

# Skibb shows way in Romania youth-led changing minds project

SIX students from Skibbereen Community School are undertaking a project aimed at raising awareness on the issue of disability, and informing people about less developed countries.

Aoife Barrett, Claire Hegarty, Siobhán Maguire, Aine Seymour, Poppy Colligan and Alicia O'Sullivan, transition year students, have teamed up with the Aurelia Trust for its 'Changing Minds' project and travel to Romania this March after months of preparation.

The Aurelia Trust is an Irish organisation working in Romania with abandoned children and also young adults who have been institutional-

## ■ Darragh Bermingham

ised since birth. The main focus of their work is to improve the lives of children and young people in state institutions by offering alternative forms of care, such as fostering, adoption, the creation of group homes and by upgrading the institutions in which they live.

The students have set up accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in an aim to inform the public and will film a documentary about their experience. "It's a very exciting and ambitious project but the staff at Skibbereen Community School have

been hugely supportive of Changing Minds and support the girls in between meetings," said community worker Susan O'Regan who has been meeting with the students at the Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen since November. "Preparations are now in full swing for our Romanian trip in March, which we're all looking forward to.

"They're a really wonderful group of young women, super friendly and highly motivated," she added.

"All 6 of them seem to have a genuine wish to improve life for people less fortunate than themselves, not only by directly visiting group homes for people with disabilities in

Romania but by trying to change attitudes and ultimately make a positive impact on policy-makers through-out this Erasmus+ partnership."

The 'Changing Minds' project came about thanks to the tenacity and perseverance of former student, 21-year-old Niall Seymour, according to Ms O'Regan. "I was so proud to be present recently at the first transnational meeting of the partner organisations in Romania," said Ms O'Regan.

"This transnational meeting was chaired by Niall who has been fantastic.

"For me, this project is an

example of youth work coming full circle and reaffirms to me my belief, that a grassroots, youth-led approach definitely reaps rewards," she added.

"I learned about European funding opportunities from being involved in Leargas-funded youth projects initiated by Susan at Skibbereen Community and Family Resource Centre from 2013 to 2015," said Niall Seymour.

"Susan and I developed a strong working relationship and both of us worked together on this Erasmus+ project and were thrilled when, on the third attempt, it was approved at European level," he added.