

SHEP Nuacht

EDITION 62 | NEW YEAR 2026

THE NEWSLETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS, SERVICE-USERS, GROUP FACILITATORS, COUNSELLORS, ADVOCATES, VOLUNTEERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, STAFF AND FRIENDS OF SHEP.



Jemma Lee, Léargas, presenting Dolores McCashin with the 2025 Erasmus Plus Excellence in Teaching Award. The 2025 Theme was Citizenship Education. SHEP is the first Adult Education Organisation in Ireland to receive this award. Also included are Tatenda Zira, Breda Power, Sarah Harrington, Niamh Findley and Jim Sheehan.

Dear SHEP Friends,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2026 and on behalf of my colleagues on the Management Committee may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy new year. The last few months in Shep have been positive, busy and vibrant with so much happening right across the project but this has been tinged with sadness as we remember some of our dear friends from the Shep community who have sadly passed away. We remember George Wallace, long time trainer with Shep (see piece below), Stella Gallagher, a committed and loyal member of the Shep choir and Margaret Reid, also, a long-time trainer who died earlier in the year. May their kind and beautiful souls rest in peace.

As we start a new year we are filled with hope and excitement. We are all deeply grateful to the many people and organisations who make SHEP's work possible, including our funders, especially the HSE (South West); Cork ETB; and Irish Aid. We are also so appreciative of the on-going support of our dear friends Perrie and Sandy Massie. For the year ahead, our priorities include responding as best we can to emerging needs in the community, continuing to modernise the Project, and building capacity so that the Project will be strong and effective into the future.

Wishing each and every one of you peace in your hearts and every blessing for 2026.

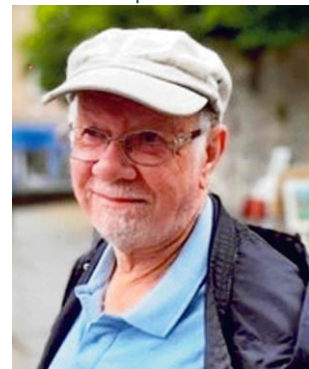
Dolores McCashin, Chairperson (SHEP)

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Memorial for George Wallace

We are all very saddened by the passing of George Wallace and we send our deepest condolences to Cora and all George's family and friends. He is greatly missed by his many colleagues and friends in SHEP. George was deeply involved with SHEP for many, many years and he made a big impact on the lives of many people through his facilitation work. To his work he brought passion, commitment, great skill and perhaps most of all a remarkable capacity to be real with people. People loved him for his insightfulness, incisiveness, good-heartedness and sincerity. He supported the SHEP work generously in many roles. A special gathering in to honour George and to acknowledge this huge contribution to the SHEP Project will take place on Friday, February 20th.



IMPORTANT NEWS

SHEP awarded important Erasmus Adult Education

SHEP has been awarded the Erasmus Plus Excellence in Teaching Award. We are the first Adult Education Organisation in Ireland to receive this award which acknowledges our commitment to inclusion, innovation and European connection.

Important Transitions – SHEP Advocacy Programme

A very significant milestone arrived in December for the SHEP Advocacy Programme with the retirement of Deirdre Lillis, after 16 years with the Project. Niamh Kelleher has also finished up with the Programme, as she now moves to a new role with Ballyhoura Development. Marge Lysaght will now increase her hours with the programme in her role as Programme Coordinator.

A Big Welcome to new Staff

We are delighted to welcome two new people to the staff team: Stefan Macovei has joined in the Information and Communications Technology role and Mary Ui Bhroin will work with Marge Lysaght on the Advocacy team as Advocacy Project Officer. Mary will have a key role in SHEP's new, advocacy work with HORIZONS (formerly COPE Foundation).



Deirdre Lillis being presented with some flowers from Niamh Kelleher, on behalf of her the SHEP Advocacy Programme, at a special gathering in SHEP in December. Also included are Fiona Devlin (who led the Advocacy programme for over ten years previously), Jessie Bowen (who has been involved for 17 years), Jim Sheehan and Marge Lysaght.

OTHER NEWS

The SHEP Advocacy Report on Decongregation (2025)

We were delighted to have a soft launch of this important SHEP report. This report documents seven years of independent advocacy by the SHEP Independent Advocacy Service (SIAS) supporting a group of women through the closure of a long-term institutional residence in Cork. Following a 2016 HIQA finding of serious non-compliance and financial irregularities, SIAS worked alongside the women to ensure their voices, rights, and choices were central to the decongregation process. Advocates built trust and addressed systemic issues including financial abuse, poor living conditions, and systemic challenges. The women developed a Charter of Rights and were empowered to self-advocate during their transition to community living, completed in December 2023. The report highlights the vital role of independent, adequately funded, advocacy plays in safeguarding rights and influencing cultural change. A formal launch of the document will take place at the Independent Advocacy Event in UCC in March.

Parent-Child Attachment Play for Parents and Carers

Building strong, nurturing relationships between parents and children is the cornerstone of healthy family dynamics. The Parent-Child Attachment Play (PCAP) programme is a wonderful initiative designed to empower parents and carers with tools to deepen their connection with their children. As an offering to support challenged parents in our community, our Coisceim Counselling Programme, with the generous support of TUSLA, piloted this 10 week programme to parents of children aged 5 to 12 years during October-December 2025. Led by two experienced play therapists, Elaine Breen and Donna Jordan, the aim of PCAP is to create a foundation for meaningful and lasting change in familial relationships through integrating reflective functioning, child-led play, and containment. The programme was a great success.

Mercy Fund

We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Mercy Solidarity Fund who once again have provided financial support to the SHEP training programme. This round of funding is supporting the delivery of two Reflective Practice programmes for Practitioners.



Jim Sheehan, at the Presentation of Awards Ceremony in Brussels in December, with Aoife Houlihan (Kinsale Community School) and Clodagh O’Gorman (Deansrath CC) who won the Secondary Schools and VET national prizes respectively. Also included (second from left) is Claire O’Neill, representing La Specia Adult Education Programme, which won the Italian (Adult Education) Award. The awards were presented by Commission Vice-President Rozana Minzatu.

SOME UPCOMING TRAINING

SHEP Certificate in Facilitation course Spring 2026

Closing date: 20th February 2026

Duration: 111 hours in length, taking place over 18 week-nights (Tuesdays) and 11 weekend days, between March-November 2026.

Application: The application form is available on the [SHEP Website](https://www.socialandhealth.com). Enquiries can also be emailed to Fern - fern.higginsatkinson@socialandhealth.com

SHEP Leadership for Living & Social Action (2026)

Extended Closing date: 2nd February 2026

Duration: 70 hours in length, taking place over 14 week-nights (Monday evenings) and 5 weekend days (Saturdays), between February- November 2026.

Application: The application form is available on the [SHEP Website](https://www.socialandhealth.com). Enquiries can also be emailed to: info@socialandhealth.com

SHEP Certificate in Continuing Personal Development 2026

Closing date: 21st January 2026

Duration: 25 weekly sessions (Wednesday nights) plus 6 weekend-days (non-residential) between February – November 2026.

Application: You can find further information about this course, the schedule and an application form on our website by visiting the [SHEP Website](https://www.socialandhealth.com). For enquiries please contact Jess Bowen, course coordinator, at jess.bowen@socialandhealth.com



Some of the members of the Our Ladies of the Apostle Community in Ardfoy, with LTI Coordinator, Larry Lynch, at an event in SHEP organised by the Horticulture LTI to mark the Harvest. The LTI project is fully funded by Cork Education and Training Board. The Ardfoy Grounds are a wonderful home for the Horticulture LTI.



The 2025 SHEP Tutor Training (Women's Well-being) Class, with Trainers Rose Crowley and Dolores McCashin, in December at the conclusion of their year-long programme.



The entire 2023-2024 Class who completed the UCC/SHEP Diploma in Social and Psychological Health Studies at the Conferring Event in Main Campus in November. SHEP personnel who were involved with this group included Mary Mangan, Brendan O'Brien, Aine Finn, Nuala McDonnell, Liam McCarthy, Sheila Kelleher, Celine Griffin and Jim Sheehan. Brendan O'Brien and Aine Finn have recently retired from the team and Norma O'Brien has joined. A big welcome also to Brid Gould who has stepped into the Course Co-Tutor role.



Some of the members of SHEP Facilitator Team in Kerry with Michelle Demougeot who is the SHEP Training and Development Officer with responsibility now for the SHEP Training Programme in Kerry. Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB) continues to be a champion and very important supporter of the SHEP work in Kerry.

SHEP CHOIR



The SHEP Community Choir continues to go from strength to strength and is an important part of the life of the SHEP Community. A large number of new people have recently applied to join for the Spring 2026 Choir Sessions: the choir is now closed for new applications. The Spring choir normally meets at the Ursulines School, in Blackrock, but the venue up until Easter will be Gaelscoil Ui Riada, Cardinal Way, Bishopstown T12 D596. If you want to know more about the SHEP choir please contact Jess Bowen at jess.bowen@socialandhealth.com



Robert O'Herlihy, presented with a gift from the SHEP Management Committee to mark his finishing up with SHEP, pictured here with Liam McCarthy, STDO. Robert was instrumental in leading SHEP's efforts since 2020 to modernise systems in the Project.



Eilish Lee, who was thanked for her contribution to the SHEP Programme over the last number of years, pictured with former staff members Justyna Jegier and Aleksandra Rogulska at a special Christmas gathering at SHEP Ardfoyle.



Full-time SHEP students on the Ardfoyle Horticulture LTI programme (2025-2026) with Assistant Coordinator, Nollaig McMahon, and four visiting teachers from our Erasmus Partner, CPEPA Miguel Hernandez, based in Huesca, Spain. SHEP and CPEPA Miguel Hernandez will collaborate on an Adult Learner Exchange to take place in April & June 2026.

New Year Blessing

*May the year ahead
hold you gently
when the road feels heavy.*

*May light find you
even on ordinary days,
and colour return
where life feels grey.*

*May you be guided
by quiet courage,
held by unseen kindness,
and brought home again and again
to what is true in you.*

International Learning Partnership

The new three-year programme (funded by Irish Aid) has recently begun. Abigail visited the Project in November. We will soon establish a new Management Committee Sub-Group to support our governance of the international partnership work. We welcome Nick Chisholm to the SHEP Management Committee to help with this important work. We are also delighted that SHEP and Sahakarmi Samaj will make a presentation on our work together at the International Conference of Community Development which will take place in Glasgow in June.

Artificial Intelligence

SHEP's 'Generative Dialogue' Group is now supporting the Project to consider how the Project should approach Artificial Intelligence. It is a complex and sensitive subject but one which SHEP, like all education organisations, needs to engage with careful discernment. A SHEP 'Touchstone' CPD workshop on the subject will take place on Monday, 19th January.

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