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Volunteers The Glue For Society Says Harkin

Volunteers were the glue which helped to hold society together and was a huge resource which deserved recognition at national and EU levels.

This was stated by Marian Harkin MEP when she spoke at the presentation of the Ireland InVOLved awards which were presented in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, to volunteers in an initiative organised as part of a European competition by Volunteering Ireland.

There were 100 million volunteers throughout the EU giving their time, their expertise, and their smiles to help a range of people and communities ranging from the trainer of the under 8's to those who worked tirelessly to attract investment to local enterprise units, she said.

“At EU level we sometimes speak about connecting with the citizen and to my mind, volunteering and support for volunteering is the very best way of connecting with the citizen” she said. Volunteering was a priority for her at European level which was why she had founded a volunteering interest group in the Parliament and completed a Report on volunteering which had been endorsed by over 95% of the Parliament's members, Marian Harkin said.

She had led a campaign to have the year 2011 designated by the European Commission as the European Year on Volunteering and had received great support from voluntary organisations at Irish and European levels, she said.

“If the EU wishes to connect with the citizen designating 2011 would deliver tangible benefits and provide real recognition of the value that attaches to volunteering”, she said.

Assessments made by John Hopkins University in the USA of a number of countries indicated that not for profit organisations contributed between 3% and 7% of GDP and was the equivalent in contribution to the financial services or transport industries in some of them, Marian Harkin said.

Volunteering was a resource residing within communities, organisations and networks and was an energy which was activated when engagement occurred with others releasing what, she said, was a most valuable form of renewable energy.

“We live in a globalised world with so many events outside our control which impact on our lives but volunteering is an antidote to some of it's worst effects and, through local action, influences local outcomes and enables us to effect positive change within our communities, Marian Harkin MEP said.

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