

# Fund



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

# FOCUS

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# Chair's Introduction

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Peace and reconciliation efforts have never been more important as many of the communities the IFI engages with continue to deal with tensions around culture, identity, and legacy issues. These challenges are exasperated further by the cost-of-living crisis.



The IFI ensures that its support is directed to those who need intervention the most. At the heart of these communities, working amidst difficult backdrops, are ordinary people championing peace for the betterment of all.

This edition of Fund Focus introduces you to everyday peacemakers and the vital role that they play within their communities. Throughout The Troubles, the negotiations around the Good Friday Agreement and today, everyday peacemakers are a testament to the positive impact that community relations and reconciliation can have.

Since the Good Friday Agreement, we have all experienced a more peaceful society. We also recognise that the journey towards a lasting peace is a long road and that is why the IFI will continue providing targeted support to marginalised communities who feel that they have been left behind by the Peace Process.

I am delighted to welcome Commissioner Mairead McGuinness as our guest

contributor for this edition. Growing up in County Louth, a border area, she is all too aware of the legacy of The Troubles and the ordinary people building peace in extraordinary ways every day. I had the honour of spending time with the Commissioner at the Assembly of European Regions (AER) conference in Leuven, Belgium in summer 2023 where her passion for communities and peace was infectious.

You'll also learn more about everyday peacemakers that the IFI is proud to support through its key programmes. Through her work with Ballinamore's 'Better Together- Níos Fearr Le Chéile' project in County Leitrim, Máirín Martin is helping break down barriers in a border area that has been negatively impacted by The Troubles. Meanwhile, Carrickfergus Peace Impact Programme in County Antrim, led by Debbie Watters and the NI Alternatives team, is building trust in deprived communities, giving them the opportunity to think positively about the future.

As you read this edition, it is important for me to thank our donors who continue to recognise the need to support communities across Northern Ireland and southern border counties - the British and Irish governments,

the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Without their ongoing financial support and political encouragement, our grassroots work in developing sustainable peace and reconciliation would not be possible.

**Paddy Harte, Chair**

# Funding Update

Eleven projects across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties have received funding of £1,172,890 (NI projects) and €801,925 (SBC projects) from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), aimed at supporting them to deliver peace and reconciliation efforts in local communities.

The funding, which will be allocated through three of the IFI programmes – Peace Impact Programme (PIP), Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) and Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP) will be used to further support important peacebuilding and community relations efforts.

The funding includes a blend of extensions to existing projects aimed at advancing important work while other projects are being funded for the first time after identifying need in local areas.

Chair of the IFI, Paddy Harte welcomed the latest allocation of funding:

*“Supporting people working in their local communities consistently demonstrate their ability to understand and address the needs of their local area. We are seeing more projects identifying innovative and creative opportunities for engagement and dialogue between communities, encouraging cooperation and relationship building.*

*“We are continuing to see tensions between and within communities in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties, specifically relating to culture, identity, and legacy, further exasperated with the lack of the Northern Ireland Executive. Our young people continue to be at risk from paramilitary recruitment and criminal influence and this funding will ensure that support is targeted at those who really need it.*

*“This grassroots support is critical to developing sustainable peace and reconciliation, particularly in some of our most divided communities and the IFI is committed to supporting these projects.”*

Peace Impact Programme (PIP)  
**£419,967 (NI) €556,074 (SBC)**

Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP)  
**£405,927 (NI) €129,236 (SBC)**

Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)  
**£346,996 (NI) €116,615 (SBC)**

**TOTAL FUNDING**  
**£1,172,890 (NI)**  
**€801,925 (SBC)**



**A** Back row L to R Board Members Peter Osborne, Sadie Ward-McDermott, Bernie Butler and Anne Carr; front row Avila Kilmurray and IFI Chair Paddy Harte.

# Everyday Peacemakers

We often hear – and rightly so – about the political leaders who negotiated the Good Friday Agreement, giants of history like John Hume, David Trimble or Mo Mowlam. Their work is rightly acknowledged and honoured. But behind each of these leaders are the everyday peacemakers who continue to work in their communities to bring people together. During the Troubles, ordinary people North and South rose to the challenge of building peace in extraordinary ways.

I grew up just outside the town of Ardee in Co. Louth, not far from the border. I remember watching news reports of what was happening not far from where I lived, of bombs and shootings and atrocities.

Today, a quarter of a century after the Good Friday Agreement, we now have a quarter of a century of peace. This is testament also to the community groups and individuals whose work underpinned it. Think of the quiet work of people like Brendan Duddy or Father Alec Reid, who facilitated secret talks during what were often very difficult times. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, who wanted to make sure women's interests were represented in peace talks. Family members like Pat Hume who kept the show on the road when political leaders like John were about their business.

But there are also people whose names we do not know, and many are still at work today. Men and women who worked and still work with courage and dedication to build and support peace in their villages, in their towns and in rural communities – and in their own families. Those working at the grassroots to show people

what they have in common rather than finding the differences. Those who create jobs and investment, so that peace can be accompanied by prosperity. Those who reach across not only physical borders, but the borders of the mind and the heart.

The International Fund for Ireland is one part of this continuing peacebuilding work, providing concrete support for everyday peacemakers, encouraging dialogue and reconciliation across the island of Ireland. The European Union also provides support, including via long-standing support for the IFI.

I always say, and not always referring to Northern Ireland, that the concept of peace is not inevitable. It's something that often takes years of reconciliation and hard work on the ground to achieve. It can be fragile or fleeting before it finally takes hold.

We see conflict around the world, where peace may seem distant – like recently in Israel and in Gaza. Here, there should be a just and lasting peace between both sides, and there is no military solution: only a political process leading to a two-state solution can achieve lasting peace.

Grassroots efforts by everyday peacemakers who strive to build trust and understanding across the



**By Mairead McGuinness,  
EU Commissioner for Financial  
Services, Financial Stability  
and Capital Markets Union**

divides in society are the bedrock that lasting peace is built on. They are the people who bridge the gap with their neighbours, who share their stories and listen with empathy, who create spaces for dialogue and collaboration.

As so many parts of the world are troubled by horror and violence, the past 25 years in Northern Ireland show that with peace, a better future is possible. But it is not easy. Many in Northern Ireland suffered personally throughout the tragedies, yet still found the generosity of spirit to be part of building peace.

We can learn from everyday peacemakers that hope is possible even in the darkest of times. It requires brave people, working quietly in their homes and communities. It demands courageous political leadership to see the bigger picture, despite pressures that they might feel from their "own side".

If we look back to 1998, we can say and see that peace can prevail.

We owe that gift of peace to those whose names we know and those we do not name. We thank them for their courage.



## CASE STUDY

# Better Together – Níos Fearr Le Chéile

There is a belief that leaders are born and not made. Driven by the need for positive change, they take the necessary steps to achieve this with the help – and support – of like-minded individuals.

Máirín Martin embodies this belief as her early involvement with those at the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was crucial in establishing the Ballinamore ‘Better Together - Níos Fearr Le Chéile’.

A community activist for the past three decades, Máirín has always tried to lead from the front throughout this time, collaborating with everyone, from grass roots level to those in public office.

Nominated to the Board of Ballinamore Area Community Council in 2015, at Máirín’s first meeting she was elected Chairperson – a position she still holds – before Leitrim County Council introduced her to Catherine Ryan – the IFI’s current Programme Manager for Sligo, Leitrim, and West Cavan.

Following these initial conversations, Máirín laid the groundwork before submitting a successful application in late 2018 which secured funding for a project for 18 months through the Peace Impact Programme.. Subsequent to this, Máirín penned the entire application for the current project; it was awarded almost 194,000 Euros over a two-year period and remains active until the start of 2024.

The project is making tangible, lasting change to the lives of those it works with as the areas those people are from have been negatively impacted by activities associated with The Troubles. Even today, 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement was signed and sealed, the work of securing buy-in from those living in counties Leitrim,



**A** Máirín Martin, Chairperson of Ballinamore Area Community Council pictured during a panel event.

Cavan, Tyrone, and Fermanagh continues. But what makes Máirín well-placed to set the agenda is her personal backstory and unique experiences.

*“I grew up throughout The Troubles in Fermanagh close to the Cavan border and married a Leitrim man, so I am fully aware of the issues on both sides of the border. I am from a Nationalist/Catholic background, and I would have had a strong mistrust of the armed forces and the RUC – my family would never have engaged in conversation with them. But as a peacemaker, I have had to show positive leadership at local level. I have learned to understand the diverse political affiliations and loyalties within my community. I am deeply committed to the process of reconciliation,” she says.*

*“Ballinamore is an example of a town isolated by both the border and the conflict and BACC Clg., recognises the long-term negative effect the conflict has had on the town in relation to both population and economic growth. It realises that in order to sustain the town, we must address the negative perception of the area in order to achieve our aims. During the conflict, all five border crossings from Leitrim to Fermanagh were closed for more than twenty years; this stultified the economic and social life of the county, and it rendered Leitrim the most isolated by the conflict.”*

Máirín adds: *“As the most prominent organisation in the Ballinamore community, we must show leadership in order to address the situation in the border area, so we work in partnership with individuals, organisations, and statutory bodies to enable our locality to reach its full potential – economically, socially and culturally. Through our actions, we are promoting the sustainable development of our area; showing a willingness to address preconceptions and address the past; building confidence in our future; improving the quality of life for all; and promoting a more just and inclusive society. In essence, it is about enhancing the quality of daily life in this border area.”*

## CASE STUDY

### Better Together – Níos Fearr Le Chéile

Better Together - Níos Fearr Le Chéile' is achieving this through social enterprise and employability training; creative readers and writers schemes facilitated by libraries; and holding workshops that allow people of different ages, beliefs, and cultures to explore the past and also look to the future.

Its life-changing initiatives have even been brought to the attention of some of the world's most influential political figures as was the case when Máirín travelled to Boston in America for a special Women in Peace Conference. Part funded by the IFI's "Our Peace Our Future" programme, it was held to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement and mirrored an event in Belgium which she attended with the International Fund for Ireland. Yet despite the headlines the project enjoys by giving people a platform to explore other people's political views, Máirín concedes the journey towards peacebuilding is only just starting.

*"People often ask me, "Why do we need a Peace Impact Programme in 2023"? From what I have experienced over*

*the past few years – and even very recently – there is still a lot of barriers to be broken down. Peacemakers have a lot to contribute by being on the ground, by listening to people or organising activities and training. Peacemakers continue to do wonderful work," she says.*

*"Since the commencement of our project, we have engaged with so many community sector groups who are carrying out invaluable peacebuilding on the ground. They have succeeded in getting cross-community and cross-border groups to engage and learn from one another and sharing their knowledge and skills for the betterment of their communities. We know Loyalist and Nationalist groups who work in interface areas and prevent trouble breaking out by engaging both sides in projects and activities. We continue to make a strong contribution to building and sustaining peace, inclusion, equality and a sustainable society and economy. We are committed to working together to build on this progress and end misconceptions on both sides and treat all as equals."*

## CASE STUDY

### Carrickfergus Peace Impact Programme

For 25 years now, Debbie Watters and the staff and Board at Alternatives NI have been devoting their time and energy to bringing about lasting change to the most socially disadvantaged Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist areas inside and outside Belfast. Thanks to new backing from the International Fund for Ireland through its Peace Impact Programme (PIP), much-needed resources are now being channelled to those areas of Carrickfergus and Greenisland that need it most.



**A** The Project team in Carrick; Jamie-Lee Mogeey and Rodney Champion

## CASE STUDY

### Carrickfergus Peace Impact Programme

Carrickfergus Peace Impact Programme is being delivered via Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) – a body that was established back in 1997 to ensure communities have access to restorative justice. Through funding under PIP, Debbie, along with the Carrick staff, which includes Johnathan Hodge (Manager) and Jamie Lee Moge and Rodney Champion (Development Officers) have staged various activities with many more planned.

*“There are different programmes and interventions aimed at addressing the legacy of the conflict in Carrickfergus, whilst also helping to promote peacebuilding there,”* says Debbie. *“It has experienced high levels of tension because of paramilitary organisations and the activities they are involved with.”*

*“The PIP is about trying to address these issues by engaging with key activists in the area – specifically those who work in community organisations in Carrickfergus – and developing their capacity to help create a more stable and peaceful space for everyone to live. It is quite hard to build a community up and rebuild their confidence, especially if they are always being knocked down on a regular basis, so that is one example of how we are working to make a difference to those areas.”*

In mid-November, a workshop was delivered to help PUL communities gain a clearer understanding of how the media works, why and how certain stories are reported in the way they are, and how people can work together to try and present a more positive narrative of Carrickfergus. One such example is the creation of a vibrant mural of the town’s castle on the dilapidated gable wall of a house.

The work of celebrated London street artist Dan Kitchener (aka Dank), replaced a space previously graffitied with ‘RIP GFA’ (a reference to the Good Friday Agreement). It also injected a fresh and alternative view on life in the coastal town and attracted positive news coverage locally, nationally and even internationally.

Other programme work delivered by the Carrick staff team has included conflict transformation workshops. In October 2023, members of the marching bands and Loyal orders came together to learn more about conflict transformation for eight weeks. They also heard how they could become more active in the public arena by constructively challenging some of the narratives regarding the legacy of the conflict. These ongoing dialogues and challenging conversations have proven to help communities move forward and lay the stepping stone for peace for future generations.

Following this, an all-new programme was launched in the nearby town of Greenisland that is intended to focus minds on the benefits of peacebuilding and also show residents the ways and means they can get involved. On top of that, a new shared space hub where people can come and feel safe is also being opened.

*“People who live in Carrickfergus have traditionally been left behind,”* says Jonathan Hodge. *“Other areas have had a lot of investment but Carrickfergus hasn’t, so the PIP is probably the first time people living in more deprived areas*



**B** Dan Kitchener’s mural in Carrickfergus.

*have actually seen proper, sustained resources being sent their way. People can see that this IFI support has gradually delivered improvements to the environment they live in each day, whether visually or through reduced tensions or paramilitary activity,”* he adds.

Those sentiments are echoed by Debbie, in particular the undeniable role the IFI continues to play. *“When a community is marginalised and perceived in a negative light, the establishment find it difficult to engage with those communities and that is why the IFI is so important,”* she says.

*“As a funding body, the IFI take risks for peace and take risks for communities where others are afraid to do that, so the fact there is PIP support in Carrickfergus is testimony to the ethos and philosophy of the IFI.”*

*“For the first time these communities are able to think strategically about their future rather than just thinking there is the odd voluntary activity going on here and there. Already, in a six-month period, we have achieved an awful lot – significant inroads have been made – so really, the PIP is seen as a grassroots, indigenous programme that is going to deliver for local people.”*

Debbie’s commitment to resolving the local issues that matter most to those people she comes into contact with on a daily basis took her to Boston in October for a three-day conference which was part funded by the “Our Peace Our Future” programme through the IFI. Opened by Joe Kennedy III Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs, the keynote speaker was the Northern Ireland peace activist, Monica McWilliams. Some of the topics discussed included how to build a shared future for young people, housing and displacement, policing, and the invaluable contributions women make in peacebuilding – something that was highlighted by Debbie’s recognition in the King’s New Years Honours List.

On November 2, she travelled across to Buckingham Palace where she was presented with her Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Princess Anne. Debbie hopes it can serve as a springboard in facilitating further change for more people.

*“I am very committed to working class Loyalist communities and I’m passionate about the work we do here at NI Alternatives. We plan to continue to engage with communities and progress peacebuilding in those areas that need it the most.”*



## Connect2Gether Marks Successful First Year - Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

'Connect2Gether' is an initiative led by County Armagh Community Development (CACD) in partnership with Clones Family Resource Centre in Monaghan.

Over a 12-month period, Connect2Gether has built valuable links through a range of activities and workshops fostering understanding between different border communities. The celebration event, held at Craigavon Civic Centre, also shared key insights and outcomes from an interim report highlighting a positive experience for those involved.

The Project has been successful in creating shared experiences, building intercommunity connections and increasing skills. Further growth is planned through phase two and this will include gardening workshops, training courses, music and culture workshops, dance classes and a residential.

*Connect2Gether project celebrates one year led by County Armagh Community Development (CACD) and Clones Family Resource Centre. Pictured L to R IFI Board Member, Peter Osborne, Alison Cleary, Clones Family Resource Centre, Lord Mayor Alderman Margaret Tinsley and William Moorcroft, CACD Chairperson pictured at the event at Craigavon Civic Centre.*



## Better Together Highlights Importance of Road Safety - Communities in Partnership (CiPP)

Better Together, which is facilitated by the Bogside, and Brandywell Initiative (BBI) delivered a road safety conference and RTC re-enhancement for young students from Moville Community College, Deelee College Raphoe, Royal and Prior in Raphoe and Scoil Mhuire Secondary School in Bunrana.

Pupils heard from the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, Garda Síochána and Road Safety Authority on the importance of road safety and the impact of dangerous or careless driving on roads on both sides of the border. As part of this, it offered the opportunity for the young people to engage directly with relevant stakeholders involved in RTC's including Gardai, Fire Service and Ambulance Service.

Partner organisation Life After provided personal testimonies of losing loved ones and of helping other families who have lost someone to the roads.

*From left are Jack Le Masurier (Scoil Mhuire), Fianna McCool (Moville Community College), Ella McCarron (Deelee College) and Aaron Kerr (Royal and Prior), Donna McCloskey (Triax Neighbourhood Management Team - TNMT) and Sharon Semple, Better Together Project.*





## Rio Ferdinand Foundation Launches new Cross-border Project - Communities in Partnership (CiPP)

The Rio Ferdinand Foundation launched its 'Beyond The Ball' project, a significant partnership with the International Fund for Ireland, with a football tournament and networking event hosted at Séan Dolans GAC in Derry/Londonderry, with local network partners at Northwest Youth Services.



Building on the successes of the 'Beyond The Ball' pilot programme in Leitrim and Fermanagh this tournament is the first step in a series of events and year round activity and will encompass the project becoming operational on a cross-border basis in Donegal, who will have teams represented at the event.

The 'Beyond The Ball' project will use football as a pathway to bring young people together from across-the-border counties in Derry/ Londonderry and Donegal to build relationships, build their leadership skills, undertake training and accreditation, and deliver joint projects to address issues that impact themselves and their communities.

*L-R: Young participants from Derry-Londonderry and Donegal came together for the launch of the 'Beyond the Ball' Project. Pictured alongside the young people are Aimee Fitzpatrick, (RFF), Stevie Mallett, North West Youth Services, Paddy Harte, Chair of IFI, Catherine Ryan, Programme Manager, IFI and Sean Thorton and Dan Gorman from RFF.*

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 British and Irish governments, the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

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