

## Minister Pat Carey speaks at the Ireland InVOLved Awards, 26th November 2008

A Chairde

I want to congratulate all of the award winners and thank you for your many hours of effort in your own communities.

In some small way, this award repays you for the hundreds of hours of your time that you have given over to helping others over many years.

As Minister with responsibility for Active Citizenship and the generation of a renewed spirit of community in Irish society I thank Elaine Bradley and all at Volunteering Ireland for asking me to be part of this evening's special event. Although my brief may seem lofty, tonight is an embodiment of how people can bring a renewed sense of community in today's Ireland.

The chance to share a stage with the real heroes of our communities is truly an honour and the award winners this evening are truly deserving.

Through your volunteer work you have distinguished yourselves as active and energetic citizens.

You have looked beyond your personal interests, your own ambitions, and you have sacrificed the time you could spend with your own families.

Instead you have turned to helping your community - your local group or team.

In doing so you have played your part in strengthening Irish society.

In making the town or townland that you live in a better place. And most importantly in enriching the lives of others.

As a former teacher and long time activist in voluntary and community groups, I know that there are huge rewards from being involved in your local community. These rewards will be known to all the volunteers here this evening. From right around the country, you have led the way in volunteering. Tonight, the leadership you have all shown is being rightly recognised and awarded.

As Minister for Active Citizenship, along with colleagues such as Minister John Curran and the Taoiseach, I look forward to working with organisations such as Volunteering Ireland.

I have no doubt that you can – and must – continue to play a central role in energizing our communities - and our society.

Indeed, we can learn from each other on how best to develop a stronger volunteering ethos in the Ireland of tomorrow.

This strengthened ethos will ensure that we have more success stories such as Marie Carroll and the other award winners here this evening.

And tonight is your night to celebrate those success stories.

You should all feel proud of the contributions you have made to the lives of others.

Feel proud in the quiet knowledge that you have made a positive impact on your community.

And feel proud that you have gained the respect of your community and the acknowledgement of your peers.

You are an inspiration to us all to make a greater effort in building stronger communities. I commend you all for your ongoing hard work.

Although I know that people such as yourself do not become involved to get awards or recognition, tonight gives us an opportunity to shine a light on your work – and to thank you wholeheartedly for it.

It is an honour to share the stage with people such as Marie Carroll and all those involved in Bayside Gymnastics.

I think that you will all agree that Marie represents all the best aspects of Irish society. She represents a true spirit of kindness and real giving which has been at the core of tonight's awards ceremony.

I want to particularly congratulate Marie and all at Bayside for this great achievement.

And in presenting the Award tonight I want to wish you the very best in representing Ireland on the European stage. I have no doubt that you will do us proud.

Enjoy the night agus go raibh míle maith agaibh.