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**Fáilte Isteach thanks 650 volunteers for contributing almost 40,000 hours of free tuition to migrant education annually**

*“I don’t think you realise the power of what you are doing as volunteers. If you suffer from inequality, if you are a member of a minority, inequality sucks itself into your bones. It can shape your life. The great liberator is education, and you have it for life.”*

Minister of State, Aodhán O’Ríordaín was speaking at the Third Age Fáilte Isteach event celebrating the commitment and dedication of its 650 volunteers.

The Minister highlighted the value of English tuition for migrants; *“You are giving them the freedom of language, the ability to speak for themselves, to stand up for themselves, and to be part of this country”*, he said.

Fáilte Isteach, a project which involves volunteers welcoming migrants to the community through free conversational English classes, was first established by Third Age in late 2006 in Summerhill, Co. Meath. Since then, it has grown from a single local, rural project into a national initiative with a presence in 22 counties and 68 branches nationwide. Volunteers deliver almost 40,000 hours of free tuition annually to a total of 2,100 migrants of all ages.

Áine Brady is CEO of Third Age, *“Today’s event is a well-deserved recognition of the tremendous commitment of our volunteers. Through their dedication and enthusiasm, they help migrants improve their English language skills, they are helping to build stronger, more integrated communities and are making a real and lasting difference to community cohesion in the areas in which they live”, she said.*

Marcella Sheridan has been volunteering with Fáilte Isteach for over five years: *“At this stage in my life, Fáilte Isteach has given me an outlet to put my skills and experience to good use. It means a lot, and has given me a lot. As well as knowing I am helping others, I am also benefiting greatly – through the friendships I have made, the different cultures and customs I have learned about, and, as I’ve said, through the opportunity it gives me to continue to do something really worthwhile”.*

As well as benefiting volunteers, Fáilte Isteach is making a real difference in the lives of its migrant students.  Being able to speak English helps families get to know their Irish neighbours and so become part of the community. Fluency in the language is also helping new migrants find work and so take their place and contribute to Irish life. In today’s Ireland Fáilte is filling a vital and educational need, and enriching every community of which it is part.

Michéal O’Muircheartaigh Third Age Board member also spoke at the event.

Fáilte Isteach is kindly supported by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration and the Iris O’Brien Foundation.

If you would like to find out more about the Fáilte Isteach project, visit [www.thirdageireland.ie](http://www.thirdageireland.ie/) or email [failteisteach@thirdgaeireland.ie](mailto:failteisteach@thirdgaeireland.ie).

**Ends**

**For further information please contact**

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**Background to Fáilte Isteach and Third Age:**

The Fáilte Isteach project involves predominantly older people volunteering their time to teach conversational English classes to migrants who have come to Ireland. The student-centered approach adopted by the programme provides basic language support in a practical, welcoming and inclusive manner.

Fáilte Isteach is an initiative of Third Age, a national voluntary organisation celebrating the third age in life when people may no longer be in paid employment, but can remain healthy, fulfilled and continue to contribute to society. The longer that people are encouraged to remain in this life stage, the better for older people themselves, their families, communities and society as a whole.

Fáilte Isteach was established by the Third Age in late 2006 in Summerhill, Co. Meath. The project, now celebrating its eight year, has grown from a local, rural project to a national initiative with a presence in 22 counties and 68 branches nationwide.