

From little acorns...



Alistair Garvey and Keir Kelly.

The resilience of 500 local volunteers who turned a disused city centre wasteland – once the site of a row of houses – into a colourful urban paradise has received the praise of the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins.

President Higgins visited the New Street Garden on Friday afternoon to launch the WiKid Children's Festival and said he was overwhelmed by the efforts of those volunteers who had brought the project to fruition.

Speaking to an invited audience, President Higgins noted the many benefits of a community garden to the people of Waterford. And he acknowledged the challenges facing Waterford of late.

"It would be wrong of me not to say how sensitive I am to the city's recent economic difficulties", he said.

The President commended the spirit of the people of Waterford, whose regeneration of the gardens was the living embodiment of the old Irish saying 'Ní neart go cur le chéile', he said.

Also in attendance was Cathaoirleach of Waterford City and County Council James Tobin, who described the gardens as a 'glorious example of what people can achieve if they work together for the greater good'.

He added that the overall WiKid festival was a brilliant opportunity for Waterford's youngest citizens to see the city 'from a new perspective'.

With officialdom out of the way, the festivities kicked off in New Street Garden and a large crowd enjoyed performances by the Waterford Academy of Music and Arts and tunes from DJ Oscar.

Volunteer Harry O'Neill said there was a feeling of 'pure relief' amongst the many workers when Friday afternoon finally came around.

“There were times when we didn’t think we’d get it finished in time, a lot of hours have been put in to get us here today”, he commented.

Site manager John Haggis said the community spirit of Waterford had been brought to life during the 12-week build: “Well, Dunphy’s gave us some kindling to mark out the site because we couldn’t afford any wood. And that was the start of it really.

Volunteers of all ages kept coming, with work going on seven days a week, often 14 hour-days.

We had everyone, from artists to trades people to those who came along and just mucked in, doing whatever we asked.

And then there were the local businesses, who supplied everything from cups of tea and ice cream to soil, plants and so much more.

” Future plans for the development of the Garden in the coming months include yoga classes and an outdoor cinema, to name but a few.

“We’re open to all ideas”, continued Haggis. “It’s a community space and we’d welcome suggestions from any individuals or groups of all interests. The more we can do to develop the space, the better.”