

All in a Day's Work

Mary Stack – Environmental Awareness Officer, Cork County Council

Mary Stack works as the Environmental Awareness Officer for Cork County Council and is based in Inniscarra, Co. Cork. She loves working with the public, especially schools, helping to raise awareness of the environment.



Images courtesy of Cork County Council staff

or meeting with Council officials over various projects that I work on. From my office in Inniscarra I do a lot of my emailing and administration work. But from my car and on my travels I get my ideas and mentally plan my work load. Recently, I assisted a small village in North Cork (Coolagown - see page 15) in winning a Gold medal for a European competition, as the most sustainable village in Europe. Cork County's small village community is a shining beacon for environmental protection. I loved being a part of this and playing my part in assisting them.

Have you always been interested in what you do?

I was a little jealous of my older brother and his love of scouting. I wanted to be part of all that outdoor stuff - camping, cooking on stones, hiking and the country conservation code. I joined the girl guides at a late age (13), when my friends were leaving! They thought it wasn't cool to be a guide at 13. I forgot to leave the organisation and went on to become leader of my group, a district and area commissioner and finally a high chief of Munster, with responsibility for about 3000 members from ladybirds to rangers. I still love that outdoor life and am still a member.

What training did you do to get where you are today?

I loved chemistry and three times a week, with two girl friends, had to go to the 'boys' school' across town in Cobh to join the 'boys chemistry class'. I received a distinction in my leaving certificate. From there I went to Cork Institute of Technology to do a diploma and after 5 years I received a fellowship to go to Trinity College to do a Masters in Environmental Science. Ten years later I returned to college by night to do a Ph.D. It was tough but looking back it took no time at all. Ten years after that I changed tack and fell in love with the law and undertook an honours law degree with University of London. That was fun and so different to science.

What is a day in your life like?

Each day is very varied and my work location can be as far north as Charleville or west to Bere Island or east to Youghal. It's great as I get to visit and meet all different people. It may be a school visit to promote the Green School Flag programme (which is accredited by An Taisce), meeting with Tidy Towns groups

What is the best thing about your job?

I like meeting communities and schools and seeing projects being launched. Seeing people and groups smiling and enjoying their successes, such as a school receiving a Green School Flag or a community increasing their marks from the previous year in Tidy Towns. I love to see good reporting of the projects and to hear from people who heard that I assisted a neighbouring village, and can they meet me.

What is the worst thing about your job?

Working in public service is difficult and frustrating. Everything moves too slowly, but I understand some of the rules that slow things down are designed to protect the spending of public money.

What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

Get the best education possible and read a lot. Keep yourself up to date with current issues on the environment. Find out what is happening in your own community. Assist in some project and learn through doing and get as much experience as possible. This will stand to you in the future.

What would you do if you weren't doing what you do?

I think I would follow a law career if I had a second life.

What is best piece of advice you have ever had?

In career terms, I did not follow the advice given to me 30 years ago to go out and make a name for myself. I am more of a back room person. However, I have found my role now with this very positive work on environmental awareness and engaging with the public. I hope to stay in this post for a few more years.



Top: Mary with Shanagarry NS; Above: A recycling project; Right: At Middleton Food Festival.