

**2019 Emerging Leaders Exchange for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**  
**Principal Bios**

**Ireland**

**Ms. Jacqueline Barrett, 23**

Youth Mentor

*Foroige - Youth Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Programme*

Sligo, Ireland

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Jacqueline Barrett is a 23-year old from Sligo, Ireland. She has been a Youth Mentor for Foroige - Youth Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Programme since 2018. As a Youth Worker Assistant, Jacqueline's work consists of weekly delivery of education and prevention programs to marginalized youth (aged 14-17 years) who are at risk of becoming involved in alcohol or substance misuse. This includes personal development and diversionary activities. The aim of this program is to involve these young people in their community in a positive way and divert youth from anti-social or offending behavior.

Jacqueline received a Leaving Certificate in 2013 from St. Attractas Community School and is now in her first year at Sligo Institute of Technology, earning her Bachelor of Arts in Social Care Practice. As part of her curriculum, she supports a group of marginalized youth in Tubbercurry in south Sligo, Ireland. Through engaging in the Emerging Leaders exchange program, she hopes to gain insight into community and youth work strategies in different cultures where young people are dealing with similar issues of disadvantage. Her aim is to gain expertise through inter-agency learning and sharing of youth work techniques that have proven successful for other projects internationally.

**Ms. Sharon Brady, 32**

Youth Officer

Foroige

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Ms. Brady currently works with Foroige as a Youth Officer assigned with targeting vulnerable, disadvantaged young people aged between 16-24 who may not be in regular education, training or employment. She engages these young people in a positive and professional manner and enables them to re-engage with education and/or employment to develop life skills that foster good relations, build confidence and resilience, enhancing their employability prospects. As part of my role I also work in partnership with other youth services, training and employment agencies to develop, coordinate and implement voluntary education and development programs for young people.

On this program, Ms. Brady expects to gain a significant increase in knowledge of the various methods that organizations use in order to best support the young people she works with. As a woman who grew up in a very marginalized area, she sees great potential in supporting similarly situated youths. She believes that this program will also greatly benefit her professional development. She would like to build

new relationships and engage with like-minded people to help develop her communication skills through understanding and learning from people of different working backgrounds. She feels this exchange would help to implement a more positive image of the young people in her area, who will eventually grow up to be leaders in her same community.

**Ms. Niamh Clerkin, 21**

Youth Worker

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Ms. Clerkin is a youth worker with Inishowen Development Partnership. She works with young, disadvantaged people to help improve their wellbeing. Her duties vary and span across age groups. For young children, she helps organize and coordinate programs for local primary/secondary schools. With older age groups, she leads them out on a universal program to learn more and reflect on their experiences. Her other duties involve working with teenaged youth on developing positive coping mechanisms and supporting interventions for specifically difficult cases. Ms. Clerkin is always trying to learn and partake in new experiences to better herself through the work that she does with the young people. She hopes to learn new ways to support young people, especially in her role working across the border with communities in Derry, Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Aaron Fallon, 22**

Facilities Team Member

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Mr. Fallon currently serves as a facilities team member with Ballymun Regional Youth Resource. He helps to keep the building to a standard of cleanliness and functionality including: setting up rooms for incoming groups, keeping everything neat and tidy at all times, and doing light reception work. After opening up the building to start the work day, Mr. Fallon provides excellent customer service to groups that use the building and provides them with anything they may need. He previously served at Ballymun Regional as a Re-engage Program Participant. He hopes that this program will help him see how his American counterparts work with disadvantaged youth, and to identify the commonalities and differences in their approach.

**Northern Ireland**

**Ms. Colleen Crothers, 33**

Children & Young People Manager

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Colleen Crothers is a 33-year old from Belfast, Northern Ireland. Colleen has been working for HUBB as the Children & Young People Manager since 2009. Her job responsibilities include running all the children and young people services that HUBB supplies for the greater North Belfast area. This includes managing their affordable childcare social business, which supports the services that HUBB delivers, such as youth clubs from 5 to 18 years old, Mothers & Tots, Autism family support group, and employability program for 16 to 24 years old.

Colleen graduated from CACHE in 2019 with a Level 5 in Childcare leadership and Management. She is very passionate about her job and her community. Colleen has been working with youth for around 15 years and feels that it is incredibly important that we constantly seek new skills and create opportunities for young people. She takes every opportunity to develop herself, so she encourages others to make changes and create a better life. Within her role, she also volunteers with young people and her community, which gives her the ability to know the real needs and issues from which people are suffering.

**Mr. Emmet Donnelly**

Active Communities Network (ACN)  
Belfast, Northern Ireland/United Kingdom

Mr. Emmet Donnelly currently works for the Belfast branch of Active Communities Network. This organization, founded in 2006, engages with communities through four main pillars of focus: grassroots project delivery, training centers and services, research and evidence of impact, and active partnerships. In Belfast, ACN has created a pilot program called GOALS (Generating Opportunities and Learning through Sport) that works with a small group of high-risk youth in Ballymurphy and Whiterock of West Belfast. Through sports, ACN is working to develop resilience and address wider mental health risks that marginalized youth face. They are also using sports to target local areas of high tension and deprivation in other communities. ACN hopes to provide positive role models and opportunities for youth.

**Mr. Conor Forker, 23**

Leader in Charge  
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Mr. Conor Forker founded the Clonmore Youth Club in 2017. Having attended other youth organizations throughout his teenage years, he grew to understand the positive impact of the services these organizations provide for the community. Since 2017, the Clonmore Youth Club has grown to over 130 members from a wide range of backgrounds and households.

Transferring his skills further, he worked with local youth organizations while studying in Scotland, impacting his understanding of the vast array of issues affecting young people in both rural and urban areas. He helped to create projects and aid colleagues in attracting more young people, and in return, he learned how to grow his small youth club to offer a wide array of activities and cater to the growing needs of young people. Awarded with the Rural Ambassador award in 2016, Mr. Conor Forker has expanded his knowledge to include urban and rural youth work, particularly through volunteering with other youth and building strong community links to support each other.

Through the Emerging Leaders program, he hopes to learn more about the multitude of organizations working with young people throughout the United States and to share collective knowledge in order to improve the lives of young people. He is eager to act as a mentor to young people in his community using his background in youth work and science, with one of his goals being to develop new STEM programs.

**Ms. Bernadene Fox, 34**

Child Protection Manager  
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In her role as Child Protection Manager at the Ulster GAA, Mrs. Bernadene Mary Fox ensures that the GAA sports center is a safe place for all children and young people to participate in Gaelic Games and Activities. Mrs. Fox develops and implements the Ulster GAA's Child Protection and Safeguarding strategy, policies, procedures, systems, and resources that ensure compliance with best practices and legal requirements. She aims to ensure that these policies promote the values, attitudes, and structures that make the sports center enjoyable for children and young people. She influences change by liaising and sharing information with statutory agencies, government departments, and other organizations across Scotland, England, and Wales.

Additionally, Mrs. Fox manages the Tutoring and Training Program on the provincial level for Ulster GAA. She works with other local partners to ensure the highest standard of safeguarding training that is delivered at the grass-roots level from volunteers. Mrs. Fox is excited that this area of her work is continuing to grow and evolve and would like to build the skills of their volunteers so that they can be more valuable in their roles and communities.

As a mother of three children, Mrs. Fox is personally inspired to ensure that youth voices are heard and that young people are supported by their communities. She is excited to build new relationships during this exchange and gain new ideas on building resilience, capacity, and cohesion within communities and among people of all ages.

**Ms. Amy Gillen, 30**

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Ms. Amy Gillen currently serves as the Youth Work Coordinator for the East Belfast Community Development Agency. In this role, her responsibilities include sharing and enhancing understanding about current youth provisions in the Neighborhood Renewal areas of East Belfast, networking, and arranging meetings with elected representatives and statutory agencies about current youth provisions. She is an advocate for young people and works to provide opportunities for them, including development, training, and access to resources. Ms. Gillen also acts as a liaison with the Ulster University community youth work department.

Previously, Ms. Gillen has worked with Youth Action Northern Ireland as the Get Set Placement & Mentoring Coordinator and with East Belfast Alternatives as a Family Support Hub Coordinator and Senior Restoratives Justice Practitioner. She earned her degree in Public Relations from Ulster University Jordanstown and has a strong background in mentorship positions. Ms. Gillen is excited by the opportunity to discover new perspectives and methods for working with youth through this program and hopes to learn how to establish stronger partnerships with other community organizations.

Ms. Gillen is passionate about youth empowerment in East Belfast as she has seen firsthand the issues that marginalized youth face. She is eager to combat the high levels of deprivation, low educational attainment, poverty, substance abuse, violence, and lack of opportunity that many young people in East Belfast experience.

**Ms. Michaela Hollywood, 29**

Trailblazers Campaigns Officer

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Ms. Michaela Hollywood earned her degree in Public Relations from Ulster University in 2014 and is now working as the Trailblazers Campaigns Officer for Muscular Dystrophy UK. In this position, she is the primary responsible officer for political scanning and responds to political issues that affect young disabled people from the age of 18 to 35. She responds to consultations at the national level and also works closely with local institutions across the UK and Northern Ireland, including the Northern Ireland Assembly. Ms. Hollywood regularly attends political meetings to advocate and lobby for improvements that will positively impact young people who live with disabilities.

In addition to these duties, Ms. Hollywood runs campaigns. At the moment, she is leading the production of a guide that addresses the challenges of hiring personal care assistants in order to ensure that young people are receiving the information and support they need in that process. Twice a year, Ms. Hollywood also organizes Northern Ireland Trailblazers meetings and social outings where participants can discuss local issues and receive peer support. She has been honored for her work with a Spirit of Ireland Award, receiving a Points of Light recognition from Prime Minister David Cameron, and being named as one of the BBC 100 Most Inspirational Women in 2015.

Ms. Hollywood is confident that her participation in the exchange will enable her to learn new ways to engage disabled youth and how to more effectively campaign on their behalf. She recognizes that the UK and the US approach disability rights differently and is curious to gain new perspectives on how to advocate, especially during times of political gridlock.

**Ms. Wendy Kerr, 32**

Manager

South Antrim Community Network

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Ms. Wendy Kerr is a manager at the South Antrim Community Network. Through her professional experience, she has taken on leadership roles managing and advising her Board of Directors in the development of suicide prevention, community development, and good relations strategies within Northern Ireland for the past 11 years. She has also taken the lead on developing a social enterprise for the South Antrim Community Network that relates to Personal Youth Development for underachieving Protestants, specifically those within NEET. This program incorporates everyday life skills that allow youth access to First Aid Training, Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults, and Food Hygiene Level 2, among other development and management skills.

Ms. Wendy Kerr also previously attended the short, 8-day TALK program, which provided space and opportunity to look at the contentious issue of Policing, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland. She is eager to explore good practice and experiences with American counterparts on this issues, exchange experiences, and have productive interactions that lead to an increased impact in her local community on these issues.

Through this program, she endeavors to build on her previous learning and continue her education, particularly through being exposed to other examples of effective community interventions. In particular, she wants to enhance her skills in strategically leading post-conflict organizations to engage young people who are at risk of paramilitaries and are ultimately marginalized through personal or community situations.

**Mr. Barry McCrory, 24**

HR Consultant

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Barry McCrory is a 24-year old from Craigavon, Northern Ireland. He has been an HR Consultant since September 2017 at Graphite HRM (Peninsula Business Services Group) in Belfast. In this position, Barry provides clients with commercial HR advice on a range of complex HR issues. He also acts as an independent investigator on Grievance and Disciplinary Matters, drafts bespoke employment documentation for clients' employees, delivers HR and Line Management Training, and acts as a change agent and HR Business Partner to clients' ongoing people transformation projects.

Barry graduated from Ulster University in 2017 with a BSc Hons in Human Resource Management. He has always been involved in volunteering from a young age. His first role was as a member of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Youth Panel. In this role, he was involved in advising the Commissioner and her staff on the issues that affected young people in Northern Ireland. Issues ranged from leisure, policing, and access to facilities. The knowledge that this role offered him was second to none as he was often influencing Government policy and had direct access to Government Ministers and Decision-Makers.

Currently, Barry is volunteering as the Chairperson of Drumgor Detached Youth Work Project (DDYWP) Management Committee. In this role, Barry oversees the organization from a strategic direction with a budget in circa of £250,000 from International Fund Ireland (IFI) to deliver one of their Personal Youth Development Programmes (PDYP). This role involves engaging with stakeholders from funders, staff, and

service users. This role has enhanced Barry's management and budget skills and has allowed him to be more resilient as he deals with complex issues.

**Mr. Paul Anthony McCusker, 33**

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Mr. McCusker has been a Belfast City Councilor since 2016, representing the people of North Belfast. He has been involved in the community from a young age and has always wanted to continue to develop his leadership skills and make new connections. His role on the council involves advocating on behalf of residents on a range of issues that include cleansing, anti-social behavior, housing, drug addiction and giving those most vulnerable a voice. He is also the coordinator of St Patrick's Soup Kitchen, which supports around 200 people a week who experience homelessness, poverty, and isolation. Community work and working with those who are marginalized has been a big part of his life through his work in the local youth centers, Belfast City Council, and St. Patrick's Soup Kitchen. Mr. McCusker recently graduated from the University of Ulster with a degree in Nursing.

**Mr. William Redpath, 30**

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Mr. William Redpath has worked his entire career in the Telecommunications industry for a small family business in Belfast, helping the company to achieve growth and success without diluting their core values. He has also worked with marginalized youth for a long time, principally as a volunteer in a large homelessness charity and as a youth mentor. He has a growing role in the Belfast community, assisting with the building of better relationships between Catholic and Protestants by focusing on projects which challenge young people to better understand each other.

In 2018, he served as the Local President of Junior Chamber International (JCI) Belfast, a global organization committed to making a difference in the world by empowering young people to create positive change. He is also a member of the Global Shapers community, which is an international network of young people who are passionate about finding solutions to the most important problems facing the world today. In addition, he has acted as an ambassador for Belfast and Northern Ireland during trips abroad to Germany, France, Poland, Estonia, and most recently to Japan. During these visits, he has met and forged strong partnerships with young people who share his values of compassion, positivity, and equality.

Mr. William Redpath is committed to creating programs between Belfast and other cities in order to create better understanding between nations. Through the Emerging Leaders program, he hopes to learn about how America works with young people in overcoming challenges similar to those facing the youth in Belfast, and to use this experience a way to improve how projects are developed and implemented in his community.

**Ms. Megan Stevenson, 21**

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Megan Stevenson is a 21-year old, third-year student at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. She is majoring in Computing and Information Technology and will graduate in 2021. Currently, she is doing her placement year with Amazon Web Services in Dublin as a Cloud Support Associate in the Security Team. As an intern for Amazon Web Services, Megan works with customers solving issues they are having with their AWS services. She supports AWS services that focus on security technologies, including Identity Access Management (IAM), Cloudwatch, KMS, Cloud Trail, etc. She also has experience with threat modeling, especially for web applications and web APIs.

Megan balances her work and study with valuable volunteering experience as well. She has achieved the Millennium Volunteer Award of excellence for volunteering over 200 hours of her time to the National Trust and Oakgrove Integrated College. Megan is also currently a Mental Health Ambassador at her university and has received her certification in Mental Health First Aid. In addition, Megan is also well-traveled. She embraces all opportunities to be a positive member of society. Megan is a keen learner and enjoys working in pressurized environments that challenge her thinking.

**Ms. Rachel Woods, 30**

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Ms. Rachel Woods has an extensive background in advocacy and community involvement. She earned her Bachelor's of History and Philosophy from Queen's University in Belfast and then proceeded to complete a Master's of Violence, Terrorism, and Security. Since then, she has worked as a research analyst, a caseworker for the Northern Ireland Assembly, and is currently a councilor at Ards and North Down Borough Council. In this role, Ms. Woods acts as a liaison with community groups, addresses constituency issues, completes casework research, attends council and committee meetings, and directs council policy. She has served as the Chair of Community and Wellbeing and been a member of a number of other working groups, including the Economic Development Working Group and Community Resuscitation Group.

Ms. Woods is excited to share her experiences with others during the program in addition to learning from others on how they address similar issues. She has seen several very successful programs in Northern Ireland that work on the community level, especially those that target youth who are stuck in a cycle of poverty, and is eager to exchange ideas and practices. Ms. Woods expects to return with ideas for new, viable projects and advice for her colleagues on how to drive change at a local level. She is currently involved in a number of projects that encourage confidence and resilience for young people and would like to continue supporting marginalized youth and promoting youth justice.