

voice

VOICE OF IRISH CONCERN
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



End of Year Newsletter 2023

OUR PROJECTS

National Recycling Bin Survey
School Waste Management Videos

Community Circular Economy Action Plans

EPA Funded Research Project

OUR CAMPAIGNS

Threads of Transparency

Ban Disposable Vapes

Picker Pals Programme

Return for Change

Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme

No Plastic. Period.

POLICY WORK AND REPORTS

Policy Work

Reports and 2023 Achievement

WORKING WITH BUSINESSES

Waste Audits & Lunch & Learns

WITH THANKS

To our members, volunteers and sponsors

Happy New Year message from the Team

2023 IN NUMBERS

12m+

VOICE's reach
through Irish and
UK media channels

1,359

Irish classrooms
signed up to
Picker Pals

10,029

Waste items
counted in our
National Survey

27

Corporate
Waste
Audits

3,134

people signed our
petition to ban
disposable vapes

7

Press
Releases



A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE TAD KIRAKOWSKI

Welcome to the annual VOICE newsletter. 2023, has been a very busy one for VOICE on the projects and policy front, but we also saw big changes internally. Mindy O'Brien retired as coordinator in May, and I stepped into those rather big shoes. I'm extremely proud and privileged to be in this position leading an Organisation that is making real change in the world.

This year saw the announcement of the DRS, a campaign VOICE has been working on for nearly 12 years. This is a huge change in how we manage material in this country for the better, however we want to continue in this work and move up the waste hierarchy from waste to prevention, through re-use and repair. You'll see how we are pushing to catalyse this change through the policy work we are doing with our partners in Europe on packaging waste. This year also saw a huge success in the ban on disposable vapes campaign which brought together voices from health, community, and environment to bring about a rapid change in the sale of these products. This year, we introduced a new campaign (Threads of Transparency) and successfully wrapped up a valuable project (Recycling Bin Survey), achieving such success that we plan to run it again next year.

This summer we repainted the office and in the process we came across some of the older campaigns that VOICE has run such as 'don't burn your rubbish in the backyard' from 1998, giving hope in how far we've come, but statistics on rising waste generation published this year pointing to greater challenges ahead.

Globally, Ireland submitted its voluntary national review on progress for the SDGs this summer with particular shortcomings on SDG12 responsible consumption and production; with 6 short years to the 2030 targets. In 2024 the global plastics treaty will be negotiated, which could be a landmark in how we manage waste internationally, while the COP summit in Abu Dhabi this November/December will continue to shape the global response to the climate crisis. What and how we consume impacts the environment, health and society across the globe as well as a driver for much of our emissions.

VOICE has, over its 26 years, been consistently creating change to drive wiser use of our resources. Sometimes the changes are quick and easy to spot, like the Disposable Vapes campaign, sometimes they are years of campaigning, and working like the DRS, and sometimes they are a quieter behavioural shift – easier to spot in retrospect than in the moment. What has enabled us to consistently call for a better environment, and enable us to continue making the changes we need to make into the future, is you, our supporters, and the fantastic, dedicated team we have here in VOICE. So thank you all for your support in 2023, and I look forward to continuing to work for a better world with you in 2024.



A LETTER FROM OUR EX-CHIEF EXECUTIVE MINDY O'BRIEN

Dear Friends,

After 11 years at the helm of VOICE in 2023 (and 14 before that as a volunteer and board member) I decided the time was right to step down. During that time, VOICE grew from an office of 2 part time staff, to a team of 10 and the ambition and scale of the projects we undertook grew with it. We saw the implementation of the Single Use Plastics Directive and the Circular Economy Act, VOICE grew national campaigns such as Sick Of Plastic and community events like 'Feeding the 5000'. The work has been hectic, busy, but fun. Looking ahead we need to continue to drive the change in the way we engage with materials if we are to have a truly circular economy, and that calls for ambitious reuse targets and a real shift in how we engage with all the material we now waste.

After a competitive interview process I was delighted to announce that Tad was appointed to the position of CEO for VOICE. Tad and I have worked together for a number of years and I believe his passion, and the fantastic team in VOICE, will lead the organisation into the future continuing to strive for a zero waste world.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mindy O'Brien".



At Mindy's Retirement Party in May



Stephen Byrne
Project Leader



Lyndsey O'Connell
Project Manager

'LIFTING THE LID' REPORT & 'THE NATIONAL RECYCLING BIN SURVEY'

Sick of Plastic Campaign
[@sickofplasticireland](https://twitter.com/sickofplasticireland)

The Dirty Truth about our Recycling Bins. This summer, Stephen Byrne ran a national survey, to find out what is in our recycling bins as part of our Sick Of Plastic Campaign.

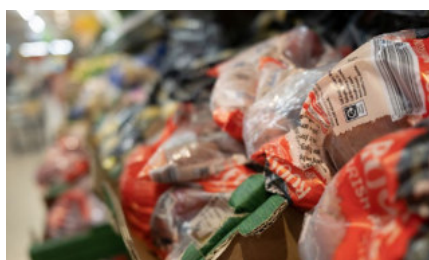
Up and down the country volunteers pulled up their sleeves and emptied out their bins, counting the amount and type of waste materials in their recycling bins.



Ireland is awash with plastic and unnecessary packaging. If your bathroom was flooding, you'd turn off the tap. So where is it all this packaging waste coming from? We had a good idea, but wanted to find out for sure.

The problem:

- According to the EPA we are producing a staggering 62 kilograms of plastic packaging waste per person per year.
- The people of Ireland have earned the unfortunate distinction of being the European Union's leading producer of plastic packaging waste per capita.
- In Ireland, 72% of plastic is incinerated, leading to a significant increase in our carbon emissions and undermining the argument that recycling is the solution.



Global plastic production is an environmental nightmare, emitting a colossal 50 million tonnes of greenhouse gases annually. Shockingly, half of all plastic produced is single-use, boasting a lifespan of just 12 minutes.

We decided to trace plastic and packaging waste back to its source. Over the summer we worked with volunteers across Ireland, who rolled up their sleeves and spilled their bins. The survey recruited **130 participants in 49 households across 13 Irish counties, analysing a total of 10,029 waste items.**

The results unquestionably highlight that our supermarkets are the primary culprits behind our packaging crisis.

We found:

- That a staggering 66% of an average recycling bin's contents originated from supermarkets, laying bare the role these giants play in our plastic predicament
- A whopping 40% of the items in an average recycling bin were supermarket plastic, highlighting the ubiquity of this packaging in our daily lives.
- A staggering 98% of participants voiced their frustration regarding the excessive waste entering their households, making it evident that the



responsibility should lie with the source of packaging waste rather than the consumer.

"I can't believe how much plastic I use - and I try to be good." Jennifer, Dublin

The solution is clear

Ireland has to introduce legislation to make supermarkets Reduce and Reuse. VOICE has made several key recommendations in our report to both retailers and the government on setting mandatory reuse and refill targets. It is only by setting mandatory targets that we will see real change. When left to self-regulate, supermarkets and retailers have shown that they only address plastic and packaging concerns in a piecemeal fashion. Supermarkets and retailers must acknowledge their pivotal role in Ireland's plastic crisis.

886,581 Media reach with this campaign Including The Independent Newspaper, Newstalk's The Hard Shoulder, The Irish Sun





Lyndsey O'Connell

Project Manager and
Director of Comms



SCHOOL WASTE VIDEOS

@schoolwastesorted

VOICE proudly took centre stage in a momentous collaboration, where we were invited by the four Dublin Local Authorities to create and develop a revolutionary initiative in School Waste Management!

In this fantastic partnership, VOICE merged its expertise with the distinguished Dublin local authorities - Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Together, we embarked on a visionary project that aimed to elevate school waste management.

Introducing the 'Sorted - How to Rock School Waste Management' video guides. These weren't your run-of-the-mill instructional videos; they were vibrant, student-led masterpieces propelling schools toward an era of cleaner, greener practices.

Picture this: Primary and Secondary schools grappling with a myriad of waste challenges, from lunch remnants to outdated textbooks. It was akin to a complex puzzle awaiting a solution, and our videos emerged as the golden keys. We didn't just provide efficiency; we crafted a strategy that makes waste management both effective and eco-friendly.

The benefits for schools? Reduced waste bills, immaculate school environments, a healthier ecosystem, and unwavering compliance with waste management regulations. Schools now have the potential to stand as beacons, demonstrating to students the art of leading a sustainable life from an early age.

These videos serve as a source of empowerment for the young environmental champions, guiding staff members eager to lead recycling revolutions in schools and easing the burden on cleaning teams by effortlessly disposing of waste. They are weapons



for pupil-led Green-Schools committees, ready to usher in transformative changes.

The best part?! These videos are free and available in both Irish and English! What are you waiting for? Join us in spreading the word! Like and share these transformative videos with anyone connected to the Irish School System [Watch Here \(or go to https://www.youtube.com/@schoolwastesorted\)](https://www.youtube.com/@schoolwastesorted)

A heartfelt thank you to the EAOs in the four Dublin local authorities for entrusting us with this pivotal project. We applaud their foresight in recognising the impact VOICE could bring to this crucial initiative.



The project team (left to right); Sinéad Fox (Fingal County Council), Lyndsey O'Connell (VOICE Ireland), Niamh Moran (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council), Martha Casserly (Dublin City Council) and Fionnaghula Ryan (South Dublin County Council).





Tad Kirakowski
Chief Executive of VOICE

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IRELAND & VOICE

Community Circular Economy Action Plans

This year we also worked with Community Foundation for Ireland to develop a new programme, the community Circular economy action plans.

The programme has two parts, an online educational section followed by a directly funded plan, with communities receiving financial support from CFI to develop their own plan and projects.

We wanted to make sure that the online educational piece was not only informative, but inspiring. So my favourite part of the year this year has been going around the countryside talking to and filming some of the amazing projects and communities who are already taking circular economy actions, from community cups in Clare, Toy libraries in Dublin to community gardens in Cork City centre.

CFI then made funding available to communities who took part and we are about to launch into the work of supporting them to identify and make the changes they want to see in their communities.

This work builds on the community outreach VOICE has long been known for, from the recycling ambassador programme, zero waste communities, and the SECAD sustainable communities projects.

We can't wait for the plans to be developed and see the actions spring up across the country, and for those actions to feed off and inspire even more and further actions.





Abi O'Callaghan-Platt
Policy Director and Project Lead



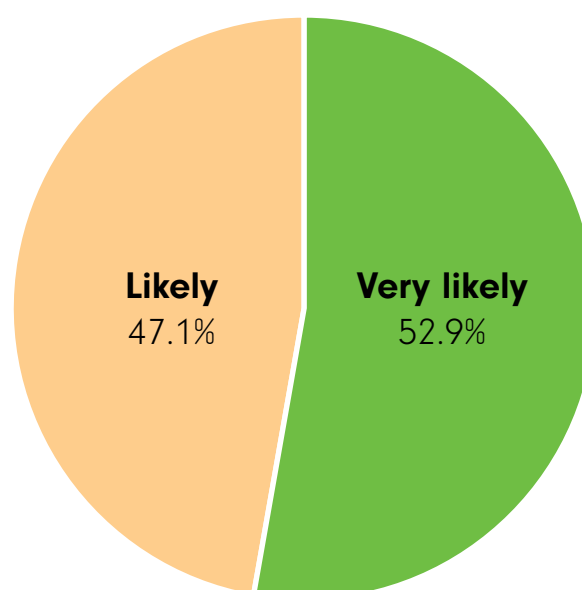
EPA FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECT

In 2023 we completed our EPA-funded research project entitled Reuse Education and Awareness for Sanitary Products: Developing strategies for promoting reusable nappies, and wipes. We developed two new programmes from this research; The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme and No Plastic. Period.

The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme offers new parents a voucher for the purchase of a reusable nappy and wipes starter bundle. 109 families were provided with starter bundles as part of the research project, which contained enough nappies to use reusables 50% of the time. The scheme succeeded in achieving the aim of increasing the use of reusable nappies, with 72% of participants using cloth nappies at the time of the survey and a further 24% intending to use them once their baby is big enough. Only 4% tried the reusable nappies provided and selected not to continue. 53% of respondents to the survey stated that they are very likely to continue using cloth nappies and 47% likely to continue.

The No Plastic. Period. Programme combines an educational workshop held in secondary schools to raise awareness of reusable alternatives to single-use disposable menstrual items with the provision of reusable menstrual items. 22 workshops were delivered, and 550 young people took part in the workshops. The percentage of young people attending the workshops that opted to take a reusable menstrual item is 56%. Overall, 22% of the workshop attendees tried the reusable

How Likely are you to continue using reusable nappies?



Abi with deputy principal O'Brien in a school in West Cork

menstrual item and 11% of all attendees at the No Plastic. Period. workshops plan to continue to use reusable menstrual items in the future and a further 7% may continue to use them.

The research report will be published in 2024 by the EPA and a short video summarising the key findings from the research, along with policy recommendations and recommendations for future research will be released.





Solene Schirrer
Campaign Lead



UNRAVELLING IRELAND'S TEXTILE CHALLENGE

This year, we have set for ourselves the challenging yet stimulating goal of entering a new waste arena that desperately needs addressing: the fashion and textile industry.

This industry, especially in the past decade, has rightfully earned its reputation as one of the most environmentally damaging (without mentioning the social impacts). The rise of fast fashion and unethical business practices has fuelled overproduction and overconsumption to levels never encountered before.

Ireland has a textile problem! The information is out there yet few people grasp or understand the connection between their own consumption choices and the far-reaching impacts of this global and harmful industry.

That's why we have set up a new campaign [Threads of Transparency!](#)

We want to shed light on the existing information on the Irish post-consumer textile sector (everything that happens once textiles are discarded). This campaign is built on two essential pillars: awareness and policymaking.

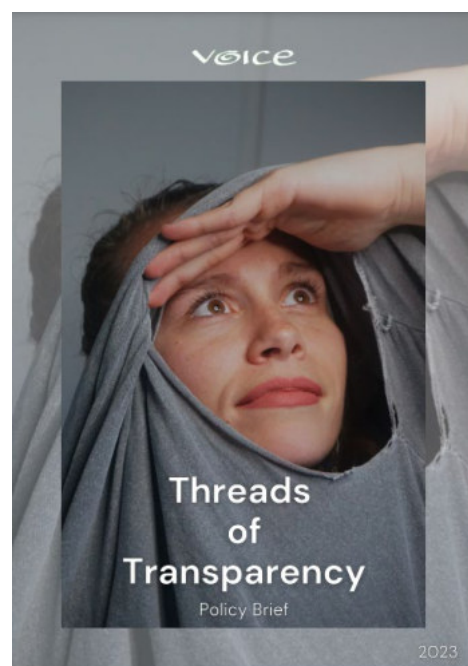
In the awareness phase, our goal is to make complex information about the sector accessible and clear. Simultaneously, we advocate for much-needed regulations in the sector on a national basis and for enhanced transparency for all stakeholders.

For this purpose, we have written a comprehensive [position paper](#) that outlines our understanding of the situation, identifies gaps in legislation, and recaps our recommendations for the sector. We hope for this paper to serve as a resource in the upcoming discussions between stakeholders. VOICE sits on the government's Textile Advisory Waste Group and will be advocating change relative to our policy position.

Additionally, it's worth noting that we've been actively engaged at the European level to ensure that our recommendations align with ongoing efforts within the EU. As we unravel the complex threads of Ireland's textile challenges, we are committed to making a significant impact both nationally and across the European continent.

Threads of Transparency was launched earlier in November, and we have high hopes that it will serve as a catalyst for more impactful work in the textile and fashion industry. The environmental and societal impacts of this industry demand immediate attention and mitigation.

If you would like to get involved in this campaign, please email solene@voiceireland.org



Cover page of Campaigns Policy Position Paper



Our Campaign will influence policy on textile waste



Lyndsey O'Connell
Project Leader

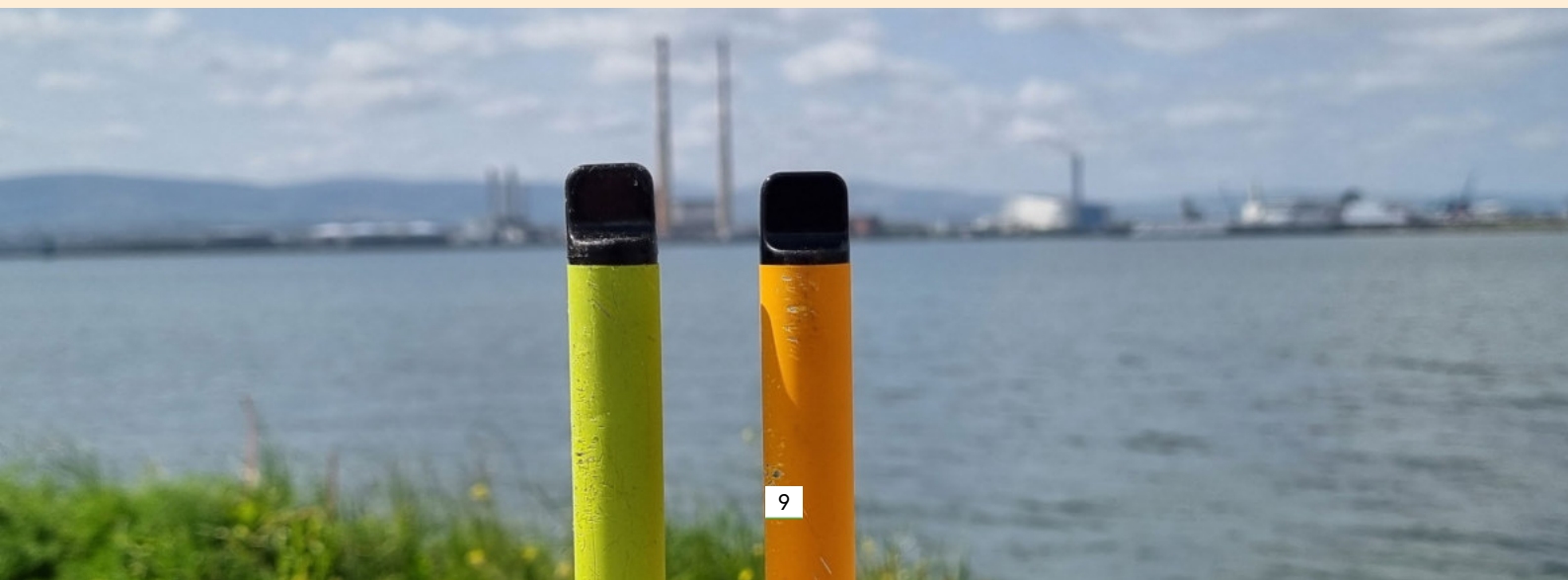
BAN DISPOSABLE VAPES

Prompted by the dual threat of disposable vapes to the environment and public health, we came together with leading health and environmental experts to call upon the Irish Government to [Ban Disposable Vapes](#).

Although disposable vapes are a relatively new product, they have quickly become a top-littered item on our fields/beaches. Laden with plastic and toxic chemicals, they are an environmental hazard. Our campaign addressed the associated risks, including harmful recycling complexities and a concerning rise in youth consumption.

- Petition 3,134 Signatures
- Open letter to Gov signed by leading health and environmental experts
- Public Consultation Opened by Minister Ossian Smyth
- 8.8 million People reached through our media campaign

Minister of State Ossian Smyth's commitment to banning disposable vapes marks a pinnacle of success. While the Minister was already dedicated, our campaign significantly shaped public opinion, contributing to widespread support for the ban.





Angela Kenny
Programme Manager



Gary Jones
Programme Administrator

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

– Nelson Mandela



We all know how much children love stories, so what if your child's favourite story was about a group of litter-picking creatures living on the magical flying island of Pickeropolis?

If this is the case, then your child may well be one of the 70,000 children who have taken part in the Picker Pals Programme over the last 4 years!

[Picker Pals](#) is on a mission to make the world better by encouraging young children to go on litter-picking adventures with their families and to tell us all about it!

Storytelling is a central theme of our programme, as the children learn to identify with our Picker Pals characters as they embark on their intrepid adventures to clean up the planet. Children follow these stories in the age-appropriate readers and fun-books included in the Picker Pack that is delivered directly to their classroom, in addition to encountering them on our YouTube “TV Show”, Picker Pals TV.

Picker Pals also provide resources to support teachers as they help their students to develop key scientific and geographical investigative skills. Our new series of educational resources covers a wide range of important environmental topics, (incl: Litter, Reduction, Reuse, Recycling,

Biodiversity, The SDG's, Making a Difference, Plastic & Love Your Place). All of these will be available to download for free in both English and as Gaeilge from the Picker Pals website, www.pickerpalsworld.org.

We counterbalance the storytelling and classroom-based elements of the programme with the practical hands-on learning that's gained when every child gets their chance to take the custom-made “Picker Pack” home, so they can lead their family on a litter-picking adventure in their local area.

Afterwards, they report back to their class and talk about their achievement, which teachers have told us helps to create a virtuous circle of healthy attitudes and behavioural change in participating schools, families and communities.

So, what have we achieved so far? In 2023 alone we had over 30,000 children taking part in regular litter-picking adventures. Every weekend, thousands of children and their families were out and about getting to grips with litter in parks, streets, beaches, playgrounds and estates all over Ireland. In total they picked up over 150 tonnes of litter - that's about the weight of a blue whale!

Why the Picker Pals programme is so popular and why everyone loves it so much.....

- Children have a deep appreciation for nature and instinctively know that it's wrong to harm our natural environment, so giving them the opportunity to be helpful in a real practical way is very empowering for them.
- Education and awareness delivered at an early age has a real impact on behaviour. Picker Pals teachers have seen a real difference in their class's attitudes towards litter and waste as a result of the programme.

- Parents have noticed that their children are bringing this positivity and respect for the environment home with them, requesting more environmentally friendly choices be made by the whole family.

- Kids love getting out and about, especially if they are the leaders of the expedition. We are after all descended from hunter gatherers and litter-picking taps into our primal desires to seek, find, collect and make an impact - in this case a very positive one.

- We all love being part of something bigger than ourselves and the Picker Pals community offers a space for children to grow and develop their environmental understanding, skills and stewardship.

- Kids love to be the star of the show and Picker Pals creates lots of opportunities for them to shine by getting their litter-picking pictures, poems, drawings and stories featured on Picker Pals TV and social media.

- Teachers and schools love Picker Pals because it's free, super easy to run and fosters greater connection with the families of their students. The programme is well-supported and provides regular opportunities for interaction, such as competitions, quizzes and live events.

If you would like to get involved as a teacher, parent or potential sponsor of the programme please get in touch at pickerpalsmanager@voiceireland.org





Solene Schirrer
Project Manager



Colin O'Byrne
Project Manager

2023 THE END OF A CHAPTER, BUT NOT THE JOURNEY.



This year will be Ireland's last year without a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) - we won't know ourselves!

Over the past two years, our [Return for Change](#) campaign has been very successful in raising awareness about the upcoming DRS in communities around the country, and for making sure that our DRS will meet the high quality of standards that we - our communities and our environment - both deserve and need.

In fact, we were so good, that *Re-turn*, the system operator for the DRS, asked if VOICE would assist them in a crucial bit of work - visiting retailers all over Dublin, in person, to talk to them about the DRS and to answer any questions they may have.

So, we got on our bikes out and took to the streets, lanes and avenues of our islands capital.

Not only was it worthwhile from an outreach perspective in terms of 'getting the word out', our tour of Dublin also gave us a greater appreciation of the thoughts and concerns retailers had about the DRS Scheme; issues and concerns which, in turn, we were able to relay to Re-turn as they continued to develop the DRS so that the transition for retailers will be as smooth as possible.

Ours is a return-to-retail model, meaning



that every bottle and can purchased from February 2024 onward will carry a deposit, which can be redeemed at any point of sale, in virtually every shop across the country so, with some few exceptions, all retailers have skin in the game.

VOICE has been advocating for a DRS for a long time and, now that it's nearly here, we are of course delighted. That being said, there's a long road ahead and we are committed to closely monitoring the Scheme to make sure it reaches its full potential. Like the Skibbereen Eagle, we'll be keeping a close eye on proceedings to ensure transparency and ambition is apparent throughout.

Moreover, the end of this chapter does not mean the end of VOICE's interest in the DRS! On the contrary, in some ways, we have only just begun. We intend to copper fasten our initial success so that

we have a firm foothold as we ascend the waste hierarchy, focusing on principles of re-use and prevention.

With good foundations set, we have the opportunity to dream bigger and aim for the top. Exciting initiatives are already being explored by so many in Ireland and abroad. Our mission is to elevate these initiatives to the point where they become the new norm, solutions which are easy to use and easy to understand, just like the DRS will be in a matter of months.

And last but not least, in the spirit of celebration, and to honour the dedication and persistence of everyone who contributed to this monumental achievement over the past 15 years, we'll be organizing a special event as the Scheme launches. This event will not only commemorate our journey but also offer a sneak peek into what's on the horizon. Watch this space...





Abi O'Callaghan Platt
Policy Director and Project Lead

NO PLASTIC. PERIOD.

No Plastic. Period. is a campaign to increase awareness of and uptake of reusable menstrual items. Disposable menstrual items can contain up to 90% plastic and 49 billion single-use menstrual products are consumed each year in the EU. However reusable menstrual items are readily available as a great alternative to single use disposables!

Though reusable menstrual items are the

environmental choice, they are also great in terms of comfort, health and cost savings and our campaign aims to inform people of this. Through this campaign we developed a series of posters for bathroom cubicles, letting people know about menstrual cups, period pants and cloth pads. We also developed a series of short animations; these are available to view on our website!

As part of our work on this topic we take part in a European wide task force whose aim is to raise awareness of reusable menstrual items. Together we are developing a European wide training programme for youth leaders around

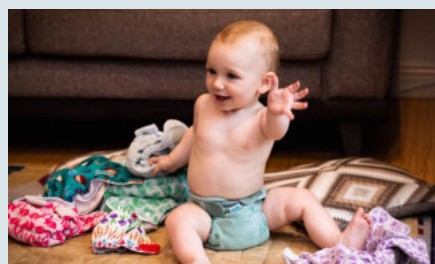
menstrual justice. Removing the stigma and taboo of menstruation, as well as ensuring everyone who has a period has easy access to safe period products when they need them is about achieving 'period justice'. Through our collaborative work we learn from each other on our varying national and cultural contexts and aim to develop resources and training to support menstrual justice across the EU.



THE CLOTH NAPPY INCENTIVE SCHEME

The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme was a great success in 2023, providing cloth nappy starter kits to 164 families! The scheme ran in five local authorities; Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Kerry County Council, Limerick City and County Council, and Cork City and County Councils and the number of kits provided were limited. The cloth nappy starter kits included 10 nappies, a packet of cloth wipes and a bag for storing used nappies prior to washing. Surveys were sent out to families participating in the scheme to hear how they got on using the nappies and wipes and to date 107 families have responded to let us know of their experiences! Families are saying:

'It's great to get the sample pack to start off and see what it's like to use them, it will encourage me to go on and increase level



of use to replace disposable fully'

'They're great for saving money and don't give my baby a rash'

'Once we got into the swing of them, it all got very easy and routine'

'Would never have tried without scheme. Building confidence in them and hoping to use more and more'

The survey also let us know of issues we needed to work on, such as the development of greater educational resources to support use of the nappies.

As well as surveys we interviewed a number of families in different circumstances to see how they experienced using cloth nappies and wipes. We met with families living in both houses and apartments, families with their first baby and families with several children including twin babies, families with both parents working and families with one parent at home. It was great to see people in different situations using cloth nappies. Follow up surveys are currently underway to look at how cloth nappy use has changed within these families over time.



The scheme comes at a time when the latest EPA Household Waste Characterisation Study found that we disposed of 75,618 tonnes of nappies in our household kerbside waste bins in 2022, and nappies make up just over 10% of waste in our household residual waste bins. Additionally in 2023, the UK Ministry for the environment, Defra, published a life cycle analysis for disposable and reusable nappies and found that reusable nappies have a 25% lower carbon footprint than single-use nappies across their full lifecycle.

In light of the findings of these two recent studies the widespread role out of the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme is crucial. In 2024 the scheme will be available in new local authority areas, supporting families in making the switch from disposables to reusables. See our social media in 2024 for information on the scheme!



Abi O'Callaghan Platt
Director of Policy

POLICY WORK

Throughout 2023 VOICE has continued to work on a policy level to push decision makers to support a move from a linear to a circular economy. This involves work on both a national and EU level.

NATIONALLY

VOICE continues as a member of the National Waste Advisory Group and through 2023 has been a member of the Textiles Advisory Group, with particular input into the Post Consumer Textiles area. As well as sitting on advisory boards VOICE makes submissions on relevant national plans such as our submission to the development of a National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy.

VOICE continues to represent the members of the Irish Environmental Network with our place on the steering committee of the Environmental Pillar. Our quarterly meetings with the Minister for the Environment has helped us keep issues pertaining to the circular economy to the fore. It has also enabled us to keep up to date with the latest developments in policy and thought regarding circular economy initiatives in Ireland, as well as the transposition and implementation of EU regulations and directives within the Irish context.



of BFFP to learn from other European environmental NGOs and to meet with our MEPs in the European Parliament to discuss these policies. In these meetings we spoke of the need to develop strong policies to prompt a system change towards reuse and move from our current single use throw away culture.

Additionally, VOICE as a member of the IEN was invited by Irish representatives within the EU Commission to take a trip to Brussels in order to meet with policymakers and politicians within the Commission and the European Parliament. This afforded us the opportunity to listen to Irish MEPs as they explained the work they do and how we, as representatives of environmental and civil society groups, could best alert them to issues of concern to us so that they might represent these concerns in Brussels.

ON AN EU LEVEL

VOICE is a member of three umbrella groups, Break Free from Plastic (BFFP), Zero Waste Europe (ZWE), and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and through these groups we engage in EU level policy. The main EU policies of concern to VOICE this year have been the revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation and the revision of the Waste Framework Directive. To this end we went to Brussels with other members

We also got the chance to speak with EU Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, Ireland's very own Mairead McGuinness. We needn't point out that the Commissioner's time is of some importance so we were glad of the opportunity to put questions to her and get her answers and thoughts in response. Whilst the particulars of the conversation will remain within the room, one of the recurring themes was the need for honest, mature and measured debate between 'competing' sides with regard to issues of environment and climate. If that leans toward the trite as you read it, it didn't come across that way in conversation, and it was encouraging to hear these words from such high office.

Through 2024 VOICE will continue to push for the adoption and implementation of policies to support the circular economy both nationally, as well as through pushing our government and MEPS to support EU circular economy policies, and the development of a strong Global Plastics Treaty.





Colin O' Byrne
Project Manager

VOICE continues to represent the members of the **Irish Environmental Network** with our place on the steering committee of the **Environmental Pillar**. Our quarterly meetings with the Minister for the Environment, has helped us keep issues pertaining to the circular economy to the fore. It has also enabled us to keep up to date with the latest developments in policy and thought regarding circular economy initiatives in Ireland, as well as the transposition and implementation of EU regulations and directives within the Irish context.

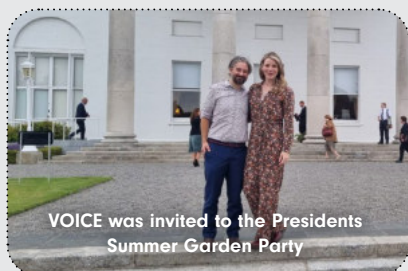


Colin and members of the Environmental Pillar outside Dáil Éireann.

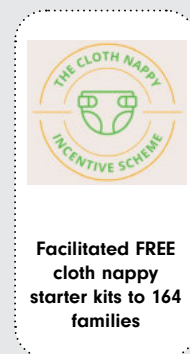
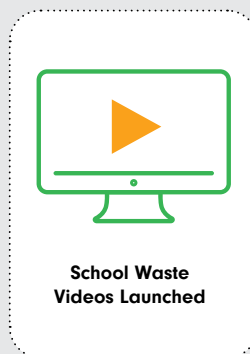
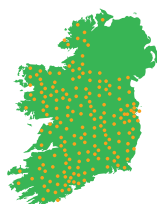


Members of the IEN were favoured with an invitation by Irish representatives within the EU Commission to take a trip to Brussels in order to meet with policymakers and politicians within the Commission and the European Parliament. This afforded us the opportunity to listen to Irish MEPs as they explained the work they do and how we, as representatives of environmental and civil society groups, could best alert them to issues of concern to us so that they might represent these concerns in Brussels.

2023 ACHIEVEMENTS



Working with 130 participants in 49 households across 13 Irish counties, analysing a total of 10,029 waste items for our National Recycling Bin Survey





Colin O' Byrne
Corporate Sponsorship Lead

CORPORATE SUPPORT AND BUSINESS PACKAGES

VOICE has continued to deliver and develop our corporate packages in 2023. In addition to our always popular [Lunch & Learn workshops](#), we also deliver our [Waste Audit Packages](#). These packages – both the visual and full audits – have gained added import this year as a result of the recently introduced commercial waste regulations. Whereas in previous years, some companies had a genuine interest in assessing how much waste they generated and how well they segregated said waste, these new regulations have introduced an added financial incentive for businesses to deal with their waste in a responsible manner.

These new regulations have come about on the back of a study published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2018 found that 70% of the contents of the average commercial waste bin could be diverted to recycling. This represents a massive loss of potentially recyclable material and unnecessarily high cost to businesses, whose waste charges would be lowered through proper segregation.

Improved waste segregation in the commercial sector can also make a significant contribution to achieving our EU recycling targets. Ireland faces challenging targets under the EU Waste Framework Directive for recycling municipal solid waste of 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030 and 65% by 2035. The most recent figures from the EPA show that we achieved a rate of 41% in 2020.

In simple terms, whereas companies were once charged for the amount of large bins lifted (collected), the new regulations will now see them charged by weight, with general waste bins in particular becoming subject to incentivised pricing. This being the case, VOICE is well-placed to bring our expertise to bear with companies who want to make



It's a messy job, but someone's got to do it! Mindy and Colin, during a corporate waste audit.

measurable changes to their waste management practices.

In order to ensure that our services have the impact we want to see, our waste audit package requires that companies commit to two waste audits, with the second one taking place up to 18 months after the first. This not only allows us to measure the success (or otherwise) of the recommendations we make based on our final report but also places an onus on the company involved to do more than just engage us for a one-off assignment, knowing their homework will be checked in the future!

An interesting development this year has been the approaches we have received from large companies who have sought out our expertise to arrange training and development programmes for their staff and clients. One needs to tread mindfully in these matters, of course, but we're confident in the values which underpin VOICE's goals. Our aim to effect positive change across society with regard to the sensible use of resources takes many forms.

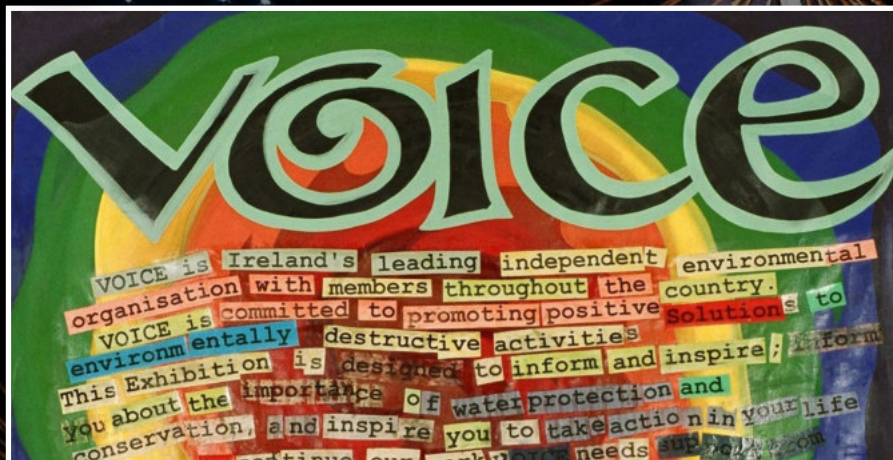
If you or your business would like to find out more about our dynamic corporate packages or to discuss solutions which suit your specific needs, feel free to drop us a line info@voiceireland.org.



Happy Holidays!

Whew! Reflecting on the accomplishments of '23, we're filled with pride at the incredible strides we've made together. None of this would have been possible without your unwavering support.

Your continuous commitment has been the driving force behind achieving long-term milestones such as the successful implementation of the DRS and our ongoing efforts in building a circular economy and reducing waste. As we celebrate these victories we are also mindful of our colleague campaigners across the globe who are facing severe challenges from war, environmental degradation and social justice. In the face of global uncertainties, your membership and donations to VOICE are more vital than ever. Together, let's continue our journey towards a more sustainable and cleaner future.



As we step into the New Year, we want to express our deepest gratitude for your invaluable support. Your belief in our mission has made a real difference, and we're excited to continue this journey together.

Wishing you a Happy New Year filled with hope, positive change, and the joy of knowing you're making a difference.

Warm regards,
The VOICE Team x

VOLUNTEER

Thank You!

We were blessed with a number of excellent volunteers and interns this year. Two of these, Solene Schirrer and Stephen Byrne, began life with VOICE in the capacity of interns and subsequently went on to become full-time members of staff, really enriching our team in the process.

Other notable mentions must go to Anastasiia Martynenko, who joined us for her fellowship for six months and helped us to steer the strategy ship to near completion, and our interns. These were young people with very little, if any, professional experience and yet they brought great enthusiasm, dedication and skill to the roles.

Our achievements this year would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of our volunteers, sponsors, members, and supporters.

If you would like to volunteer with VOICE, please email info@voiceireland.org.

Thank you to our Volunteers:

Stephen Byrne
Elayna Davis-Mercer
Solene Schirrer
Na Guang
Camille Schumacker
Sarah Jane Smith and
Indrani Malhotra

And all of the community groups around Ireland that took part in our CFI Circular Economy Guide.

Thank you to our Sponsors

Aramark Property Services
Bailey Hygiene
CACEIS
Cavan County Council
MSD
Miss Earth Ireland
BMW
Dr. Bronners
Community Foundation of Ireland
Cork City Council
Cork County Council
DECC
Department of Finance
DRSI
EPA
eShop World
Fianna Fail
Fingal County Council
Galway City Council

Galway County Council
Hewlett Packard
Hibernia REIT
HSBC
iEN
IRES Reit
Kerry County Council
Kildare County Council
Limerick City Council
Mayo County Council
Meath County Council
MIZA (Re ZWE)
Olive Mount Trust
PM Group
POBOL
PWC
RenRe
Robert Hegarty
Roscommon County Council
SECAD
Simmons & Simmons
Three Ireland
Tipperary County Council
Tipperary Energy Agency (TEA)
TOMRA
Upton Foundation - FOE
Version 1
Westmeath County Council
Wexford County Council
Wexford Rape Crisis Centre
Zero Waste Europe

FACTORY

Consciously designed and responsibly printed by **The FACTORY** on 100% recycled paper with eco-inks, using self-generated green energy. www.thefactory.ie | info@thefactory.ie | [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/thefactoryie) | [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/thefactoryie) | [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/thefactoryie) | 057 9133119