

# FundFocus

September 2024

## 'Our Peace Our Future'



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# Chair's Introduction

**Welcome to the latest edition of Fund Focus where we champion everyday peacebuilding and demonstrate the positive impact that IFI supported projects are having in communities across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties of Ireland.**



For over 35 years, the IFI has made a significant contribution to the Peace Process, but we also recognise the challenges and divisions that remain across this society.

This work remains critical on our peacebuilding journey across the island of Ireland, and we must continue to tackle issues in order to create a more inclusive, shared society for all.

In this issue, you will learn more about the 'Our Peace Our Future' funding initiative which was launched last year.

It encapsulates everyday peacebuilding where we highlight the huge contribution that people across all walks of life have made to help deliver peace within communities, between communities and across the border in the last 25 years. In addition, we look forward to the next 25 years, by exploring how people throughout this society can work together to foster peace and reconciliation in a meaningful way. We must remind ourselves that "Our Peace" is the responsibility of all of us.

Our guest interview in this edition is Rachael Pierce, a former participant in a Personal Youth Development

Project in North Belfast. She shares a powerful testimony on drug and alcohol abuse, which led her to turn her life around and she now advocates for young people and housing rights. Rachael is an inspiration for how young people are playing an important role in shaping a more positive future for their communities.

We also catch up with two projects who have used Our Peace Our Future funding to deliver innovative plans.

The W.A.Y Programme in Donegal engages with the most marginalised young people to develop crucial skills that foster good relations, confidence, and resilience. The programme delivered a range of historic workshops and visits so young people could learn more about the past and the legacy of 'The Troubles'. They also explored how society needs to tackle discrimination, racism and war in the next 25 years. Alongside this, local charity 'Liquid Therapy' worked with the project to offer A Dip in The Ocean. Participants braved the cold waters taking part in surfing lessons, which are beneficial for people affected by trauma.

You will also meet a creative group of students who used Our Peace Our Future funding to develop a Podcast Series featuring well-known

contributors including Professor Monica McWilliams, co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. The 'Better Peace' Podcast encouraged students to explore various themes around the Good Friday Agreement, progress made since 1998 and how politicians can continue to deliver on issues that matter to young people. As well as making their voices heard, the students involved received hands on media training to develop a range of skills and even composed and performed the music that now accompanies each episode.

Thanks to the generous support of our longstanding donors- the British and Irish Governments, the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand- we can continue our peace and reconciliation work, delivering for communities who need our support.

Paddy Harte, Chair



# Funding Update

**Seventeen projects across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties of Ireland have received £3,305,873/ €3,789,268 to deliver peace and reconciliation work.**

The latest round of funding will assist projects across a range of initiatives including engaging with communities who have yet to see or experience peace dividends from the Good Friday Agreement.

Funding has been allocated to three of the four core programmes under the current strategy including, Peace Impact Programme (PIP), Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) and Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP).

Commenting on the financial support, IFI Chair Paddy Harte said; *"We recognise that a lot of progress has been made but the reality on the ground indicates that there are many who feel that the Peace Process has not delivered what it should have, particularly in the most vulnerable and marginalised communities across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland."*

*"Our projects are working within incredibly challenging environments where issues around culture, identity,*

*flags, bonfires, sectarianism, trauma and ongoing paramilitary influences are causing deep division.*

*"Recent elections may also have stirred up disaffection within communities, creating more extreme political views. This can often create a vacuum of instability particularly in marginalised communities where young people can be more susceptible to paramilitary or criminal influence.*

*"Part of this funding is providing targeted interventions for at-risk young people, instilling confidence, and offering more positive life choices. By empowering young people to take control of their lives, we can give communities the tools to help create stability and opportunity for future generations."*

*"Thanks to the ongoing support of our international donors, we can continue to deliver unique peacebuilding programmes. We are committed to supporting those who need interventions the most and are one of the few organisations who are prepared to take these risks to help create an inclusive, shared future for all."*

## Peace Impact Programme (PIP)

**£191,451 (NI) €216,339 (SBC)**

## Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP)

**£1,875,482 (NI) €2,119,293 (SBC)**

## Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

**£1,238,940 (NI) €1,453,636 (SBC)**

## TOTAL FUNDING

**£3,305,873 (NI)**

**€3,789,268 (SBC)**

IFI Board- L to R Peter Osborne, Bernie Butler, Sadie Ward McDermott, IFI Chair Paddy Harte, Anne Carr and Avila Kilmurray.





# FundFocus Profile

Rachael  
Pierce

**The International Fund for Ireland's Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) has helped transform the lives of many teenagers living in the greater Belfast area – just ask Rachael Pierce. Joining YOLO – a PYDP project co-ordinated by Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum (CCRF) that works with 16-25-year-olds in the Lower Cliftonville, Lower Oldpark and Shankill areas of the city – was the all-important step the once directionless teenager took to tap into her full potential.**

Life, as she explains, hasn't been easy, but with good people around her – and funding from bodies like the International Fund for Ireland that assists community-based initiatives like YOLO – she has used this to turn her life around, and introduce what she desperately needed: stability.

Aged eight, she lost her mother, meaning she no longer had a full-time family home despite the love and care of her relatives. By 16, as part of a "chaotic lifestyle" that involved drinking alcohol and consuming drugs to the detriment of her mental health, sofa-surfing quickly became the norm. But as her situation improved at CCRF, doors opened, and opportunities presented themselves.



*Rachael delivered a powerful speech at a Housing Rights' 60th anniversary event in Stormont back in May.*

"The major fork in the road moment for me came when I attended a cluster event on overcoming addiction and heard from a girl named Danielle Collins," explains Rachael. "Hearing her journey really resonated with me. It triggered me to want to make changes, which I did with the help and support of PYDP. I received so much support and encouragement from CCRF, and this is a real testament to the staff there. I was at a stage in my life where I was not the easiest to work with – but it has helped me to move forward. Now, I am in a full-time job, I have a place I can call home, and I am no longer living the chaotic lifestyle I was living when I first joined the programme."

"Before, I lacked serious motivation in all aspects of my life, and just getting that bit of support I needed really made me feel like I mattered – it motivated me to get my life back on track. Having that made such a big difference, knowing that someone was in my corner and wanting me to win at life. I have taken so much from the programme, whether it be the skills and qualifications I gained, the friendships I made, or the emotional help the programme gave me along the way."

Arguably one of the biggest contributions staff made was the completion of a housing application; it was the first meaningful building block Rachael laid down, with the second following soon after as she secured employment with Housing Rights as a Peer Advocate on its Young Persons' Team. It was a natural fit, according to Rachael, given her experience of youth work and homelessness. She also had a clear idea of what needed to be addressed because of the conversations she had with those at Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum: drug and alcohol abuse, poor mental health, managing money, and trouble accessing education and employment featured repeatedly.

"I knew the job was meant for me," says Rachael, who has been involved in projects that have centred on listening to those with expertise and experience of housing and homelessness issues.

"I believe my role allows me to bring about positive change for young people – I have experienced first-hand many of the issues the young people I work with are currently going through, so being in a position where I can try to make a change, that inspires me – and it motivates me to do more."

That motivation took her to an event in Belfast back in May. At the 60th anniversary of Housing Rights which was attended by Northern Ireland's Minister for the Communities – Gordon Lyons MLA – and Professor Balakrishnan Rajagopal – the United Nations' Special Rapporteur to the Right to Adequate Housing – Rachael delivered what was a powerful and indeed deeply moving speech.

Although Rachael used the platform to recall how tough her personal situation was, she was quick to point out that through her peer advocate role, the problem of young children and teens being left behind remains unresolved. Politicians and decision-makers also learned how she intends to help "shape the service" individuals receive "to best attend their needs". However, it was far from an easy thing to do for Rachael. "I really had to

push myself out of my comfort zone to tell my own story that day," she recalls. "On the day of the event, after delivering the speech, I felt moved and also encouraged from the response of everyone in the room, and also the days following the speech – but I feel that it is incredibly important that this response is now turned into action."

"While there are many opportunities for young people, some are at a disadvantage and unable to access them. People from areas like mine face significant challenges but I remain optimistic about the future of Northern Ireland. The younger generation are more concerned with social issues and the issues that affect the working class, but as society changes, it is evident that Northern Ireland is becoming more diverse. That has already brought its own challenges, and the levels of threat and racism have increased. But I am hopeful society here can continue to move towards a more peaceful and inclusive future. Young people are the future and with the correct support and right opportunities they can create a peaceful society where we can all live and work together."



*Rachael works as a Peer Advocate on Housing Rights' Young Persons' Team. She is pictured alongside her colleagues at the event in Stormont.*



CASE  
STUDY

## Bundoran Community Development – W.A.Y Programme

Convincing teenagers to engage meaningfully with more serious, grown-up subjects such as peace and reconciliation is never easy – but with support from the International Fund for Ireland's Our Peace Our Future initiative, Bundoran Community Development has succeeded in overcoming this barrier.

With €8,300 (£7,025) of funding, Bundoran Community Development has introduced a new strand to its Wild Atlantic Youth (W.A.Y) programme – an initiative where the focus is moving beyond the legacy of the past because of The Troubles, by engaging with the area's most disadvantaged individuals.

Having increased spend, in addition to that already made available through the International Fund for Ireland's Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP), project leaders Danielle Carty and Caoimhe Moloney have connected with those boys and girls who regularly visit Bundoran Community Centre.

Between September last year and April of this year, the Project worked with other groups affiliated to Bundoran Community Centre, its trusted partners, and schools in the local area. During this time, they have built connections, co-ordinated facilitated activities, and educated teenagers on diversity, rights and rights-based issues and inclusion through small-scale, intergenerational schemes.

As Caoimhe Moloney – Project Co-ordinator of the W.A.Y Project – explains: "Our Peace Our Future gave participants the opportunity to be involved in something that they may not have had the chance to be a part of otherwise. It has allowed young people to build – and develop – crucial life skills which foster good relations, confidence, and resilience through experiences and memories that will last them a lifetime. The IFI has also allowed us, within our local community, to build on the good relations work that is already happening and widen that scope of work to reach other groups in the community.



*The W.A.Y Project team joined forces with Liquid Therapy to deliver surfing lessons, with this forming part of a wider programme of events specifically designed to target young people.*

"It goes without saying that young people's voices should be heard within their communities; they are powerful and should not be overlooked. We placed an emphasis on the conversations that took place with the project's participants and the facilitators of the activities. Doing this has allowed for real-life, educational conversations to take place in a learning – and inclusive – environment. It meant that one generation had the opportunity to be heard and listened to by the other. This has also allowed those involved to give back to their community through engagement with various other community groups."

Young people have enjoyed educational historic workshops, a guest speaker visit from the Children in Crossfire founder Richard Moore, and trips to the historic Derry's Walls and Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast. Danielle and Caoimhe also joined forces with Liquid Therapy – a charity that offers 'ADITO' (A Dip In The

“Young people have developed crucial life skills which foster good relations, confidence, and resilience through experiences and memories that will last a lifetime.”

CASE  
STUDY

## Bundoran Community Development – W.A.Y. Programme

Ocean) therapy which is scientifically proven to benefit those impacted by experiences of trauma.

A total of 12 young people – both local and from new communities – braved the cold to take part in two, eight block sessions to get to know one another better as part of a process designed to enhance integration in neighbourhoods. With Bundoran's demographic changing, due to families displaced by the conflict in Ukraine turning to Ireland for safe refuge, Danielle believes there has never been a more pertinent time for young people to discuss past events and allow them to take ownership of the future.

"We responded to a common need of the project participants – and ADITO was the perfect fit," says Danielle, who is the Bundoran Community Centre Manager. ADITO was a cornerstone for the start of the project as it began by breaking down barriers that may have existed between the participants. Such programmes have been developed over a period of 12 years and are evidence-based, addressing barriers to inclusion in both sport and society, while promoting mental health and overall well-being.

"Bringing diverse groups of young people together for peacebuilding and conflict resolution has been very fitting at this present moment in our community. Ethnic diversity of the local community has changed in the last 25 years and over the course of the next 25 years, part of the conversation that needs to happen is about how, as a society, we tackle the issues of discrimination, racism, and war.

Danielle adds: "Our Peace Our Future funding has allowed us to deliver real and positive community transformation through reconciliation and a variety of capacity building activities. This can only be a positive step as we move forward, it has almost been like planting the seed to move forward and address issues like community tensions. It has been wonderful to watch this integration happen within our Community Centre as the young people integrate rather than separate. We believe the best way to make change is through our youth."



Our Peace Our Future funding from the International Fund for Ireland allowed a group of 12 young people to participate in the Wild Atlantic Youth (W.A.Y) Project and experience A Dip In The Ocean – a therapy that benefits those affected by trauma.



CASE  
STUDY

## Politics in Action – ‘Better Peace’ Podcast

When the Executive Director and Project Manager of Belfast-based Politics in Action (PIA) sat down to apply for *Our Peace Our Future* funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), creating something that would leave a tangible, lasting and far-reaching legacy was uppermost in both their minds.

In the end, Paul Smyth and Thérèse Cullen concluded that a podcast series would meet the funding criteria best, and with their application for £10,000 of support, work to turn an idea into a reality commenced.

With the help of nine young people (four from Co. Donegal, two from Portadown, three from Belfast) aged between 15 and 18, they have delivered a series of Better Peace Podcasts that explore a range of topics with guest interviewees from across the UK and Ireland. At the heart of these discussions is the Belfast Good Friday Agreement; the progress made since 1998; and how politicians can continue to deliver in those areas of greatest importance to young people. As a teaser, identity and culture, mental health, the environment, policing and human rights, participation and political reform are all profiled.

Paul Smyth said the assistance from the IFI's *Our Peace Our Future* initiative, which recognises the vital role community organisations have made to the Peace Process, was a 'timely and a terrific fit' and has allowed 'us to engage in a really creative, challenging, and productive process'.

He said: "Since the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we've been thinking about creating a podcast to explore young people's thoughts about the impact of that agreement and the challenges remaining for our society. Young people are no longer simply the consumers of media. They expect to be able to interact and co-create media, as they get their information from a very wide range of sources.



*Nine young people aged 15-18 helped with the researching, recording, and editing of each Better Peace podcast which received 'Our Peace Our Future' funding.*

"We advertised the project across our programmes and these nine young people put themselves forward; none of them knew all the others beforehand but they have become such a strong group through the process of working together. They came up with great questions for the interviewees, and their group discussions show how much they learnt being part of the process, and how much they enjoy working together."

Participants were encouraged to think journalistically, according to Paul, meaning they had to present issues from multiple perspectives: by bringing these informed opinions and arguments together in the same place, it allows listeners of each

“None of them knew all the others beforehand but they’ve now become such a strong group.”



CASE  
STUDY

## Politics in Action – ‘Better Peace’ Podcast

podcast to reach their own conclusion. This was done by building in as many layers as possible to an episode, comprising two-way interviews, panel discussions, and ‘vox pops’ with people on the street – a well-used straw poll that is intended to gauge public feeling.

“We sometimes had to do a number of takes, particularly during the visit to Edinburgh and Cardiff when we were looking at the ‘Votes at 16’ subject. It was a long and tiring trip with a lot of disruption, but the group worked really hard to ensure there was energy in the content, and that they did justice to both the subject and the experiences of their interviewees.”

As well as allowing young people to express their views, and provide a platform where ideas could be challenged, participants have also enhanced their future career prospects by receiving hands-on media training from former Ulster Television (UTV) broadcast journalist, Jude Mitchell Hill.

This comprised researching, writing, interviewing, recording, and then editing the audio that was captured for each programme. Even the introductory music was a collaborative effort with Aoife Mallon – a Politics in Action Trustee and talented singer-songwriter, composing it and singing harmonies with one of the young people.

“For the project we tendered for a journalist, and we were delighted when Jude applied for the role – she’s a highly experienced journalist, a human rights activist and also has a great deal of youth work experience,” said Therese.

“She was really great with the young people, helping them to get the most from the experience. The podcast format was a great way to teach technical, journalistic and research skills and learn how to use their voice effectively. The podcast is also a great resource for teachers, youth and community workers and others who want to explore the important themes raised,” she added.



To listen to the Better Peace Podcast series, visit [www.betterpeacepodcast.buzzsprout.com](http://www.betterpeacepodcast.buzzsprout.com)

*Professor Monica McWilliams, co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and former Human Rights Commissioner, was one of the special contributors to the Better Peace Podcast.*

# FundFocus News...

## Galbally Youth & Community Association 'Game Changer Project' – Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP)

Fifteen young people from across South and East Tyrone have gained a range of levels 3 training and personal development certification with Galbally Youth and Community Associations' 'Game Changer' project.

In recent years, the area has witnessed an increase in the number of young people involved in risk-taking behaviours e.g. drugs, alcohol, anti-social behaviour. There has been an increase in the number of young people leaving school with no or low qualifications and more people suffering from poor mental health problems. Due to its rurality, isolation is also an issue in the area – young people having no or little access to public transport which limits opportunities for training or employment.

Speaking at the celebration event, participants shared how the project has impacted their lives offering opportunity thanks to the range of accredited and non-accredited training and workshops available.

*L-R Pictured at an event at Galbally Community Centre, Bridget Nugent, Project Co-Ordinator of 'Game Changer' Project, participant Reece Freeman, IFI Chair, Paddy Harte, Marie Therese Soares, project participant and Fergal O'Donnell, Director of Galbally Youth and Community Association.*



## CBenACT – Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

A cross-border community project supporting women to develop skills and competencies for STEM (science, engineering, maths, technology) related roles and trade occupations such as carpentry and plumbing, marked progress on an 18-month project with an event hosted by Creative Spark and WOMEN'STEC at the Enterprise FabLab, Dundalk.

Participants from Louth, Newry, Mourne and Down gathered to share insights and learnings including a visual display showcasing individual perspectives and experiences gained from the project. To date, fifty-one women completed training and skills development in a variety of STEM disciplines and trades including plumbing and carpentry.

CBenACT aims to address the interconnected issues facing border communities and equip organisations on both sides of the border with the skills and training to deliver cross-border activities and initiatives.

*Seun Grace Atioko, Creative Spark; Sadie Ward McDermott, IFI and Roisin O'Hanlon, Lislea Lively Ladies pictured at the CiPP funded event in Dundalk.*





# FundFocus News...

## TASCIT – Peace Barriers Programme (PBP)

Sixty residents from interface areas in North and West Belfast recently completed a cross- community course that aims to build respect and understanding as part of a wider programme examining attitudes to Peace Barriers and their removal.

'Challenging Conversations' is an innovative nine-week course that encourages residents from Nationalist and Unionist backgrounds to explore and discuss issues such as the legacy of The Troubles, cultural heritage, politics, history, identity, flags and more.

The course is delivered by TASCIT (Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition), a cross-community partnership involving four local organisations - Lower Shankill Community Association (LSCA), Twaddell & Woodvale Residents Association (TWRA), Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne (CRUA) and the North Belfast Interface Network (NBIN, Ardoyne).

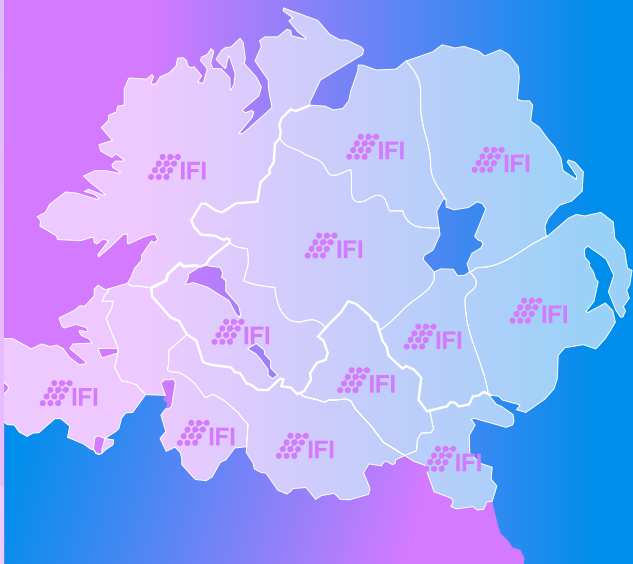
Thanks to the support of The Executive Office, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), Belfast City Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Challenging Conversations has successfully engaged with more than 300 residents since it began in 2018.

Speaking at the celebration event, participants shared how the project has impacted their lives offering opportunity thanks to the range of accredited and non-accredited training and workshops available.

*L to R Laurence Simms DFA, Participant Angela Whelan, Junior Ministers Aisling Reilly and Pam Cameron, IFI Board Member Peter Osborne and Stephen Scott participant at the Challenging Conversations event.*



*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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