



Sadie Hamill, Philomena Gallagher and Tony Creaney from the Craigavon Area and their counterparts from Sicily Domenico La Torre, Grazia Bruno and Grazia Bruguglio. Also pictured is Carolyn Hale from the W.E.A. who organised the event.



## Older people take part in voluntary activities

The WEA Learning Age Team has secured funding from the European Lifelong Learning Programme for a Grundtvig Senior Volunteering Project (SVP). This project entitled "Creative Volunteering" will see the exchange of volunteers from Club Amici di Salvatore Quasimodo in Roccalumera, Sicily and learners from the WEA. Three older people (Philomena Gallagher, Tony Creaney and Sadie Hamill) from the Lurgan, Portadown area travelled to Sicily in June 2011 for 3 weeks to share their skills and experiences with senior groups in the Messina area. In return three older people from Sicily (Domenico La Torre, Grazia Bruno and Grazia Briguglio) are currently visiting Northern Ireland to work with local senior groups taking part in activities of a useful social value.

As populations age, it is becoming ever more important to ensure that all older people have the opportunity to live full and active lives and remain important members of our communities. The risk of social isolation increases and it is well documented how this can bring about depression, ill-health and dependency. There is evidence that shows how involvement in learning activities have a positive impact on later life and can reduce isolation, keeping the body active, stimulating the mind and promoting a greater involvement in community life. Volunteering is increasingly recognised as a valuable informal learning experience particularly for older people and is a way of offering new learning opportunities thus promoting the process of active aging and emphasising the contribution that older people can make.

This project offers older people aged 50+ the opportunity to take part in volunteering activities that will bring about benefits for them individually and their communities. They will volunteer with local senior groups in planning, organising and facilitating activities that promote positive aging and encourage participation in learning activities.