

## **Family Resource Centres are the key to cohesive and inclusive communities (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/112097>)**

“Cohesive and inclusive communities are possible with the right supports in place, and Family Resource Centres (FRCs) are key to delivering these supports.” That’s according to Edgar Flores, a Guatemalan man who came to Ireland as an international protection applicant with his young family in 2023, and now works as a bilingual family support worker at Clones FRC, Co. Monaghan.

Speaking at the [Family Resource Centre National Forum \(FRCNF\)](https://www.familyresource.ie/) national conference, Mr Flores shared his experience of navigating the immigration system in Ireland and how he draws on this to help others, as part of his role with Clones FRC.

### **Edgar’s story**

Edgar came to Ireland from Guatemala in February 2023 with his wife and two children (aged 5 and 13) as international protection applicants. To help him integrate, Edgar began volunteering in his local community and eventually set up Monaghan’s Men’s Group for other migrants living in the area. Edgar was granted a working visa in November 2023 and has worked with the FRC in Clones since January 2024, where his work focuses on supporting families and individuals who are trying to find their way. Edgar assists families and individuals in navigating the immigration process in Ireland, while also supporting them in obtaining qualifications and training, such as manual handling, to help them successfully transition into the workforce. Edgar can speak several languages which allows him to work with families of all nationalities. Edgar and his family are still waiting to hear an answer on their immigration status.

Presenting at the conference in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, **Edgar Flores** said, “Arriving in Ireland with my family in 2023, I found it very difficult to navigate the immigration system. We were transferred from Dublin to Monaghan where there was very little support for migrants. Since I wasn’t permitted to work, volunteering in the community was a great way for me to get involved and to become a part of the community. The Monaghan’s Men’s Group has been hugely successful – including collaborating with Monaghan Tidy Towns and winning several awards. You can really see the positive impact being involved in the community has on people. These types of groups could be implemented in other communities easily through local FRCs, with adequate funding.

“I speak several languages including Spanish, Portuguese, English, and some Italian and French. This has been beneficial in my work at Clones FRC. Being able to use my own experiences to help others and support them from their arrival in Ireland right through to being integrated into the community has been really rewarding. FRCs are embedded in local communities across the country which allows them to provide these vital supports and services on the ground in response to local needs. I hope sharing my own experiences will help others to continue to create inclusive communities.”

Also speaking at the conference, **Fergal Landy, CEO of Family Resource Centre National Forum** said: “As we grapple with the complexities of integration, building communities that are inclusive is crucial. Family Resource Centres have been instrumental in supporting those who have come and made their lives in local communities around Ireland. We’ve heard lots of examples of best practices today and how these can be replicated in communities across the country with the right funding from Government.

“In the last number of years, fearmongers and far-right extremists have been exploiting tensions in our community, dividing society along racial and ethnic lines. Many of our communities are struggling with intergenerational poverty and inequality without access to housing or proper public services in areas like health, including mental health, disability, and education. In a fully inclusive Ireland, everyone – regardless of their background, gender, or ethnicity – should have access to their basic human needs and the opportunity to contribute and thrive in the community.

“Edgar’s story shows us what can happen when a community has the right supports in place. Migrants who become a part of our society by participating economically, socially, culturally and politically, can only have a positive impact on our society as a whole. It’s vital that real community development, through FRCs and similar community work settings, is adequately and sustainably resourced so that we can build communities that are inclusive and welcoming for everyone.”

The conference featured roundtable discussions, presentations of best practices and expert speakers exploring the theme ‘Inclusive Communities and Intercultural Practice: A Community Development Approach to Interculturalism through the National FRC Programme’.

### **Speaker highlights included:**

- Dr Ebum Joseph, Nigerian-Irish lecturer and Special Rapporteur for the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR);
- Niamh McDonald, Director of the Hope and Courage Collective;
- Anastasia Crickley, All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work, Education & Training (AIEB);
- Martin Collins, Director of Pavee Point; and
- Michael Darragh MacAuley, CEO of Sanctuary Runners.

**Further information on the FRCNF is available here: [www.familyresource.ie](http://www.familyresource.ie) (<http://www.familyresource.ie>).**

**Region**

Nationwide

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