

FUND Focus



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

The newsletter of the
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Communities taking risk

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

By all accounts, the journey towards peace has been remarkable and characterised by the bravery and ambition of those who have been willing to take risks to end conflict and secure compromise at political and grassroots level.

Challenging and encouraging communities to take these, often difficult, steps has been a hallmark of the Fund from its earliest days and 30 years later risk is still in the DNA of our work. It is something that has defined how we operate and, as a result, our interventions have consistently broken new ground in areas where other organisations have not been able or willing to go.

This edition of Fund Focus looks at 'Communities taking Risk' and we are grateful for the insightful contributions from Professor Tony Gallagher, Queens University Belfast, who highlights the creativity and ambition that schools have brought to bridge divisions in education.

Many of those who are bringing the greatest degree of change have accepted the hazards that come with putting themselves on the line. The commitment of these individuals and community groups is inspiring and they, particularly young people, can take great credit from the fact

that their actions are helping to stabilise communities, give women a stronger role in peacebuilding and reduce the threat of sectarian violence. The risks they are taking, with our support, are paying dividends at a challenging time for communities and the Peace Process.

In recent months, series of protracted multi-party talks have concluded with the 'Fresh Start' agreement. It signals movement on a range of complicated issues that the Northern Ireland Assembly has yet to address fully, including how we deal with our past. We commend the efforts to reach this agreement but recognise that there is an urgent need for the political parties to ensure that the commitments to resolve deep-rooted community issues are appropriately implemented.

As new funding streams come on line, it is vital that they respond to the evolving landscapes with the ambition, imagination and a flexibility that communities deserve. The Fund has never shied

away from sharing the learning of its programmes and our door remains open. Since the last edition of Fund Focus, we launched our new 'Community Consolidation – Peace Consolidation 2016-2020' Strategy. It concentrates the resources and uniqueness of the Fund towards the areas where it can make the most significant and pressing contribution. The strategy commits the Fund to an essential scope of work that will pave the way for communities to resolve difficult issues of division.

We can only do this because individuals and communities are willing to take the risks with us. The projects we have supported, and continue to support, should be commended for their bravery in providing strong leadership and stepping up to make a difference.

Dr Adrian Johnston,
CHAIRMAN

International Fund for Ireland commits €2.2m/£1.57m towards 23 community projects

In November, the International Fund for Ireland confirmed €2.2m/£1.57m of financial assistance to support 23 community projects in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties of Ireland.

The funding, approved at the recent Board Meeting in Cavan, will see €2m/£1.44m shared among 16 projects that are working to address difficult issues linked to the legacy of conflict and will engage with young people who are at risk of becoming involved in sectarian or anti-social activity.

A further €179,200/£128,000 will be shared among seven Peace Walls initiatives based in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry that are building confidence within communities and opening new conversations on potential changes to physical divisions.

Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the Fund, said: "This allocation of funding is timely and supports urgent action at a community level. The groups receiving support are engaging with those who have

been left behind by the Peace Process and in some cases will work to reduce the influence of those who violently oppose the political settlement. In recent weeks, we've welcomed political progress in a number of important areas.

"In the last three years, we've challenged and encouraged communities to develop brave solutions to difficult issues like parading, paramilitary violence and issues related to the legacy of the conflict. We know there are risks that still need to be taken for peace and the Fund is both prepared and qualified to undertake the heavy lifting in critical areas where others remain unwilling or unable to go."

Further information about all the beneficiaries from the International Fund for Ireland's latest funding package and the Fund's new 2016-2020 strategy

are available at www.internationalfundforireland.com



ABOVE: Pictured at the International Fund for Ireland Board Meeting in County Cavan are Board Members: (back row) Paddy Harte; Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman; Allen McAdam; Billy Gamble; (front row) Dorothy Clarke; Hilary Singleton and Siobhan Fitzpatrick.

Schools are seizing the chance to take bold steps together



A teacher assists a young student during a lesson delivered as part of the Shared Education Programme.

Today, more than 17 years since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, education in Northern Ireland remains heavily divided with 90 per cent of children in Northern Ireland attending single-community schools. Bridging separation in education delivery can be a difficult challenge, but the risks taken in schools are paying dividends says Tony Gallagher, Professor of Education at Queen's University Belfast.

When I attended school we had permission to have our school badge on popper fastenings so that it could be removed when we left the premises. Back in the 1970s in Belfast, school uniforms marked you as Protestant or Catholic, and that could be dangerous.

Schools are important social institutions, so it is no surprise that many looked to them to provide some healing balm in a society wracked by violence. And many educators responded: curriculum initiatives, contact programmes and new integrated schools provided a basis for new learning as many tried to build a peaceful world. And the people who did this showed inspiration, courage, resilience, imagination, bravery and creativity.

But by the time of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998 any reasonable review of the impact of schools had to acknowledge that, for all the amazing things that had been achieved, there was little evidence of significant systemic change. Preparing young people to live and work in a divided society was an acknowledged priority of schools, but there were many more important priorities and work in this area remained peripheral.

The International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies took an imaginative

step by supporting shared education, a new form of school collaboration to transform the relationships between students, teachers, parents and communities, potentially across every part of Northern Ireland. This was an initiative that combined the efforts of many, but at its heart lay the commitment of teachers to the children in their care, and to children everywhere.

The Sharing Education Programme provided an opportunity that teachers grasped with alacrity: if overcoming a barrier, or solving a problem, or thinking the previously unthinkable enhanced the possibility of a better world for their students, then they would do it: even when it didn't work they learned from the experience.

This was, and is, an approach to change with which government is distinctly uncomfortable: tackling novel problems requires innovation, but innovation requires some tolerance of failure, and that is anathema in the audit-driven culture we inhabit.

Shared education was created by the imagination, creativity and energy of our teachers, but it required that we freed them from the constraints of received wisdom and the suffocation of rules. They have demonstrated the boundless

possibilities that can be realised if we trust professionals, and give them the chance to transform their world, as in so doing they lay the foundations for transforming ours.

And now, if you walk through the corridors of schools involved in shared education, you will see a plethora of school uniforms. What was once a sign of division has become the living sign of a newly developing comfort with difference. And not one of the badges is on poppers.



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CASE STUDY: Inter Estate Project

The Inter Estate Partnership (IEP) works closely with five Unionist housing estates in Antrim town. It offers a range of practical employment-related training courses and aims to help tackle big social issues such as anti-social behaviour, drug abuse and inter-community tensions.

Supported by the International Fund for Ireland through the Peace Impact Programme, the project has assisted more than 40 people over the last year to gain full time employment and continues to offer a lifeline to those living in areas affected by difficult and sensitive issues.

Much of the project area is situated close to an interface and various paramilitary factions still have a significant influence on the estates.

Local participant Samuel Chestnutt turned his life around after learning about the IEP through the Steeple Defenders Flute Band of which he was a member. "I was born and reared in the Ballycraigie

estate in Antrim. Over the years, most of us were involved in rioting and it was normal to see families fleeing from the area. It came to the point where I was on the verge of getting heavily involved with paramilitaries as it seemed to be the norm.

"I decided to give the IEP programme a go because I lost my job as a joiner due to the downturn in the construction industry. I took part in various training courses such as first aid, food hygiene and child protection. Through the security license qualifications I've been lucky enough to work at some of the UK and Ireland's headline music gigs including Electric Picnic, Glastonbury and T in the Park.

"IEP is a great success and works very hard with people and organisations within these areas even though there still is a degree of ongoing conflict. Other communities could use the work that IEP is doing within their own areas to try and help young people."

Raymond Thompson, the Project Officer for



Samuel Chestnutt tells his story at a recent Fund event in Washington DC.

IEP believes that although there is still much work to be done here, young people now have support and are encouraged to be open to possibility and long-term opportunities.

"The programme tackles complex issues such as drugs, alcohol and involvement in criminal activities. We work quite closely with the PSNI who tell us that the level of anti-social behaviour has dropped since the programme began, which is very encouraging.

"This work is critical to address tensions within the community and offer young people a real chance for their future. We hope that the project will continue to shape a positive future for the town."

CASE STUDY: Donegal Youth Service

Donegal Youth Service operates a unique outreach initiative in the bordering counties of Donegal and Tyrone. It was awarded €87,258 for its ACTIV8 project through the Fund's PIP programme.

Areas in Donegal and Tyrone have had a difficult past and many feel that they have not experienced the benefits of the ceasefire. Issues remain today and young people especially in the 16-24 age bracket are more likely to be at risk of becoming further alienated and targeted by those opposed to the Peace Process.

Strabane in Co. Tyrone is one town in particular that has experienced the troubles from the past. It was known as the most bombed town during this turbulent

period and remains an area that has levels of paramilitary influence.

Donegal Youth Service is working hard to build trust and offer a positive outlook. Charlene Logue, Youth Outreach Manager with Donegal Youth Service and Line Manager of the ACTIV8 Project, believes that taking risks with community engagement is paying off.

"Areas both North and South of the border have strong political divides so there is a real need to improve trust and acceptance in each of the areas we work in.

"The ACTIV8 Project deals with young people who feel left behind by the Peace Process. Issues we encounter include lack of employment opportunities coupled with a deep sense of disaffection with the political parties in the areas. Young people at times often feel intimidation and suppression by various factions operating in local communities too.

"Through the project we have been able to offer a number of courses such as Community Development, Youth Work and Youth Leadership Training. There were 76 young people involved in the project and to date 44 have achieved qualifications. This is really encouraging in areas that traditionally have low educational attainment."

Ongoing projects with four of the groups have played an important role in creating trust and acceptance within local communities. Through the IFI's support, a number of activities like improving the aesthetic appearance of the Resource Centre, visiting patients in hospital and family fun days demonstrate how small steps can make a big difference.

Charlene adds;

"This project has encouraged people to get involved in community life, to learn and accept history, culture and tradition as well as receive training in and facilitate community engagement activity.

"We have worked with all involved to understand the past and used the project as a stepping stone to make people aware of a wider sense of community and how we must share experiences and space in order to move forwards."



LEFT: Pictured are guests at the ACTIV8 presentation- seated, Lorraine Thompson, Regional Director, DYS, Mary Moy, Development Officer, IFI, Dr. Adrian Johnston, Chairman, IFI and Charlene Logue, DYS. Standing, Sheena Laverty and Boris Lisov, youth workers.

Blackmountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP) - Peace Impact Programme

In December, four young people who enrolled on a special apprenticeship-type initiative were honoured for bringing new community leadership and positive change to the Highfield and Springmartin areas of West Belfast. Delivered by Blackmountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP) and Blackmountain Action Group (BMAG) the Community Peer Leadership Programme enabled the participants to complete accredited training and engage in mentoring and peer youth work within their communities. Pictured are Billy Gamble, International Fund for Ireland Board Member (back left) and Joanna Felo, BMSSP (back right); pictured with Blackmountain Shared Space Project peer mentors Dylan McMurray, Chloe O'Boyle, Ryan Moorhead, Alexander McCaw, and youth worker Donna McCracken.



Leafair/Carson/Ultoniae – Peace Impact Programme

In November, an ambitious six-month partnership aimed at addressing common issues in Unionist and Nationalist communities was hailed for its impact across Londonderry/Derry, Ballymena and North Antrim. The three-way partnership brings together experiences from ground-breaking work that has been pioneered by Leafair Community Association in Londonderry/Derry, Ballymena-based Carson Project and Ultoniae Cultural & Heritage Society (UCHS) in North Antrim. The cross-community partnership has opened new and challenging discussions between previously opposed sections of society and develop new ways to tackle common issues linked to isolation and the legacy of conflict. Pictured at a celebration event for the partnership are (L-R) Lizzie Lindsay, Ultoniae Cultural & Heritage Society; Jim McIlroy, Carson Project; Claire Wilson and Catherine Whoriskey, Leafair Community Association; and Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland.



'Between the Jigs and the Marches' – Peace Impact Programme

Musicians and community representatives from both traditions came together in Sligo in August for the launch of 'Between the Jigs and the Marches' – a cross-border musical celebration in association with Fleadh Cheoil 2015. It formed a distinct element of this year's Fleadh which was opened by Irish President Michael D Higgins. The project aimed to enhance peace and reconciliation by exploring the connections between Ulster Scots and traditional Irish musical traditions as well as their influences on culture and identity. The peace initiative uses free performances, sessions, lectures and exhibitions to stimulate new conversations and connect people through their love of music. Pictured at the launch are: Michael Hurley, Musical Director and Composer, 'Between the Jigs and the Marches'; Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú; Councillor Thomas Healy, Mayor of Sligo; Dorothy Clarke, Board Member, International Fund for Ireland; Bartley Gavin, Chair of the Fleadh Cheoil Executive Committee.





Ulidia Training – Peace Impact Programme

In August, a County Antrim Peace Impact Project (PIP) celebrated its role in revitalising traditional skills and crafts while reducing tensions and turning around young lives in Ballymoney and surrounding areas. The Ulidia Training Peace Impact Project (PIP) has engaged more than 100 young people in culturally relevant activities that encourage learning and community development through a range of traditional crafts including banner and drum head painting, embroidery and leatherwork. The project also delivers other learning opportunities and offers a chance for wider community dialogue on issues linked to conflict and division. Pictured with Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland (centre left); are Ulidia Training PIP participants Jason Anderson and Richard McConaghie; and project coordinator Kenny Blair (right).

‘Reaching Out, Looking Forward’ – Peace Impact Programme

In August, Leitrim residents and community representatives came together at St Georges Heritage Centre in Carrick-on-Shannon to mark the completion of the eight-month ‘Reaching Out, Looking Forward’ project. County Leitrim Grand Orange Lodge delivered the project which incorporated a series of events and initiatives aimed at helping to address some of the negative local attitudes to the Orange Order that exist within both communities. The initial phase of the project incorporated a World War 1 research project as a central theme, offering a unifying cross-community platform to bring both traditions together. It resulted in the publication of ‘Leitrim, a County at War’, which details the impact of the war years on Leitrim and its people from both traditions. Pictured at the event are (l-r) Catherine Ryan, International Fund for Ireland; Alan Madill, Project Committee Chair; David Morton, Leitrim Orange Lodge; Quincey Dougan, Author; John Bredin, Carrick on Shannon Heritage Group; Dorothy Clarke, International Fund for Ireland Board Member; and Joe Morton, County Grand Master, Leitrim Grand Orange Lodge.



Blackmountain Shared Spaces Project – Peace Walls Programme

A new survey launched in October indicated that the majority of residents living near a cluster of interface sites in West Belfast would back plans to develop a shared community facility on a derelict factory site. The Shared Community Survey, developed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP), sought the views of 341 people based in the Springmartin/Highfield, Springfield/Moyard and Slibh Dubh areas. The project has been working in close partnership with NI Housing Executive, Belfast City Council and the International Fund for Ireland to explore new options to transform the sites. BMSSP has used assistance from the Fund to build community confidence and support for the transformation of a number of interface sites in the area. Pictured at the launch of the survey are (L-R) Guy Spence, Belfast Deputy Lord Mayor; Seamus Corr, BMSSP Coordinator; Billy Gamble, International Fund for Ireland Board Member; and Arder Carson, Belfast Lord Mayor.

