country who have some kind of green space or derelict space or whatever that they could use to develop a project

like this. Like, what would you say to anybody who's listening who might be interested in beginning a project like this? Where would they start?

Caroline: I think that starting small and growing, growing a project is really important. You know, identifying what you're trying to address, what kind of need you're trying to address, or what kind of social issue maybe you're trying to target, or if there's a combination of them. And then engaging your community about your idea or about what it is that your initiative is trying to do. Give it time and also really get input from your community because ultimately it's for your community and so it the community helps shape the initiative. And then you're also going to be looking for people to contribute to the project. You'll need volunteers. You'll need people dedicating time or skills, whether it's through, you know, fundraising skills or it's actual practical, like how to build a garden bed skill, for example. Yes, starting out small, identifying what it is that you're trying to do, what challenge you're trying to face or meet, or find a solution for, and then engage in community around that and bring them with you on that journey. as you build your program or your initiative.

Maeve Halpin: And I guess like you guys did to do a kind of needs assessment in the 1st place to ask local people what they feel is needed in the area.

Caroline: Yes, so that's also important. If you can do a community needs analysis or an assessment or a survey, you know, hold community forums or community teas where you can discuss those issues or those ideas or people can bring forward maybe local needs, that's also a great way to do it.

Maeve Halpin: Because it has to be bottom up, broad then top up. down, doesn't it?

Caroline: Yes, definitely.

Lisa: Exactly. And I suppose that's one thing as well that I suppose with a lot of community initiatives, kind of ideas come up there for initiatives and that. And then you might see, you know, a lot of people will turn up to something and then, you know, people will fizzle out because they don't feel that they were included enough in the conversation. So always be mindful as well that it's open to all community members and there's no idea that shouldn't be spoken about or hashed out. Make everybody feel welcome and included. I suppose it's about inclusivity as well and make everybody feel that they're part of. And they're welcome.

Maeve Halpin: Yes, I found as well working with groups, it's good to do small group little discussions because a lot of people won't want to speak in the big group, but if you put them into little groups of four and get the brainstorm together, you know, and then one person feeds back what they've come up with, like that kind of includes people too. Yes, Yes. Well, listen, you've done amazing work and it's ongoing and growing and thriving from what I can hear there. Can you tell the listeners what websites, where can they find out more information about you?

Caroline: Of course. So you can find us on [cranmore.ie](https://www.cranmore.ie). That's our website. So Yes, <https://www.cranmore.ie/>. And you'll find a lot of information there about what we do. You'll find lovely videos as well, pictures, some of our background as well, our stories. And in addition to that, [our Facebook page](#) is very active and then [Instagram](#) as well. So we try to maintain really relevant on social media, just to communicate what we're doing and also just engaging with the local community as well. So those are two areas where people can find information about us.

Maeve Halpin:

And your Facebook page is called Cranmore Co-op. People can get more information there.

Caroline:

That's right.

Maeve Halpin: It's very inspiring the work that you're doing there both and all your team and the fact that so many people from different backgrounds and different age groups are all included. I mean, that's really what's the fundamental of community work, I think, and bringing together generations from different age groups and people from different backgrounds and everybody, different people bringing different skills together. This is really the concept of what used to be called *Meitheal* in Ireland, where people always came together for a harvest. At harvest time, all the local farmers would go to one farm and bring in all the crops, and then they'd go to the next farm. That used to happen when I was young. So it's very much in the spirit of *Meitheal*, what you're doing there, which I think is fantastic.

Caroline:

Yes, I know you're right and identify like it is in the spirit of community, right? And is that what *Meitheal* means?

Maeve Halpin: Yes. And different people, everybody coming together.

Caroline: That's great. Yes. We're working together to achieve betterment of the community or to achieve a goal or a task.

Maeve Halpin: Yes. And helping each other. Yes. Which I think is something that's really fundamental to our culture in Ireland. And you're creating the opportunity for people to participate in that, which is fantastic. Yes. [cranmore.ie](https://www.cranmore.ie) is her website. Carolina Navarro, who's the coordinator and Lisa Wallace, community develop worker. Thank you so much for your time and keep up the good work.