

Fr Sheehy's GAA Club, Tipperary - bringing communities alive and strengthening relationships

Fr Sheehy's GAA club, in partnership with Siul Eile organise social gatherings that reconnect communities with each other and their locality through walking programs that combat isolation. In 2016 they coordinated over 80 walks around Clogheen and the surrounding areas, attended by over 350 individuals who between them walked almost 16,000km, all in their own locality. The walkers were of all ages ranging from 4 years to 77 years. The walks were suitable for most people as almost all walks were between 3 and 8km with everyone walking at their own pace.

One of their most successful walking programmes, Couch to Mountain Top, involved four walks a week for 12 weeks, where they explored the Knockmealdowns extensively and also part of the Galtees. One hundred and sixty locals participated in this program, who were amazed and surprised at all the trails on their doorstep. The positive social aspect of the walking was the biggest success and when the 12 week program finished the majority of walkers continued to meet up and go for their walks together. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to get out and meet their neighbours for a chat. Couch to Mountain Top brought neighbours together that would hardly ever get the opportunity to see each other and relationships strengthened naturally.

Following on from the Couch to Mountain Top program, Fr Sheehy's GAA and Siul Eile were accepted to be part of BNest social enterprise incubation program being held in University of Limerick. Future walking programmes planned in the Clogheen area for 2017 include Community Hall Crawl, Walk on the Wild Side, Nighttime Graveyard Tour and Cottage Industry Pitstops.

Some quotes from participants:

"A great way for all the local and neighbouring people to get fit and healthy together and also to get to know new people"

"The Galtee Mor climb was a sacred day, a fitting finale to a great Couch to Mountain Top program"

"Really enjoyed it, both socially and to get fit, very well organised"

"I found the walking programs one of the best things I ever got involved in"

"Since I started the walking programs in June, I have enjoyed every minute of it."

"Great to meet people and have the craic."

"I really enjoyed going to different venues each week. It was very well organised and a pleasure to be part of it."