

Lessons in Global Citizenship Education Leadership from West Wicklow Youthreach Part 2

Learner-led Global Citizenship Projects in West Wicklow
Youthreach



“It’s been great, there’s a sense of accomplishment, I feel I made a change. It shows that you can make change happen, even if it starts with the smallest thing”

Erin, learner at West Wicklow Youthreach

This is part 2 of West Wicklow Youthreach (WWYR) case study. WWYR received a WorldWide Global Schools Special Passport Award in 2024 for its whole-centre approach to Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

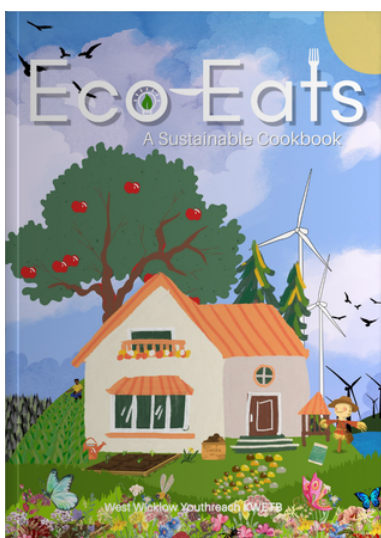
Background

This is part 2 of West Wicklow Youthreach (WWYR) case study. For part 1 check here. WWYR received a WorldWide Global Schools Special Passport Award in 2024 for its whole-centre approach to Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

Educator and GCE lead at West Wicklow Youthreach, Emma Doyle, teaches a Sustainability module to all learners in WWYR. The module incorporates a justice-led approach to critically exploring the Sustainable Development Goals, where learners focus not only on the environmental aspect of particular Goals, but work to understand how human rights are at the centre of these issues. GCE is embedded across a range of modules, including Art & Design, Communications, SPHE and more. A large aspect of GCE in WWYR is the cross-curricular, learner-led global citizenship projects.

This case study presents three recent projects: Eco-Eats, The Swap Shop and the Upcycling Art Project: Reintegration.

Eco-Eats: Sustainable Cookbook



Eco-Eats cookbook cover

Eco-Eats is a sustainable cookbook created by West Wicklow Youthreach learners, showcasing their commitment to environmental and social justice. It serves as a valuable Global Citizenship Education (GCE) resource for the Blessington Further Education and Training Centre and beyond. Hardcopies have been shared with local libraries, Youthreach centres, and community groups, with a digital version also available online.

See the [social media promotion](#) for Eco-Eats.

The project originated from learners love of food and cooking, and then evolved into a critical exploration of the role of food production, food systems and agriculture in mitigating climate change locally and globally. The project dug deeper into our responsibilities as global citizens and as consumers in promoting food security, eco-system protection and the human rights of workers involved in agriculture and food production. With Emma's support and guidance, learners collaborated in groups and researched the relevant science and data; created sustainable menus; devised a ranking system for scoring sustainable foods and recipes and designed the high quality cookbook.



In addition to the range of sustainable recipes, Eco-Eats offers tips and advice for sustainable eating practices, a sustainable food checklist and a helpful explanation of common logos and symbols. This project is a source of immense pride for the learners at West Wicklow Youthreach and feedback on the cookbook highlights how the tasty recipes are good for both people and planet.

Impact of Eco-Eats

Eco-Eats is used on a daily basis in the centre's kitchen to provide sustainable breakfasts and lunches to staff and learners. It is also a tool for classroom based teaching on the global impact of food systems on people and planet. Eco-Eats has also inspired another justice-themed project, the Blessington Further Education and Training Centre Sustainable Garden.

Swap Shop

In March 2025, West Wicklow Youthreach held its first learner-led Swap Shop at Blessington Further Education and Training Centre, promoting sustainability, waste reduction, and community engagement through sustainable fashion.

The event was supported by the scaffolding of teaching and learning. Specifically the critical exploration of clothing and textile industries and how they negatively impact people and planet. In line with the WWGS Guiding Principles for GCE, finding root causes and prioritising human rights, learners examined how human rights are exploited in textile factories, the waste generated by fast fashion, and its related environmental impacts. The Digging Deeper Tool was used to explore fast fashion as a justice issue. Learners watched the Channel 4 documentary Untold: Inside the Shein Machine, where undercover cameras go inside the factories of the Chinese “fast fashion” brand Shein. In addition, artist Lynn Haughton worked with the students to focus on textile waste and its environmental impacts.

Educator Emma reflected on the scaffolding process and how the pre-event learning was being “internally processed and kind of feeding into the idea (of the Swap Shop) as we went along”. Learners explored how the Swap Shop supported a number of interconnected SDGs, and these were highlighted as part of the promotion of the project.

Learners collected, sorted and displayed hundreds of clothing items; encouraging BFETC learners, staff and members of the public to participate by swapping or donating clothes to support more sustainable fashion choices. Leftover items were donated to the local Saint Vincent De Paul charity and Direct Provision Centres ensuring there was no waste. Check out the Swap Shop social media post [here](#).



Instagram post on the sustainable Swap Shop

Emma explained that the idea for the Swap Shop originated with Youthreach learner Erin who was a force in driving the project:

“Erin is a great champion of all things sustainability and she would be very proactive outside of here as well. She is great at taking things we have learned and bringing them outside (to her wider community) so it’s really nice to see that she is passing on her passion and learning in this way.”

Impact of the Swap Shop Project

The project boosted Erin’s confidence as a GCE leader while helping her and other learners develop teamwork, design, public speaking, and personal skills, contributing to module achievements and cross-curricular learning. The knowledge, skills and values built up through the project fed into the achievement of several learner modules and provided many cross-curricular links. The depth of Erin’s unlearning and reconstructing, another of the WWGS Guiding Principles for GCE, is also evident:

“I wouldn’t have thought Penneys was a Fast Fashion shop, I just thought it was cheap and easily accessible, but then when I actually looked into it and thought about it, I was like, ‘Ok, I need to slow down and think, stop going into Penneys and make a better choice’”.

This slowing down, reflecting and critical thinking by Erin, has led her to change her consumer behaviour away from companies “that aren’t paying their people fairly” and buying clothes “that aren’t going to last long”. An added bonus of the project is that Erin also found a beautiful pre-loved dress for her Debs Ball at the Swap Shop!



Guiding Principles relevant to the Swap Shop project.

Upcycling Art Project: Reintegration

Final-year Design learners created a GCE-themed upcycled art piece, Reintegration. The piece symbolises the cycle of life and nature's enduring growth using mainly recycled materials.

“It represents growth and rebirth-how the nuances in an individual's life get left behind to allow room for growth and healing, represented by the flowers blooming from the carcass of the chameleon.[..] Even with dark topics like death and distress, there is always beauty within to transform. Where there is death, new life will thrive in its place”

From the description of the art work on display in West Wicklow Youthreach



Upcycling Art Project: Reintegration

The project was heavily inspired by the learning from the previous Apollo Art Project with Lynn Haughton and the focus on textile waste, as well as the Sustainability modules delivered by educator Emma. For instance, learners sought to understand how the Sustainable Development Goals connect to their upcycling project and wider justice issues such as climate justice, textile waste, waste generation, trade justice. As a result, they focused on seeking out more just and sustainable options for material and textile use.

Impact of the Reintegration Art Project

Art can be a powerful tool in GCE, it can deliver messages about the climate crisis and human rights atrocities in unique ways, forcing us to see, hear and engage with realities that can be otherwise overlooked.

Youthreach learners and artists Katie and Olga reflect on their learning from this project:

“Everything can be given a second chance, every object can be used again, for another purpose. Just because people don’t see the value in the object anymore that doesn’t mean we have to completely abandon it, we can give it a new life and upcycle it into something beautiful that stands for something.”

Katie, Youthreach learner

“It was definitely helpful to better understand how to transform these materials into something new because sometimes you can just overlook things.”

Olga, Youthreach learner

The power of the Arts to highlight justice and environmental issues and to challenge our responses is explored in a 2025 [Irish Times article](#) by Sadhbh O’Neill. “Art can communicate messages about our dying planet that are otherwise hard to hear: Art is humanity’s oldest companion and, as we ignore a crisis that threatens both, can be a powerful means of expression.”