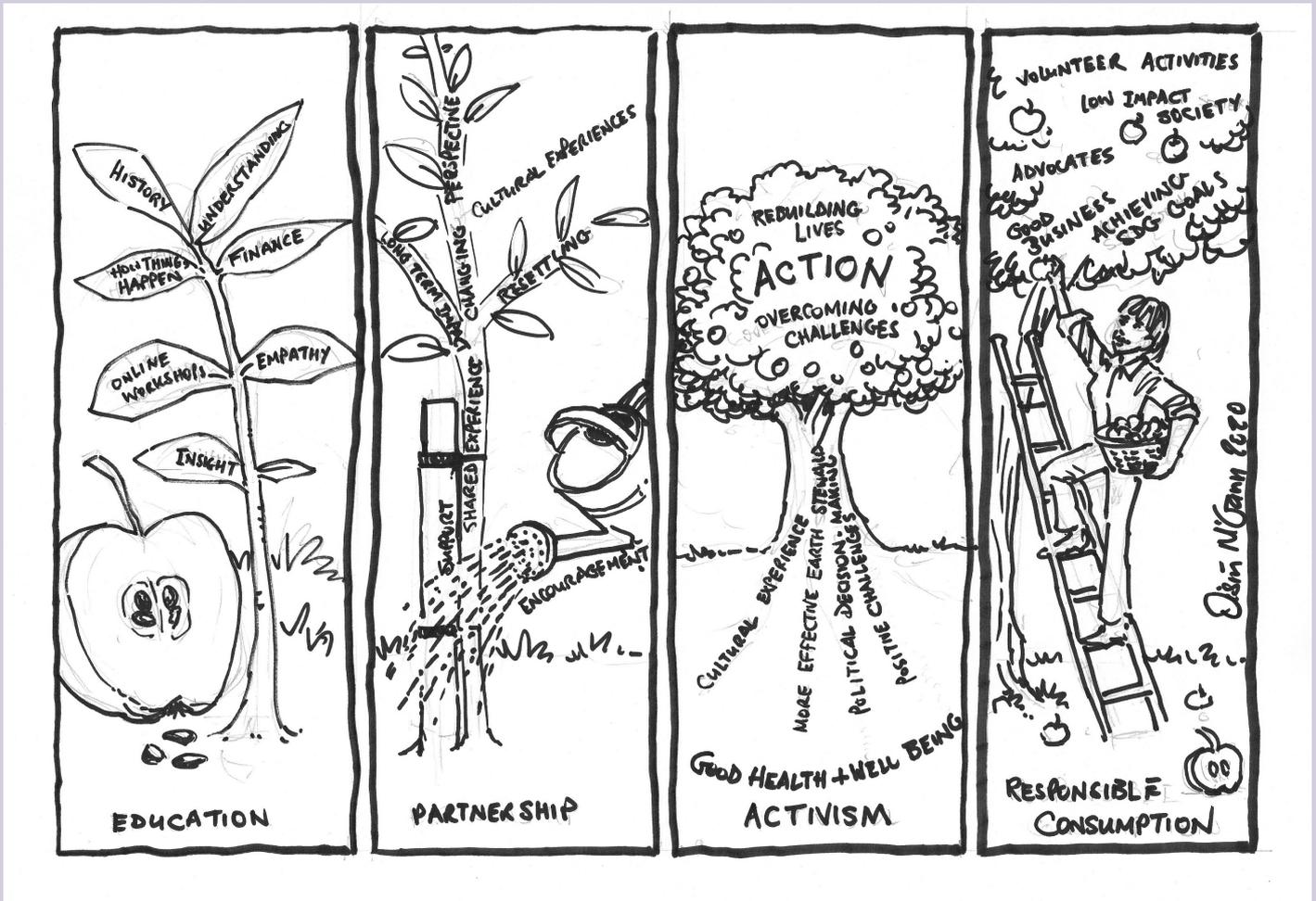


SDG ADVOCATE TRAINING 2020



REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020 a group of 19 motivated and concerned Active Citizens from all over Ireland took the “call to action”. They signed up to SDG Advocate Training which promised to be an 8-month exciting and challenging experiential learning journey, incorporating two weeks overseas in Vietnam or Tanzania. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the following 8 months unraveled a very different kind of challenge; one that allowed for only an online connection to be possible. Expectations of travel, overnight residentials, team building, personal interaction whilst learning, working and sharing diminished. Zoom became the prism in which we were channeled and to my surprise... it worked! The impact of this year’s training is evidenced through the reflections shared in this short manual and the 12 documented Action Projects available on Development Perspectives research page “Stories of Action” www.developmentperspectives.ie

The SDG Advocate Training is part of a larger programme called “Saoita”; the Irish word for “Worldly - Wise”. And indeed the 2020 Advocates proved sapient in their flexibility to adapt whilst remaining rooted in the integrity of their goal; to deepen their understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals and to design informed action projects of positive change in the Adult and Community Education Sector.

Margaret (Mog) Downey - SDG Advocate Training Co-Ordinator





It's baffling to think that the SDG Advocate Training project 2020 has ended. After eight months spent charting unfamiliar waters, it really only feels like a moment since we all mingled freely in that beautiful old building in Drogheda, imagining all that the experience would bring. Who knew then that our horizons would radically and rapidly shift from visions of lands far and wide to the confines of our own virtual screensaver backgrounds?

At the outset of the Advocate Training, I had been in the midst of working with researchers on developing guidelines for tutors supporting vulnerable learners in further education. As the evidence stacked up, I was genuinely shocked to learn just how difficult daily life is for so many people here in Ireland, with adults from all walks of life struggling in silence to function without the most basic literacy and numeracy skills. Reflecting on my own privileged position as the eldest of three for whom university was a natural rite of passage, I could only imagine the limitations that a lack of educational opportunity might impose on work and family life.

Looking back, I think on some level I have always been aware of, and quietly uncomfortable with, inequality. Growing up on the outskirts of Belfast during the 90s provided some good grounding in the kind of lifestyle choices people make when opportunities are few and far between. Listening closely to the stories of the people my organisation supports in present times has shown me that the fortunate circumstances I find myself in have as much to do with my luck in life's lottery as any level of ability or competence.

I feel the SDG Advocate project appealed to me on two levels. Firstly, the call to action spoke to my desire to redress the balance through the means presented by my line of work. Secondly, being a natural introvert who gravitates towards the fence for the sake of harmony, I was looking for a way of challenging myself to take a more proactive vocal stance on the side of an issue that spoke to me.

Previous career choices in teaching, mentoring and advisory roles have played to this diplomatic tendency which has often seen me revert back to listening and observing mode. NOW feels like as pertinent a time as any to engage in meaningful dialogue, and I found that the experience with DP was the perfect way to

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'test the water' in a warm and respectful environment.

The whole experience has shown me a lot about resilience, flexibility and the positive difference that a sense of connection to others and a shared purpose can make. Like the majority of other humans at the moment, I know I've felt the fluctuations in motivation and mood over the last weeks and months. In all honesty, there were times when the thoughts of giving a screen full of people my undivided attention for three hours on a Saturday morning didn't always appeal to my instinctual drive of pressing snooze! However, each time I showed up, I was always so glad I did and was instantly reminded of why it mattered. It only took a few minutes of Mog's grounding sessions to completely shift this mind-set into one of relaxed engagement and before I knew it, the time had run out and the energy and ideas were firing!

I found quite a lot of learning and consolidation that inspired the next steps, happened whilst in the breakout sessions. Having this time to share ideas with a group of really interesting people with viewpoints different than my own enabled me to step up and start the conversation. As synchronicity would have it, one of these sessions led to fellow advocate Anne and I starting our own conversation around potential future collaboration in the world of Further Education and Training.

So what now? I look forward to continuing connecting the dots and exploring the avenues for sharing what I have learned. In terms of my own action project, I've spent time delving into the rich evidence of inclusive, creative blended learning emerging from across the sector, and my aim is to highlight those resources that meet the needs of adults seeking to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills with a view to collaborating with authors interested in producing accessible and engaging SDG-related materials. Networking within my existing circle and also relationship building will be key elements of the success of this effort, and I feel well equipped to do this with my recently acquired DP toolkit.

I feel optimistic that despite the many challenges faced by the sector at present, there is a place for people to flourish and to discover their connection to the SDGs through the supportive environment of community education. I am hopeful that I can make a positive contribution to the virtual learning space by making the SDGs a little more open to all.

Thank you to my fellow advocates and to all at Development Perspectives for a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Looking forward to singing your praises loud and proud, well away from that old fence.



I chose to take part in the SDG Advocate Training project because I feel that the SDG's focus on the most pressing issues of our generation. I was finding that I never set aside the time to learn more about the SDGs and the challenges associated with meeting our obligations, so this training provided a dedicated space to do this. My hope was to make a positive contribution in an informed way.

An important part of the project was for participants to put their learning into action by developing action projects. I decided on an action project which involves collating SDG information for tutors in adult education. This relates mainly to SDG 4: Quality Education but in a general sense it applies to all of the SDG's. I am keen to make suggested links between the information I provide and learning outcomes on accredited programmes. My hope is that this will encourage tutors to introduce the SDG's in their teaching and learning. The resources will consist of G-Slides with images, links and videos.

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Of the many insights, for me, over the course of the Advocate training was the notion of simplicity and baby steps. To me these have become the golden rules of engaging with my action project. One goal at a time, one month at a time, images and simple text that give a clear message and offer simple actions. I remind myself not to lose faith when one week is less productive than the next, this is a marathon, not a race, a bit like mindfulness, being gentle with yourself when progress seems slow and celebrating each success as you go along.

The challenges have been many, finding the time to work on my project, engaging the stakeholders (community education groups and tutors), analysing feedback and creating a suite of virtual resources that will meet their needs. Another important insight and challenge for me has been the integrity of the resources, by this I mean ensuring that all of the information I provide is sourced from reliable sources and referenced properly.



The journey of learning for this year SDG's Advocate Training started for me on the very first day at the selection process on the 7th March of 2020. Back then little did we know that lockdown was a week away. The excitement, joy, and energy was high in the room, full of like-minded people who wanted to learn and to join efforts to bring about change for the common good of all of us.

Over the last decade, I developed a sense of responsibility towards the protection of the environment as I lived and witnessed what was happening. I experienced the pain of travelling to find water during drought, carrying water and waiting for long hours in turn for drinking water containers. All this because of anthropogenic actions that lead to the deterioration of climate and the rise of inequalities on many levels between the Global South and Global North. As a result, I felt an onus of guardianship to act, to play my part in making earth a better place and to contribute to collective efforts through the Just Transition Framework.

Growing up in a corrupted society, where justice and human rights were compromised, and extraordinarily little consideration given to protect the environment, I decided to take action to hold my values to a test. This has motivated me to get involved in community work by raising awareness in the community on local, national, and international issues such as promoting social change, social justice, climate actions, human rights to achieve equality and the Just Transition Framework. However, the deeper I got involved the more I felt the need to improve my skills on sustainability, my knowledge on these issues, and to become a well-informed leader to lead change and improve society in an innovative educational way.

Development Prospective (DP) provided a platform through the SDG Advocate Training project to learn theories and pedagogies, that were totally new to me, in an engaging setting with fellow advocates and project facilitators. There were challenging moments when we were asked to re-evaluate our knowledge and beliefs. I found this hard to do and difficult to challenge, critically examine and to let go of what I have always recognised as views and beliefs. This process of critical thinking has enlightened me of the lack of understanding of some simple fundamentals of several actions that I have been doing, based on unbalanced judgments I

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was making. I came to realise the full extent of the impact of some of these actions which I now realise were based primarily on assumptions not facts. Seeing other perspectives and values has increased my empathy to include more balanced views on economic, environmental and social perspectives to address the issues of concern.

Gaining theoretical knowledge and tools through the SDG Advocate Training reignited active citizenship in me. I got involved in my local community and became part of a small team to run campaigns, facilitate, educate, and empower individuals and organisations to take part, become active and work towards a healthy society. I believe that it is only through collective efforts that we can create an active, open, and encouraging community that welcomes all citizens irrespective of their backgrounds, race, religion, or ethnicity. My biggest realisation has been that this work would not be possible without joining efforts and through teaming up with like-minded enthusiastic and hardworking individuals sharing the same goals, values, and vision.

This has resulted in the forming of the Wexford Environmental Network (WEN) with aims to collaborate, promote sustainable practices and address inequalities, biodiversity, water, and climate change issues. Through this Network, groups have joined forces and are working together on campaigns, policy making contributions, projects and activities that draw on all local resources to protect our environment and to bring about positive environmental change locally and have an inspiring impact globally.

Undoubtedly, 2020 has proven to be an incredibly challenging year with unprecedented out of our control COVID-19 pandemic, that has created havoc to lifestyles, planning, study visit trips and action projects for this year SDG's Advocacy Training project. However, alternative methods were quickly found and "Zoom" has become a remarkably familiar online platform to learn and share ideas.

This is a wakeup call to all of us that requires immediate adaptations to a new lifestyle, building resilience and to continue collective efforts to bring about change in making a meaningful impact on protecting the future for the next generation. Nevertheless, the long mile road starts with first few steps, collective stakeholders 'actions and finding solutions instead of criticising only. Believing in small changes can have a massive impact for the greater good of the humanity.



SDG Advocate Training taught me that I can leverage my skills, theatre experience and contacts network to take action in a meaningful and impactful way. The training provided me with valuable insight into development education and a comprehensive understanding of the SDG's, their significance and impact. I developed an awareness and understanding of systems, approaches, different perspectives, the 'Hero's Journey', and reflective practice, as well as increased awareness of my own values and capabilities.

From participating in the SDG Advocate Training, I have been motivated to take action and create a project that uses my passion, experience, and skills in Theatre & Arts to mobilise change in my community.

I am passionate about Theatre and the Arts, its importance and significant relationship to the SDG Goal of Good Health and Wellbeing. It is a form of communication that brings people together and offers a communal experience which helps us to understand the people around us and the world we live in. It offers narratives that create meaning and the opportunity to see from different perspectives, reflect on events and stories, listen to different sides of conversations and empathise with the challenges of our fellow human being.

As a medium for self-expression and risk taking, Theatre and the Arts have the potential to influence how we think and feel about our lives, our behaviours and value systems. It is a powerful platform to advocate for new voices and new ways of being, which contributes to our vitality, ability to live sustainably and our evolution as a society, which is so integral to the Sustainable Development Goals.

It has been extremely uplifting to be a participant on this project for its inspiring teaching and learning. It has offered me the chance to be part of a community of like-minded people, which has been so heart-warming and positive. I feel very privileged to have taken part and to share in the progression of fellow advocates and change makers.

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I was lucky enough to spend 2 years volunteering in Cambodia and having the privilege of learning how to live with simple means but with huge community support despite their limited means. This community life and support was a revelation to me and I saw how it benefitted the whole community from young to old. The wisdom of the older generation was passed on and the new learning from the younger generation was integrated to support the community to thrive.

On my return to Ireland and assimilating back into a community, I saw the good work that individual groups were doing and I hoped to harness this into a cohesive team so that different groups can support each other's aims in the community. For example, our local tidy towns committee, our local ladies football team as well as other youth groups are all very active. But our area lacks the facility to support these

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different type of groups to work together on something that would benefit all ages and categories of the community, such as a community garden or a community walk. This kind of collaboration would provide a lot of benefits to the area including keeping families involved in their community and learning how to take care of their natural environment, as well as the benefits for people's mental wellbeing.

The SDG Advocate Training that I was lucky enough to be a part of this year was excellent. As an advocate I was given support, advice and regular inspiration to continue persevering with my action ideas throughout the process. The training was extremely well thought-out and structured in a way that meant you could be at any stage of your action project and still take something useful from the training to enhance it. In short, the SDG Advocate Training empowered me with the knowledge that our actions matter, no matter how big or small and our impact is beneficial when we persevere.



I am extremely grateful to be a member of the 2020 SDG Advocate cohort. As a participant on the Advocate Training, I chose to develop an action that would explore how language is used to communicate social norms through social relationships and interaction. I was motivated to focus on SDG Goal 5 Gender Equality as I believe that the route to equality is through feminist perspectives and activism. While feminism and equality discourses do appear more frequently in the mainstream, there is still low interaction or implementation of feminist led policy on a national level. The transformational change needed for Ireland to meet the 2030 goals is dependent on the amplification of a diversity of voices and experiences. I hope that *The EmpowWord Project* can contribute to this in some way.

The Advocate project helped me to develop the format of *The EmpowWord Project* through engaging workshops, mentoring sessions and study visits over the past few months. It was a rich source of knowledge building and sharing. The workshops were fun, energetic and a place for dynamic thinking as the group adapted to the changing realities due to the pandemic.

Relating policy to action and vice versa are a part of the fundamental principles of the SDGs and are key to imagining new directions for living in Ireland. This is where individual adaptations for sustainable living can be used as a force for positive change, without losing sight of the structural and material factors that are responsible for current social and ecological reality.

For me, it is important to reflect on how gender role expectations are at play in Irish society today as we move into a new decade of development. This is crucial for a just transition in response to Ireland's commitments to mitigate climate change and climate change effects. Consequently, actions bringing Irish society forward and protecting Ireland's environment to meet the 2050 goals must consider how Irish citizens' needs are met through sustainable, inclusive and just means. As Ireland's rankings on SDG measures for Gender Equality show that significant challenges remain, the action I have put in place hopes to explore how these challenges can be understood in ways that communicate and connect to the lived

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experiences in Ireland. Gender Equality should not be seen as a specific focus on women and girls but should be understood in terms of how intersectional equality is of benefit to all genders and society.

The leadership and generosity shown by Mog, Bobby, Stephanie, Nick and the DP team, the Advocacy project leaders, and the trainees has been incredible. I have firm belief in each of the advocates' ability to make positive change and impacts through their own action projects and look forward to supporting them. The work that has been done already while people have full time jobs, families, and during the covid restrictions, has been inspiring.

Matthew O'Neill – Reflections 2020



The SDG Advocate Training was able to introduce me to the SDGs and enabled me to think about what they mean in terms of education as well as development. During this process we were asked to challenge ourselves in understanding the ideologies and prejudices we may have and how this can affect our thinking. As well as how these can impact upon the different mandates we set ourselves and how we can confront these, so they no longer impact upon our learning and commitments.

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For me, this meant changing my ideas about international development and how this needs to be based around a human centric approach. It is from this space that I was motivated and guided in my own action project in developing a tool kit for Non-Governmental Organisations working in the area of the SDGs, to actively battle dis and misinformation.

Understanding the need to be aware of different cultures and utilising a human approach, has informed me in developing a human rights-based tool kit which can work in challenging the issues of dis and misinformation.



The initial sessions on development education, what it is, how it was formed and the theories that underpin its various forms was a really empowering experience. It helped me to place my own work and workshops into a wider sphere of theory and education that I was not aware of. Questioning what is meant when we say 'development' and

'progress' was a very thought-provoking conversation led by Bobby and Nick. Learning about the reticular activating system, was really fascinating too. Insights like that have helped me to deepen my understanding of critical, systems and design thinking and how they relate to our neurology. I found these discussions to be very grounding as well as being part of such a diverse group of advocates.

Underpinning all of this were Mog's gentle invitations to arrive to and leave each space with a conscious awareness

of our breaths and bodies. I think this subtle technique really allowed the group to be held by one another at a deeper energetic level even when we were meeting in an online format. This practise sang to me with an air of ceremony about it. I know that this mindful awareness of space, ceremony and communing together makes for healing, restorative spaces that allow for discussion to penetrate deeper into each person's spirit rather than it being an intellectual undertaking only. I found this so valuable and I could see a similar mindfulness in the work of Gareth and Karen of *Síolta Chroí*. To relate to a network of likeminded individuals in this way, without it being fluffy or uber-spiritual was really nourishing and motivating for me.

The theoretical knowledge that I gained in design thinking has been so helpful for me to put long term ideas I have had into practise. To empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test is a simple and effect way to bring an idea into action and understand the impact it has. As a social entrepreneur and educator, it is essential to be able to measure the impact of the work I am doing. Understanding the design thinking principles has helped me to get two clearly defined pilot programmes up and running in the past few months and I know it will continue to be a great resource from which to draw.

So often I have waited until something is 'perfect' to offer but being in this training with so many inspiring people really helped me build the confidence to try things, fail and then fail better on the road to success, it's the only way we can grow.

During the training it was so valuable and helpful to hear from the leaders and their experiences and insights. This made the practical action seem more attainable when we could connect and discuss ideas with others who are on the same SDG advocate path as those of us in the project, just a few steps ahead. Dialogue for the goals is essential and listening to everyone else's ideas, visions and struggles really helped to motivate me and transform my ideas into solid actions. So often I have waited until something is 'perfect' to offer but being in this project with so many inspiring people really helped me build the confidence to try things, fail and then fail better on the road to success, it's the only way we can grow.

Michelle Phillips – Reflections 2020

LANGUAGE

Language Language

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Definition: "The principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture"



Throughout the SDG Advocate Training, language and how it is used really got me thinking, it was a bit of a moment for me when we were learning about discourse and language with Nick. There were many occasions over the last year that I could not always fully understand what my peers were talking about, in essence I got the general idea but the language confused me. I then realised that every individual has their own special set of linguistic skill and tuning into that helps the listener to hear and to understand. I asked myself *"How can a person respond, if they do not understand"* I realised it was more and more important to learn to listen, *to listen*, rather than to listen to respond.

When we carried out the active listening this really was a challenge for the ear, mind and mouth. Over the last few years I have really seen the power of language and how it can be manipulated and misguided providing

Doing the SDG Advocate Training really helped me to understand the importance of words and language in a daily context.

misinformation proving that language is ever evolving and must be used wisely. Language has the power to make a person feel stupid, inferior and left out of the conversation or it can empower and raise up an individual. The idea of thinking before you speak comes to mind and is worthwhile

Doing the SDG Advocate Training really helped me to understand the importance of words and language in a daily context. I hope to be a better listener and help empower my audience when I get to carry out my action project, now that I have realised the positivity that language can give. The trainings awakened a strong curiosity in language and how it is used.

Karen Kelly – Reflections 2020



The SDG Advocate Training project enabled me to question my personal and professional context. It provided me with an opportunity to ask questions about what is important to me and what I feel passionately about. The project inspired me to change things in my life and encouraged me to apply for a Masters in international Development. This was something I had considered for a few years but work commitments abroad meant it had not been possible. I feel like the SDG Advocate Training project is just the start of the adventure, my hero's journey.

My favourite part of the project was meeting the other SDG Advocates. Their ideas and actions are truly inspiring and I have learned so much more about the SDGs and different projects in Ireland that cater for a broad audience of learners and participants. During lockdown and coronavirus, it was really positive to hear these stories and to see how much good work is being developed and achieved in communities throughout the country. I also enjoyed the theory from each of the exploratory phases to find out where my practice is situated. Alan Rogers claims that "*development practice is a continuous process concerned with change.*" As a starting point, my practice is continually changing and evolving as I learn from workshops I deliver and from courses I develop. As a practitioner and "developing person," (Brookfield) I endeavour to achieve Freire's "*awakening of critical consciousness*" that can lead toward emancipation. The SDG Advocate Training has made me more aware of critically evaluating my work to find out how I can improve my practice.

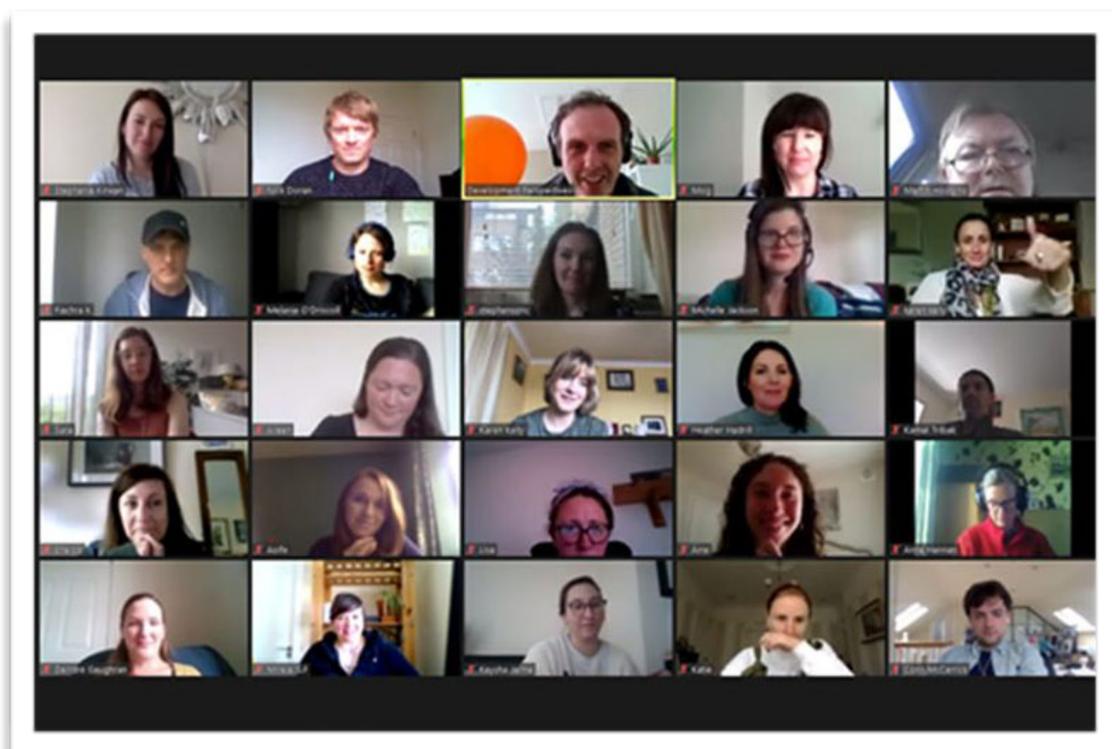
I feel like the SDG Advocate Training project is just the start of the adventure, my 'hero's journey.

In August 2020, I went on a tour with *Secret Street Tours*. It was perhaps a defining moment as part of the *SDG Advocate* project as it demonstrated the inequality in Irish society today. Shane spoke at length about the streets that were his home for many years and the hardship associated with homelessness in Dublin. The moment we turned down a side street in Smithfield toward the Capuchin Day Centre was heart-breaking. To see so many people queuing up for food parcels made me stop in my tracks. This experience reminded of the quote from Anais Nin that *"we don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."* I walk past Smithfield every day on my way to work and never saw this street before. It made me evaluate the world I live in and what I see or notice around me.

As an *SDG Advocate*, I focused on an action addressing *SDG 4 Quality Education "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"* given my professional context. Two years ago, I piloted an online education module titled 'Challenging Discrimination' with *QQI* youth learners. I developed a digital course and piloted it with a small number of students. This year, I focused on expanding and editing the course in line with the *SDGs* to introduce new concepts to youth learners and to provide a platform for youth learners to carry out a research project topic of their choosing around discrimination and inclusion.

My work practice last year involved working with a tech company to develop an introductory coding programme around the narrative of social innovation and climate action. Since September 2020, I facilitated two teacher training *CPD* (Continuing Professional Development) sessions to pilot the coding module in post-primary schools across Ireland. I am working on a number of projects right now, writing new courses around social innovation and the *SDGs* for different learner audiences.

I could not recommend the *SDG Advocate Training* project enough.



Saolta

*Empowerment for a better world through
Adult and Community Education.*

