



Local Authorities supporting free public drinking water



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Environmental Protection Agency
An tAidmheallán um Chaomnú na n-Éinseal

LAPN 
Local Authority Prevention Network



Introduction

Many of us now like to stay hydrated and so we drink water on-the-go. And we often buy water in plastic bottles to do so. But we don't have to. We can reduce the number of single use plastic bottles used in Ireland each year (an estimated 80 million) by using the existing water infrastructure to refill our reusable bottles whenever we want. This will help prevent plastic waste and conserve valuable resources, both of which are part of Ireland's commitment to driving the circular economy and tackling our climate crisis.

This booklet, which was developed through a partnership of local authorities participating in Local Authority Prevention Network (LAPN), shows some of the different ways that local authorities are helping people access free public drinking water. Helping you help the environment.

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Free water refills wherever you are

When you want a glass of water at home you reach for a glass and the tap. But you can't do that while on the go.

That's often why we buy water in plastic bottles but this is not good for the environment – it is damaging our climate and our planet. This water has to be 'manufactured' and transported, consuming raw materials and energy. It also leads to single use plastic waste which we can see every day. It also costs you money – in fact bottled water can cost more per litre than petrol or diesel!

ACCORDING TO A RECENT EPA SURVEY, 81% OF THE POPULATION HAVE A REUSABLE WATER BOTTLE BUT 80% DON'T KNOW WHERE TO REFILL IT IN A PUBLIC PLACE

By providing easy access to free water refill points, we're trying to change how water is consumed when people are out and about. By using these refill points you can create your own simple but positive climate action.

This booklet will show you how local authorities are helping to make this free water refill movement happen and how you can play your part.

So, however you might decide to contribute, we hope you can find some help and guidance in this booklet on bringing free drinking water to the public and preventing the need for single use plastics.

Taking the first step



Public Bodies

What you can do:

Public buildings (and those managing them) are hugely important when it comes to water refill projects. These locations typically have a high footfall of potential users and are an important place to convey positive environmental actions.

Who you can contact:

Depending on the type of project there are numerous people that may be involved (e.g. parks department, individual facilities managers). However, the first point of contact should be the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local authority. They have been involved in developing this booklet and through the LAPN network have access to a lot of information on the options presented here.



Community Leader

What you can do:

Community groups are often the ones that stimulate water refill projects and, while the focus initially is often on public water fountains, there may be other options for your community that are worth considering.

Who you can contact:

Regardless of whether it's for the refurbishment of an old fitting or the installation of a new refill point you should contact the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local authority. They should be able to get information on other similar projects and may be able to help you access funding to support your initiative.



Business Owner

What you can do:

Advertising the provision of free water refills is good for business so make sure to let your customers and the passing public know. Many businesses are actually already doing this, they just don't openly promote it!

Who you can contact:

If you are interested in getting started get in touch with the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local authority. They will know if there are other businesses or community groups already involved. If not, they will be able to help you get up and running.



Event Organiser

What you can do:

Having water refill points at festivals/events is fantastic - but the public need to know about them, ideally in advance. So, after getting your refill points organised, make sure to promote them before and during the event.

Who you can contact:

A good starting point is the greenyourfestival.ie website. There is a lot of information on different initiatives that festival and event organisers can do. Also, the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local authority will have information on options and potential support materials that may be available.



Free tap refills on the move

Refill Ireland is an Irish non profit social enterprise already working to make Ireland's towns and cities tap water 'refill friendly' for everyone while on-the-go. They support business communities, public organisations, community groups and local authorities to create and maintain locations where reusable water bottles can be refilled for FREE. **Use the TAP MAP at www.refill.ie or check out the App.**

Getting started

There are a number of ways to provide people with access to free water refills while on-the-go. Though each is different in terms of where they are located and the target audience, there are a number of common things to consider before setting them up. These include:



1

Local Partners

Each of the different types of project will need others to be involved. For some types of projects (e.g. installing in local authority offices) this will be straightforward whereas for others (e.g. the local business community) this may take more engagement and time to establish.



2

Set up costs

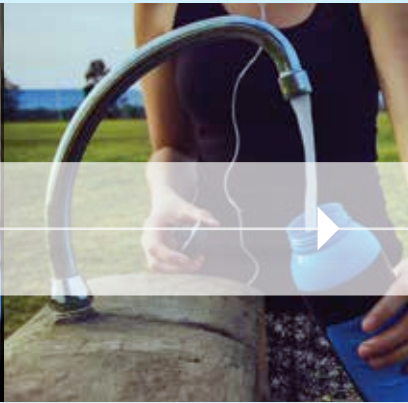
These will also vary depending on the project and whether additional infrastructure is required. School initiatives can avail of existing infrastructure (though they may need to purchase dedicated fountains) whereas public fountains (even where old existing ones are in place) can be costly due to the civil works required.



3

Location location

While the best location for a refill point may be obvious, it is important to consider what will optimise use for the target audience. It has been found that refill points established in "easy to plumb" locations aren't always used as much as they should be due to ease or frequency of access



4

Ongoing management

This is an important aspect for all types of projects. Cleaning schedules, annual maintenance and procedures if water quality issues arise, all need to be considered in advance.



5

Measure

Being able to report on the impacts of such initiatives is really important so when you are establishing them consider putting in water counters or water meters to help you monitor success.



The case studies compiled on the following pages outline the five types of projects that have been supported through LAPN. They provide excellent examples of the different initiatives already underway in Ireland and further details on some of the challenges and benefits associated with each.

Local Businesses

Local authorities will assist businesses to voluntarily provide FREE tap water to members of the public. This is not limited to cafés and hotels but can include everyone from the barber to the butcher.

Potential Partners:

Local Businesses, Community Groups, NGOs, Local Authorities, Business Association, Refill Ireland.

Cost: Low

Ongoing maintenance required: No

Main Benefits:

- Reduced litter locally
- Promote positive green actions in the locality
- Potential to generate trade for participating businesses
- Greening local businesses

Key Challenges:

- Direct engagement with local businesses required to get them signed up
- Convincing businesses of the benefits of being involved
- Most businesses use existing infrastructure though some choose to put in dedicated fountains which is a cost
- Ensuring ease of access and visibility of refill facilities

Target Audience:

- Passing trade and existing customers



Cavan Co Co

In 2019 Cavan Co. Co., in conjunction with Refill Ireland, created business networks in four towns in the county to provide free water refills for people with reusable bottles/cups.

The initial engagement was carried out with Tidy Towns Groups in Cavan Town, Cootehill and Butlersbridge who carried out a door to door business outreach campaign to get businesses involved in this waste prevention and hydration project. The outreach campaign in Virginia was carried out by Refill Ireland.

A total of 51 businesses signed up and the new additions to the Tap Map* are made up of a wide assortment of businesses including hairdressers, pubs, restaurants, bike shops, pet stores, barbers, vaping stores, butchers, auctioneers, IT/Phone stores, pharmacies/chemists, hardware stores, clothes shop, college, cake shop, gift shop, bakeries, take away, jewellers, toy shops, deli's, butchers, health store, credit union, GAA club, newsagent, architects and flower shops.

A social media campaign accompanied the roll out which brought a great awareness of the on-the-go refills available throughout the county. In addition to the business networks additional refill stations have been fitted at Breifne College and Cootehill Credit Union.



Tramore

The Tramore Refill project was started by Tramore Eco Group in 2017 with over 70 locations now signed up to the Refill Ireland Tap Map. The project started with a number of local people simply asking businesses as they went about their day and it seems that this informal approach has allowed the participation to grow slowly but surely over the last two years.

In conjunction with Refill Ireland the local Eco Group approached a wide range of businesses; the remit wasn't narrowed to cafés, but instead now includes barbers, bookies, solicitors offices, bakery, dry cleaners, pubs, the local radio, dentists, Japanese gardens (local attraction) and clothes shops. Nowhere was considered unapproachable and, due to the casual nature of the approach, few businesses have declined to be involved.

Participating businesses display a sticker on their windows and these have generated interest and conversations locally. The Eco group also post photos of newly signed up business owners with their sticker which provides good publicity on social media for the business, good awareness about the initiative and a great local story. This local approach to local businesses has worked well here with great interest and participation in Tramore.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council

In order to promote the concept of refilling water bottles on-the-go, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council sponsored a competition to install two tap water dispensers in local businesses in their area. The competition, facilitated by Refill Ireland aimed to encourage local businesses to help address the issue of reducing single use plastic bottles by providing free water refill points for the public to access.

The competition winners were Select Stores in Dalkey and The Dutch Bike Store, both of which were regarded as "Community Refill Hubs". The water refill stations were installed in highly visible parts of both these shops and a year's free maintenance was also included in the prize.



These Community Refill Hubs are being used to promote the elimination of single use plastic water bottles to customers as well as encouraging other businesses to become involved by providing free tap water refill options for their staff and where appropriate for their customers and the public.

Public Buildings

Local authorities own and manage a large number of public buildings including county/city halls, libraries and public pools. With the large footfall through these each day they are an ideal place to consider for a water refill point.

Potential Partners:

Public buildings (e.g. leisure centres, libraries, local authority headquarters), facilities managers, government departments and agencies, OPW.

Cost: Low to Medium

Ongoing maintenance required: Yes

Main Benefits:

- Reduced waste bills
- Reduced litter
- Promote positive environmental message to the public
- Safe, secure locations

Key Challenges:

- Usually requires dedicated fountains to be installed
- These require ongoing upkeep and maintenance
- Making the target audience aware of and getting them to use the filling stations

Target Audience:

- The public and people using local authority buildings
- People using public services



Castlebar

The Castlebar Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre opened to the public in April 2019. In an effort to reduce waste related to single use plastic bottles, which can be an issue in leisure centres, Mayo County Council installed a bottle filling station to provide free chilled water refills.

The station, which is prominently situated in the public reception area, has an inbuilt counter which will be used to monitor the number of free refills provided. Seventeen days after opening, the counter had recorded 3,644 refills while 42,000 refills were recorded 6 months after opening! The unit will require filter changes, service and sanitisation twice yearly – all this, including the energy and water costs, are covered by Mayo County Council.

Prominent signage using the Refill Ireland logo is located beside the unit to encourage use and to align the branding with the National Tap Map Campaign. With the success of the water filling station, after the initial pilot, units were installed in a further 3 public leisure centres in the county.

Galway

In 2019, Galway City Council, through their LAPN project, installed water dispensers into a number of Community Centres across the City. The buildings chosen are ones that are used by sports clubs and various other organisations throughout the week, so there is high footfall. Up to now these buildings had vending machines and these have been removed and replaced with unique wall mounted bottle filling stations. The main aim is to substantially reduce the volume of plastic bottles which are created by users of the facilities thus reducing the volume of waste being created.



These particular units count the number of water refills and this will allow an estimate of the number of bottles saved to be made.

Bi-lingual posters were designed to further promote the units within the buildings and the locations of the water refill points will be added to the Refill Ireland TAP Map. Additional units will be rolled-out in other public buildings in 2021 when Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Co. Monaghan

Over the past 2 years, Monaghan County Council has provided 4 new water filling stations in public buildings in the County. The first unit installed was at the outside of the library building in Monaghan Town.

This was built into the wall which allows 24/7 access. The library is in the town centre and also close to St Peter's Lake, which is a popular local site. The 2nd unit was installed outside Oakland Recreation Centre in Glaslough village – this wonderful community centre is home to the children's play park, a wildlife garden, the library and lots more. Next up was the unit installed in Lough Muckno, Castleblayney.

This is a very busy family area and is also host to a weekly Saturday morning Park Run where those partaking no longer need to bring along single use plastic bottles.



Finally, a unit was installed in Clones alongside outdoor gym equipment in Barry McGuigan Park. Monaghan County Council has been delighted with the success of the units and has noticed as more and more local people become aware of the units, usage is steadily increasing.

It is hoping to continue to roll out such units in other appropriate locations in the coming months.

Schools and 3rd Level Institutions

Both schools and third level institutions have a captive audience that need access to drinking water while on-site. Water refill points are a great way to provide water while minimising single use plastic, reducing waste and litter and promoting a good water message.

Potential Partners:

Local businesses, schools, local authorities, student representative bodies, Refill Ireland.

Cost: Low to Medium

Ongoing maintenance required: Yes

Main Benefits:

- Reduced waste bills
- Promoting good message to the students/employees
- Healthy hydration

Key Challenges:

- Usually requires dedicated refill points to be installed
- These require ongoing upkeep and maintenance
- Installing in the best location for visibility access and water pressure
- Potential conflict with existing services

Target Audience:

- Staff, students and visitors

Wicklow Schools

Plastic bottle use has been identified as an issue in Irish secondary schools. As part of their 2018 LAPN programme, Wicklow County Council worked with three secondary schools to address this issue by installing water fountains in different locations and assessing their success.

Usage varied from school to school with one school reading 14,025 in the first six months while another achieved 48,625 uses. The convenience of the location of the fountains was found to be a factor with the lower usage recorded for a machine located on a side corridor while the higher usage was for a central corridor located close to the main canteen area.

Based on the success of the initial fountains others have now been added by some of the schools. In addition, reusable bottles are now given to new students of one school and another has banned the use of single use bottles after the success of their refill station.

As part of the project one school surveyed students and found that, after their internal campaign, the number of students purchasing single use bottles reduced from 80% to 28% after 6 months.



University of Limerick

The idea for a series of water refill points throughout UL was driven initially by a student from the University of California who brought the idea to the UL Environmental Society. When the society first started the disposal of plastic bottles on campus was an issue that they were very concerned by. Since then, UL branded reusable bottles have been available through Student Services.



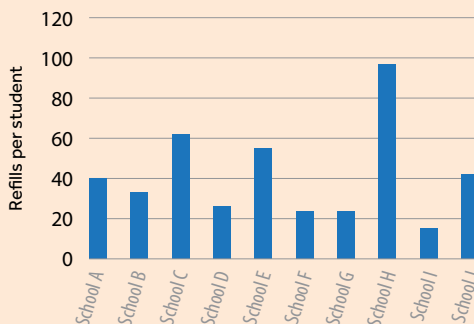
In December 2017, two fountains were introduced to the UL Student Life Centre. Based on the success to date (the fountains average over 2,600 refills a month), and the positive feedback from the students, more refill points were being rolled out over 2019. These refill points will be clearly sign posted and included on the campus map.

IN TERMS OF WASTE PREVENTION, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE FIRST 2 REFILL POINTS HAVE RESULTED IN A REDUCTION OF OVER 400 SINGLE USE PLASTIC BOTTLES EACH WEEK ON CAMPUS.

Roscommon Schools

Water fountain units were installed in all 9 secondary schools in County Roscommon as part of their 2018 LAPN programme. Roscommon County Council co-funded the first servicing of all units at 50% reduced cost leaving the responsibility of servicing to the school. The units chosen are operated by a sensor and feature a bottle counter as well as a bubbler water fountain. Included in the set-up was a 12-month warranty on the fountains and the rental contracts last 2 years. The schools also paid an installation fee.

Based on the data collected during the first year from the 10 participating schools, the average refills per student is 43. A number of the schools did an assessment of the number of plastic bottles in the municipal waste stream over the course of a year. Based on preliminary figures it appears that the introduction of the refill units reduce the plastic bottles disposed of by between 30 – 50%.



The above graph represents the successful results so far in each school (2019)

In addition to installing the water fountains a number of the schools also introduced branded reusable bottles. The reduction in plastic bottles disposed of appears to be higher in these schools.

Festivals and Events

While many events and festivals are run in the same place each year, having appropriate water refill points can be challenging. While dedicated fountains are ideal, mobile units are a great way to provide water in difficult to access locations or where local fountains are not available.

Potential Partners:

Festival and event committees, local authorities, Community Groups, Refill Ireland.

Cost: Low to Medium

Ongoing maintenance required: Yes

Main Benefits:

- Reduced waste bills
- Reduced litter
- Promoting good message to the public

Key Challenges:

- Usually requires either dedicated water points or mobile units to provide water
- Requires promotion in advance of the event or festival
- May not have access to appropriate water supply
- Depending on event, may require additional staff/volunteers to manage

Target Audience:

- Visitors, organisers and traders



Mobile Hydration Station

In 2019 Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council supported Refill Ireland to design and build a mobile hydration unit. This mobile water refilling station, which is housed in a large van, consists of two 1,000 litres food grade water tanks to store water as well as the associated pipework and distribution infrastructure.

The van, which is branded and aesthetically pleasing, is to be used at small festivals and events in order to reduce the amount of plastic used in the local community. Small festivals can be difficult – no water supply points and a huge contributor to waste disposal.

The mobile hydration station unit was launched in April 2019 at the Willow Park School Rugby Blitz. On the first outing, Refill Ireland supplied 2,000 litres of water and managed 3,000 reusable tumblers, preventing the disposal of over 2,000 single use plastic water bottles. This indicated a promising future for this mobile hydration station.

Limerick Mini-Marathon

In 2018 Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) partnered with St. Michaels Rowing Club (SMRC) introducing reusable water cups for their annual mini-marathon running event. Previously urban run events resulted in recycling over 800 plastic bottles. These were often mostly full as runners tend to only sip during a race and many had to be collected by volunteers after the race.

"THIS SAVES AN ESTIMATED 800 SINGLE USE PLASTIC BOTTLES AND 9 HOURS LITTER PICKING TIME"



For the 2018 event, LCCC provided 500 reusable cups branded with #RunReuseRefill. Participants were advised to reduce plastic waste and to bring their own self-watering pouches. The SMRC volunteers supplied the cups at the mid-point hydration station of the 10km run and encouraged runners to put the cups in the large 'skip' bags further along the route. Afterwards the cups were washed and stored at SMRC for future use. Since the initial event they have been reused at over 10 different local events.

Cork City Council

Cork City Council, in association with Science Foundation Ireland, held Cork's first Carnival of Science in Fitzgerald's Park in June 2019. The two day event featured more than 100 exhibitors and performers offering non-stop, family-friendly experiments, interactive activities, games, street cuisine and a packed line-up of live entertainment. The event was aimed at encouraging families to interact with science and technology in new and engaging ways. The festival was a huge success with over 13,000 people attending over the two days.

The Carnival, which was a green event, provided a hydration station for bottle refills. The hydration station consisted of a food grade IBC (Intermediate Bulk Container) which was surrounded on all four sides with a plywood box. The box was wrapped in vinyl and carried festival branding. The station proved to be extremely popular and following the event a decision was made to install a permanent water refill station at the park.



Outdoor Refill Points

Public fountains are very much part of our heritage and, while some have been restored in recent years, many communities are now looking at upgrading older fountains and installing new systems in locations with high footfall.

Potential Partners:

Local Authorities, Businesses, Refill Ireland, Community Groups.

Cost: Potentially high

Ongoing maintenance required: Yes

Main Benefits:

- Promoting good message to the public
- Reduced litter
- Promotion of healthy hydration while in public areas

Key Challenges:

- Usually requires dedicated fountains or refill points to be installed or existing ones to be upgraded
- Procedure required for:
 - ongoing upkeep and maintenance
 - boil water notices
- Can be a target for vandalism

Target Audience:

- The public



Greystones Town Centre

As part of Greystones Tidy Towns efforts to reduce the volume of plastic being disposed of locally, they linked up with the Greystones Municipal District of Wicklow County Council, to install three public water refill points.

The first, which was installed as a demonstration model across from the DART station, used a fountain design that is robust and low maintenance. While the Municipal District Office recognises that there will be ongoing monitoring and maintenance required, it is expected that this will be offset by the reduction in on-street litter and volumes of street bin waste collected.

Along with the other two locations (adjacent to the playground and an access point to the beach and the second near the harbour), all three were chosen as they had high pedestrian footfall and also had existing connection points to water for Wicklow County Council to avail of.

Feedback so far has been very positive from the public, local representatives and the media, and it is hoped to install further fountains for the town in the future.

Dún Laoghaire Public Parks

In the past few years Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council has been working to help avoid the volume of single-use plastics being disposed of in its public parks. Assisted by their local representatives, the Parks Department has taken great steps towards eliminating this problem.

Two modern, robust water fountains and refill units were placed in one of the county's most popular parks – Marlay Park . Pictured is the one installed in the Craft Courtyard which is very well used and also benefits from passive surveillance by the tenants and their customers. Having had such positive feedback from the thirsty visitors to this Park, who can refill their bottles for free, similar units have been installed in the People's Park and Cabinteely Park.



The new water fountains and refill units, which are continuously monitored, and cleaned on a daily basis in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, are an important element of the Council's efforts to reduce single use plastics in public areas.

The Waterford Greenway

Waterford City and County Council installed bottle filling stations along the Waterford Greenway, using LAPN funding, in 2018. These were installed at either end of the Greenway and at two points in the middle. Bottle filling stations were chosen, rather than water fountains, in order to minimise vandalism and also ensure it was easy to refill bottles.

With almost 250,000 people using the Greenway in its first 10 months, these water stations have the potential to prevent a significant number of bottles being disposed of and so far they have received very good feedback. They have also had the added benefit of raising awareness of single use plastic bottles with local events and communities.





Why not refill?

A local supply of safe, clean water is being pumped into homes, schools, gyms, sports facilities, shops and businesses all over Ireland.

Under the paths we walk and roads we travel there is a public infrastructure to take drinking water throughout the country.

Instead of manufacturing, transporting and bottling water in plastic, why not make use of this infrastructure?

All you need is a reusable bottle or cup and you're good to go.

Refilling is:

- a) good for you, providing the water you need
- b) good for your pocket – it's free
- c) good for the environment – reducing waste
- d) good for our climate – reducing emissions
- e) pretty cool and fashionable!



Let's go full circle...

In 1981, when presented with a bottle of water by the owner of a new bottled water company, the late Gay Byrne said: 'Sure who'd buy water?' In those days nobody would have dreamt of it. Now, an estimated 220,000 plastic water bottles are used each day in Ireland. That's over 80 million bottles per year. Most of these are used just once and then thrown away. Unfortunately, many end up littering our streets, parks, waterways, beaches, coastlines and seas.

PLASTIC BOTTLES OFTEN END UP LITTERING OUR STREETS, WATERWAYS, BEACHES, COASTLINES AND SEAS

Plastic can take hundreds of years to bio-degrade. Manufacturing plastic also requires precious natural resources. Of course we do recycle many of these bottles (though this usually happens in other countries and is an energy intensive process), but not creating the waste in the first place is the best option for the planet and our climate. We're all becoming more conscious of single use plastic packaging. Refilling reusable bottles is an easy action that anyone can take to reduce this.

There is nothing wrong with bottled water. But since tap water is such a readily available resource in Ireland, why not make the most of it?

Maybe in a few years we'll be asking ourselves again: 'sure, who'd buy water?'



Local Authority Prevention Network

The Local Authority Prevention Network is an initiative of the Environmental Protection Agency-led National Waste Prevention Programme.

Since 2009, LAPN has provided a network and grant-aid funding for staff in Irish local authorities to undertake waste prevention projects within local communities or with local businesses.

Many thanks to all local authorities that contributed to this booklet.

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