

Everyday
Peacebuilding



FundFocus

October 2025



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Chair's Introduction

Welcome to the October edition of Fund Focus where we will be exploring some of the challenges that young people face in a post-conflict society.

This edition is timely as we bear witness to the devastating trauma in other areas of the world, and populations struggling to deal with the impact, the aftermath and the loss.



Whilst the violence of our own Troubles is largely behind us, for many young people here born after the Good Friday Agreement, the legacy of that is visible in poor mental health, intergenerational trauma, poverty, segregation, paramilitary activity, educational underachievement and barriers to employment. A volatile society like ours, seems even more susceptible to the aftershocks of wider geopolitical change and the ensuing exposure to targeted disinformation and negative influences in social media. There is vital work to be done and the IFI will put its shoulder to the wheel.

For nearly 40 years, the IFI has been instrumental in providing targeted support for those that need it most through its peacebuilding efforts. From early economic investment and essential connecting infrastructure in the 1980s to the present day, the organisation has remained committed to empowering people. By helping them build stronger relationships, skills and develop positive leadership, the IFI is actively working to give people the tools to create their own better, shared future.

Our guest contributor for this issue is Gabi Kent, a Senior Lecturer at The Open University. She recently led important research, with several partners, on the challenges young people face in areas most impacted by the Troubles. Teenagers have been engaging in valuable discussions that ultimately have changed how they view the issues that affect them. Thanks to this research,

those involved also developed vital skills to move beyond the conflict of the past, to contribute positively to what the future might look like.

You'll also read about two young men whose different life experiences and journeys make me incredibly proud of the impact our funding continues to have.

After facing a period of homelessness, Malcolm has just graduated with a Music degree from Ulster University and has a UK tour planned for later this year with Irish singer-songwriter George Houston. Stephen's journey has been equally transformative. He has spent his entire life living in the shadow of Belfast's Peace Walls. The walls have had a profound impact, but an IFI project has given him a new outlook on life, and he is now passionate about becoming a youth worker and helping others like himself.

We also chat with two projects, funded through our PYDP Programme, that are helping young people overcome barriers, and offering a second chance in life.

Youth Work Ireland North Connaught has been instrumental in targeting some of the most at risk young people in Leitrim and Cavan, giving participants in rural areas a voice to influence a new post-conflict society.

The IgnYte project in Derry/Londonderry is working with young people in the city delivering a range of skills including personal development, education and employability. In an area that has been susceptible to paramilitary influence over the years, young people are

moving away from tired ideologies and finding new role models in others who are giving back to their communities positively with pride.

This is a powerful edition that champions the young voices who are shaping the future of where we call home. Their stories serve as a potent reminder that while the past is behind us, the legacy of The Troubles continues to have a profound impact on the next generation.

As we shape the next phase of IFI, in an uncertain operating context, we have reached out to many whose lives have been touched by the Fund over the years. It is clear that our work is not yet done, that we have quite literally saved lives and have played a central role in the ongoing transition to a tolerant and respectful society. This essential work, built over nearly 40 years must continue. It's an investment in a shared society and in the people who will lead it. I would like to thank the ongoing support of our donors—the British and Irish Governments, the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—without their encouragement, this vital peacebuilding would not be possible.

Shona McCarthy, Chair

Funding Update

Two projects have received £176,150 / €208,167 to deliver peace and reconciliation work with communities under the Peace Impact Programme (PIP) and Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP).

The PIP Programme delivers sensitive interventions in communities that have not previously, or have only partially, participated in peacebuilding and reconciliation activities. Meanwhile, the CiPP Programme helps build resilience and empower communities to build stronger, meaningful cross-border partnerships.

Gallagher Community Response has received £92,590 / €109,845 support through the PIP programme for a further 12 months to continue work with residents in the Gallagher and Outer North areas of Derry city. It will target at-risk young people, local residents, bonfire-builders, community activists and organisations, elected representatives, and statutory agencies. The group will continue to focus on three areas of work most needed within their community: Community cohesion - working towards building a more empowered community; an engagement programme for youth; and the provision of mediation and restorative practice for the community.

Inishowen Development Partnership, lead partner, will deliver a further phase of work with Limavady United Football Club and Finn Harps Football Club through the CiPP Programme. The Gateway Soccer Connections project will use £83,200 / €98,322 to connect communities North and South through the universality of soccer as a sport. It will work with five schools across Inishowen in Donegal and County Derry/Londonderry. This next phase will be broadened out to be inclusive for all students and also build capacity for teachers and coaches by delivering training in the 'Show Racism the Red Card' programme.

Welcoming the support, IFI Chair, Shona McCarthy added; *"This funding is tailored specifically to community need and the IFI has a long track record of investing in marginalised communities to deliver long-term impact for positive change and reconciliation. Many of these communities face challenges such as socio-economic issues, employment barriers, social isolation alongside living every day with the legacy of The Troubles. Through this funding, projects can empower local communities to create more opportunities for a shared future for all."*



Caption: IFI Board Members L to R; Angila Chada, Anne Carr, Katy Hayward, Janet McConkey, Shona McCarthy, IFI Chair; Bill Pauley and Anne Conaghan.

FundFocus Guest Contributor

Gabi Kent

Sowing seeds for the next generations of thinkers and changemakers

You get caught up in it (fighting and rioting). Like everyone's talking about it and it be's in group chats. Like that's what influences you the most... it's my decision to go but the FOMO be's choking ya.

Young man, West Belfast

How can societies recovering from violent conflict enable young people growing up in its shadow to escape this past, imagine more peaceful futures and to take their place in making this a reality.

This is a knotty challenge for those involved in peacebuilding. It is also the driving question underpinning a recent Open University study I led in collaboration with five frontline youth organisations working with at risk young people involved in or directly affected by interface violence or anti-social behaviours in contested spaces across Belfast. These were areas where young people's experiences of interpersonal violence were further compounded by social inequalities.

This research published in May 2025¹, sheds some light on the complex challenges young people face growing up in conflict affected areas and how deeply this shapes their choices and behaviours. It also shows how developing skills of critical thinking, and self-reflection has enabled these young people to better understand themselves and

their social worlds, which for many has been personally transformative and provides the skills needed for longer-term change. Vital to this story of change is the role of IFI in providing critical and timely funding to support local peacebuilding efforts in the aftermath of youth riots in the Spring of 2021, where the seeds of the educational intervention were sown.



Gabi Kent is a Senior Lecturer in Knowledge Exchange at The Open University, principal investigator on the Learning from *Why Riot?* action research project and co-lead on The Open University in Ireland's *Time to Think* initiative. Prior to joining The Open University, she worked variously as a peacebuilding consultant, researcher and community engagement practitioner for the UN and other organisations. Her background is as a documentary film maker. Gabi has worked with community partners in Northern Ireland since 2013 using digital storytelling and co-creation methods in the fields of education, social justice, social change and peacebuilding.

¹ The Learning from *Why Riot?* study and publications can be found on the Open University's Open Societal Challenges Website: <https://societal-challenges.open.ac.uk/challenges/learning-from-why-riot/145>

FundFocus Guest Contributor

The Why Riot? course was born out of a collaboration between conflict transformation practitioner William Mitchell and The Open University. It originates in a youth intervention project devised and run by William for eight young men in the Shankill with IFI PIP diversionary funding, and developed into a free open education course we co-authored on The Open University's Open Learn platform for other young people facing similar challenges. In July 2023, The Open University funded a study working with five frontline youth organisations (East Belfast Area Youth Project, Lagmore Youth Project, North Belfast Area Youth project, St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre and South Belfast Alternatives) as co-researcher partners and involving 60 young people aged 13 to 17 to explore their experiences of completing Why Riot?. The community based education programme would be delivered by local youth workers (co-researchers) in the community. Our aim was to understand how this co-

created course made with young people in the aftermath of riots in Belfast in 2021 to develop critical thinking and self-reflection skills, could be used as a youth programme to support local peacebuilding.

The challenges young people face in Northern Ireland today

The promise of peace and prosperity is clearly experienced very differently by Northern Ireland's post conflict generation, depending on where you are growing up.

24% of children (approximately 109,000) live in relative poverty and 19% (approximately 86,000) live in absolute poverty, including most of the young people in this study. All five groups in this study are in areas with persistently high levels of multiple deprivation (MDM, 2017; NISRA, 2021). Growing up in cultures and context of violence (in all its forms) has deeply corrosive effects on young people. This includes on their mental and physical

health, their life opportunities, their sense of confidence including in education and self-esteem and on the limited expectations others hold for them and in turn they hold for themselves.

This showed, for example in how these young people saw themselves, often embracing labels they were given as 'hoods and thugs' while struggling between these identities and their own values, hopes and dreams, even if not yet fully formed. As young people full of potential at the start of their lives these impacts were also visible through the constraints they felt about 'who they ought to be' in the eyes of some in their communities and wider society. Alongside their internal struggle they were also navigating wider anxieties in their communities and public discourses of fear whether about other political communities, newcomers or wider demographic shifts. Often this was amplified through social media.



Caption: Gabi Kent (centre), pictured with research partners at the Why Riot? launch.

FundFocus Guest Contributor

What we have learned about what is needed to support young people towards non-violence

Flexible adaptative program design, creating emotional safety, co-creating dialogic spaces for critical thinking and reflection, being led by and responsive to youth needs and single identity spaces all featured strongly as mechanisms which supported change in this study. These young people can make a significant contribution to building a peaceful, inclusive and more prosperous future for all in Northern Ireland. This is the starting point for any lasting solutions. Less visible but equally vital is the role of considered risk taking amongst all parties, creative partnerships and funders to seed these projects.

Crucially, nurturing secure, grounded and socially connected young people and supporting them in learning how to think, not what to think develops self-reflection and decision-making skills they will need if they are to become the next generation of peacebuilders and changemakers. Young people who completed the programme (67%) went on to join cross-community peacebuilding groups and to set up peer mentoring programmes, to pursue their own educational goals and dreams and to enjoy the skills they had developed.

In the words of Stephen, one of the original young men who helped to co-create the *Why Riot?* course and then went on to be a peer educator on the *Learning from Why Riot?* project.

“Me and my friends, considering that we were so-called reckless hoods and thugs. That we were able to make something so empowering or powerful that young people may be able to learn off it and... maybe see a different point of view and think of what they're doing. That alone I found very powerful.

Stephen aged 18, *Why Riot?* peer educator





FundFocus Participant Voices

Malcolm
Boyd

Behind every International Fund for Ireland project are individuals who have their own unique story. Some are personal, many are moving, and others hugely uplifting. All three apply to Donegal Youth Service participant, Malcolm Boyd. He is sharing his experience in the hope it can inspire others. Donegal Youth Service's support has been central to this transformation.

Malcolm's first setback came at a young age when his father died, leaving his mentally ill mother to look after him. It was not long before he became her primary carer, and his world started to unravel. His education also suffered, and he left school aged 14.

"I often wonder how things would have panned out had my father not passed away, if my mother would have ended up the way she did, or what I'd be doing myself. I sometimes think I'd still be living at home and working on the farm – it was something I was afraid of as a teenager, that I would never get to leave Carrickfinn and have my own life. I also felt school wasn't for me – I knew it wasn't the right environment."

As his mother's health deteriorated, a complete breakdown in family relations meant he was told – under false pretences – that he had to leave his childhood home, and with no one to turn to, he moved to a hostel run by St Vincent de Paul. Soon after, he joined Donegal Youth Service's Reactiv8 programme. At the time he didn't realise it, but this marked his path to recovery and a journey of personal development.

"The owner of St. Colmcille's Hostel was on the Board of Management for Donegal Youth Service and also one of the members of the Reactiv8 Advisory Group," Malcolm explains. "He offered to take me



Caption: Youth support worker Michelle Wylam and Malcolm pictured at his recent graduation.

FundFocus Participant Voices

in to speak to Michelle Wylam, one of the project workers. I went to be polite, with no real belief that it would be any good to me, but Michelle cared about what I wanted to do and what I was interested in, so I decided to give it a chance."

Although still a dark period, his potential shone through, particularly his natural musical ability. His earliest musical memories are singing in church, his dad recording an album of covers, and receiving a guitar as a Christmas present that he quickly fell in love with.

Recognising this ability instantly, Michelle helped him secure a place on a course at the Nerve Centre in Derry-Londonderry. It provided him with structured support and training to cultivate his musical passion and skills, and enabled him to pursue further education at the North West Regional College where he also completed Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

"It was a huge relief having someone in my corner who had my best interests at heart," says Malcolm. "Michelle and the programme helped me to apply for my course, apply for HAP (Housing Assistance Payments), and they were able to cover some of my travel costs to Derry which was a huge help. I also knew I would have support from Michelle if any issues raised their head again. I excelled each year in my studies and was an award-winning student at North West Regional

College, because I was able to flourish here. Different strokes for different folks."

Malcolm's journey was helped by the strong connections he made with other Reactiv8 participants where he got the opportunity, through Good Relations workshops and trips, to understand and appreciate people from other backgrounds. He says it gave him "confidence from having friends for the first time since leaving school" – people who had also turned things around after facing similarly tough times.

This sense of togetherness was also the catalyst for a new band, and as this bond grew, they successfully applied for social housing together. Things continued to progress when he was fast-tracked to Ulster University's Magee Campus to study a degree in Music. He excelled and graduated with a 2:1 degree in July – a momentous occasion that he shared with Michelle.

"Without joining the Reactiv8 programme in 2017, a lot of this would not have been possible. These projects are so important for people where conventional education has not worked," admits Malcolm.

Malcolm now teaches music lessons and has a UK tour lined up at the end of the year with Irish singer-songwriter George Houston on the back of opening two shows for multiple Brit and NME

"I think I'm more confident, more positive, and more equipped to deal with problems... before, I didn't really see much of a future for myself."

award winner, Paul Weller. His next goal is to continue this education journey by lecturing at North West Regional College.

"I think I'm more confident, more positive, and more equipped to deal with problems," he reflects. "Before, I didn't really see much of a future for myself, because I was feeling so terrible so much of the time, but now, even on my worst days, I'm usually able to tell myself that things will turn around eventually."

"There is more than one way to skin a cat, and more than one pathway to success. School doesn't work for everybody, and I believe there is absolutely no shame in seeing that within yourself. I think it is actually quite a brave move to say, 'This doesn't work for me, I want to try something different.'"

"Without joining the Reactiv8 programme in 2017, a lot of this would not have been possible."



FundFocus

Participant Voices

Stephen
McAllister

In interface areas of Belfast, Peace Walls are a fabric of life. Erected during the Troubles to keep those communities living on either side safe, the eight-metre-tall structures have shaped and defined the lives of many people. Just ask Stephen McAllister. At 19, he does not shy away from the fact the walls weren't something he thought impacted him. That changed when he joined a project funded by the International Fund for Ireland.

A constant in his daily life, the structures made him think and feel differently about those people from Catholic, Nationalist and Republican (CNR) neighbourhoods. However, on the back of a friend's recommendation to give Wall2Wall a chance, things soon changed.

It is a cross-community initiative that works with 16-20-year-olds and receives International Fund for Ireland (IFI) support, and is coordinated by Springboard Opportunities Limited.

"It isn't just a physical wall – it's something that shaped my mindset too," explains Stephen.

"I've always been interested in my own community, and I always like to see it painted in a good picture. I saw Wall2Wall as an opportunity to do that – but also hear from people who had different views from a community that was separated only by a wall. Wall2Wall has made me feel a lot more connected to people from the Nationalist community and I'd say I've gained friends that will remain friends, long after the programme."

"I have grown up with a view that is very much a part of me – but Wall2Wall has got me to see different sides. It's never been about changing what I think, but rather exposing me to people who think differently, and allowing me to make sense of it myself. I now believe that



Above: Stephen McAllister says the work of Wall2Wall has transformed his view of cross-community work for the better.

FundFocus Participant Voices

“Wall2Wall’s given me a sense of purpose and a want to pursue a career in youth work, supporting other young people to challenge themselves like I did...”

division can be removed because, in a lot of ways, it has for me, but I also know this isn’t just about me – many others feel and see division differently.”

Wall2Wall’s delivered change through several planned visits, including one to the General Post Office in Dublin. It narrates the key moments that shaped Irish history, from the 1916 Easter Rising to the Troubles. Stephen was also in the group that went on a study trip to Cyprus where Peace Walls currently divide the northern third of the Mediterranean island due to it being partitioned after Turkey’s invasion, including parts of the capital, Nicosia.

“The GPO visit was another case of me seeing and hearing something I never had the chance to before,” says Stephen. “It didn’t necessarily change my view, maybe more that it was a story of nationalism I’d never heard, and I was able to connect with the feelings that came with it the same way as it would for me with WW1 or Battle of the Somme. As for Cyprus, that gave me a lot of hope; we’ve a doom and gloom attitude towards Belfast at times in that it’ll always be segregated, but then you see Nicosia – having to show passports every time you want to cross from one side to the other, the fact not everyone can cross, or that cross-community work isn’t supported very well. It gives me hope that we’re a lot further on compared to some other places.”

“We went over as one group, even though we’d very different political identities – Nationalist and Unionist – and together we were able to share things we’d learned within Wall2Wall to other young people who didn’t have the same connection as we did. That was powerful. Cyprus was one of the best experiences of my life; it made me think about the future I want, where we’re not hiding behind walls or afraid of what’s on the other side”

Having seen – and experienced – first-hand the transformative work that takes place at Wall2Wall, how project leaders inspire young people, and the sense of hope their work provides, Stephen wants to ensure this continues, while also giving something back. He says: *“I want to keep learning, exploring who I am, where I come from, and what my community could look like in the future. Wall2Wall’s given me a sense of purpose and a want to pursue a career in youth work, supporting other young people to challenge themselves like I did, but also for them to look at me as change that can happen.”*

Having taken the conscious decision to broaden his understanding of political history in Northern Ireland especially – and actively challenged the deeply entrenched narrative in some Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities – Stephen has demonstrated that young people can build an equal, shared and

peaceful society. His hope is that more people from similar backgrounds will follow in his footsteps.

“It would be good to see them take more of an interest in their communities and have more of a voice,” he says. “I’d also say: throw yourselves into more cross-community groups so you can express yourselves and your culture while being both respectful and understanding. Embrace it, be yourself, and do not be afraid of being uncomfortable or not knowing things because every opportunity is a chance to learn. Meeting new people from different backgrounds means you can learn lots about them and yourself that isn’t always easy to hear, or see, from others around you.”

“I want to keep learning, exploring who I am, where I come from, and what my community could look like in the future.”

PROJECT
CASE
STUDYYouth Work Ireland
North Connaught

Youth Work Ireland North Connaught

Youth Work Ireland North Connaught is instrumental in targeting and supporting disadvantaged young people in Ballinamore, County Leitrim, and the border area of West Cavan.

It has received support from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) since 2016 for Ballinamore Youth Action Project (BYAP) through its Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP). The latest tranche of support is allowing BYAP to bring 12 new and 12 existing participants from Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods together.

The Project mentors young people who tend to fall through the cracks in society by offering personal development to improve physical and mental wellness; upskilling to increase employability; and good relations work that facilitates peace and relationship building.

This is essential in an area that continues to rebuild post-Troubles, where dissident activity and influence remain high. Other everyday barriers include growing rates of juvenile crime, rising social deprivation, issues concerning homelessness, and a chronic lack of youth support infrastructure.

Project Co-Ordinator Aine Crowe says: "A lot of border communities are rural and feel disconnected from central government investment. This can contribute to the lack of resources to fund training courses that create employment opportunities in areas like Ballinamore. There is a strong education training board in the North Connaught region, but Leitrim is a small county, and rural towns such as Ballinamore really lack training and education opportunities, and transport to other facilities which would provide these key services.

"There was limited economic growth during and after the conflict, which caused factories and businesses to close. They never reopened, so young people feel the only way they can gain employment is to move to Dublin – or bigger towns and cities. This



Caption: An OCN Level 1 course in Leadership Skills was delivered in partnership with the Rio Ferdinand Foundation.

weakens local communities, and it reduces opportunities for youth leadership and innovation."

Aine points to Brexit for having rekindled tensions along the border, making young people feel politically and economically vulnerable. It is also contributing to a sense of disillusionment as they're unable to realise the opportunities and possibilities that exist – but all is not lost, as she explains: "They just need a bit of help to find these opportunities. While most young people today did not experience the Troubles directly, many grew up with stories of violence, fear, and division. It can lead to inherited trauma, or a sense of anxiety about their place in society.

"For young people here, the Troubles are not a distant historical event. They remain present in the physical, emotional, and economic landscape, and while there has been peace, the unequal recovery, the fragile identity politics, and the lack of consistent youth support means this generation still carries a heavy burden. In order to continue this great work, and to support young people in the area, we need to see more targeted investment in border youth education and employment, trauma-informed mental health services, and more cross-community initiatives that give young people a voice in shaping the post-conflict future – not just remembering the past."

"Support from the IFI is crucial if BYAP is to continue empowering young people through a mix of engagement, inclusive education

PROJECT
CASE
STUDY

Caption: A team building trip for young people from Ballinamore, Ballinamallard and Galbally.

and cross-community experiences while, at the same time, promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation, and mutual understanding by fostering leadership, dialogue, and respect.

“By creating safe spaces for dialogue, understanding and sharing experiences, BYAP and its partners are actively helping to bridge the divide between young people in the North and South.

“These initiatives foster a stronger sense of belonging as well as identity and mutual respect which are both essential for good mental health, educational engagement, and future employment opportunities. The IFI takes a strategic, long-term approach to peacebuilding and they do this by investing in community-led projects that help promote reconciliation, reduce division, and create pathways for shared futures. This approach aligns closely with the needs and the realities of the young people that we engage with in border communities, particularly those still living with the legacy of the Troubles.

“In our work, we see a real hunger for safe spaces for young people to meet peers from different backgrounds, challenge inherited narratives, and understand different perspectives. Our joint programmes with groups in Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan, and Sligo, such as conflict tours, good relations days, and shared training and workshops, reflect the emphasis the IFI places on building relationships across traditional divides – something that is absolutely vital for breaking cycles of mistrust. It also recognises peacebuilding must be led by the next generation.

“We need to continue to listen to young people's voices, fund their development, and recognise their power. It is important to remember they are not the problem to be fixed – they are the solution in progress.”



Caption: Members of Fermanagh Positive Outlooks and Ballinamore Youth Action Project pictured at the Years of Chaos and Hope Exhibition in Enniskillen Castle.

PROJECT
CASE
STUDY

St Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust

Young people from some of the most socially disadvantaged areas of Derry-Londonderry are being given a second chance to realise their potential with the help of St. Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust's IgnYte project. Funded through the IFI's Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP), it works with residents close to St Columb's Park, particularly those not in employment, education or training, and are susceptible to paramilitary involvement.

Young people can come to the attention of paramilitaries through substance or alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour, or criminal activity. IgnYte works hard to redress this, as well as the high suicide rates amongst young people, particularly young males, and the political impasse created by recent events, including Brexit. This is done through IgnYte's integrated training and support programme approach, with good relations and personal development; skills and social development; and education and employability development, which spans a two-year period.

Participants IgnYte works with are either chosen with input from community workers or are referred by other community groups and statutory agencies, including the PSNI and the Probation Service. These young people are typically the hardest to reach; their social, educational, or emotional difficulties often drive them to isolation. This in turn, can pave the way for long-term economic inactivity, poor mental health, low self-worth, and frequently, drug or alcohol dependency.

Project Director, Sharon Doherty says: "The challenges that are faced by young people growing up in a post-conflict society vary significantly depending on which community they come from. We know this disparity has deep, historical roots.



Caption: IgnYte participants help to plant seeds as part of the social action garden project.

"The Catholic, Nationalist, Republican (CNR) community traditionally viewed education as a pathway out of poverty and marginalisation, and they invested heavily in academic achievement. In contrast, the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community often relied on industrial employment, where jobs were historically passed down through generations, and were linked to maintaining a Protestant workforce.

"As those industries declined, that community was left without a strong educational or economic safety net – a legacy that still impacts young people today. Areas with strong paramilitary influence, particularly in some Loyalist areas, continue to suffer from high levels of criminality, drug abuse and intimidation. These conditions create environments that are not conducive to learning, personal development or upwards mobility.

"Recognising the low educational attainment and long-term economic inactivity, the IFI views employability and education as vital tools for transforming here into a thriving and successful community.

"Through our work, we are helping to create a new generation of role models. Young people who once saw local paramilitary

PROJECT
CASE
STUDY

figures as their heroes, are now inspiring others from their own communities. These individuals are in stable jobs, returning to their communities with pride, enjoying the ability to afford a better quality of life, and looking forward to a future built on hard work – not on drugs or crime.

“In one case, a participant shared that without the intervention of IgnYte, they might not be here today. At their lowest point, they had fallen into such despair that they seriously considered ending their life. Another young person who had already served a custodial sentence admitted they were on a clear path back into crime and that IgnYte’s intervention was the turning point that redirected their life.”

IgnYte also empowers young people from post-conflict and marginalised communities to drive peace, reconciliation, and positive social change. It achieves this by creating inclusive, safe, and engaging opportunities that build confidence, purpose, identity, and strong cross-community relationships.

Sharon says: *“Our work is focused on bridging divides, whether cultural, political, or social through sustained youth engagement and creative, dialogue-based programmes. We believe that peacebuilding is most effective when it is youth-led and rooted in lived experience.”*



Caption: The former Derry City and Strabane District Council Mayor, Lilian Seenoi-Barr, meeting IgnYte participants at an Apprentice Job Fair in the Guildhall.



Caption: Tutor Paddy Maguire leads an OCN NI Level 2 in Personal Finances.

Through their lived experiences, participants develop into socially responsible, empathetic young leaders. They achieve this through social action projects, such as renovating the Foyle Down Syndrome Trust Garden. According to Sharon, these projects enhance valued community resources and foster a deeper understanding of inclusion, compassion, and shared purpose. They empower young people to shape their future and challenge past divisions. As Sharon explains, *“Our work ensures that those most affected by conflict are at the heart of peacebuilding efforts locally and on an international stage.*

“Young people who have faced and overcome the systemic challenges of living in areas burdened by intergenerational poverty, conflict, legacy, and social exclusion are uniquely positioned to be powerful role models. Their success stories can become the most effective counter-narratives to the negative influences that persist in these communities.

“They have the power to challenge the harmful narratives often pushed by sections of the media and some political voices. Young people are the future of sustained peacebuilding in Northern Ireland; we need to ensure that they too see themselves as future leaders, that they see that they have a role to play in continued peacebuilding and in shaping the future not only for themselves but for their own children.”

FundFocus News...

Manchester United Foundation, Uniting Communities Programme Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

Football legend John O'Shea hosted a celebration event with the Manchester United Foundation at Ulster University in Derry/Londonderry. The event showcased the work of the Foundation in Northern Ireland since 2018 and also marked a new partnership with the IFI.

The new Uniting Communities programme, funded through CiPP, will make a positive difference to young people across Derry and Donegal. It will give them the tools and training to make positive life choices and ensure they have a voice and influence within their local communities. It is working with the following schools on a cross-border and cross-community basis; Rosses Community School, Dungloe, Donegal, St Joseph's Boys School, Creggan, Derry and Oakgrove Integrated College, Strathfoyle, Londonderry.

Football sessions were delivered on the day with John O'Shea as well as a Q&A panel where guests were informed of the impact and value of the Foundation's work.

Manchester United Foundation participants Daniel and Bryanne; Shona McCarthy, IFI Chair; John Shiels, CEO, Manchester United Foundation; former Man. Utd. and Republic of Ireland defender John O'Shea, and Malachy O'Neill, director of Regional Engagement, Ulster University.



The BREEN Centre / Inishowen Development Partnership – Women Crossing Borders Communities in Partnership Programme (CiPP)

Sixty women from Inishowen and Newtownabbey, representing diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, have successfully completed the Women Crossing Borders project.

Over an 18-month period, the initiative empowered these women to become positive role models within their local communities. The unique focus on women showcased their crucial role within local communities. Through a series of workshops covering topics such as cultural identity and communication skills, accredited training, and engaging residencies, participants not only deepened their understanding of different perspectives but also built meaningful cross-border links. This led to profound personal growth for many women who took part.

All of those who took part had no previous experience of cross-border and many had never taken part in cross-community engagement. The project was delivered in partnership by The BREEN Centre working in Newtownabbey and Inishowen Development Partnership in Donegal. Its achievements were celebrated with a two-day residential at Da Vinci's Hotel in Derry/Londonderry.

Pictured, above, (L-R) Aine McLaughlin IDP; Deputy Mayor of Derry City and Strabane, Alderman Niree McMorris; IFI Board Member, Bill Pauley; Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, Niamh Kenendy and Adree Wallace, Breen centre.



FundFocus News...

Letterkenny Community Development Project, Letterkenny Community Impact Project Peace Impact Programme (PIP)

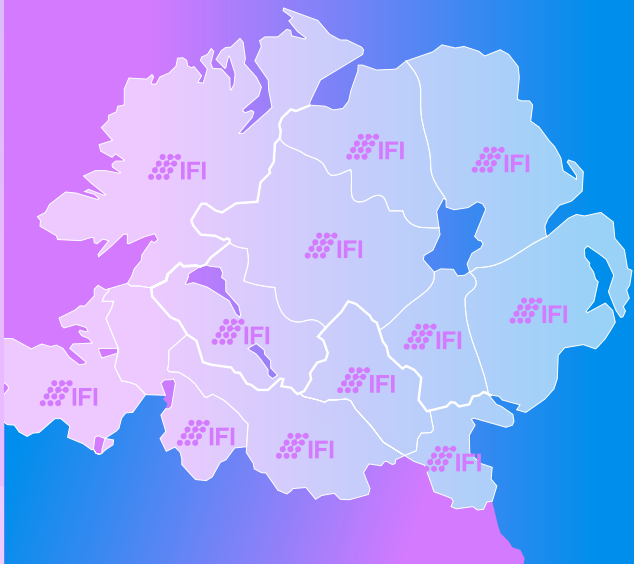
A new cross-community programme aimed at supporting residents in some of Letterkenny's most disadvantaged areas was recently launched by the Letterkenny Community Development Project (CDP).

Letterkenny Community Impact Project focuses on building relationships, empowering local leadership, and addressing issues such as poverty, deprivation, exclusion, and social division through a coordinated series of cross-community initiatives. The project is working with residents in three disadvantaged areas and eight different estates in Letterkenny. This targeted support programme aims to engage underrepresented voices in peacebuilding processes such as young people at risk, socially isolated individuals, former political prisoners, and members of ethnic minority groups. It was officially launched at The Courtyard, Letterkenny to mark the beginning of a significant new chapter in local peace and reconciliation. It will provide a platform for dialogue, understanding and shared action, bringing together people from all walks of life to build a stronger and more connected future.

Pictured, above, (L-R) is Mary Moy IFI; Margaret Tonner, Letterkenny CDP; Lorraine Callan, Letterkenny CDP and Shona McCarthy, IFI Chair.



The IFI 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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