

'SHE' OPENS GATEWAY INTO LOCAL POLITICS For Women In Rural Ireland

With just a few months remaining before the Local Elections in June, See Her Elected – the award-winning government funded programme which supports women from rural Ireland to become county councillors – is continuing its series of workshops and live radio training in preparing women to put their names on the ballot papers.

Currently only 242 (26%) of Ireland's 949 elected city and county councillors are women and there is a significant problem in rural Ireland.

Counties such as Offaly, for example, have only two female councillors out of 19 representatives on the council, while Monaghan and Longford County Councils have only two women out of 18 councillors. Donegal County Council has only four female councillors out of 37, while Mayo County Council has only two women in the chamber out of 30 councillors.

The See Her Elected programme, which is funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, runs both online and in-person election workshops and the 'Introduction to Politics' workshops. It also collaborates with local authorities and secondary schools to address the stark under representation of women in local politics in rural Ireland.

SHE's Programme Manager Dr Michelle Maher said that the organisation has "opened a gateway and created a path into local politics for women all over rural Ireland".

She said that this has been achieved through a series of free online 'Fast Track to Election' workshops which focus on canvassing, campaign, and communications strategy.

"The workshops take place at three different times of the week to fit in with the busy lifestyle of women. As well as targeting prospective local election candidates our workshops are also open to campaign managers or any women who would like to support other women to get elected," note Dr Maher.

MONTHLY MENTORING CLINICS

"We also run monthly mentoring clinics to address specific queries or topics as requested by the prospective local election candidates.



SHE provides in-studio radio training for women with Ocean FM – this local station in Sligo is one of many rural stations, such as Clare FM, Highland Radio, Tipp FM etc, to prepare for and manage live radio interviews.

Within the past few months See Her Elected has also collaborated with numerous local authorities and PPNs throughout the country to deliver the 'Introduction to Politics' workshops and seminars," she added.

These workshops have been run in collaboration with Fingal County Council, Louth Local Development Company, with the support of Leitrim Library Service, to roll out these workshops. Dr Maher explained that they are aimed at women who would like to learn more about politics, or any women who are new to the country and would like to learn more about how the Irish political system works.



Panellists at See Her Elected's 'Women in Politics' event at the Seven Oaks Hotel in Carlow – (seated l-r): Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor, Cathaoirleach Cllr Andrea Dalton and Catherine Callaghan (Fine Gael candidate in the Tullow area) with (standing l-r): SHE's Communications Manager Mairead O'Shea and Programme Manager Dr Michelle Maher, and Lorna O'Callaghan, Administrative Officer with Carlow County Council.

Women In Politics



Dr Michelle Maher, SHE Programme Manager, (pictured left) with some participants at the 'Introduction to Local Politics' workshop in Balbriggan, in association with Fingal County Council, to support voter participation and understanding.

"See Her Elected wants to see more women, more people from ethnic minorities and more diversity in our county council chambers. Our aim is to increase the numbers of women in local politics particularly in rural counties. The 'Introduction to Politics' workshop delivers the building blocks of understanding how politics works in Ireland and helps to understand how the voting system works here. It is about explaining how politics works in your county, where you fit in, and what you can do to have a say in what goes on," she pointed out.

In recent weeks See Her Elected has also teamed up with Carlow County Council to bring a 'Women in Politics in Carlow' event to the Seven Oaks Hotel in Carlow Town. A workshop was also delivered in collaboration with Carlow PPN.

MORE WOMEN, MORE DIVERSITY

Over 100 secondary school students from all over County Carlow turned out for the event which included a presentation from See Her Elected to outline the organisation's work to help increase the number of female county councillors in rural Ireland while also looking at the history of women in politics in County Carlow.

Several panellists including Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor, Cathaoirleach of Carlow County Council, Cllr Andrea Dalton and local election candidate Catherine Callaghan also shared their lived experience of being a woman in politics and they fielded numerous questions from the students.

See Her Elected Communications Manager Mairead O'Shea highlighted the fact that Carlow has one of the lowest

numbers of female county councillors in the country; there are only two female councillors out of 18 representatives on the council.

"Since 1925 only 13 women have ever been elected to Carlow County Council – that's in almost 100 years! Kathleen Brady was the first woman elected to Carlow County Council in 1960 and she was the only woman to run for election out of 38 candidates that year. Kathleen served for almost 20 years on the council, and she was also the first female Cathaoirleach of the council in 1977.

"Fast forward to present day and unfortunately the situation hasn't



See Her Elected (SHE) – a joint initiative between Longford Women's Link and 50:50 North West – was formed in 2019 to address the under-representation of women in the county councils of the North-West and Midlands regions. Since then, the grassroots organisation has been supporting women across rural Ireland to become county councillors or to be part of their campaign teams. For further information visit www.seeherelected.ie email info@seeherelected.ie or phone 086-0320455.



Dr Michelle Maher, SHE Programme Manager, pictured (centre in back row) with Louth Local Development Company and Louth PPN at a recent 'Introduction to Local Politics' workshop.

advanced to any great degree. With Cllr Adrienne Wallace currently on maternity leave, Carlow's current Cathaoirleach Cllr Andrea Dalton is now the only female councillor in the chamber. Cllr Dalton is the first female chair in 30 years and only the fourth in the council's history, so we really need to see more women and more diversity in Carlow's council chamber," according to O'Shea.

Other events have included SHE's guest speaking slot at the National Women in Enterprise Day at Kilronan Castle in association with Roscommon, Mayo, and Galway Local Enterprise Offices.

LIVE RADIO INTERVIEW TRAINING

Not content to rest on their laurels the See Her Elected team is also currently delivering in-studio radio training with several local stations throughout the country in a bid to meet one of the biggest asks from women in the workshops – how to prepare for and manage a live radio interview.

Training has already taken place in Highland Radio, Ocean FM and Clare FM, with further in-studio training to be delivered in Midlands 103, Tipp FM and Flirt FM in Galway. November saw secondary school workshops and specific media training delivered for Wexford Women's Coalition while similar workshops for schools were rolled out in Leitrim.

SHE has also written Ireland's

first 'Guidebook to Running in the 2024 Local Elections' as part of a toolkit of practical supports for women inspired to run for election and join their campaign teams. The book is available to download free of charge on SHE's website and women who attend the workshops will each receive a free copy of the book.

