Vets Without Borders Ireland

Support healthier animals, stronger livelihoods and thriving communities

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VIVA Founder Brendan Mimnagh

(1948–2025)

Brendan Mimnagh, the youngest of five children, grew up on a farm in Killoe, Co. Longford. After secondary school, he spent a year at Ballyhaise Agricultural College before entering UCD's Veterinary College, graduating in 1973. He often recalled that the highlight of his graduation was a celebratory lunch at Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel with his father and sisters.

After a year working in Anglesey, Wales, Brendan returned to Longford following the sudden death of a local vet, taking on his own practice with the support of Kathleen, his future wife. They met in Dublin while Brendan was in college and Kathleen worked in Harcourt St. Together, they ran the practice from a garage attached to their home, marrying in 1976 and raising three children: Mark, Martina, and Paul.

Running a large animal practice in rural Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s was physically demanding, with little time off. Farmers often woke Brendan in the middle of the night by throwing pebbles at his window. The practice later moved to Church St., Longford, with Gerry Mulvihill joining as a partner. Even something as simple as transferring the practice phone took six months in the 1980s, reflecting the challenges of running a rural business at the time.

After twenty years in practice, Brendan joined the Department of Agriculture as a Veterinary Inspector. His first posting was in Ballybay, Co. Monaghan, before returning to Longford. A career highlight was his key role in controlling the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in the Cooley Peninsula, Co. Louth, coordinating the temporary headquarters in Ballymascanlon Hotel and overseeing the deployment of vets for herd surveillance.

Brendan's early experiences on his family farm gave him a deep understanding of the importance of livestock to rural communities. Inspired by the foundation of Bóthar in 1991, Brendan accompanied many early livestock shipments to Africa and Eastern Europe. These experiences led him to found Volunteers in Irish Veterinary Assistance (VIVA) in 1999, channelling the Irish veterinary community's expertise into overseas development projects.

VIVA's first major initiative responded to the aftermath of the Kosovo war, when returning farmers faced acute fodder shortages. Brendan's radio appeal raised over €20,000, allowing VIVA, in partnership with Heifer Kosovo, to import essential feed. Over 25 years, Brendan helped raise more than €1 million for projects across Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Known for his curiosity, love of travel, and genuine warmth, Brendan treated everyone he met from farmers to government officials with respect and kindness. He never sought accolades, doing the work for its joy and impact.

In retirement, Brendan cherished simple pleasures, spending hours in his garden glasshouse reading or listening to country music. He and Kathleen also enjoyed travelling and spending time with their three grandchildren,

Nathan, Cara, and Lauren. In summer 2024, Brendan was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a challenging treatment regime before passing away in January 2025. Even in his final weeks, he remained focused on family, hoping to spend time with his grandchildren over Christmas.

Brendan is survived by his wife Kathleen, children Mark, Martina, and Paul, Mark's wife Pauline, his grandchildren, his sister Carmel, and his many friends at home and abroad. His legacy lives on through Vets Without Borders Ireland and the countless lives he touched, both in Ireland and overseas.

Vets Without Borders Ireland - A New Chapter

Earlier this year, Volunteers in Irish Veterinary Assistance (VIVA) officially rebranded as Vets Without Borders Ireland, aligning our name and mission with the global network Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International (VSF International) of which we have been a part for many years now. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International (VSF-Int) is a network that brings together 12 non-profit organisations that support smallholder farmers and pastoralists around the world.

A Legacy of Irish Solidarity

Though all things must move forward and evolve we will always remember our Founder Brendan Mimnagh (1948 - 2025). A Longford native, Brendan established VIVA in 1999, based on a simple but powerful idea: that the Irish veterinary sector could make a lasting difference in communities in crisis overseas.

Vets Without Borders Ireland

Now in our 26th year, we ask that you continue to support us, as without your support we could not have helped the thousands of people and animals who have benefited from our work over the last two and a half decades. We are committed to ensuring the organisation thrives into the future and to keeping the original vision alive. We want to expand our work and we hope that you will stay with us as we move forward into the next exciting chapter for Vets Without Borders Ireland.

Looking Ahead

In January 2025, Rebecca Reynolds was appointed as our first Director of Strategy and Development, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of what had, until then, been a fully voluntary organisation. Rebecca brings two decades of experience in Organisational Development in the Not-for-Profit sector and we are thrilled to have her on board to help us drive and navigate the growth and development of Vets Without Borders Ireland.

Together, we look forward to building a stronger, more sustainable future - one where healthy animals support healthy communities.

Ciaran Gobl, Chairperson, Vets Without Borders Ireland Chairperson and Mike Burke, CEO, Vets Without Borders Ireland.

Wheels Without Borders 2025!

Since 2005, we've been incredibly grateful to have the unwavering support of the VIVA Wheelers, who have raised almost €340,000 for VIVA's projects around the world!

Over the years, their fundraising cycles and hikes have taken them from Vietnam, Morocco, and Mallorca to some of Ireland's most beautiful landscapes - the Burren, Westport, Ballyhoura Country, Sligo, and many places in between. Long may this amazing spirit of adventure and generosity continue!

Help us keep the wheels turning - and the boots hiking!

We're always looking for new participants to join the journey. Whether you're a cyclist, hiker, or walker, if you'd like to challenge yourself while supporting animal health and livelihoods in the

Developing World, we'd love to have you on board for our Wheels Without Borders event next year.

Scan the QR code to join our mailing list, and we'll keep you updated on all our news, events, and opportunities to get involved.

This year marked the **18th trip** for the VIVA Wheelers, who returned to the **Slieve Bloom Mountains** for the first time since 2018. Unfortunately, the weather gods weren't quite as kind this time - the cyclists endured several soakings while the hikers managed to stay a little drier under the forest canopy!

Basing themselves in **Tullamore**, the twenty cyclists set off towards **Kinnitty**, tackling the challenging **Wolftrap climb** before catching their breath on the descent, only to take on the next ascent to **The Cut viewing point**. A fast downhill to **Clonaslee** led them to **Feery's Bar**, where spirits were revived with sandwiches and warmth. The return journey wound past the re-wetted bogs of the **Lough Boora Discovery Park**, before a well-earned final stop at **The Thatch Pub** on the **Grand Canal in Pollagh**, ahead of the last 10km home stretch.

Meanwhile, our **hiking group** saw an excellent turnout this year - fifteen supporters took on the **Glenbarrow Loop**, completing a rewarding three-hour trek through some of the best scenery the Slieve Blooms have to offer.

A heartfelt thank you goes to **Eamon O'Sullivan**, who once again organised **Zoetis' generous sponsorship** covering event costs. This year's **sponsorship** brings Zoetis' total contribution since 2011 to **€30,000** - a truly remarkable show of ongoing support. A huge shoutout to Eamon too, who not only conquered Wolftrap and The Cut but also scaled **Mount Kilimanjaro** in the same month!

We're also deeply grateful to **Seamus Fagan** for his expert route planning, **Paddy O'Donoghue** and **Veterinary Instruments Ltd (VIL)** for sponsoring the cyclists' lunch, and to **Gerry Hanlon**, our hiking guide, who kindly donated his fee to VWBI.

This November marks **20 years since the first VIVA Wheelers adventure**, when twenty passionate supporters raised **€80,000** cycling through the hills of **north-east Vietnam**. Many of those original adventurers - including **James Madden, Donagh McDonnell, Seamus Fagan, Joe Kavanagh, Syd Nagle, Donal Connolly,** and **Roy Gallie** - are still cycling and hiking with us today. Our deepest thanks go to **Pat Murphy**, the Loughrea vet whose vision started it all.

All told, this year's event raised an outstanding €15,281 for **Vets Without Borders Ireland (VWBI)**. Thank you to everyone who took part and supported the event.

Returning to Nepal: Reflections on Progress and Partnership

By Ciaran Gobl, Chairperson, Vets Without Borders Ireland.

Sixteen years ago, I left Nepal after completing a life-changing year with **VIVA** and our long-standing partners, the **Animal Health Training and Consultancy Service (AHTCS)**. Returning in October 2025, I was excited, curious and a little apprehensive - wondering how the country, and the communities I once worked alongside, had changed.

Urban Nepal has evolved rapidly. The streets are busier, the air thicker, and - like everywhere else - mobile phones and social media have become part of daily life. Yet beyond the city limits, once the road climbs into the foothills, everything slows to a more natural rhythm. The terraced paddy fields remain lush and familiar, and life in the villages still revolves around farming, family, and livestock.

Livestock: The Lifeline of Rural Communities

In the remote mountain regions, far from tourist routes, farming continues to be the backbone of survival. Livestock are often a family's most valuable asset - a source of food, income, and security. But access to veterinary services remains extremely limited.

That's why **Vets Without Borders Ireland** and **AHTCS** have worked to train **Village Animal Health Workers (VAHWs)** in each of our four project sites. These dedicated individuals complete an intensive **40-day training programme**, enabling them to deliver basic animal healthcare in their own villages while acting as a bridge to our project veterinarians in **Pokhara** for more complex cases.

Meeting these VAHWs again was one of the highlights of my visit. Each carries a well-equipped kit box - with tools for **dehorning, castration,**

vaccination, assisting with calving and kidding, and parasite control (including faecal egg counts). Their skills and commitment make them trusted figures within their communities, improving both animal welfare and farmers' livelihoods.

GOAT RESOURCE CENTER
Pokhara-13, Nepal
Estd. : July 2025 [Shrawan 2082]
Vets Without Borders Ireland
Vets Without Borders Ireland

Farmer Groups and Shared Learning

At each project site, local farmers have also formed **training and support groups**, fostering collaboration and shared problem-solving. Together with AHTCS, they've received practical instruction on **goat management, breeding, and nutrition**. These sessions have been reinforced with the distribution of **fodder seedlings** and **improved breeding bucks**, helping farmers put their new knowledge into practice.

Listening to the group discussions, I was struck by their energy and ambition. Farmers spoke openly about their challenges and future plans. One group, for example, is seeking support for a **weighing scale** to help ensure fair pricing at market and a **new buffalo bull** to improve local milk yields through better genetics. These are simple but impactful goals - the kind that lead to lasting change.

A Legacy of Learning in Arba

Another key stop on my visit was the **AHTCS training campus in Arba**, just outside Pokhara. This impressive facility accommodates up to **40 trainee VAHWs** for its government-accredited programme and includes a **fodder and forage nursery** to support sustainable livestock feeding practices.

It is also home to the **Brendan Mimnagh Goat Resource Centre**, named in honour of VIVA's founder. I had the privilege of officially opening the new building - a moment that carried deep personal significance. With ongoing support from Vets Without Borders Ireland, this centre will serve as a hub for improving goat health and welfare across the region for many years to come.

Looking Ahead

This current project cycle will draw to a close at the end of 2026 and our focus is firmly on the future. For 2027, we aim to **expand our reach into additional villages**, working alongside local government veterinarians to **map existing veterinary services**, identify areas where new VAHWs are needed, and provide **refresher training** to strengthen existing capacity.

Beyond training, we're also exploring how to improve **market access** for farmers in remote communities - helping them secure fairer prices for their animals and build more sustainable livelihoods.

Continuing the Journey

Returning to Nepal after sixteen years, I was reminded of what first drew me to this work - the resilience, warmth, and quiet determination of the people. The challenges of rural life are immense, but so too is the ingenuity of those who face them.

With the continued partnership of **Vets Without Borders Ireland**, **AHTCS**, and our dedicated supporters, that spirit of progress will endure - transforming the lives of farmers, families, and communities, one village at a time.

Leading by Example: How Goat Farming Transformed Mr. Sapkota's Future

Mr. Surya Bikram Sapkota, 46, from Madi Rural Municipality–4, Kaski, returned home after a decade abroad, determined to build a sustainable future in his village. Starting with just five indigenous goats, he joined the Community Livestock Production Strengthening Project (CLPSP) program of Animal Health Training and Consultancy Service (AHTCS), where he regularly attended group meetings and training sessions.

After participating in a two-day goat farming training, he applied new skills to improve his herd management and fodder production. With support from AHTCS, his herd grew to 20 goats, enabling him to fully sustain his household expenses through goat farming.

Today, Mr. Sapkota is recognized as a lead farmer in his community, sharing his knowledge and inspiring others to adopt improved practices.

With a vision to expand his herd to 50 goats, he aims to become a model commercial farmer-proving that with dedication and the right support, a dignified life is possible in the village.

Heifer Draw 2025

This year's **Heifer Draw** was a fantastic success, raising **€7315** for our work! A huge thank you to our ever-generous sponsor, **Duggan Veterinary Supplies** in Thurles, who kindly provided all the prizes.

The draw took place at Duggan Veterinary — a brilliant facility that includes a modern education and practical training centre, with comfy lecture rooms and a fully equipped wet lab. If you're passing by, be sure to call in — they'd love to show you around!

Congratulations to our 2025 Winners!

1st Prize –
The Heifer/€1000:
Darragh O'Connor

2nd Prize
Weekend Away Hotel Voucher (Monk's, Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare): **Milo O'Driscoll**

3rd Prize
€500: **Kenny Tully**

4th Prize
€250: **Jackie Mooney**

A huge **thank you** to everyone who bought or sold a ticket, your support means so much.

And a special shout-out to our top ticket sellers: **Brendan Leslie, Cathy Waddell and Rachel Burgess**, we are so grateful for your great work and commitment!

Pictured: *Brian O'Callaghan (Duggan Veterinary) and Rebecca Reynolds (Vets Without Borders Ireland) get ready to draw the winners ticket.*

Why I Joined Vets Without Borders Ireland

By Rebecca Reynolds, Director of Strategy and Development

When I joined Vets Without Borders Ireland as Director of Strategy and Development earlier this year, I knew I was stepping into something special. For more than two decades, this organisation - formerly VIVA (Volunteers in Irish Veterinary Assistance) - has embodied a powerful idea: that Irish veterinary professionals can make a lasting difference to communities around the world.

What drew me to this role was that blend of heart and purpose. The organisation's mission has compassion and expertise at its foundation - improving animal health to strengthen human livelihoods. It's a philosophy that recognises what every farmer knows instinctively: that the wellbeing of animals and people are inseparable.

Over the past 25 years, our volunteers, donors, and partners have built a remarkable legacy. From goat projects in Nepal to animal health training in Uganda, and emergency responses in regions hit by crisis. As the year has gone by, I have learned that the impact of Irish veterinary solidarity has been profound. I'm deeply conscious of the dedication and vision that created this organisation, especially that of our founder, the late Brendan Mimnagh and Mike Burke, who, with the support of our Board of Directors, has led the organisation as volunteer CEO for over 10 years.

As we move forward under the banner of *Vets Without Borders Ireland*, this rebrand represents more than just a change of name. Rebranding is an essential strategic response to ensure the continued survival of the original idea that was VIVA. Each year brings increasing challenges caused by climate change and ongoing political and

economic instability. Communities in highly impacted countries need support now more than ever.

Aligning ourselves with *Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International (VSF-Int)*, the global network of which we are already a part, will help position us more strongly for success in delivering vital programmes and support to those who need them most. Poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental degradation are deeply intertwined - and with them comes the growing threat of zoonotic diseases.

However, we can and are making a positive and sustainable difference, as can be clearly seen by Ciaran Gobls recent visit to Nepal. By sharing knowledge around good livestock management, supporting vaccination programmes, and promoting the holistic care of livestock, we help families and communities not only to survive, but to thrive. Aligning with the *Vets Without Borders* global identity also reinforces our commitment to the One Health approach, which recognises the interconnected health of people, animals, and the environment. With an estimated 75% of emerging human diseases originating from animals, the importance of One Health has never been clearer.

Looking ahead, my vision for Vets Without Borders Ireland is one of growth, connection, and sustainability. We want to build new partnerships, diversify our funding, and engage the next generation of veterinary professionals who are eager to make a difference. We'll also focus on strengthening our organisational capacity and communicating our story more widely - both at home and abroad.

This is an exciting time for Vets Without Borders Ireland. We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before - volunteers, supporters, and partners - and now, together, we have the opportunity to shape what comes next.

If you've supported us in the past, thank you. If you're new to our work, I warmly invite you to join us. Together, we can continue to transform lives and support communities that sustain and restore rangelands. Through our efforts, we promote enlightened policies, protect the economic and cultural value of pastoralism, uphold pastoralists' rights, and enhance the nutrition and well-being of all who depend on these landscapes.

International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralism

2026 has been designated the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralism. But what does this mean? Rangelands-areas of natural grasses, shrubs, and scattered trees grazed by livestock and wildlife-cover more than half of the world's land surface. They support the livelihoods of around 500 million pastoralists and hold significant potential for climate solutions. To raise global awareness, the government of Mongolia proposed this International Year. With increasing climate variability, population growth, and unsustainable land-use practices, urgent global action is needed to safeguard food security and the vital ecosystem services these lands provide.

In support of the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026**, the **VSF-International group** is launching a coordinated global awareness campaign throughout 2026 to showcase the ecological, social, and economic importance of pastoralism.

Campaign title: *"Healthy Rangelands, Resilient Communities, Connected Future"*

The campaign aims to raise public understanding of pastoralists' vital role-a message that resonates strongly in Ireland, where pastoralism has long been a cornerstone of agriculture. At the heart of the campaign is the **One Health principle**, which recognises that the health of humans, animals, and the environment is deeply interconnected. Pastoralism exemplifies this balance.

By working in harmony with nature and employing mobile, adaptive livestock systems, pastoralists help to:

- **Support ecosystem health:** protect rangelands, sequester carbon, and sustain biodiversity;
- **Promote animal health:** manage livestock breeds that are well-suited to their environments;
- **Enhance human well-being:** provide nutritious food, secure livelihoods, and strengthen social cohesion.

Maya Rana Taprang group

Beneficeries

Pragati Livestock Group

Bharat Raj Acharya &
Bosun Dhara Acharya

Ramila Acharya with her goats

Don't miss a thing!

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