



# South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd

**RSS Supervisors**  
Breda Keating  
David Neill  
Paddy Casey  
Thomas Fitzgerald

**TUS Supervisor**  
Conchubhair Lyne

**Cahirciveen**  
T. 087 659 3389  
T. 087 968 1520  
T. 087 136 0238  
T. 087 641 0634  
T. 087 260 1140

E. bkeating@skdp.net  
E. doneill@skdp.net  
E. pcasey@skdp.net  
E. tfitzpatrick@skdp.net  
E. clyne@skdp.net



Emmett Curran, Jason O'Leary, Pat O'Driscoll member SKDP Board, Paul Tarrant, Brian Morgan Chairman Lighthouse Committee, Paul Duff, Patsy McDonagh, Conchubhair Lyne Tus Supervisor, John Moran, Fionan Murphy Valentia Development group and Vincent Curran at the Valentia Island Lighthouse project.

# Huge tourism potential at Valentia Lighthouse

FOR the last three years, Valentia Lighthouse has operated as a heritage site and tourist attraction. The community leased the building from the Commissioners of Irish Lights who continue to operate it as a coastal light.

"Last year, we had between six and a half and seven thousand visitors," said Brian Morgan, Chairperson of the Lighthouse Committee, a subdivision of Valentia Island Development Committee, a larger group that was formed to create employment opportunities on the island.

Valentia Lighthouse has huge potential as a tourism hotspot and its development is being fostered by the involvement of TUS and RSS participants who fulfill several functions there.

"Without these schemes the lighthouse wouldn't be possible. They provide us with our tour guides," Brian said. "We train up to six people from the schemes and they stay with us all summer." Eventually, the Lighthouse Committee would like to be in a position where they can afford to take someone on full time. In the meantime, being able to rely on the schemes for their staffing needs is hugely welcome. "They enable us to keep the gates open. We'd be lost without them," said Brian.

As well as providing suitable candidates for the role of tour guide, the schemes also helped with renovations to the Valentia Lighthouse building as preparations were being made to open it to the public.

"We've been able to call on scheme people, as and when required, to help with maintenance jobs. We've also received great support from our sponsors who have been instrumental in making Valentia Lighthouse a going concern and we'd like to thank Iveragh Broadband, Quirke Builders Providers, Sandtex Paints and Crown Paints Ireland," said Brian.

"If we didn't have the scheme, we couldn't afford to pay staff to run the lighthouse," Brian added. "In our experience, those that come to us are passionate about the job because they can see a return for their efforts."



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# Cahirciveen Festival of Music and the Arts

THE August bank holiday weekend is a special weekend in Cahirciveen as the town comes alive for its annual 'Festival of Music and the Arts.' Now in its 20th year, this three-day extravaganza of arts and entertainment attracts thousands of people to the area and has come to represent a very important event in the seasonal calendar.

This year the festival takes place from Friday, 31st July – Sunday, 2nd August and if its success in recent years is anything to go by, then the town has a lot to look forward to.

Each night of the festival a major musical will take to the main outdoor stage and this year, country music darling Derek Ryan will be performing, as well as The Original Rudeboys and Hells Bells who, according to Hugh, "are the biggest tribute band in Europe to 70s rock band, ACDC.

A second outdoor stage is also needed for all of the musical acts, competitions and dancing that will take place over this fun-filled weekend. "The lads from the RSS scheme are responsible for this stage," Hugh said. "They are completely in charge of putting it up and taking it down. They help us in many other ways as well, including putting up big 10 x 4 foot signs around the town to promote the festival, upgrading equipment and painting."

The work that the scheme participants do to prepare for and manage the festival is vitally important to its success. "We,



One GEIS group Isault Ring, Emma O'Shea, Gemma Musgrave and Sarah O'Connell from Cahirciveen participating in the Senior Busking at the Cahersiveen Festival of Music.

the volunteers, used to do everything ourselves but we were just inundated with the amount of work and people were getting burnt out. The scheme lads do a pile for us now," said Hugh.

The festival has not only become a highly anticipated weekend of great fun, it has also become one of the town's most important money makers. "It's a massive bonus for the town. Unofficial figures showed that last year, the town took in around €2.5 million euro. The festival is a lifeline for our local businesses and they fully support our efforts."

The Cahirciveen Festival of Music and the Arts has availed of the skills of RSS

participants for the last five years and the committee knows that they can rely on them to do a good job. On concert nights the town has seen more than 4,000 people attend the three main concerts. To accommodate such a crowd, there is no parking on Main Street because barriers are erected on each end and mobile huts installed where people can pay for admission. The RSS lads upgrade and paint these huts, they collect and install the crowd control barriers and over the course of the weekend, they make sure the town is kept clean and unobstructed. Hugh said, "without a doubt, those lads are an integral part of running the festival."



Mannix Point International Music group participating in the Senior Busking at the Cahersiveen Festival of Music and Arts in Cahersiveen.

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Gerard Fitzgerald, Steve Lynott, Concubhair Lyne, Dessie Cronin, Michael Lehane, Joseph Keating, David Walsh, Brendan Corkery, Tim Kirby, Damien O'Driscoll, Paddy Casey and Declan Kirby of the Ballinskelligs Inshore Rescue.

## Ballinskelligs Inshore Rescue

BALLINSKELLIGS Inshore Rescue is a not-for-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers. Established in 2006 it was the local community who initiated the purchase of a community rescue boat and its supporting facilities to provide search and rescue services in an area that covers Ballinskelligs Bay, St. Finians Bay and the Skelligs. The inshore rescue service is part of Community Rescue Boats Ireland, a collective of independent, voluntary rescue boats which is administered by Irish Water Safety and overseen by the Irish Coast Guard.

"We bought the boat in 2008 – a seven metre long rig - and in that same year, we built a purpose-built shed for it," said Brendan Corkery, Treasurer of Ballinskelligs Inshore Rescue committee, who explained that doing so was possible in large part due to generous donations from local people.

Ballinskelligs Inshore Rescue have availed of both the RSS and TUS schemes and have found them an integral element in the provision of a reliable and effective rescue service.

Their first involvement with the RSS scheme was around 2011 when the government first began to roll it out. They were lucky enough to be assigned an RSS worker for regular maintenance work on the boathouse and rescue boat equipment.

"Good maintenance of the boat and trailer is especially important in a harsh, salt water environment," Brendan explained. "Painting and greasing the launch trailer, looking after the wheel barings and cleaning the boat are all important tasks.

There is also a maintenance workload in maintaining life jackets and flares – they have to be kept up to date on a regular basis."

In a volunteer organisation such as an inshore rescue unit, it is very important to understand the amount of time that volunteers give up to make it work.

Crew members give up their own time to go on mandatory training courses, to be on call and to be part of rescue missions. "You'd be asking a lot of your voluntary crew to do all this in addition to maintaining the boat and equipment, so we really welcome the help of these scheme workers," Brendan said. "The TUS and RSS schemes work very well together – there is no conflict."

Due to insurance reasons, scheme workers do not go out on the water as part of the crew, but outside of their RSS hours, many of them double up as volunteer crew members in their own time.

"The participants in the schemes are usually local and have the skills we need. They are committed to the organisation and understand what we're all about," said Brendan.

## The Kerry Way

THE Kerry Way is one of Ireland's most popular and scenic walking trails. "It is the walkers' equivalent of the Ring of Kerry motoring route," said Sean O Suilleabhain, Chairperson of the Kerry Way committee. "The main circuit is about 180 kilometers and if you take into account the spurs that branch off it, all told it's about 260 kilometres. We call it a walk through history."

It was Sean who first dreamed up the idea to take the old roads and redevelop them into a trail that was not only a piece of history in itself, but also cut a path through the various historic tales of the surrounding area.

The Kerry Way project was initially started by an enthusiastic group of walkers, led by a dedicated committee. "It was put in place through community effort and with the help of landowners themselves who granted access through their property for the walkways," Sean said.

The first section of the Kerry Way opened in 1985 and for many years, it fell on the shoulders of volunteers and committee members to try to maintain it. When the RSS scheme launched in 2004, the committee was relieved to find that they qualified to avail of such a valuable resource.

"The RSS is very important. It's the saviour of the Kerry Way. If the route wasn't kept up to nick, it would fail and sections would have to be closed off," said Sean.

With the RSS participants on hand to do all manner of maintenance work, the committee knows that the route will always meet the standards set by the Irish Sports Council.

"For all these routes, there's an annual inspection by the Irish Sports Council's National Trails Office. Also, Kerry County Council extended its insurance to cover landowners on the Kerry Way, so there have to be regular inspections," Sean said.

The RSS scheme carried out all of the maintenance on the Kerry Way up until the introduction of the Walks Scheme in 2009. Landowners who joined the Walk Scheme maintain the section of walk that crosses through their land, while the RSS scheme maintains those sections where the landowner is not part of the Walks

Scheme. They also carry out any reroutes.

Sean also said that the RSS scheme was put in place, not only for the community to benefit from the particular skills of the participants but also for all involved to enjoy a social benefit.

"The RSS participants have a great work ethic. They are very enthusiastic workers, but the social angle is very important as well." Alot of times, they help the elderly by doing jobs around their homes. They paint the house, cut the grass, mend fences or wash windows, depending on what is required of them. "The RSS is also about getting people in isolated areas out and meeting each other," Sean said.



Tom Fitzgerald Supervisor, Una Clinton O'Neill, Thomas O'Sullivan and Pat O'Connor on the Kerry Way Dromid.



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## Cahirsiveen Parish Graveyards

IN Cahirsiveen, there are four graveyards and up until a few years ago, they were all in a bad state of disrepair. "They were overgrown with nettles and very run down," said Gerard Sugrue who was one of a few concerned locals who set up a small committee to address the issue. "We've done tremendous work in the graveyards since – sustaining paths, putting down kerbing, painting and putting up new gates."

What has been the reaction to the work in the graveyards? "Local people are very pleased. And the local undertakers are also very pleased!" said Gerard. "Before, they would have has to cut back bushes and cut the grass just to get to grave sites."

As well as being a founding committee member, Gerard is also a participant on the RSS scheme which provides the manpower for the regular upkeep of all four graveyards.

Gerard is delighted to be part of the RSS team. "I'm a small farmer and it's an added income for me. I live on my own and it's great to meet people and the workers. It's good for a person to get up and out."

The RSS team does not confine its efforts to Cahirsiveen. "We also travel to graveyards in Valentia and Portmagee," Gerard said. However, the work of the RSS team is not limited to maintaining the graveyards, important and all as that may be.

"We also visit older people in the community," Gerard said. "We paint houses, wash windows and trim hedges. We always wear our RSS/SKDP jackets so people can identify us straight away.

"Our elderly neighbours know that there will be no strangers coming to the house – we're all locals. "We know who we're going to and they know who's coming to visit them. The RSS is very effective in South Kerry," he said.

Being a part of the RSS scheme is a year-round job that requires participants to work 19.5 hours a week. A major advantage of the scheme is the degree of flexibility that the role offers, both to the participant and to the community groups or individuals whom they serve. "We go where and when we're needed," Gerard said and explained that this also allows the participants, who are all either small farmers or fishermen, to take care of their own business as well.

Having a flexible arrangement also means that the workers are not confined to one particular project so they may spend their hours working across various different jobs. "The RSS scheme done tremendous work," he said.

"We would like to thank our RSS supervisors for always meeting with the committee, for getting the work done and keeping things in tip top shape.

And a big thank you is also due to Kerry County Council for all their support, especially Bernard and Deirdre in Cahirsiveen and Peter Bradley."



Thomas O'Shea, David O'Neill, Donal O'Sullivan SKDP Board member and Gerard Sugrue at the Parish Graveyard, Cahersiveen.



Gerard Sugrue and Thomas O'Shea at the Parish Graveyard, Cahersiveen.

TO SUPERVISOR  
BRED, MICHAEL AND PATRICK,  
VERY MANY THANKS  
FOR YOUR DEDICATION AND  
WORK ETHIC IN CRACOW PARK  
AND SENSORY GARDEN,  
KNIGHTSTOWN VALENTIA ISLAND

Best Wishes to  
the South Kerry Development Partnership from

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# Tigh an Oileain assisted living facility

TIGH an Oileain is an assisted living facility that opened on Valentia Island in 2003. It caters for those who live with a learning disability and houses a total of six residents - five men and one woman - all over the age of forty.

The residence is under the auspices of the Kerry Parents and Friends Association, which was fully supportive when Rosaleen O'Connell first came up with the idea of

building such a facility on the island. Over the years, her son, Diarmuid, who has a learning disability, had been schooled in Beaufort and Killarney and Rosaleen was eager to have him live closer to home. "It's better if the family is not too far away," she said, "and the Kerry Parents and Friends Association were glad to accommodate us."

As well as serving families from Valentia, local people from Portmagee, Cahirsiveen and Cahirdaniel also have family members living in Tigh an Oileain and enjoy having them close by.

Rosaleen serves on the committee and said that they are very grateful for the generous support of so many. "We were very lucky that there was such a widespread group of people in the locality, including those involved in golf and football, to help us raise funds to establish Tigh an Oileain. We even received donations from the USA, the UK and other counties in Ireland."

Although this beautifully situated centre has full- and part-time permanent staff, it has benefited greatly from its involvement with the RSS scheme. "We've had RSS participants here for some time, and I have to say that they are second to none. Every single one of them has been exemplary," Rosaleen said.

The residents at Tigh an Oileain are at various levels of learning, but Rosaleen said that the RSS team treat them as equals, spending their time helping them with their day-to-day jobs and activities. "The RSS people come in alongside the residents, rather than above them," she said. "They treat them as friends."

There is plenty of work to do outside at Tigh an Oileain, which is situated on two acres of donated land: sowing, weeding and harvesting the fruit and vegetable garden that supplies the residents with homegrown produce; growing flowers for the Tidy Town; looking after the chickens and ducks and minding the residents' collection of beautiful doves. And then there is all the repair and maintenance work of the buildings and grounds that needs to be done to make it feel like home. Not only do the RSS workers have the skills to tend to all these tasks, they also interact with the residents on a one-to-one basis and train them to be self-sufficient.

"We're very lucky with the RSS people that the scheme supervisors pick," said Rosaleen. "Whoever selects them for us has a gift in hand and any time we have dealt with RSS officials, they have been very courteous, very practical and very professional. I hope the RSS scheme continues and that it gets the respect it deserves. Having them around makes it safe for the residents at Tigh an Oileain because they are surrounded by people who care."



Brendan Keating, Patrick O'Sullivan, Diarmuid O'Connell, John James Casey, Tigh an Oileain.

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