



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

## **Evaluation of the Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme**

**March 2013**



Wallace consulting

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# 1 Background

## 1.1 Introduction

The Rural Development Council (RDC) appointed **Wallace Consulting** to undertake an evaluation of the Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme (MCSCB, the programme).

This document evidences and explores the progress made towards the programme's aims and outcomes as reflected in its Logic Model. It summarises recent research and policy developments and presents an analysis of the work conducted to date. The implications for programme development are also discussed.

## 1.2 Rural Development Council

RDC exists to promote positive and sustainable change in order to help regenerate rural areas. It brings together, organises and structures the different and often competing interests of rural development, so that collective needs and opportunities in rural areas can be realised.

Over the years RDC has evolved to become a key delivery agent under the NI Rural Development Programme and has been involved in the delivery of support services and planning regeneration projects that meet local needs. The launch of the RDC Strategic Framework in 2007 marked the beginning of a new journey towards independence focusing upon three key areas:

- Developing objective analysis;
- Delivering practical actions and solutions; and
- Sharing best practice.

RDC's Vision is for a living, working, sustainable, shared countryside. In pursuit of this RDC has worked with and supported the community, voluntary, private and public sector through a range of economic, social, cultural and environmental projects and programmes. Its work bridges urban, rural and cross-border activity – in recognition that rural areas do not exist in isolation.

RDC act as an agent of the International Fund for Ireland (the Fund) and currently has a number of programme contracts.

## 1.3 International Fund for Ireland

The Fund is an independent international organisation which was established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986. Financed by contributions from the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the Fund promotes economic and social advance and encourages contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland.

At its core, the Fund's mission is to tackle the underlying causes of sectarianism and violence and to build reconciliation between people and within and between communities throughout the island of Ireland.

In January 2006, the Fund launched a five-year strategy "Sharing this Space" which marked a significant shift in emphasis, moving its focus away from economic regeneration to reconciliation.



The strategy aims to make the Fund more flexible and responsive to the evolving and complex environment in which it works, while retaining its strong focus on reconciliation. It will enable the Fund to target the areas of greatest need, to ensure that its work is sustainable in the long-term.

## 1.4 Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme

The Fund recognised that community halls play a central role within neighbourhoods and facilitating physical regeneration can lead to community renewal and increased opportunities for community cohesion. The MCSCB programme was a community development/relations initiative which would act as a stepping stone for community action and increased understanding of one's own and other communities' needs and aspirations. MCSCB was designed to foster good relationships within and between communities and facilitate the development and wider usage of existing community halls. The programme is managed by the RDC and funded by the International Fund. It was open to urban and rural groups operating within Northern Ireland and the six Southern border counties of Monaghan, Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo and aimed to:

- Increase the capacity and confidence of groups managing community halls;
- Support the wider usage of existing space; and
- Foster and develop relationships within and between communities.

To fulfil these aims, the programme offered a structured support package via a two strand approach:

- **Strand One** involved a tailored programme of training, mentoring, networking and best practice visits based on a facilitated needs analysis completed by RDC staff. This includes a compulsory 'promoting good relations' module specific to group capacity and stage of development; and
- **Strand Two** provided project grant aid and implementation support for minor works to support the increased and wider usage of existing facilities. Participation on the Strand One development support programme was essential and only those successfully completing Strand One activities were eligible to apply for project grant assistance.

## 1.5 Evaluation Methodology

The main objective of the evaluation is to measure impact throughout the life of the programme and to draw out best practice in order to inform and influence future development. A Logic Model methodology has been applied as it provides a solid basis for strategy development and evaluation planning. Qualitative and quantitative indicators have been established and the evaluation will measure impact against the outlined outputs and outcomes (see Table 1.1 overleaf). The research methodology comprises of the following:

- **Desk Research:** A review of the research and policy landscape;
- **Database Analysis:** Profile of applications, awards and rejections;
- **Case-File Review:** Detailing evidence of needs addressed, activities undertaken, participant benefits, partnership building etc;
- **Case-studies:** Case-studies of selected projects to include beneficiary discussions; and
- **Stakeholder Consultations:** Interviews with internal and external stakeholders.

Throughout the course of the evaluation, we drew upon the detailed knowledge and understanding of RDC staff.



Table 1.1  
**Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders: Logic Model Framework**

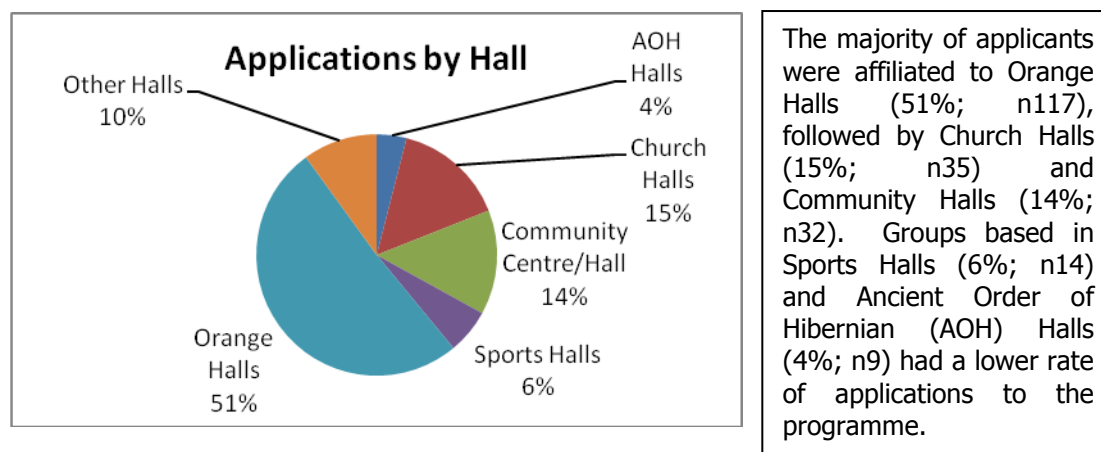
Themes & Objectives	Outputs	Outcomes	Indicators
<b>Good Relations:</b> Building Bridges	76 groups participating in Strand One training; 76 event calendars;	Increase in cross-community activity and participation during the programme; Evidence of post-programme cross-community activity.	Profile of groups/facilities obtaining support; Proportion of groups now involved in cross-community activity; Proportion of groups now involved in cross-border activity.
<b>Shared &amp; Better Future:</b> Integrating	76 Good Relations Plans developed; 201 MCSCB accreditations; 48 members trained in Child protection;	More open and welcoming facilities and neighbourhoods; Increased sustainability of the halls through shared services and increased community interaction.	Groups state that hall is being used by both Protestants and Catholics; Groups state the hall is a more open and welcoming place; Groups report greater use by local community and others.
<b>Community Cohesion:</b> Building Foundations	21 members trained in Disability Awareness; 6 best practice visits;	Increased capacity and confidence of groups managing community halls; Evidence of community bonding and bridging; High levels of community pride and participation.	Pre-/post- Training Evaluation scores indicate improvement; Participants believe the regeneration activity has improved quality of life; Proportion of groups now involved in other programmes; Proportion of groups stating that community spirit in the area has improved; Proportion of groups reporting increased membership/representation.
<b>Neighbourhood Renewal:</b> Leaving a Legacy	70 attendees at cross-border visits; 223 attendees at cross-community visits; 70 minor works grants up to £50,000/€60,000	Contribution towards the physical & social renewal of neighbourhoods; Enhanced programme of activity and services; Greater awareness of the group, facilities and area within and outside the local area	Evidence and extent of regeneration activity to address dereliction/under-use; Proportion of groups in NRA, Areas at Risk, SPOD areas; Proportion of groups in urban/rural areas; Residents and local stakeholders perceive that participation has been positive in terms of their external profile; Participants would recommend participation to others; Evidence that participation has helped leverage other funding into the area.

## 2 Programme Applications and Awards

### 2.1 Application Summary

There was a high level of interest in the MCSCB programme with 229 groups applying to join Strand One, with 77 groups accepted onto the programme. Of these 70 progressed to Strand Two of the programme.

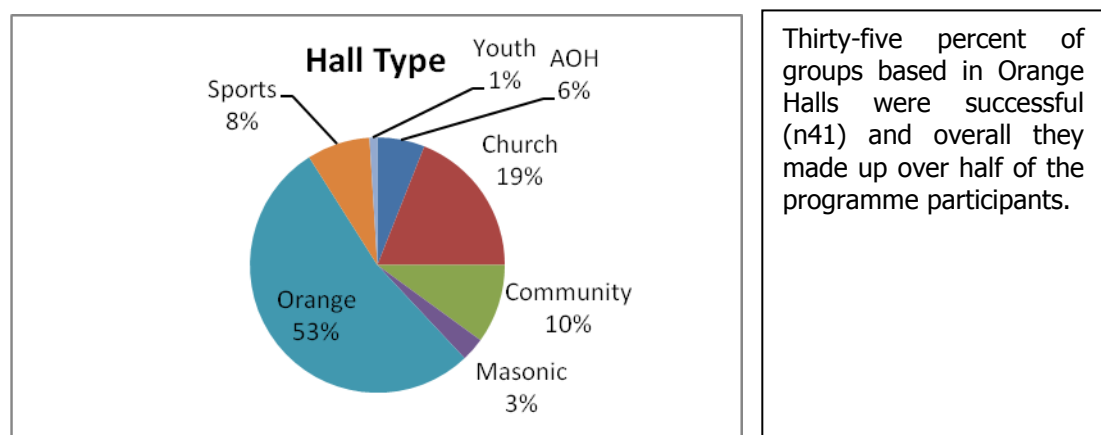
Figure 2.1  
**Applications by Hall Type**



Applications were scored against agreed Fund criteria by RDC staff. Recommendations for inclusion onto the programme were made to the Board of the Fund. Overall, 77 groups were accepted onto Strand One (one group only wished to complete Strand One). This equates to 34% of the total applications made to the programme.

### 2.2 Successful Applications

Figure 2.2  
**Successful Applications by Hall Type**



The volume of applications between indicates that interest in the programme was been sustained and the need evidenced via the submissions remained high. The high uptake from groups affiliated to the Orange Order is perceived to have been a positive development as these institutions had not traditionally engaged with funding agencies.

### 3 Impact: Development Support

#### 3.1 Training and Development

Based on facilitated needs analysis, a development programme was tailored to the needs of the individual groups. A range of formal and informal support was delivered on an individual group and clustered basis, to include mentoring, training, networking and best practice visits. Applicants had to provide a minimum of a twelve month commitment to Strand One and a minimum of six group members were required to take part in the training. As part of the training, at least one group member must have participated in the Level One Maximising Community Space training accredited by the Open College Network. Other optional modules such as Child Protection and Disability Awareness were also made available.

#### 3.2 Training Uptake

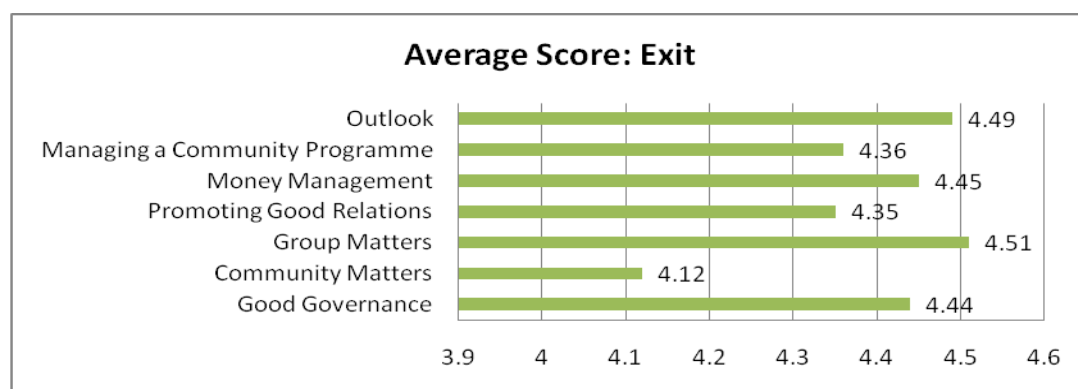
On average between eight and nine people per group attended each of the training sessions. Overall, 201 people achieved accreditations through the Open College Network. Each group had at least two accredited members. Nine groups (21 members) availed of the optional Disability Awareness training and seventeen groups (48 members) participated in Child Protection training.

#### 3.3 Self-rated Group Development

At the end of Strand One, groups were asked to complete a self evaluation in order to gauge perceived capacity pre- and post-training (0=No Knowledge; 5=Excellent Knowledge). On average groups rated their pre-programme knowledge between 2 and 3.

Figure 3.1 illustrates groups' self-rated average scores post-Strand One. All of the dimensions scored between 4 and 5 on the scale indicating a general improvement overall.

Figure 3.1  
**Self-rating of Capacity Post-Strand One**



#### 3.4 Changes in Group Composition

During the Strand One evaluation, the majority of groups (76%) stated that their Management Committee composition had remained unchanged.<sup>1</sup> Many groups reported that their members had been elected at their AGM and therefore could not be changed.

<sup>1</sup> Data from 71 groups available.



However, the 24% which reported changes stated that they had widened their membership to reflect the various groups which use the hall and/or specific groups in the community.

*"We've now got a hall committee set up with select vestry members plus representatives of groups using hall. It gives a wider decision making process and is more representative."*  
[Church Hall]

*"We elected a new committee with groups using the hall. Some are cross-community which has widened the input to the team."*[Orange Hall]

*"We've brought women on board...gives out clear message it's not a men only club."*  
[Orange Hall]

Seventy-two percent of groups felt that their management committee was representative of the wider community – even if it had remained single identity. However, 24% (n17) recognised that their committees weren't representative. Many groups stated that involvement in the training had led them to reflect upon the single identity nature of their committees and whilst this would not be easily or quickly rectified, they hoped that increased emphasis upon relationship building would lead to more members coming on board irrespective of their religion.

### 3.5 Training Satisfaction

Eighty-five percent of groups stated that they were Very Satisfied with the training and development support provided. The majority of comments supported the practical nature of the training content which proved invaluable in developing group capacity and a plan of action for the development and sustainability of future community activity. Groups felt that the training had made them look at their own practice and explore how it could be improved.

*"We learned how to organise the group and ourselves...forward plan and the importance of financial and community participation."*[Sports Hall]

*"We got to know quite a few other groups and saw what working together can really achieve."*[Orange Hall]

Ninety-seven percent stated that inclusion in the programme had helped to increase the capacity and confidence of their group to manage their venue. Indeed, there are numerous comments providing evidence of the positive impact which participation has had upon group confidence, communication and outreach activity. Many group members felt that the training had helped them to see their halls in a new light and to recognise the value of opening the venue to the wider community. The experience also appeared to strengthen existing groups and provide a renewed sense of purpose and optimism.

*"This has been a superb programme enhancing our capacity as a group and making us face up to the future in a really constructive way. We have developed a unity of purpose and benefited from the inclusion of people we would never have involved before. Participation has really boosted the group."*[Church Hall]

*"Previously our hall managed itself (usually badly) with yearly deficits in money matters. We know how to plan, budget and maximise potential for hall usage. The group are buoyant for the future and confidence is high that most targets can be achieved over the next few years."*[Orange Hall]

*"We've more confidence in approaching the Catholic community and showing them the hall is available for all."*[Orange Hall]

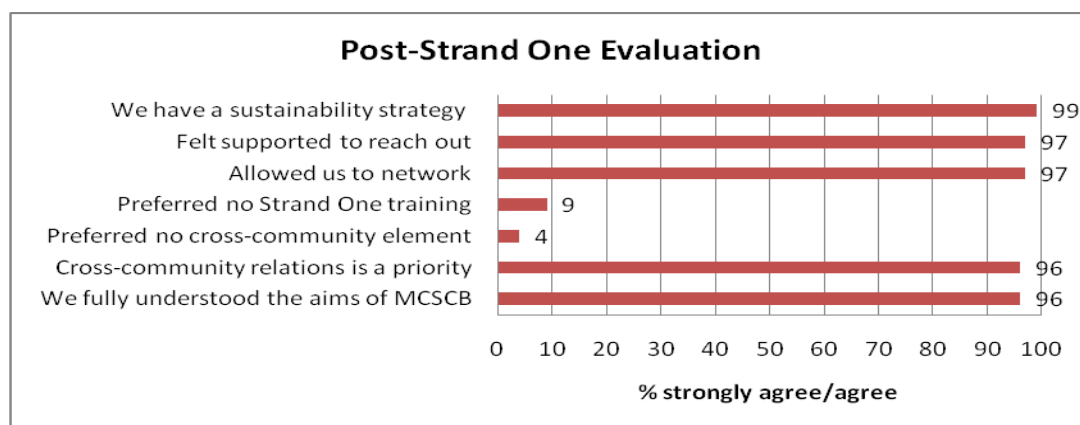




*"The Freemasons have in the past been looked on as people who wish to remain apart from communities. The programme has helped us to overcome this image and become part of the community which was a main objective before participation."* [Masonic Hall]

Figure 3.2 provides overall satisfaction ratings post-Strand One. An overwhelming majority of 96% of groups stated that community relations are a priority for their group at this time, however a small number of groups (4%) would have preferred to have applied for funding from a programme with no cross-community element. Similarly, only 9% of groups would have preferred to have applied for funding without undertaking Strand One training.

Figure 3.2  
**Post- Strand One Capacity**



### 3.6 Anticipated Longer Term Impact

Seventy-three percent reported that participation had led to unexpected outcomes and in many cases this was related to the positive impact of cross-community participation generated through the MCSCB study visits.

*"The branching out and community focus of the group are now accepted as part and parcel of any new hall and that not all change is a bad thing."* [Orange Hall]

A desire to be more inclusive and to address any negative perceptions of the halls and the groups which use them was identified as one long term impact arising from the programme.

*"It's our intention to continue to promote our existence in the village and to extinguish all those myths and beliefs which have caused so much friction in the past and which could continue if not addressed."* [Masonic Hall]

Many of those who took part in the training were anxious and somewhat reluctant at the beginning, primarily focusing on the funding available at Strand Two. However, they quickly 'bought into the programme in spirit and deed'. Participant groups were said to have steadily gained each others' trust before finding common ground. For example AOH and Orange Lodge members had lengthy discussions in relation to their respective tradition of banners which made for highly successful study visits to their halls.

Discussions were said to have been at times challenging however, it is clear that the managed and supportive environments in which they took place allowed for open and honest debate and served to build relationships, rather than divide the groups. A spirit and camaraderie developed within the groups and they came to support each other and provide encouragement on the wider use of their halls. Participants looked forward to hosting each other on study visits with a sense of pride and respect for those who had never entered a hall used by another tradition.

## 4 Impact: Leaving a Legacy

### 4.1 Physical Regeneration

Strand Two of the MCSCB programme was concerned with physical regeneration. Grants of up to £50,000/€60,000 or up to 95% of the total cost of the project – whichever is lesser were available upon successful completion of Strand One. A separate grant application process was completed and at least 5% of the match funding had to be raised locally. The total project could not exceed £100,000/€120,000. Eligible projects included small scale extensions and renovations to accommodate multiple activities, alterations to mechanical and electrical services to allow for efficient use of the premises and general works to meet health and safety standards.

In total 70 groups proceeded to Strand Two (54 based in the North and 16 based in the South). The total project costs for Northern Ireland groups were £3,572,687.26, with average total project costs of £66,160.88. The total project costs for Southern Ireland groups were €1,140,518.04, with an average cost of €71,282.38.

RDC staff reported that groups saw the funding as an opportunity to make significant improvements to their buildings and many availed of the maximum grant available and undertook a variety of fundraising activities in order to meet the match funding requirement. The total grants for Northern Ireland based groups amounted to £2,651,975.63 with average grant £49,110.66. The total grants for Southern Ireland based groups was €938,183.00 with average grant €58,636.44.

The 5% community contribution was believed to have been an essential requirement of the programme as it illustrated that groups were able to demonstrate self-sufficiency going forward.

Group match funding for Northern Ireland groups amounted to £920,711.63 with average match funding of £17,050.22. South of Ireland groups provided €202,335.04, with an average match funding of €12,645.94.

The pre-/post-programme impact is dramatic in the majority of cases, with the development of a range of useable, welcoming community buildings across Northern and Southern Ireland. Many groups availed of extensions in order that they could undertake a range of activities simultaneously, as opposed to having one large hall. This has meant that more groups are sharing space, facilitating youth groups, dance classes etc and enabling people with different ages and interests to come together socially and become involved in community life.

### 4.2 Survey Findings

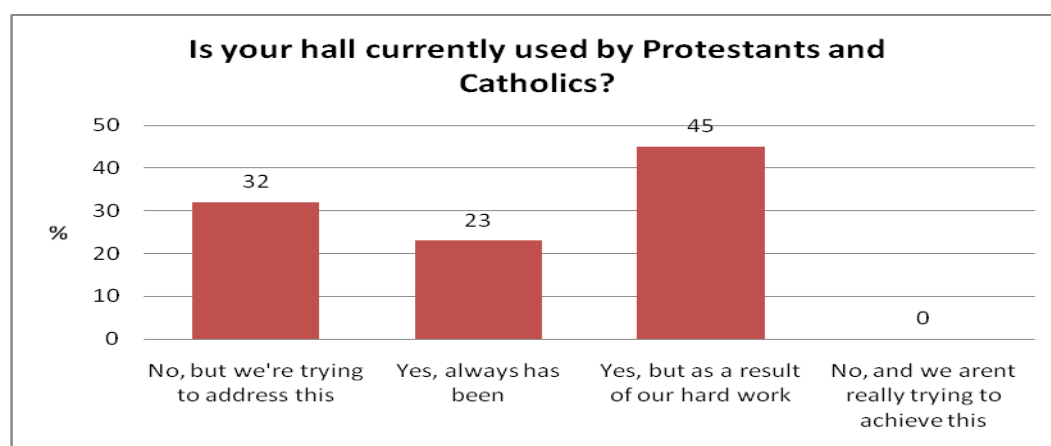
Forty-nine anonymous postal surveys were distributed to groups who had completed both Strand One and Two of the programme in November 2012. A total of 31 completed questionnaires were received – an overall response rate of 63%.

Table 4.1 illustrates that all the respondents reported increased levels of activity within their hall and that their group is comparably stronger as a direct result of their involvement in the programme. Many respondents agreed that there are more local people using the hall, they now advertise events more widely and they felt that their hall is more open and welcoming than before. Additionally many stated that they had new groups using the hall and that their group now has a higher profile within the community. Eighty-one percent of respondents agreed that there was a greater sense of community.

Table 4.1  
**Programme Impact**

Statement	Count (n)	%	Disagree (n)
More activities take place in the hall now	31	100	-
The way we advertise the activities held there is more open and inclusive	29	94	n2
We have at least one new group using the hall	28	90	n2
There are more people using the hall from the local area	29	94	n2
There are more people using the hall from the surrounding area	20	65	-
Our hall is a more open and welcoming place than before	29	94	2
The group has a higher profile within the community	28	90	1
Our group is stronger from the experience	31	100	-
There's a greater sense of community here than before	25	81	-

Figure 4.1  
**Current Use**



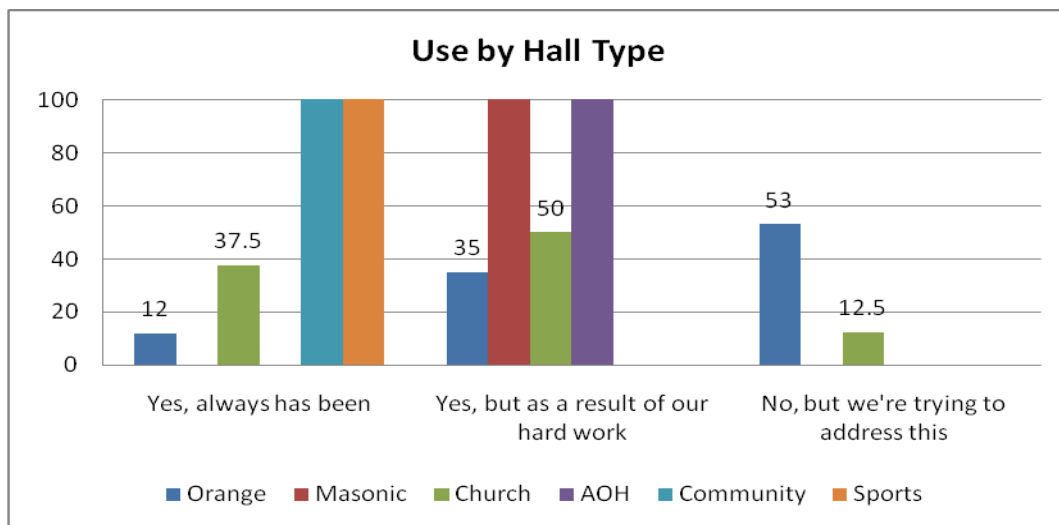
*"Funding for the renovation of small rural halls has raised the profile of these halls in recent years which has helped renew trust in community relations as we extend a welcome to everyone and prove ourselves worthy of support given to us."* [Orange Hall]

*"Historically our hall was used by all sections of the community but usage by the Catholic community had declined in the years preceding our involvement in the programme. This has now been reversed due to better facilities and being more inviting to all."* [Orange Hall]

*"We have a cross community keep fit class run weekly in our hall. We have held a charity auction attended by both sections of our community. This would never have happened 10 years ago."* [Orange Hall]

Churches and Orange Halls appear to face the greatest challenges in encouraging cross-community use. Twelve percent of respondents with an Orange Hall stated that they had always had mixed use. However, 35% reported that they had achieved this through hard work. Just over half stated that they were still trying to address single identity use.

Figure 4.2  
**Current Use by Hall Type**



*"Being a Protestant church Catholics can often feel cautious about coming in, but we have been working at being more inclusive."* [Church Hall]

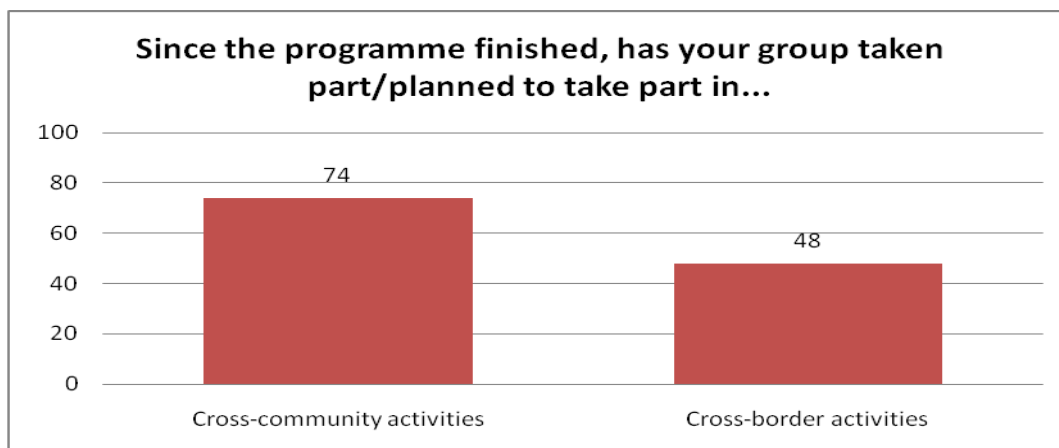
*"We are striving to make our events more acceptable to all sections of our community."* [Orange Hall]

*"We want all sections of our community to come and use our facility but it will take time for things to happen."* [Orange Hall]

Seventy-four percent of respondents stated that their involvement in MCSCB has led them to do things differently. The majority of comments indicated that groups had realised the need to be more inclusive, to advertise more widely and to reach out on a cross-community basis.

Figure 4.3 illustrates that whilst just under half the respondents had taken part in cross-border activities and 74% had taken part in cross-community activities after programme completion.

Figure 4.3  
**Post-Programme Activity**





Comments indicate that groups have taken part in an array of cross-community fundraising activities, functions and social events, to include bowling, treasure hunts, golf tournaments, dance classes and youth activities. Cross-border work was also planned with a number of groups stating that they were involved in or planning visits due to relationships made via the programme.

*"Through our involvement with the programme we have learnt much and by its guidance we have felt supported and more confident to strive to make our group viable."* [Orange Order]

*"The programme has widely publicised our hall and raised our profile in the community."* [Church Hall]

*"Definitely some areas and groups throughout the province need help in readdressing lack of community funding for us this programme was of practical and financial help."* [Orange Order]

*"We have received many congratulatory and favourable comments after being involved in this programme and appreciate the expert guidance and financial backing we received. We would encourage involvement in this programme."* [Orange Order]

Programme participants were asked anonymously to identify the impact and legacy of Strand Two. Significantly, all of the respondents reported that more activities have taken place in their hall and that their groups are stronger from the experience. Almost all of the participants agreed their advertising is more open and inclusive and agreed that the facility is a more open and welcoming place than before.

The majority of halls are used on a cross-community basis to varying degrees and respondents point to a combination of improved facilities and services in their efforts to engage with others. However one third are still trying to address this and highlight the difficulties of tackling perceptions regarding the territorialisation of space as exclusively for members or congregations, the external stereotyping of organisations such as the GAA and Orange Order and internal challenges within their own memberships. It is positive to note that all of the respondents point to further commitment and ongoing effort to address this.

## 5 Programme Appraisal

### 5.1 Good Relations: Building Bridges

Table 5.1 illustrates the associated outputs and desired outcomes in relation to improving good relations within and between communities.

Table 5.1  
**Good Relations Outputs and Outcomes**

Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 76 groups participating in Strand One Good Relations training;</li> <li>• 76 Good Relations Plans developed;</li> <li>• 70 attendees at cross-border visits;</li> <li>• 223 attendees at cross-community visits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in cross-community activity and participation during the programme;</li> <li>• Evidence of post-programme cross-community activity.</li> </ul>

RDC and the Fund did take an initial risk with the programme and there were reservations about whether groups would be willing to fully engage. The networking element of the MCSCB programme has been invaluable in introducing groups to cross-community and cross-border activity in a subtle and informal manner. From the research evidence it is apparent that many cultural groups were initially wary about the Good Relations element of the training and entering into venues affiliated to the “other community”. However, the study visits and networking events have been cited as the highlight of the programme as they have led groups to think about stereotypes and territorial demarcations, within and outside their own neighbourhoods.

Cross-community outreach and engagement has been an outcome of the programme. Groups have commented that they now understand the need to proactively invite and welcome local residents to their venues, rather than sit back and wait for them to show interest.

Importantly, since the programme concluded, 96% of groups stated that cross-community work is currently a priority. Indeed, 74% of groups have taken part in, or have planned cross-community activities. The majority of these are based upon shared interests such as social and sporting events and joint community fundraising efforts. Almost half of participants are planning or have already undertaken cross-border work including visits to the halls of other programme participants. However, it must be noted that cross-community and cross-border work remains a challenge to institutions such as the Orange Order and indeed some church organisations. The research highlights that some group members have disengaged from the MCSCB programme due to the good relations element and there have been internal differences of opinion on how to progress with this work at a local level.

Each participating group now has a Good Relations Plan which demonstrates how they will be inclusive in their approach and activities. Overall, the programme is considered to have increased awareness of local minority/majority groups and how their own organisation may be perceived externally. However, there are variations regarding the emphasis placed upon this element – with some groups wanting to embrace inclusivity and others prepared to meet the minimum requirements. It must be recognised that for some groups, the development of the plan is a major step forward and only a small number of participants would have preferred no cross-community element to the programme.

## 5.2 Shared and Better Future: Integrating

Table 5.2  
**Shared and Better Future: Outputs and Outcomes**

Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 76 Events Calendars developed;</li> <li>• 6 best practice visits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More open and welcoming facilities and neighbourhoods;</li> <li>• Increased sustainability of the halls through shared activities and increased community interaction.</li> </ul>

The MCSCB programme is believed to have opened up new possibilities for group members and made them appreciate the valuable assets that they have. The Strand One training allowed groups to reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses and look at their internal structures, procedures and activities through the eyes of others.

As a result of this some groups made changes, in order that their decision-making and governance structures were more representative of the wider community. New people were recruited onto committees and new user groups welcomed into their facilities. Interviews highlight examples of improved gender equality within the management of halls where some women who would have traditionally only held catering and cleaning roles, are now active members of the committees. The broad spectrum of participant ages also allowed for supporting one other. For others, the diversity in terms of the social and economic background of participants was also a new experience as solicitors, doctors and engineers sat side-by-side with the unemployed, farmers and factory operatives for the first time in a learning environment.

However, the concept of cross-community representation was challenging for many cultural organisations and some felt that they should remain single identity. Other groups were able to overcome these barriers by setting up a new halls committee which reflected a variety of community backgrounds, gender, age etc.

The financial planning element of the training and the matched funding requirement during Strand Two was critical in reducing the risk that the investment made in these groups was sustained. Whereas some groups felt that they were financially aware, others admitted that the management of their venues had been disorganised and unprofessional. Post-programme there was an awareness that the hall had to be self-financing and that overheads and running costs needed to be planned for and secured through rentals. This in itself ensured that groups looked outside their usual networks and user-groups to broaden the appeal of their venue. The publication and promotion of a calendar of events has led to increased levels of activities which attract a wide range of people and to a greater extent serve to open up the facilities. Indeed, 68% of halls are now used on a cross-community basis, with 45% of respondents stating that this achievement has been the result of the group's determination and community outreach. The remainder of the groups state that they are actively working towards this goal.

## 5.3 Community Cohesion: Building Foundations

Table 5.3  
**Community Cohesion: Outputs and Outcomes**

Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 201 MCSCB accreditations;</li> <li>• 48 members trained in Child Protection;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased capacity and confidence of groups managing community halls;</li> <li>• Evidence of community bonding and bridging;</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 members trained in Disability Awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of community pride and participation.</li> </ul>
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During Strand One of the Programme, 201 participants achieved an OCN Level One accreditation in Maximising Community Space and many expressed satisfaction at achieving a recognised qualification through the programme. There were further opportunities to receive Child Protection and Disability Awareness training. Upon entry to MCSCB, participants felt that they didn't have a clear understanding of community needs and requirements in relation to health and safety and future planning. Post-programme ratings however indicate that groups are more confident in addressing these matters. Indeed, after the training, concerns seem to have shifted away from internal matters - to publicity and increasing cross-community and cross-border working.

Each group have progressed at different rates, but it appears that attitudes and behaviours have begun to change as a result of the experience. Participants themselves have stated that their group has gotten to know one another on a deeper level as a result of the discussions and debates which evolved from the training sessions. There is no doubt that participants consider that their halls are being managed more effectively and there is more sharing of community space as a result of the programme. The case-studies highlight the expanse of activities which are being undertaken as a direct result of the programme.

The research demonstrates that participation has provided groups with a renewed sense of pride and the tangible nature of the physical development work has provided a renewed sense of purpose. The post-programme survey evidence suggests that new and improved relationships with local residents, community and voluntary groups and local Councils have developed as a result of the experience, with some participants stating that group members have become more involved in community consultation and internal decision-making processes.

The bespoke nature of the training provision and ongoing support has meant that MCSCB has enabled groups to progress at the rate they felt most comfortable – contributing to the sustainability of the local infrastructure as well as achieving personal development goals. Staff have highlighted the importance of sustaining this activity and nurturing the dedication and commitment shown by the volunteer members who are immersed in community life and have a desire to deliver positive change.

## 5.4 Community Renewal: Leaving a Legacy

Table 5.4  
**Community Renewal: Targets and Outcomes**

Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70 minor works grants up to £50,000;</li> <li>• £2,651,975.63 + €938,183.00 IFI investment;</li> <li>• 76 Event Calendars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution towards the physical &amp; social renewal of neighbourhoods;</li> <li>• Enhanced programme of activity and services;</li> <li>• Greater awareness of the group, facilities and area within and outside the local area</li> </ul>

Discussions with RDC staff, trainers and the groups themselves, reveal the importance of connecting capacity building with the physical regeneration activities. Although the lure of the capital grant element to MCSCB was initially strong, groups recognised that they had significantly benefitted from the Strand One training. This stage had enabled RDC staff to get to know participants and gauge the level of support which would be required throughout the process. The individualised nature of the support has meant that the





training could be adapted to suit knowledge gaps within the group and participants spoke highly of the method by which the training was delivered.

Staff highlighted that some groups were nervous with regards to bringing too much attention on their facility – specifically symbolic premises which may have previously been vandalised. Therefore a number did not want to formally launch their venue upon completion of the capital works and this was respected. The initiative demonstrates that reconciliation is a slow process and that confidence building and self-examination play a critical role. Ninety percent of participants agreed that their group has a higher profile within the local community and that the development of the halls had spurred interest and support locally.

Over 40% of those surveyed had secured further funding to develop activities, make additional physical improvements to their halls and also to purchase equipment as a result of MCSCB participation. Many respondents stated that they wouldn't have been aware of other funding opportunities, nor had the confidence to enquire before the programme.

Participant recommendation of the programme is very high particularly in terms of the training and practical support provided to develop internal policies and processes, how to be more inclusive in their outlook and the physical improvements to their buildings. Overall, the groups believe their experience will have a lasting impact on them as individuals and as a group and all have stated that they will continue their efforts to break down barriers both within their own groups and in the wider community. Therefore the programme has ensured a lasting legacy on participants and it is anticipated that further benefits can be extracted as the learning experience is imbedded in the groups and members in the future. The majority of respondents stated that there are more people from the local area now using the hall and 81% reported that there is a greater sense of community than before.

## 5.5 Implications and Programme Development

The evaluation findings illustrate the explicit links between community development and good relations activities. In recognition of psychological territorialisation and demarcations within both urban and rural areas, the programme has successfully targeted traditionally "closed" institutions via the assistance of networking bodies. Although it would be unrealistic to say that all groups have progressed easily and readily in terms of the extent of formalised cross-community activities, it has succeeded in creating space for internal reflection as well as delivering more open structures and venues. The positive feedback and the fact that RDC, upon completion of a second funding phase, still has a list of groups wishing to complete the Strand One training and avail of the physical refurbishment element is testament that the need for the programme prevails. RDC staff report that the programme also demonstrates that a model which originated to meet rural needs, can also be successfully extended to meet the requirements of urban counterparts. It also demonstrates that comparatively low level investment can leverage additional finances and activities beyond the initial expectations of the participants. Within a challenging funding environment the following observations are made for exploration by RDC:

- The strategic direction for using future European Funding for which Northern Ireland might qualify in the period 2014-2020 is currently being developed. All future programmes will need to be developed as an integrated approach to address key strategic priorities and targets and demonstrate a close alignment with the principles and goals of the Europe 2020 strategy (to include promoting employment and supporting labour mobility, promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and investing in education, skills and lifelong learning). It is envisaged that any future PEACE IV Programme will continue as a cross-border co-operation programme aiming to consolidate and build upon, the progress towards reconciliation made under the previous three programmes.
- **Good Relations:** There are obvious linkages between MCSCB and funding streams such as the EU PEACE Programme. MCSCB's strength is that it already has the support



of a number of key cultural institutions and there is a strong desire to continue this work. The programme would be strengthened by bringing more churches, sporting, youth and community venues on board. It is widely recognised that facilities located in single identity areas, or which have symbolic connotations are not perceived to be accessible by all. However, there is growing momentum towards addressing stereotypes and making appropriate use of existing community space. The evaluation illustrates that groups want to move away from negative stereotypes and enjoy sharing their culture and traditions with others. However, the majority do not know how to go about this. The value of the MCSCB programme lies in the fact that it adapted to the pace of the participants and concentrated upon building social infrastructure in the first instance. Despite the fact that it was single identity in nature compared to many initiatives, it has demonstrated that it has led to more representative groups and shared facilities. Against a push from many funders to engage groups in cross-community initiatives from the outset, it is suggested that the softer self-awareness approach adopted by MCSCB, although slower in terms of delivering outcomes, has the potential for greater long-term sustainability. The cross-border element introduced in this cross border Phase of the programme was important as considerable barriers to mobility remain, particularly within the PUL affiliated organisations. It is suggested that greater exploration of the bands culture could be undertaken. These usually have a younger age demographic compared to, for example the Orange Order although there are close affiliations;

- **Cohesion/Social Inclusion:** It is suggested that there is potential to forge links with the Housing Executive Shared Communities Programme. The pilot of the Shared Communities Programme provided impetus to religiously “mixed” communities to undertake low level cross-community activities within their local area. These were aimed at increasing contact, nurturing community spirit, community safety and inclusiveness within what was already a mixed religion environment. One of the identified inhibitors to advancing cross-community activities and relationship-building, particularly within rural communities was the absence of appropriate community facilities to meet and interact. Due to the lack of shared housing areas in NI, nurturing, marketing and promoting this concept is critical to sustaining minority communities – particularly when evidence suggests that there is a tendency towards socialising outside neighbourhoods and eventually leading to demographic shifts.
- **Economic Development:** It must be stressed that there is an increasing policy shift towards addressing community relations via physical regeneration initiatives. Funding streams are providing more and more emphasis upon economic regeneration. MCSCB through the capital works strand has the potential to assist the struggling construction industry, stimulate skills development and provide work placements/apprenticeships. A stronger affiliation with employability, community revitalisation through self-sufficiency and support for fledgling social enterprise should be explored. Potential funding streams could be OFMdFM Social Investment Fund, European Social Fund and NIRDPA Axis 3 (improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity). The Fund will also firmly underpin its efforts towards peace-building by promoting an emphasis upon social and economic advance; and
- **Community Renewal:** RDC should consider MCSCB’s fit with the RDP Village Regeneration Plans managed by the Local Action Groups. The aim is to increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills, innovate and co-operate in order to tackle local development objectives. There are considerable difficulties in obtaining grants to undertake capital works. However, there is no doubt that having a community venue enables groups to have a focal point for its activities as well as raising its profile and standing. RDC should consider developing Strand One of the MCSCB as a standalone option. This would enable support to be provided to groups which already have a fit for purpose facility but wish to improve their effectiveness and external reach – supporting community groups to utilise venues and become increasingly self-sustaining. In this way the MCSCB programme encourages and enhances voluntary contributions, civic pride and place making.

## Appendix - Case-Studies

### 1. Michael Davitt Gaelic Athletic Club, Swatragh

Michael Davitt Gaelic Athletic Club is located in the rural, isolated and mainly nationalist community of Swatragh. Swatragh is a small village in Co. Londonderry, situated five miles from Maghera and six miles from Garvagh. The Club was formed in 1946 with the aim of providing recreational activities for young people in the form of Gaelic games, football, hurling and camogie. In addition to sporting activities, the Club hosts cultural activities such as Irish dancing, singing, instrumental music and drama. In 1988 the hall was destroyed due to an arson attack.

#### **Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme**

Prior to MCSCB, Swatragh GAC hall was mostly used for sporting activities and large functions. However due to its size and open plan layout only one group could use the space at any given time. The Club also recognised the need to improve community relations in the local area and had hosted several cross-community events including 'Sport-a-Mix' involving five local Catholic and Protestant Primary Schools for a week of games and activities, an annual community festival and fundraising functions for the Church of Ireland. Members were keen to encourage further and sustainable participation from the Unionist community in order to break down barriers and dispel the myths about their organisation. During MCSCB Strand One training they developed a three year calendar of events including health and information sessions, concerts, slimming club, art and photography classes, fundraising events, community fun days, senior citizens activities and cultural diversity sessions. The Club wished to improve access and facilities in the hall and submitted a Strand Two application for the following minor capital works to include:

- Provision of disabled access to the main entrance hall;
- Replacement of doors, windows and heaters;
- Construction of a 22m Square Extension to accommodate a kitchen; and
- Painting and decoration.

The total cost of the work amounted to £64,727 of which £49,999 was granted from the Programme and a further £14,728 was raised by the Club.

#### **Impact of the Programme**

Swatragh GAC believes both strands of the Programme have had a significant impact on their Club and within their community. In Strand One, an average of nine members attended eight training sessions of the Development Support Programme and the OCN Level One 'Maximising Community Space' accreditation was completed by seven Committee Members. Two members also participated in a study visit to a community hall outside Omagh. The Chair of the Committee considered the training to have been:

*"An excellent experience overall. Aside from the extremely useful nature of the training in relation to manage ourselves more effectively, get our message across and involve new people, it was great to meet other groups and over a short period of time, break down barriers and change perceptions about what we do and who we are".*

The Club felt they learnt valuable lessons about their responsibilities to their members and the wider community particularly in relation to the creation of a shared community space. They looked at various methods of identifying community needs and implementing the policies and procedures to more effectively manage a community hall. One of the highlights of the training programme was the study visit to a rural group located in a predominately Protestant area. Swatragh GAC found it extremely useful to hear how other groups reached out on a cross-community basis to encourage people to use their facilities and challenge perceptions about each other. They also received telephone calls from Protestant groups



involved in the programme asking them for advice on technical issues and additional grants.

The hall now has disability access and has been extended to create a new kitchen. External doors, windows and the heating system have been replaced and bookings for the hall include one from the local Church of Ireland.

*"It's definitely a more welcoming space. It's warmer and there's better use of the hall in terms of numbers and variety of things to do and we are more than a GAA Club, we the lifeblood of our community."*

Swatragh GAC has developed the range of services and activities they provide to include space for functions and can cater for up to 250 people. This new usage is reported to have enormous benefits as it ensures local and more affordable local access for functions and events.

### **Ongoing Aspirations**

Swatragh GAC has developed a Good Relations Policy and Action Plan and ten members have undertaken Good Relations training. They have strengthened their cross community activities as a result of participating in the Programme and have hosted several 'Community Fun Days' including targeting farmers from all backgrounds with antique farm machinery. They have widened the scope of their activities to include common interest activities such as zumba, keep-fit and jive classes which they hope will encourage and support members of the Protestant community in their local area to attend. They have also held a music concert which was attended by elected representatives from the Unionist community.

They plan to build on this work by ensuring the local Protestant community are aware of what they can offer and can use the building and attend events. The Club readily admit that not all members were initially enthusiastic about the programme, but they supported it nevertheless.

*"We have come a long way from we started this funding application to now. We had been doing some cross-community work but it is a slow process and not everyone has travelled at the same pace. There are still mindsets to change across the whole community. But we are going to build on what we have achieved and welcome everyone to our Club by making sure we get our message across that we are open and welcoming to all in the community."*

The Club have not finished their work on the building and are currently raising money themselves to continue upgrading the hall. They also feel that more work needs to be undertaken to encourage more Protestants to become involved in Gaelic games and intend to use the knowledge and experience gained to develop this area of work.

*"We still have a long way to go but we look back to programmes such as Sport-a-Mix where Catholic and Protestant kids came together to play football, hurling, camogie, rugby and cricket over five days. At the start of that week, Protestant parents were reluctant to let their children get involved but by the end of the week we even had Unionist Councillors supporting it. It's definitely something we will build on."*

## **2. North Belfast Orange Memorial Hall**

North Belfast Orange Memorial Hall was originally built in 1923 it was almost destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1975 and the venue has frequently been attacked.

It is a two-storey building which is split into two units and the rear of the building is let out to a social and recreation club. The hall is used by a range of organisations including Oranges Lodges, Black Preceptories and Apprentice Boys of Derry Clubs and for a variety of activities including pipe and flute band practice, adult education classes, arts and crafts, cultural and historical activities, meetings and events.



## Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme

Prior to the MCSCB application, the hall was used by different organisations for a variety of activities including band practice, adult education classes, arts and crafts, cultural activities, meetings and events. The Committee developed a three year calendar of activities which they wished to take place in the hall including: Community relations sessions, music tuition classes, establishment of a camera club, guided tours, historical lectures, dance classes and for meetings of various organisations such as the local golf society and Northern Ireland Supporters Club. They also envisaged creating a cultural centre providing community development, recreational and educational programmes aimed at local people and visitors to increase the understanding of diverse identities within and between communities.

However, the space could not facilitate multiple groups at any one time so North Belfast Orange Memorial Hall applied to the programme to fund alterations to the internal layout of their hall to create new space and better utilise existing space. They had a large void in their ceiling and proposed to make improvements to their existing hall to create a 50m square multi-purpose room within. The total cost of the work amounted to £51,300 of which £48,735 was granted from the Programme and a further £2,565 was raised by the Committee.

### Impact of the Programme

Overall, the Committee believe the programme has made a positive impact on their capacity, their range of activities and the utilisation of their hall. In Strand One, between five and ten members undertook eight training sessions including: Understanding our Group in the Community, Planning Ahead based on Community Needs, Promoting Good Relations, Fundraising, Support from the Community and Others, Managing Activities and Premises and Financial Sustainability. Since completing the Programme, several members of the Committee have completed courses in Child Protection and First Aid. OCN portfolios were compiled by eight Committee members and two attended cross-community study visits.

*"We learned an awful lot in the training, it really made us look at how we do things and we've really tightened up our paperwork. We took on board that learning and put a lot of new systems in place to make us more accountable and started to share out and delegate the work of the whole Committee. We've also passed on that learning to new Committee members."*

Overall, participants from North Belfast really enjoyed the training and felt that *"relationships were built really quickly and people definitely felt at ease with each other after the first few nights and we actually didn't do much talking to the other Orange groups there"*. The study visits were deemed to be initially challenging:

*"You have to remember that many people in our community were badly affected by The Troubles so they were anxious about going to AOH and GAA halls. We decided to send our younger members on the study visits because we thought they'd be more open to it. Well the feedback was just brilliant, in one AOH hall, our guys spent the whole time talking about the ins-and-outs of banners, and they actually had a lot in common! So, definitely they were a success and it was fed back about how well they were treated."*

The building works completed in Strand Two have enabled an extension of programme activity due to the additional space and the group are now offering more education and training programmes, cultural activities, talks and tours. Their arts and crafts group have completed training in upholstery and are currently re-furbishing all of their chairs.

The Committee have tried to quell the perception that the hall is for the exclusive use of members of the Orange Order and have identified issues such as a need for increased



activities for older people in the area. They host well attended tea dances every month which some Catholics from the surrounding areas in North Belfast attend.

*"They're not coming in their hundreds but we want to make them welcome and the great thing is, some of them were friends before the Troubles and hadn't see each other for years. Now we have a small number who come over to appreciate the music and maybe reminisce about days gone by. Mindsets on both sides don't change overnight but we'll keep taking the small steps when we can."*

### **Ongoing Aspirations**

The Committee have had many challenges to overcome in relation to their own perceptions. They have also faced some opposition from people living in the area who have challenged the Committee's cross-community work:

*"Some people find it hard because of the well-known history of the conflict and the belief that there is an attack on culture and traditions. We have been asked why we are meeting different groups from Catholic areas and not Loyalist groups. It's the same on both sides, not everyone can move that far and it will be a very slow process. We definitely have more support than we would have had a few years ago."*

The group have hosted a visit by members of the SDLP, representatives from the New Lodge and Holy Family Primary School. Sean Kelly MEP also received a tour of the building and was introduced to the culture and heritage of the groups using the hall. A cross-community Fun Day in Grove Playing Fields has now become an annual event and includes children from across North Belfast.

Relationships with Belfast City Council have improved as a result of programme activity and the group have been in discussions with the Department of Justice and the PSNI and have given their support to a partial removal of a Peace Wall in the middle of the Park adjacent to their hall.

Overall, the Committee agree their experience in the programme has changed how they operate and they have worked hard to develop their outreach work since completing the training aspect of the programme. The Committee also believe there have been small, but significant shifts in mindsets and perceptions within the community as a result:

*"The best bit about the whole programme was getting to meet the other groups, making new contacts and working together. I saw real commitment from our community, some made big sacrifices to get involved and they didn't always have the support of their own family or neighbours. It was a big thing for many of us but we got the support we needed and are developing our work from what we learned. Quite a few of us now think a friend is just someone you haven't met yet and through this programme we made friends in the most unexpected of places."*

### **3. Curran (1776) Hall Development Association, Castledawson**

Curran Masonic Hall is located four miles from Castledawson and was built in 1776. It is managed by the Curran (1776) Hall Development Committee, a single identity Protestant community group which was formed in 2008.

#### **Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme**

Prior to their application for funding, the Hall Development Association was limited in the scope of activities they could provide due to lack of basic facilities such as toilets and kitchen. There had been a two-storey extension built onto the rear of the building for a meeting room which could only be accessed through the main hall. However, the ground floor was derelict and in need of complete refurbishment.



The Committee subsequently developed a three year calendar of events for their hall based on the results of a community audit. They wanted to continue with existing activities (e.g. meetings of the fishing and gun clubs) and provide a range of additional activities such as the establishment of a women's group, historical and cultural events (including groups such as the G.A.A. and A.O.H.), training courses, educational and recreational classes. They also wished to make the hall a venue for community meetings and social functions and include more women, young people and older people.

The Committee wanted to improve access and install facilities in the hall and applied to the Programme to fund minor capital works including:

- Installation of heating;
- Installation of a chairlift;
- Provision of disabled facilities;
- Provision of toilet and kitchen facilities;
- Re-plastering and re-wiring throughout; and
- Re-roofing.

The total cost of the work amounted to £53,160 of which £49,500 was granted from the Programme and a further £3,660 was raised by the Committee.

### **Impact of the Programme**

The Committee believes the programme has supported them to be a "*stronger group with more to offer the whole community in a welcoming hall and a friendly manner.*"

In Strand One, an average of seven members undertook training sessions. The OCN Level One 'Maximising Community Space' accreditation was completed by eight Committee Members and three participated in a study visit to Co. Donegal. Several members of the group have also visited other halls in Cavan, Keady and Loughguile and attended community relations events hosted by Magherafelt District Council.

*"I think we all learned a lot from the training, we found the financial and management training very useful for the grant itself but we were also able to meet new people and discuss issues like history and culture and learn about others such as the AOH. It was a very new and very positive experience for all of us."*

Refurbishment of the derelict part of the building has allowed the Committee to develop more activities including celebration and community events, cultural and historical talks, quizzes and more space for a women's group, senior citizens club, young farmers, music groups and training.

Prior to receiving funding, there was some cross-community use of the hall through the local gun and fishing clubs. They have held an open day to raise awareness of the history of the hall and they invited other groups who they have met as a result of their participation on Strand One of this Programme, in particular a neighbouring A.O.H. group.

*"We felt it was the best way to tell people about who we are and about our culture and heritage. We want to reach out to everyone in all sides of the community. There are also a lot of people in the Protestant community who don't understand what we are about. So we have a lot of reaching out to do and this programme allowed us to keep doing what we had started with better facilities and training."*

The Committee have maintained cross-border relationships developed through Strand One of the programme with groups in both Ramelton and St. Johnstone in Co. Donegal. They hope to host them in their hall in the near future.



## Community Aspirations

Since participating in the programme, the Committee have attended several good relations events hosted by their local Council and have liaised with the Good Relations Officer to further encourage cross community participation. They have also begun to look at other funding opportunities to run accredited and recreational courses in the hall which will be targeted at all sections of the local community.

The Committee believe the programme has *"really changed us as a group because of the training we had, the people we engaged with and the fantastic facilities we now have."*

They highlight the new relationships developed with other participants in the programme. This had been their first experience of a capital funding programme and they feel they relied heavily on the support and guidance of RDC staff to ensure the works were completed.

*"We wouldn't have been able to do it without the ongoing support we received, it was new territory for us and the whole programme made us think about how we all should and can work together for the betterment of our community. More people from both sides of the community use the hall now and it's a more welcoming place. We can't thank RDC and IFI enough for this."*

## 4. Muff Community Development Co-Operative, County Donegal

Muff Community Development Co-Operative is an umbrella organisation consisting of 25 other community groups in the local area based in St. Mary's Community Hall, Muff, Co. Donegal. The hall is formerly a parish hall erected in the 1950s and has a main hall, stage, meeting room and kitchen and toilet facilities. It is leased from St. Eugene's Diocesan Trust and used by a youth group, a parent and toddler group, an accordion band, soccer club, festival committee, senior citizens club and a women's group.

### Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme

St. Mary's Community Hall was in need of a number of repairs to the roof and emergency exits. The group had initially considered a new build but had spent considerable amounts of money on the building in previous years. The Co-operative proposed to create a social area, install new heating and provide a separate entrance and exit. The stage area needed to be raised and the area sound proofed and the kitchen facilities upgraded. The works were aimed at helping to alleviate dampness, lack of heat and draughts. It would also make the building multi-purpose by creating three comfortable spaces within which activities can take place simultaneously. They hoped that by providing improved facilities and infrastructure, space would be created to build cross-community relationships.

The Co-operative wished to improve access and upgrade facilities in the hall and applied to the Programme to fund minor capital works including:

- Roof repairs;
- Installation of new windows;
- Draught proofing existing doors;
- Disabled access including disabled parking bays;
- Replacing guttering and downpipes;
- Conversion of existing under stage area;
- Upgrade of balcony area, kitchen facilities and heating system;
- Sound proofing of doors; and
- Installation of security lighting, signage and canopy to front of building.





The total cost of the work amounted to €58,356 of which €55,438 was granted from the Programme and a further €2,918 was raised by the Committee.

### **Impact of the Programme**

The Manager of Muff Community Development Co-operative strongly believes the programme has had a significant impact on the groups using the hall, the hall itself and ultimately the local area.

In Strand One, an average of eight members attended eight training sessions of the Development Support Programme. The OCN Level One 'Maximising Community Space' accreditation was completed by four Committee Members and one Committee Member participated in a study visit. The Manager summed up the training experience:

*"Initially I suppose we were sceptical, we felt we were open to everyone in our community as it was and probably looked at the training as a means to securing the funding. But of course it was much more than that, it allowed us to come together and think about the way that 'welcome' is communicated and how not everyone sees our hall the way we do. It was also very practical and we learnt very valuable lessons along the way on how to manage a capital project."*

The Co-operative also found the training allowed them to explore relationships with other smaller communities living in their local area and develop practical strategies to reach out to the Polish, Romanian and African families who have moved to Muff during the last number of years. They also used the training to consider external perceptions surrounding the Hall particularly in relation to the fact that historically, it was a Catholic Church hall but had become a community hall in more recent times.

*"We found the training very positive, it gave us the space to look at what we do, how we do it, where are the gaps, who is missing etc. and that we might have the welcome policy we now much more sure about how we action it. We were doing a lot of work beforehand but the training has made us better at it and we've never had a problem with participation but this just focused the minds to do more."*

During Strand Two, the hall was upgraded and facilities have vastly improved. It is now much more efficient to run as a result of the work carried out which has allowed the Co-Operative to expand the ranges of groups using the hall and the level of activities carried out. They now have the capacity for three groups to use the space simultaneously with the creation of new, sound-proofed rooms which has had a very positive impact. For example, they can now accommodate a book club, women's group and Irish dancers at the one time. This has ensured that more people are sharing the space in the hall and they are also continuing to address the lack of community and recreational facilities in the area as identified in the Muff Local Area Plan 2004-2010.

*"We still have more work to do on the hall itself and we will keep working on that but it has had an impact on the local area too, people sometimes need to see we are progressing and the funding to upgrade their local hall can often show others that we are doing something good for the community. Our area has changed a lot in recent years and we need to move with those times and this programme has allowed us to do that in so many ways."*

### **Community Aspirations**

Muff Community Development Co-Operative had been engaged in both cross-community and cross-border work prior to their application but have used their experience to develop and strengthen relationships. Their Committee has 22% representation from a Protestant background in an area which is over 87% Catholic. They have also continued to develop their relationships with local Orange Lodges, Masonic Halls and members of Ethnic Minority



groups by ensuring personal invitations are made to events and activities and to work together to tackle the lack of facilities and activities in their area.

They are also keen to develop their work with the many families in the local area who have moved to the Muff area from Derry and who have integrated with varying degrees of success. Members of the group have taken a tour of The Apprentice Boys building in Londonderry and they are looking at ways to develop further engagement. They are keen to stress that their steps are '*gentle to ensure we all move together as much as is possible*' and point to previous unsuccessful attempts at discussion.

*"We feel we need to take this at a responsible pace and understanding that for some on every side, experiences are too raw, so it needs to be managed carefully and the benefits of working together have to be clear for all to see."*

They Co-operative believe they already have generally good relationships with statutory agencies south of the border but this programme has given them much further insight into the work of RDC. They are now looking at potential funders to develop a playground at the hall and believe the training and completed works will strengthen their applications in the future.

*"It really was a great experience, the best bit was actually being able to sit back and take stock of what we do and we have a better hall and better community relations as a result. The work doesn't just stop there. We will keep working and build on this for the whole of our community."*

## 5. Parish of Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with All Saints, Craigyhill

All Saints' Church of Ireland Hall in Larne, County Antrim was built in 1962 and has a 999 year lease with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The hall is used for Sunday School, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, Parent and Toddler Groups, Bowls Clubs, birthday parties, funeral and baptism refreshments, concerts and a summer fete.

### **Maximising Community Space Crossing Borders Programme**

The Committee identified the need for the project by conducting a survey on a cross section of the local community with the aid of both a local Protestant and a local Catholic school. The hall was unable to accommodate the elderly, disabled and parents with young children as it could only be accessed by steps and did not comply with building control regulations. Improving the hall would enable them to build on their existing activities but also allow them to increase usage from all sections of the local community through parenting courses, pre-school activities, music, community workshops and events, a disabled club, senior citizens club, youth activities and a ladies fitness club. They also wished to provide space for cultural activities such as Irish and Ulster Scots dancing and a Catholic folk Club.

Both planning permission and building control approval had been secured for the proposed works and NIHE waived the condition on the lease that the hall only be used for 'ecclesiastical purposes'. The Committee wished to improve access and facilities in the hall and applied to the programme to fund minor capital works including:

- Provision of new steps, disability access ramp and level access to the hall;
- Provision of level egress from all fire exits;
- Provision of tactile paving to new approach route;
- Provision of automatic opening entrance door and canopy;
- Upgrading of toilets (including disabled toilets), kitchen and electrics; and
- Provision of new internal doors and ironmongery.



The total cost of the work amounted to £52,900 of which £49,500 was granted from the Programme and a further £3,400 was raised by the Committee.

### **Impact of the Programme**

During Strand One the OCN Level One 'Maximising Community Space' portfolio was completed by two members and a further two participated in a cross-community study visit. The training was considered to have been the highlight of the programme:

*"It really was a great experience to meet the other groups and to listen to others talking about how they reach out to other communities to involve them. We always felt we were open to all and have done cross-community work in the area, but the training allowed us to take that a step further and look at how we can do it better."*

*"I think there is a lot more pride in our hall as a result and naturally there are more people using it than ever before. Our new users are involved in a wide range of cultural activities and our previous users are much happier to be here as it is a much better hall."*

The Committee also benefited from the practical aspects of the training:

*"It just makes us better at running the hall, especially since we have grown in usage, so it was very worthwhile and we can pass that on to others involved and it keeps benefiting over and over."*

During Strand Two, access improvements ensured that people with disabilities and parents of young children in particular, have benefited. The hall no longer has boarded up windows and is enjoying the natural daylight. The group have continued to fundraise and are currently replacing the old felt roof of the hall. The work took almost two years to complete as a result of issues with the lease and the length of time it took to secure planning permission and building control approval but they are delighted with the result:

*"We had so much support from RDC and as a voluntary group with jobs, families and other commitments, we are proud of what we achieved by coming together to get the work done. At times it wasn't easy and we found it sometimes slow, but it all came together and the results are great. We have more work we'd like to do to the building in the future and this will spur us on."*

They group also benefited from the support of members of the Church and from within the local community as they came together to help with parts of the refurbishment.

*"It really galvanised people into giving something to the community, quite a few people pooled their DIY skills and helped to paint the interior and the windows. I felt it helped to bring a new sense of community and volunteering to the Church and that was very heartening as there is a renewed sense of pride."*

### **Community Aspirations**

The Church hall committee has developed a Good Relations Policy and Action Plan. They had previously been involved in cross-community work and have used their learning and experience to develop this:

*"We have concentrated on our communication and advertising messages to involve more people in the hall and now have more Catholic children attending the youth club for example. We emphasise that we are 'open to all' in everything we do and that is the strong message that is coming from the hall and all involved in it."*

They have also had lunch with the priests of St. Anthony's Catholic Church and have visited the community centre in a nearby Nationalist area to ensure they receive all information



about activities in the hall. They are committed to continuing to build good relations and the Nationalist Deputy Mayor and local Catholic Clergy were warmly welcomed to the launch of the hall. They also have plans for a series of Inter-Church visits and a cross-border visit to a group in Co. Leitrim.

*"This programme has really opened our eyes about the need to reach out to others in a meaningful way and to follow on from it. The grant might have finished but the work has only started."*

The group has concentrated on developing cross-community activities with other Churches and schools in their local area. They have also secured funding from Lloyds for a part-time caretaker for the Hall who is responsible for routine cleaning and maintenance. They have no initial plans to seek further funding but believe their training at Strand One and overall programme experience will greatly support any further efforts.

Overall, the group have had an extremely positive experience and have utilised their training to develop more programmes and wider participation. The highlight has been the revitalisation of their hall and the renewed sense of community that the work has generated:

*"We just feel we have a great facility and that we are proud of and want to actively share with all our neighbours. We feel if we continue to lead by example, others will follow. So we will keep improving our hall and working with the whole community to play our part in tackling the challenges we all face."*