

# Fund



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

# FOCUS

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# Chair's Introduction

For over three decades, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) has paved the way for peace across the island of Ireland. This year marks a milestone in reconciliation as we observe the 25th Anniversary of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement.



As we reflect on those days of negotiations, and those who played a key role in getting the Agreement across the line, we must also acknowledge the transformative journey on which the IFI has embarked since 1998.

I recently had the honour of representing the IFI at a series of events to mark this significant anniversary and to reflect on the important role which the IFI played in peacebuilding both in the years leading up to the Agreement and in the decades after. While undoubtedly much has been achieved over the last 25 years, and society is in a better place, it is clear the journey to create lasting peace still continues.

This edition of Fund Focus examines the wider themes of peace and reconciliation both then and now. There is a unique opportunity to look ahead to the next crucial stage of peacebuilding as many of our projects continue to deliver for communities within a challenging climate.

With this in mind, the IFI is proud to announce a new funding initiative that champions the vital role community leaders have played and continue to play

in the Peace Process. 'Our Peace Our Future' highlights the often-overlooked community sector and recognises the huge contribution that ordinary people have made and continue to make to help deliver peace within communities, between communities, across the border and East-West.

The IFI is committed to continuing to invest in its grassroots peace and reconciliation efforts in communities that are suffering from high levels of economic and social deprivation, many of which continue to deal with the legacy of The Troubles today.

In this edition, our guest contributors are IFI Board Members Anne Carr and Avila Kilmurray. Both share their uniquely personal experiences of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement negotiations at the time, in the context of their involvement in the Women's Coalition.

We speak with North West Cultural Partnership's Chief Executive Brian Dougherty in Derry/Londonderry. Funded through the IFI's Peace Impact Programme (PIP) in the Fountain Estate area of the city, the project is looking at positive cultural expression within the PUL community now located in its newly renovated home in the New Gate Arts and Cultural Centre. The Partnership has set a goal to replicate the Walled City Tattoo Performance from 2013's UK

City of Culture for a Dublin audience next summer.

You will also read about an experience of a lifetime for young people from the PYDP 'New Leaf' Project in Ardee, Louth. They recently had a private meeting with US President Joe Biden when he visited Dundalk in April. Despite operating in a rural border area, the project is making considerable progress by creating a safe space and offering positive alternatives for participants to turn their lives around.

As the International Fund for Ireland looks ahead to the next 25 years of peacebuilding both North-South and East-West, we must support and continue to invest in those communities who still feel the legacy of The Troubles today. The work of the IFI will be critical in supporting those communities and helping them achieve a peaceful and positive future for generations to come.

**Paddy Harte, Chair**

# Our Peace Our Future to Champion Community Peacemakers

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) has unveiled a new £1m funding initiative that will recognise the critical role community organisations have made to the Peace Process.

The **'Our Peace, Our Future'** Initiative is open to projects currently funded under the IFI's four flagship Programmes. It is hoped that organisations with a wealth of experience from diverse backgrounds can work to examine the future direction of peacebuilding, exploring the successes and future challenges that communities face in their pursuit for sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Projects that receive funding under the Initiative will aim to develop strong relations – both North-South and East-West as well as using arts and culture across the island of Ireland to benefit future generations.

The Initiative was launched at a Special Board Meeting in Derry/Londonderry on the 25th anniversary of the Referendum where a large majority voted in favour of The Good Friday Agreement across the island of Ireland.

IFI Chair, Paddy Harte talks about the significance of Our Peace, Our Future; *"The IFI has always worked to support marginalised communities where the Peace Process has delivered limited benefits."*

*"Much has been achieved since 1998 and many challenges remain but we must recognise contributions from the often-overlooked community sector. These individuals were at the coalface, essentially quiet peacemakers who kept everything together and encouraged progress and dialogue."*

*"The IFI believes there is now a unique opportunity to look ahead to the next crucial stage of peacebuilding as projects continue to deliver in a challenging climate. It's important that we acknowledge the past and how it has influenced where we are but, equally, embrace the future, potential growth and opportunities it can bring. The wealth of experience that our projects can provide will play a key role in the creation of a more inclusive, shared society for all."*

Projects will work through partnership, equality and mutual respect, commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences and use cultural wealth through language, commemoration of the past, music and sport to better understand diversity.

There will also be a strong emphasis on the endorsement of civil and political leadership roles that have traditionally been underrepresented, including women and new citizens that make significant contributions to society.

Eligible projects must align with the overarching values and engage with opportunities to help develop further peace and reconciliation, promoting successful peacebuilding efforts of the past and looking to what will work for the next 25 years.



**A** Back row L to R: Avila Kilmurray, Peter Osborne, IFI Chair Paddy Harte, Ross Mealiff, Anne Carr; Front L to R Bernie Butler and Sadie Ward-McDermott

# The Good Friday Agreement Then and Now

The copy of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that was circulated to every household in Northern Ireland stated *'This Agreement is about your future. Please read it carefully. It's Your Decision'*. In the two concurrent referenda, North and South, in May 1998, the people of the island of Ireland said YES to the Agreement.

Not everyone was happy, but the vast majority recognised the historic compromises that had been made by both Republicans and Unionists. There was also a popular rejection of the idea of constitutional issues being decided through violence. I slept on the floor of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) rooms in Castle Buildings on the Thursday night. Mo Mowlam came in, threw off her wig (she was suffering from cancer) and said she was worried but hopeful. Martin McGuinness visited at 6.00 am to recite one of his poems in exchange for a non-meat sandwich. David Ervine argued for acceptance notwithstanding the echo of doors being closed as a small number of Unionist Party members who rejected the terms of the Agreement walked out. But 12 hours later it was done. The sense of relief and elation was palpable.

The NIWC argued for more support for community development and the representation of women in the Agreement. It ensured reference to integrated education and housing, as well as attending to the concerns of the victims/survivors of violence. It championed participatory democracy, the idea of drawing on civil society insights through a Civic Forum. It called for

equality and human rights, which, together with inclusion, were its three founding principles. These were all issues that had been discussed by community-based women's groups and activists over the previous three decades. They were demands that had been heard at Trade Union conferences and NGO gatherings. Women had a long involvement in what is now termed peacebuilding; but for many it was just common sense, albeit that it often took courage to mobilise around such issues on a cross-community basis.

Twenty-five years on we can celebrate relative peace. It is crucial that we recognise the very different circumstances that we are now living in thanks to the Agreement. However, there has been a failure to implement many of the social and rights issues so crucial for people still living in disadvantaged communities – the very communities that were often at the forefront of the violent conflict. It is programmes in these communities that the International Fund for Ireland supports. It walks with local activists in responding to everyday peace issues and averting tensions. It helps weave networks and relationships that create space for greater understanding of 'the other' whether across a peace wall or on the other side of the border. This work is still essential.

It was snowing on Good Friday 1998, but the chill could not dampen the sense that history was being made. Hope and history rhymed, but there was still the need for imagination, commitment and courage to craft a future that could deliver for all sections of society. With the bedrock of peacebuilding in place, the work of translating it into future-focused solutions remains.



**By Avila Kilmurray,  
IFI Board Member**



# The Good Friday Agreement Then and Now

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My journey as a peace and reconciliation activist started with personal experience of the violent conflict that rocked our society. Growing up in the Greater Shankill area in the 1960s and early 70s, our lives were devastated by bombings, shootings, rioting, and families having to leave their homes.



**By Anne Carr,  
IFI Board Member**

When I had children of my own in a “mixed marriage”, I was passionate about ensuring another generation didn’t suffer as we did. That became my mission in life. In 1985, then living in Newcastle, Co. Down, I joined a small group of parents who wanted to establish an integrated primary school, the first outside Belfast. I joined the Board of Governors, became chairperson, and spent 20 years developing ‘All Children’s’.

In 1990, I joined the peacebuilding organisation Women Together as a Development Officer with my friend Pat Campbell. For years, this provided opportunities for women from across our divides to meet, share stories, develop understanding, campaign for an end to all violence, and build a society rooted in fairness, justice and equality.

I joined so many other women in the Ulster People’s College to hear Bronagh Hinds’ idea of establishing the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition. The goal was to secure two seats at the table of the newly announced “Peace Talks” that followed the 1996 ceasefires. We worked tirelessly and were delighted when Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar were nominated.

Local elections were due in early 1997 and we decided to run candidates across Northern Ireland to raise our profile and broaden our base. My profile was high with the peacebuilding work I was involved in, and I was the one candidate we managed to get elected.

From 1997 to 2001, I sat as an elected representative for the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition in Down District Council. I’ve since been told I was the first woman in the world, from a women’s political grouping, to be elected to public office.

I completed my term on the Council and helped establish the Community Dialogue organisation. As Dialogue Development Officer, I helped make possible the most difficult and challenging dialogue processes with people who often had never sat together in the same rooms before.

On April 9, 1998, I’d spent most of the previous two days in the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition room in Castle Buildings, Stormont. We hoped, waited and encouraged positive progress and resolution of final issues. A long-awaited peace agreement was in its final stages.

As all the following morning came to move to the main gallery. An agreement had been reached. The room was packed as representatives of the Loyalist and Republican communities pressed their button in accepting the Good Friday Agreement.

25 years on from those most difficult, challenging and yet rewarding days, we are all still on a journey, but I’m delighted to continue to build peace and reconciliation in whatever way I can.

I have joined the Board of the International Fund for Ireland because their dedicated commitment to the grassroots development of peace and reconciliation over so many years has been invaluable.

## CASE STUDY

# North West Cultural Partnership (NWCP)

The late John Hume – an architect of the Good Friday Agreement – once said he was “grateful for the opportunity to make a difference” in Northern Ireland’s push for peace and reconciliation. His contributions have inspired many in Northern Ireland – both young and old – to uphold this legacy.

This is especially true in his home city of Derry/Londonderry and the broader area, as seen by the North West Cultural Partnership (NWCP), which was formally established back in 2016. Based in the Fountain Estate, what started out with five like-minded volunteers has grown to 14 staff members, with a recruitment drive underway to employ more as demand for its services grow.

At a cost of £1.7m, renovation and extension work at the New Gate Arts and Cultural Centre close to the city’s historic walls has just been completed. Comprising a 140-seater performance space and dance studio, it also includes an exhibition space, a rooftop break-out space and an art room.

This work ensures the public can continue to receive music, drama and creative arts training, and engage in performances, talks and good relations workshops, tours, festivals and cultural events. Elsewhere, preliminary work on a second phase renovation of two houses that were acquired by NWCP is due to commence shortly; in time these will be turned into six apartments with the income generated from them going to support its activities.

Led by Chief Executive Brian Dougherty, NWCP came about after the Londonderry Bands Forum amalgamated with Bob Harte Memorial Trust, Sollus Cultural Productions, Blue Eagle Productions, Sollus Highland Dance, and Bready and District Ulster Scots.



**A** The NWCP team in a planning meeting for upcoming events.

It has received International Fund for Ireland support through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP), the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP), and more recently the IFI’s Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP) – initiatives that are designed to deliver tangible, positive community transformation.

“Londonderry Bands Forum was funded by the IFI in 2012, and since then the IFI has continued to resource other programmes and projects we have been doing.

“Currently, the PIP is looking at cultural expression which explores the issues that are affecting civic society, whether it be bonfires, contentious symbolism or murals. We work with those young people and adults to understand what way we can manage pro-Union culture in the correct way.

“The real positive about the IFI is that they get it, whereas some funders don’t. The IFI listens to the groups they work with; they’re flexible and they’re realistic as well and that allows us to react to challenges because challenges always change.

“Our work came about because the IFI took a chance on the Londonderry Bands Forum 10 years ago, so as an organisation it’s had a real impact. It isn’t about short-term, piecemeal peacebuilding work but long-term, strategic thinking. You cannot underestimate the impact it has had.”

Recently, NWCP and Bready and District Ulster Scots Development Association (BDUSDA) worked together, focussing on those marginalised sections of the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist (PUL) communities. Cross-border work and greater networking with others was also explored by them.

“The nature of the structure of the NWCP is that it is made up of six autonomous bodies – six bodies that work closely together – of which Bready and District Ulster Scots Development Association is one,” says Brian.

“The big challenge, particularly in the Unionist community and rural Unionist communities is that there’s lots of

## CASE STUDY

### North West Cultural Partnership (NWCP)

skills but these are isolated. We want to bring a sense of connectivity and co-ordination to that and help to identify that talent.”

Brian and his team ran a three-week summer camp out of the New Gate Arts and Cultural Centre. A total of 15 students and academic staff from Hofstra University on Long Island in New York participated in a series of lectures, site visits and panel discussions to examine the impact of the Good Friday Agreement.

“We are probably the first community association that’s done this, to set it up, have it resourced and organise it, so it is one way of dipping our toe into the international narrative because what we find is that international students – largely from the eastern seaboard universities that have an Irish-American interest from Boston or Harvard – come here with a remarkably narrow, binary view of politics and we find that not only incredible but also incredibly frustrating,” he says.

Work also continues behind the scenes to replicate the Walled City Tattoo performance that was held in Ebrington Square during Londonderry’s year as the UK City of Culture in 2013, for a Dublin audience

next summer. This is another way to create a clearer understanding about PUL culture, says Brian: “We want to welcome young people – and performers – from Dublin into the Fountain Estate and we want to help them understand why a young Loyalist wants to be in a band, but also make young people from here appreciate what makes young people in the South of Ireland tick.”

As for the Good Friday Agreement, Brian says it’s been transformative for Northern Ireland but is mindful of the work that remains unfinished.

“A lot of good has come out of it but we’re not out of the woods by any respect.”

He adds: “There is still a way to go, especially as far as economic opportunity in this part of the world goes but things are better now than they were 25 years ago.

“It isn’t rocket science, but the one thing I have learned as a community worker is quite simple: if you give a young person a job then a lot of the other problems fall by the wayside, and if you give them responsibility, a mortgage, a car loan, or a sense of hope, then things will quickly improve.”

## CASE STUDY

### DEE HUB, New Leaf Project

In 2017, a purpose-built, not-for-profit youth and community space opened its doors in Ardee. Since then, the ‘Dee Hub’ has become a beacon of hope for the area’s most vulnerable individuals.



**A** *IFI Chair Paddy Harte, Irish Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin, Damien McKenna, New Leaf Project Co-ordinator and participants meet US President Joe Biden in Dundalk.*



Operated and managed by the Ardee & District Community Trust, it provides life-changing support for those who are deemed to be at risk of social exclusion. Resources also target young people who could be potentially coerced by factions within proscribed paramilitary organisations.

Help is offered to parents and families, too, and can take the form of counselling, whilst advice is available for senior and retired citizens. People currently out of work – and teens who could potentially fall foul of either drug or alcohol abuse – can also engage at the Dee Hub.

For co-ordinator Damien McKenna, who successfully manages the International Fund for Ireland-backed 'New Leaf' Project under the Personal Youth Development Programme, the aim is to give individuals living throughout mid Louth access to "a safe, creative and dynamic Community ResourceHub".

Projects such as New Leaf tend to be multi-faceted and involve different public sector bodies and organisations, including Louth County Council and the Probation Service. Local Gardai officers are also involved and have been strong advocates of the International Fund for Ireland's contribution.

Through New Leaf, those aged 15-24 get the chance to build and develop life skills that help foster good relations, self-confidence and resilience, and enhance their employability skills. By devising and delivering individually tailored programmes that address the specific needs of teenagers who have left the education system early, they are able to take advantage of new, exciting and varied opportunities.

"The New Leaf project has, over time, embedded itself in the ethos and core values of the International Fund for Ireland," explains Damien.

"Our aim is to create a safe space for young people in these communities to explore alternative options than those posed by paramilitary or criminal organisations.

"As part of this exploration, we work with young people in the community to reflect the future of Ireland, its different communities and backgrounds, to challenge discrimination and prejudice.

"Being a border county and a border town poses a challenge in itself, with paramilitary groups and the legacy of the conflict still paramount in the area. Being beside a community that is involved in a drug feud has an impact, too.

"Challenges and issues such as coercion, drug-related intimidation and the legacy of the conflict have a huge bearing on the young people living in these areas," he adds.

"Coupled with rural isolation and exclusion from support services – or lack thereof – have widened the gap of deprivation which leads to early school leaving, unemployment and engagement in criminal and paramilitary activities."

"We provide an alternative for young people in the area. Through support and personal development, we can effectively impact the lives of those we engage with. We provide individual pathways and opportunities for young people to progress and overcome barriers they may encounter. As a service we measure success on the qualitative outcomes we try to achieve.

"Moments such as organising and hosting the first ever pride event in the mid-Louth area for example, but more recently we have looked at our recent Personal Youth Development Programme activity and from that cohort we supported, over 90% returned to education, training or employment. 100% obtained qualifications that will help them secure employment in the future."

In April this year, Damien and current New Leaf participants had a private meeting with the American President Joe Biden during his official state visit to Ireland. International Fund for Ireland Chair Paddy Harte and the Irish Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin were also present in the same corner of Dundalk's Windsor Bar as they learned about the work that takes place at Dee Hub – and how it transforms people's lives.

"This was a wonderful experience for the service and especially for the young people involved. To get the opportunity to meet the US President and talk to him about their experience of the programme was something that they will never forget.

"That in itself was marvellous, but to feel like they are worth something and not to be left in the margins of society made them feel 10 feet tall. It is an experience that I know they will never forget as they move forward on their personal journeys."

Being able to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement was another milestone for the Dee Hub and those who have personal connections to it. It has offered a fantastic platform for us to obtain and maintain peace in Ireland," says Damien.

"It also offers governments a chance to support communities north and south and give them the space to grow. We have been given the gift of peace and with peace comes the shared space to open dialogue.

"It has delivered an opportunity for communities to explore the realisation that they can not only understand each other better but can also help one another to grow and build a better future on the island of Ireland.

"It is important to remember the Good Friday Agreement wasn't the end of things, more the beginning of everything.

"I believe that for communities to flourish over the next phase, they must be allowed to critically reflect on their own situations, explore the options and act for themselves.

"It is critical we recognise the abilities of these communities and help them realise their own potential, to support them and to encourage them on their journeys to peace and reconciliation, on both sides of the border and across Ireland."



## Launch of 'Community Active Play Project' - Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

The Community Active Play Project is using sport and physical activity programmes to build positive long-lasting relationships as well as improve the social and emotional well-being of adults and children in disadvantaged cross-border urban communities in Donegal and Derry/ Londonderry.

Funded through CiPP and led by Donegal Local Sports Partnership (DLSP), in collaboration with Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership (WNP), it will develop and implement a series of sport and physical activity programmes. It will work specifically with community organisations in Letterkenny, Donegal Town and Waterside Neighbourhood Renewal Area with the purpose of engaging adults and children from disadvantaged cross-border urban communities.

The concept is an exciting opportunity that uses Active Play through recreational games, sports and physical activity to break down barriers, create new community relationships while positively impacting physical and emotional wellbeing.

*Pictured are: (L-R) Gretta Donaghy, Monica Quinn, Patsy Ferry, Garry Glennon.*



## Fermanagh Positive Youth Outlooks Celebration event, Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP)

Young people from County Fermanagh celebrated reaching personal and professional milestones, thanks to the support of Fermanagh Positive Youth Outlooks, which is associated with well-known community group Fermanagh Sports and Cultural Awareness Association (FSCAA).

Many of the young people involved with the project come from a range of challenging backgrounds including paramilitary recruitment, anti-social activity, dealings with the criminal justice system, substance abuse, poor mental health, and a mistrust of statutory institutions. The Project supports young people on a range of issues helping them develop life skills that foster good relations, and build confidence and resilience, which ultimately makes them more employable.

The Project has been funded by the IFI since April 2021 delivering 60 accredited qualifications including Essential Skills, Peace and Reconciliation, Personal Development, First Aid, Youth Leadership, Health, and Safety. Seventeen young people have also secured employment through the support of the project and team.

*Pictured at the celebration event are: (Back L to R) IFI Board Member Peter Osborne, Tom Elliott, MLA (UUP), Cllr Rosemary Barton (UUP), Cllr Diana Armstrong (UUP), Project Worker Alex Elliot and Cllr John Coyle (SDLP), (front) Participants Amanda Elliot and Kyle Nelson.*



## NetWORKS23 Workshop - Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

An ambitious cross-border project is bringing people together to develop a successful social enterprise capacity building programme that will make border communities more sustainable.



NetWORKS23 has a strong focus on developing and embedding sustainable relationships on a cross-border basis through supporting cooperation and innovation between groups and organisations North and South. The project is being led by Community Finance Ireland in partnership with Rural Community Network. Through a shared learning approach, NetWORKS 23 will facilitate cross-community and cross-border engagement with people who have had limited opportunities for collaborative working. The Project targets community and voluntary organisations in Derry/Londonderry, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Fermanagh, Donegal and Tyrone. Participants to date have attended residentials in Sligo and a cross-border workshop in Greysteel at the Vale Centre. The day long seminar provided practical insight into the Vale Centre's commercial activities, revenue generation and how a social enterprise approach feeds into the public and social services offered to the wider community.

*Pictured at the workshop are Front, from left, Bridie Mullen, Vale Centre committee, Ultan Faherty, Halo Business Angel Network (HBAN) Coordinator North West, Paddy Harte Chair of the International Fund for Ireland, Donal Traynor Group CEO CFI, Damian McAteer Group Chair CFI, Noel Ellis (Killymard/Donegal Town Orange Lodge), Pauline O'Reilly (St. Patrick's, Donagh, Fermanagh), Stephen McElhinney (Cully Hall Committee, Donegal). Back, from left, are Fintan Kelly (Aclare Community Council, Sligo), Sean Donnelly (Brocagh & District Regeneration Group, Tyrone), and Mandy Ellis (Hilltown Ladies Lodge, Donegal).*

The Fund delivers peace and reconciliation work across Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties as illustrated in the map.



The International Fund for Ireland is an independent international organisation established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 with the objectives of promoting economic and social advance and of encouraging contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout Ireland. Donors to the Fund are the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

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