



**FRONTLINE HEROES:** Meath Civil Defence unit with officer Michael Fitzsimons (c) with their vehicles; (inset) volunteers loading food parcels

# CIVIL SERVICE...



**IRISH DAILY STAR** on the frontline with unsung heroes



**EXCLUSIVE**  
 ■ Michael O'TOOLE

**MEET** the unsung heroes of the COVID-19 crisis who are working day and night to help the needy in society — all in their free time.

*The Star* was yesterday given exclusive access to a Civil Defence team as it worked in Meath, providing much needed assistance to pensioners and other needy people.

The specially-trained volunteers are best known for helping to marshal public events during the summer — but are often called in as back-up in

crisis situations in their local communities.

And they have been active all over the country since the crisis blew up at the end of March.

**Food**

The unpaid volunteers have been helping to deliver food aid to families — as well as ease the strain on the HSE by transporting patients to and from medical appointments.

**And the 3,500-strong Civil Defence has also been helping to bring people to testing centres all over the country as well as delivering meals on wheels to the elderly and housebound.**

*The Star* visited a Civil Defence team yesterday as it toured much of Co Meath on vital missions to back up

other state services.

Michael Fitzsimons, the Civil Defence Officer — or commander

— for the county told *The Star* that he has some 188 volunteers, almost 100 of whom are working on the frontline on COVID-19 duties.

**His team has a fleet of 15 vehicles — including 4x4s, ambulances and even a people carrier that it uses on missions all over the county.**

He said his personnel have carried out 171 different taskings for the people of Meath since the lockdown was ordered on March 27.

“That’s normally what we would do in a year,” he said. “We have had some days where you could be out until 7pm or 8pm.”

He added: “The reaction is very positive,

the volunteers are receiving a lot of compliments from the

people we are helping.

People are hugely thankful for the help they are getting."

Mr Fitzsimons said a lot as requests for assistance came through the local community forum and from the local public health nurses, who ask them to bring the elderly to, or inform them of, appointments.

But he said that in one case the Civil Defence team was contacted by an Irish person overseas asking them to visit his elderly mother – and they

were happy to oblige.

One of the most important jobs is using the team's three ambulances to ferry patients all over Meath to hospital appointments, including to Dublin, with three tasks alone yesterday.

### Centre

*The Star* accompanied Mr Fitzsimons to Duleek Health Centre in Meath, where his personnel helped transfer local woman Theresa Maughan to and from her home for a medical appointment.

Mrs Maughan told *The Star* she was grateful to the Civil Defence for their help.

"They are great people and very helpful," she said.

And local public health nurse Helen Rynne told *The Star* the Civil Defence was providing a vital service.

She said: "They have been so good.

"They have brought in a lady to us three times-a-week for the last few weeks and it has been huge for her and for us.

*"They have gone up to her house, they have brought her in for a designated time slot and waited for her and brought her back home again, the service is fantastic.*

"The patients are delighted, it makes our job a lot easier.

"It's great for the client as well because she gets out of the house and it's a bit of social contact for her."

And Civil Defence volunteer driver Warren Stott, who brought Mrs Maughan to the health centre, told *The Star* he and his colleagues were enjoying the work – even though he comes in on days off from his public service job.

He said: "I have been doing this for the last six weeks, so you keep doing your bit.

"There are about three or four of us off during the week that end up doing this off duty.

"We do all the events in the summer but that is not really our core task,

most of the stuff we do is fun runs and things like that but what we're here to do is stuff like this.

"This is the real deal.

### Clients

"I think the clients look forward to us coming. The client gets to know us and we get to know the clients."

*The Star* also accompanied volunteers at work in other parts of Meath – including to Kells, where they picked up almost 60 food parcels to deliver in the area.

Emma Prunty, food initiative coordinator of Meath Partnership that organised the food runs, told *The Star* the parcels scheme would

not be able to function without the Civil Defence.

Ms Prunty said: "The Civil Defence have been absolutely fantastic and they are delivering around 100 of them for us each week.

"We could not do this without them. They are coordinated and organised so it is hassle free when they come.

"They are giving up their own time to do this which is amazing.

"They have been invaluable."

Civil Defence volunteer Amy Brady, from Kells, said she got a lot out of being involved in the voluntary organisation.

*She said: "I joined because I like first aid and I wanted to help people. The Civil Defence has been great for me, I'm in two years. It is busy but I love it.*

"I love meeting people and sometimes we are the only people the clients will meet from one week to the next. You get a lot out of being in the Civil Defence."

**'People are hugely thankful for the help they are getting'**



**OFFERING LIFTS:** Warren Stott with Helen Rynne after collecting Theresa Maughan for appointment



**HELPING HAND:**  
Nurse Neasa Ni  
Ghinneartai with  
nurse Helen  
Rynne at the  
medical centre in  
Duleek, Co Meath



**MEMBER:**  
Meath Civil  
Defence officer  
Michael  
Fitzsimons



**FOOD DELIVERIES:** Volunteer Shane Quinn at the  
food supply centre in Kells in Co Meath