



# **Housing Community Network Annual Report**

**Housing**  
Executive



**Supporting™  
Communities**  
Empowering Society

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# Housing Executive Chief Executive



**Watch the video here...**

**<https://youtu.be/m0Rpyn0i9Lk>**

**It is my pleasure to present the first, digital annual report of the Housing Community Network.**

I'm sure you will agree that the report shows just how much great work there is going on in our neighbourhoods. From the outset, I want give my heartfelt thanks to every member of the community network.

A resilient community is one that has the capability to come together in the face of adversity, to challenge and drive change for the better. In an ever-evolving world it is vitally important, now more than ever before, that we have champions within our communities who can stand up and be counted.

When you consider the challenges and difficult circumstances that you in the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector have been encountering in recent years, I must commend you for ensuring that our community organisations have remained strong and resilient. None of this would be achieved without your leadership, commitment and an ambition for improvement in your neighbourhood.

Over the years the Housing Executive has strived to empower and enable our communities, to give them a voice so that their interests can be represented, to share their concerns and to help build a society that has the ability to speak and stand up for itself and

most importantly, be heard.

This document includes Area Impact Reports and it is fantastic to see from this publication what has been achieved in each area, whether this relates to the figures for how many Housing Community Network meetings were held, how much money has been invested in each community, or how many actions have been taken to enhance community safety, community involvement, community cohesion or social enterprise.

For the first time we have produced a digital only version of the report, in line with our commitment as an organisation to help tackle the climate emergency. The report is available to everyone on the communities page of our website.

Thank you all for your hard work, commitment and unwavering resilience in helping us to deliver the best possible services for our tenants and other residents who live in our communities. We anticipate that the next year will bring some additional challenges, and that your resilience and spirit will help us to face these trials together and shape and deliver our services.

**GRANIA LONG**  
**Chief Executive**

# Housing Executive Chair



**Watch the video here...**

**<https://youtu.be/faWEwWCpoJM>**

**As the new Chair of the Housing Executive, I am delighted to be involved with the first, digital Housing Community Network annual report and I'm sure you will agree with me in saying, there are a wealth of examples in this report which highlight the positive work being carried out in neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland.**

I'm delighted and proud to have been recently appointed as Chair of the Housing Executive. In my short period in the role, I've already got to see some of the valuable work that is going on daily to build cohesive communities.

I was delighted to hear that our Central Housing Forum representatives had decided that their annual community conference would focus on the cost of living.

I know there is fantastic work being carried out within the Housing Executive and we are acutely aware of the current crisis facing all of us. We endeavour to help our tenants, and to that end we have secured additional financial inclusion advisers who can help tenants and signpost

them to critical services, as well as continuing with established support measures like the oil buying network and community grants.

This report also provides examples of partnerships between the Housing Executive and the local communities we work with. These partnerships work because of a shared focus on community involvement, community safety and social enterprise.

I would like to add a special word of thanks to our Housing Community Network, Central Housing Forum, Disability Forum, Youth Forum and Rural Forum members and, of course, Supporting Communities for their commitment over the past year.

It is evident that the valuable contributions of voluntary time and insight have an important impact on the Housing Executive, our local communities and wider society.

**NICOLE LAPPIN**  
**Chair**



# Central Housing Forum Chair

**It has been another busy year for our group where we had our work cut out for us! As top tier representatives of the Housing Community Network, the Central Housing Forum works with the Housing Executive at a strategic level to co-design and co-produce policies, procedures, and services that affect tenants and communities across Northern Ireland.**

In 2022, the COVID-19 Pandemic continued to impact our work, as did the uncertainties around a sitting Stormont Executive and Assembly and the impact that would have on the social housing reform programme.

However, our ongoing work with the Housing Executive ensures the continued positive development of their services and our influence over policies and procedures to the benefit of local communities.

For example, our work has influenced vital matters such as Welfare Reform, the Community Involvement Strategy Review, the Cohesion Strategy Review, Draft Homelessness Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Draft Corporate Plan, and changes to policies and procedures.

During the past year, we have set up and continued various sub groups to address additional critical thematic areas such as Digital Inclusion, Cavity Wall Insulation, Climate Change and Disabled Adaptations.

This past year, we updated our Terms of Reference to reflect the co-design and co-production work we engage in with the Housing Executive. This 'doing with, not doing to' approach was further solidified when the Chief Executive of the Housing Executive signed the document on behalf of the whole organisation.

Over the forthcoming year, we aim to strengthen all tiers of the Housing Community Network by using the Central Housing Forum's Terms of Reference as a template for all Housing Community Network meetings to create sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive communities along with Supporting Communities and the Housing Executive.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues on the Central Housing Forum for their commitment and contributions over the past year.

Special thanks to those who have stepped down recently; Joseph Walsh, Amanda Stewart, Phyllis Abraham (RIP), Leanne Reid, Harry Smith, and Gerry O'Reilly. I welcome our new members who have come on board, Stephen Mills, Derek Cooke, Alan Johnston, Patricia Bray, Paul Dynes, Janine Freeman and Bernie McConnell.

Our work is made possible through the support and guidance of Supporting Communities, including Colm McDaid, Conor Flanagan and Darragh O'Neill and wider



team, and the Housing Executive staff members who attend and service our meetings, including Caroline Connor, Jill Smyth, Deirdre Crawford, Naoimh McArdle-McFall, Anne Ross, and Tony Clarke.

Whilst these staff are no longer working directly with CHF due to retirement and staff changes, I would also like to thank Colm McQuillan, Ian McCrickard, and Denise Conlon for their valuable support and input to the Central Housing Forum.

**LINDA WATSON BEM**  
**Chair**

## Central Housing Forum Members

Mid & East Antrim	Valerie Reynolds
South	Derek Cooke
West	Linda Watson
South Antrim	Alan Johnston
South & East Belfast	Bernie McConnell
West Belfast & Shankill	Renee Crawford Ian McLaughlin
South West	Siobhan McDermott
Causeway	Sheila McWilliams
North Down & Ards	Stephen Mills
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Janine Freeman
South Down	Valerie Rooney
Rural Residents Forum	Patricia McQuillan
Disability Forum	Patricia Bray
NI Youth Forum	Paul Dynes Blair Anderson
Housing Executive	Caroline Connor Jill Smyth Deirdre Crawford Anne Ross Naomh McArdle-McFall Anthony Clarke
Supporting Communities	Colm McDaid Conor Flanagan Darragh O'Neill

**The Central Housing Forum engaged in many pieces of work throughout the last year. Noted below are a selection of key points:**

### Central Housing Forum Housing Manifesto

The Central Housing Forum prepared a revised manifesto outlining the key policy requests the Housing Community Network would like to see in the Programme for Government. We continue to keep these issues under review.

### Review of the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy

The Central Housing Forum has been actively involved in implementing this crucial strategy and will continue to review it on an ongoing basis. As well as reviewing the outgoing plan, the CHF members will play an instrumental role in helping to co-design the Community Involvement Strategy for the next five years. There will be consultation on this crucial work across the HCN structure and representatives from the Central Housing Forum will lead on this.

### Community Conference

The Working Group made up of Central Members, Housing Executive and Supporting Communities staff, met regularly to plan the annual conference is to be held in 2023. The event's theme will be #HELPP: Heat Eat Light People Power,' focussing on help available to local communities to get through the cost-of-living crisis and fuel poverty.

### Sub Groups

Central members updated the Housing Executive Board, Chief Executive and Directors on the wide range of subgroups they participate in and their achievements for the benefit of local communities.

Members continued to make a tangible, positive impact on the various subgroups, including Disability, Rural, Youth, Welfare Reform, Social Clauses and Enterprise, Community Conference, Digital Inclusion, CSE Benchmarking, Community Safety, Climate Change, Housing Executive Grants and Cavity Wall Insulation.



## Engagement Session with the Housing Executive Board

The Central Housing Forum took a new approach to direct engagement with the Chairman and Board of the Housing Executive. Members gave updates on the various subgroups, discussed achievements to date, and where improvements could be made in the future.

## Online HCN Forums

Central Housing Forum members have been involved in the newly established Online Forums to make them as user-friendly as possible. Community representatives' input is essential in rolling this out to other levels of the HCN.

## Customer Service Excellence

The CHF and the other tiers of the HCN played a crucial role again this year in supporting the Housing Executive to maintain and improve their CSE accreditation.

## Categories of Work

The Central Housing Forum continued to meet monthly throughout the pandemic. Meetings continued via Zoom; however, members attended in-person meetings towards the end of 2022.

A hybrid option was available for those who could not attend in person. Members remarked on the benefits of a hybrid set-up in the Housing Executive's boardroom.

## Information

Members were kept up to date or provided with presentations on the following issues:

- Renaturing Strategy
- Tenancy Sustainment Funding
- Cohesion Strategy Review
- Homelessness Strategy
- Apprenticeships
- Ukrainian Resettlement Programme
- Asset Management/Contracts Updates
- Evolve Project
- Housing Executive succession and assignments
- CTOS Survey
- Draft Corporate Plan
- Customer Service Excellence

## Consultation

Consultation took place on the following topics:

- Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy
- Housing Executive Community Involvement Strategy
- Housing Executive Draft Corporate Plan
- Community Safety/ASB Strategy
- Cohesion Strategy
- Renaturing Strategy

On behalf of the Central Housing Forum members, myself and my Vice Chair, Patricia, we very much look forward to another busy and exciting year for the Central Housing Forum.

**LINDA WATSON BEN**     **PATRICIA MCOUILLAN MBE**  
**Chairperson**             **Vice Chairperson**



# North Belfast

## AREA REPORT

### The Community Shed Project

The Community Shed Project was developed by Ligoniel Improvement Association and has become a huge asset to the area, as it has attracted groups from both inside and outside North Belfast to take part in projects. The group who utilised it the most is the Men's Wellbeing Group.

The group began as a number of socially isolated retired or unemployed men who wanted to do something to keep them occupied, but it has become so much more than this. The men now use the shed for tea/coffee, workshops, shelter and a chat; whilst using the polytunnels to learn new skills and grow fruit and vegetables.

### Tar isteach

The funding from the Housing Executive has enabled Tar Isteach to respond to the needs of local communities on both sides of interfaces in North Belfast promptly and efficiently.

During this time they helped people with housing needs and related benefits issues, particularly people who needed support or who were affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and also by the restrictions in movement at the time.

People received real time support and they received accurate, reliable, up to date information, at all times through this programme.

They needed to respond quickly to ensure peoples' anxieties and concerns didn't intensify. Ensuring



peoples housing needs were met was always critical during this time of unprecedented change.

### Ballysillan

Ballysillan & Silverstream Diversionary Programme held a community fun day. This event increased cohesion within the community, and the community now see this space as a place that they can celebrate culture positively and safely.

This event allowed for positive expression of culture and it acted as a diversionary project and environmental awareness programme. The entertainment included bouncy castles, face painting, sports, games, music and food was enjoyed by all in attendance.

5

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings\*



Community  
Grants

£13,975



Community  
Safety

£40,000

11

Community  
Lets



Community  
Cohesion

£21,786

\*HCN Meetings may include Interagency meetings



# South & East Belfast

## AREA REPORT

### Lagan Village Community Pantomime

The group held a Christmas Panto with a group of children which included young people with additional needs from the Lagan Village area. Throughout the course of 10 workshops, the young people were able to learn their parts for the pantomime.

These meetings gave the participants plenty of opportunity to build friendships and learn about one another. In order for the group to gain confidence in performing they were guided through the workshops with experienced performers and learnt the music, dances and words for the show in just 10 weeks.

At the end of the workshops the groups were more than ready to perform in front of an audience. Throughout this project the young people built confidence in themselves, learnt new skills and were able to feel a connection with their community.

### Confederation Cup

The Intercommunity Sports Fiesta consisted of football activities, tagged as NI Confederation Cup. The project involved participants from Africa, Asia, Europe,

and local people who live in local Housing Executive Estates from South Belfast. Race Relations was the main theme for this project uniting individuals' different backgrounds.

Local people participated together with people from different ethnic backgrounds to achieve social change. The project also culminated in the group winning the Queens Award 2022 for voluntary service as a result of taking part in these activities for their volunteer leadership skills.

The project's aim was to enhance confidence and resilience in ethnic communities, resulting in positive decision making and life choices by individual participants to break barriers.

### Community Festival South & East Belfast

NI Alternatives held a Culture Festival at CS Lewis Square. The programme was diverse with lots of workshops including art and craft, mask making, Indian and Arabic calligraphy, Zumba, Irish music and African drums.

There was a fantastic attendance from all sections of the community, lots of interactions and a great atmosphere.



£13,260 Social Enterprise

6

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings



Community  
Grants

£22,535



Community  
Safety

£66,830

1

Community  
Let



Community  
Cohesion

£30,056

# West Belfast

## AREA REPORT

### Lagmore Youth Cohesion Project

Monkstown and Lagmore are two estates with single identity communities and as a result, young people have little opportunities to connect or learn about each other's communities, culture or traditions.

With support from the Housing Executive, both organisations were able to deliver good relations programmes of engagement that gives young people an opportunity to build friendships and break down barriers of understanding and acceptance of others in their communities and surrounding areas.

These two groups supported intervention work throughout the summer and began a journey looking at good relations as a collective group and undertook good relations training and opportunities to connect together.

The series of summer intervention programmes deterred young people from engaging in sectarian and anti-social behaviour. The project has continued to support, drive and deliver a new generation of young people that will support diversity, inclusion and good relations at every level.

### Black Mountain Shared Space

Black Mountain Shared Space held a Family Fun Christmas Event at one of the Interface Barriers at the bottom of the Springmartin Road. This event was cross community and the first of its kind in the area. There was family fun activities as well as market stalls.

The local youth and community groups sold their own crafts to raise funds for their groups on a not for profit basis. The event was a real lift for the local community



in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic and has been factored into the dairy for each year going forward.

### St. James Community Farm

As part of their activities, St James Community Forum manage a community farm within the Falls Road area of Belfast. Community grant funding from the Housing Executive enabled the group to secure additional land, which had been gifted by the Ulster Wildlife Trust to extend the farm.

St James Community Farm held a Christmas event to welcome new and previous visitors to the site and of course the animals were a particularly big hit with children and families.

4

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings

4

Community  
Lets



Community  
Grants

£22,431



Community  
Cohesion



Community  
Safety

£85,780

£38,336



# Lisburn & Castlereagh

## AREA REPORT

### Derriaghy Community Garden

Derriaghy Village Community Association worked tirelessly supporting the most elderly and vulnerable Housing Executive tenants throughout the pandemic. The late Jim McLaughlin (Community Representative) stayed in touch regularly, checking in on tenants to ensure they remained connected.

The project was hugely significant during lockdown as it encouraged individuals to come forward and make a difference in their community. The intention for this garden was to grow vegetables to give to the local older residents and families who needed support.

In the future, it is planned the space will be used to carry out events such as Christmas celebrations, annual fun days and other events that previously there was no suitable location. Vegetables grown here will be given to Housing Executive tenants and others throughout the neighbourhood.

### Longstone Halloween Event

Longstone Community Association held a Halloween party for the residents in Ballybeen. In a joint funding approach with Community Cohesion and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, members were able to get together for a party and enjoy the fireworks display, promoting community cohesion amongst both communities.

### Knockmore Fun Day

In this joint funding from the Housing Executive and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Knockmore community association were able to host a fun day with a BBQ, live music, bouncy castle, rodeo bull, tea cups ride and inflatable games to connect residents with each other and help build relationships.

The project heightened community spirit and brought everyone together in compliance with COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions.



4

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings



Community  
Grants

£18,200



Community  
Safety

£6,000

10

Community  
Lets



Community  
Cohesion

£19,101



# Ards & North Down

## AREA REPORT

### Getting Connected

This project was developed as part of the need for digital support in the community by the Portaferry Community Collective. The Collective decided to work closely with partner groups in the village to identify those in need, so they could provide laptops and tablets.

As well as this the group purchased sim cards with pre-loaded data to enable engagement from people who were the most isolated and needed to access support, advice and engage in online activities. Throughout the programme there was a particular emphasis on the older population, school children and their families.

There was support available to help keep members of the community who suffer from rural poverty and social isolation connected, thereby helping to try to reduce poor educational attainment, social isolation and mental health problems. Many families would have struggled without the project and it was especially important in the times of home schooling during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

### Loughries Men's Shed

Loughries Men's Shed was formed in Newtownards, Co Down in February 2021 by a group of men who, during lockdown became acutely aware that the mental health and general wellbeing of their friends, families and members of the local community was deteriorating.

The group noticed that local men were struggling to cope with the lockdown and the unique challenges that this presented. Therefore, the group decided to design, purchase and erect (on allotment) a large bespoke wooden shed that is now used as a community hub/base.



### Kilcooley Summer Scheme

A number of Housing Executive tenants from the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor enjoyed volunteering at Kilcooley Women's Centre Summer Scheme. Held in the Community Centre over a three-week period, local children from the area have been able to gather for the first time since COVID-19 Pandemic regulations.

Kilcooley Women's Centre has also held a second summer scheme for Lisnabreen and Whitehill estates in Shiloh Christian Fellowship.

5

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings



Community  
Grants

£16,992



Community  
Safety

£17,300

11

Community  
Lets



Community  
Cohesion

£15,216

# South Down

## AREA REPORT

### Good Morning Down

Good Morning Down is a befriending service and community safety group, which engages with up to 170 older and vulnerable residents across the Down area on a regular and ongoing basis.

The Christmas event was a greatly anticipated occasion, providing an opportunity for 120 GMD members to meet in person, socialise and celebrate the spirit of the festive season with a Christmas dinner together. This event allowed GMD members to hear presentations and visit information stalls set up by various charity and statutory bodies including the Housing Executive. Importantly, the event offered an opportunity for members to interact with pupils from the nearby De La Salle School who treated attendees with marvellous renditions of their favourite Christmas carols.

### Halloween Event in Downpatrick

This is an annual project that Downpatrick Community Collective have been delivering for the past 9 years. It is a public event delivered from a town centre location that is open to every community member/resident living within the greater Downpatrick area.

The main aim of this town centre event is to provide a single event on Halloween night that local residents can come and enjoy. This provided a safe and family friendly environment and promoted an inclusive community.



### Barcroft Garden

Newry Felons Association received Community Cohesion funding to develop a pocket forest in a local space currently managed by the group.

The site adjacent to Barcroft Community Centre had potential to be developed to create a shared space in which people can support their on skills development, have spaces in which to develop relationships and build confidence whilst maintaining a good level of community cohesion. The pocket forest is a fresh new idea which also has the added value of supporting sustainability and biodiversity in the area.





# South West

## AREA REPORT

### Cultural Day

Culmore & O'Kane Residents Association held a cultural fun day to build community relations. The project encouraged community cohesion and was particularly aimed at integrating ethnic community members that had moved into the estates during the COVID-19 Pandemic and ensuring they felt welcome. The project brought people together in a positive way, which resulted in an increased sense of belonging and community spirit.

### Cavanleck

A Community Grant enabled the group to buy a laptop, 10 tablets, computer printer and outdoor cleaning and gardening equipment. Local volunteers make up the Enniskillen-based association, who work together for the overall improvement of the area.

Throughout the year, the association runs different programmes and events in its popular Leaf Centre, which temporarily closed during lockdown. New digital technology will now help local residents and tenants complete job and benefit applications and stay digitally connected.

### Shandon

Shandon Park received funding from Community Involvement Grants to run Christmas crafts activities for local children from the estate, tackling the social isolation from the COVID-19 Pandemic, and bringing the children together to make Christmas cards, Christmas cookies and table centre pieces.



7

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings

5

Community  
Lets

£

Community  
Grants

£11,288



Community  
Cohesion



£5,000  
Social Enterprise

£4,829



# South

## AREA REPORT

### Edgarstown

This multi-element community programme aimed at encouraging and supporting residents in social housing areas to safely participate, involved local residents participating in Christmas activities including Inter-generational arts and crafts on a cross community basis.

These activities are important in encouraging and maintaining community participation, involvement and connectivity at an interface area.

### Bannside Community Association

The 'Ladies we have this' engagement programme provided group work sessions in arts and crafts, chair yoga, drop in and IT skills.

The project has helped women come together, gain confidence and work together on a cross community basis. Bannside Development Centre is based on the Portadown Interface, and the classes have brought people from both communities together at a time of heightened local tensions, further strengthening the strong bonds of friendship that stretch across barrier in Portadown.

### Portadown Wellness centre

After receiving Community Grant funding, Portadown Wellness Centre was able to implement a wood carving suite.

This funding allowed the group to purchase equipment and tools to set up the suite.

The wood carving suite runs weekly and they are very fortunate to have two incredibly talented wood carvers as tutors, Derek Black and Alan Anderson. The benefit of this facility has been phenomenal; it has been utilised by the members of the community who are suffering from mental illness and require rehabilitation.



**21** Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings

**18** Community  
Lets



Community  
Grants

**£18,956**



Community  
Cohesion



Community  
Safety

**£73,286**

**£18,713**

# Mid Ulster

## AREA REPORT

### Magherafelt Womens Group

Magherafelt Womens Group received funding from the Housing Executive to run a range of classes and workshops.

These included a four week menopause programme which highlighted the impact of the menopause on life, work and relationships and its effect on mental health and wellbeing. The group also ran two craft workshops for Autumn and Christmas which were very popular and allowed participants to engage in the seasonal spirit.

The project was seen as important in helping the community engage and regain and maintain good mental health, while building confidence and relationships.

### Respect Cookstown

Crime, anti-social behaviour and community safety were under the microscope at two Cookstown schools, thanks to Housing Executive funding.

Four hundred and fifty Key Stage 3 students from Cookstown High School and Holy Trinity College got together over the last year to take part in the Respect Programme.



Developed by the Children's Safety Education Foundation (CSEF), the Respect Programme teaches teenagers about the consequences of anti-social behaviour and crime including hate crime on communities, as well as the health, safety and the wellbeing of young people.

The Housing Executive supports the project in different areas of Northern Ireland each year. In the last five years, 12 schools and hundreds of students have taken part.

### Maghera Cross Community Link

As a result of Cohesion Funding from the Housing Executive, 63 children from local primary schools

came together to take part in weekly bake and art classes over a 5 week period. The children were taught how to cook basic meals and to participate in art classes.

The Link's open door policy allowed primary school children from a wide range of backgrounds including minority communities and also children with special educational needs to come together to learn new skills, interact and have fun.

This group included children from estates who do not normally interact with others in the community. Through the project, meaningful relationships were formed and new skills learned; and all in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

12

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings

3

Community  
Lets



Community  
Grants

£2,069



Community  
Cohesion



Community  
Safety

£15,500

£10,944



# South Antrim

## AREA REPORT



### Crafty Crafters

Throughout the duration of the project, the Queens Park Women's Group met once a week for two hours over an eight-week period. Crafty Crafters first received funding for this project through community grants and the sessions were so successful that they applied for further funding to run extra classes through cohesion funding.

Ongoing projects like these have an immensely positive impact on communities' health and wellbeing. Residents who took part felt that their mental health was better because they were interacting in a relaxed and fun environment. The participants were proud of the pieces of art they were making and so they felt a sense of achievement.

### Tidal Toome

Housing Executive funding has helped the local community create a new interactive play area for children at the Lockkeeper's Cottage. TIDAL Toome, the vibrant community group in the area, has been continually working to provide and improve services for the village and the surrounding rural area for almost 30 years.

Funding from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Unit has helped them create the kiddies cottage garden play area at the front of the Lockkeeper's Cottage, increasing the appeal of this busy social enterprise café on the banks of the River Bann.

### Newtownabbey Youth

Newtownabbey's Rathcoole estate is home to around 8,000 people with a vibrant young generation making waves in the creative arts. NACN (Newtownabbey Arts and Cultural Network) Coole Studios recognise the wealth of young talent on their doorstep.

With support from the Housing Executive they deliver targeted advice and support to the youth network in Newtownabbey and beyond. Much more than a youth club, Coole Studios run a cultural hub for young people aged 8 to 25.

They focus on developing young people by engaging in workshops and projects that increase their skills and knowledge, empowering them to be more socially connected and confident to succeed.





# Mid & East Antrim

## AREA REPORT

### Portglenone Paddlers

Portglenone Paddler Group organised paddling sessions after they had received funding to purchase equipment for a programme called Getting Active on the Bann. The project was aimed at encouraging people of all ages from the area to take part in this alternative outdoor leisure activity. Paddle sports have a very positive impact on both mental and physical health. The engagement with this project was astounding, there were over 200 participants who took part in the weekly sessions on the River Bann and the pool session at Antrim Forum. Throughout the course of the programme, the group also taught participants about the environment and protection of the waterways.

### Larne YMCA

Irish rugby legend Willie John McBride officially opened Larne YMCA's new mobile unit with the help from a Housing Executive's community grant.

Housing Executive funding enabled the youth organisation to furnish and equip a portable

building so that early intervention strategies, group work and one-to-one counselling sessions can be delivered.

The venue is used to deliver a project aimed at educating young people, aged between 9 and 18, about drugs and alcohol and therefore decreasing the likelihood of them becoming involved in anti-social behaviour.

### Dunclug youth mural

The Dunclug Youth Intervention project involved the young people as a response to the anti-social behaviour in the Dunclug area. The children and young people had been lighting fires and hanging about the power station. The group realised that this is very dangerous, particularly if it would catch fire.

The young people were happy to work with an artist to create a design and be involved in painting the power station. The artist consulted with the young people and delivered a number of workshops to help them to complete the artwork and aimed to tackle the dangerous practices going on in terms of fire lighting.



4

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings

6

Community  
Lets



Community  
Grants

£15,662



Community  
Cohesion



Community  
Safety

£65,000

£23,231



# Causeway

## AREA REPORT

### Cloughmills Community Action Team (CCAT)

CCAT received funding for an exciting programme called 'Women in Gardening'. The site is open for community access all the time and is managed co-operatively by a group of volunteers.

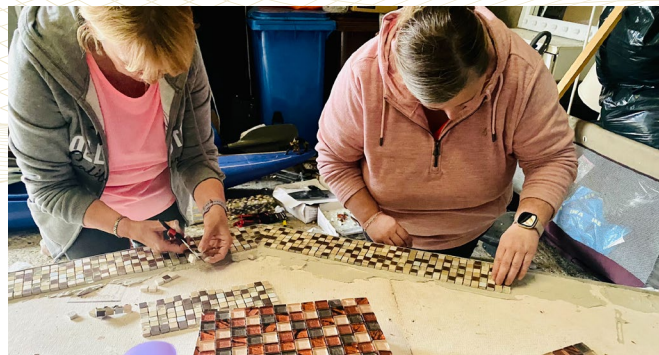
CCAT manage a significant food growing project and associated skills training programme including gardening courses and cooking activities for people of all ages.

They use permaculture principles on site and maximise the biodiversity potential by not using any chemicals. The objective of this project was to build skills in gardening and food production, having a beneficial impact for health and wellbeing.

There was a great uptake of local women to the programme as it was a new and exciting opportunity for them to cultivate a space in their community and meet other like-minded women. Those who took part loved the satisfaction of seeing the small seeds growing into something they could eat. Some of the group were so taken by their new gardening skills that they became regular volunteers and now help maintain the space as a community resource.

### Moneydig

Moneydig Community Association brought generations together to make a piece of art for their shared space patio. This project encouraged the residents who were still isolating to come out of their homes and rejoin society. The project enhanced the area and the new patio area has helped with the mental health issues following on from months of lockdowns and self-isolation.



### Library Causeway

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Building Ballysally Together recognised that individuals had become more socially isolated and were struggling to find new activities to occupy their mind.

Building Ballysally together wished to refurbish, redecorate and republish their library in order to tackle social isolation by bringing people together who have similar interests. The hope was to help people engage in conversations and build meaningful relationships.

The Housing Executive grant enabled the group to provide new library shelving. The upgraded library has provided a safe, quiet space for individuals to enjoy whilst reading. The community is able to access both the internet and printing facilities free of charge.

The project has had a positive effect on the local communities' mental and physical health. People have been made more aware of other support that can be offered and as a result have engaged in other projects and events that are run within the organisation.

8

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings



Community  
Grants

£16,249



Community  
Safety

£2,570

13

Community  
Lets



Community  
Cohesion

£7,461

# West Area

## AREA REPORT

### BHM Summit

In marking Black History Month, North West Migrant Forum (NWMF) held a BHM Summit. The summit aimed to (1) draw attention to the remarkable, and often tragic, history of African people; (2) highlight some of the key issues facing the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities; and (3) celebrate the extraordinary rich and varied culture of people of African descent currently living in Northern Ireland.

The Summit also examined the intersection of race and leadership. Focusing on how we can collectively create a culture of equality, respect and inclusion, where everyone can advance and thrive through policy and practice.

### Santas Grotto

Despite his busy schedule, Father Christmas and his helpers were in town to spread some festive cheer at the Santa's grotto event, organised by Caw & Nelson Drive Action Group (C&NDAG). Santa left Rudolph and the other reindeer at home in the North Pole and instead made his way through Sperrin Park in a horse-drawn carriage to greet families with a jolly 'Ho, Ho, Ho'. Crowds waved and took snaps as he rolled into the Crescent Community & Cultural Centre which was transformed into a winter wonderland and grotto.

Once inside, excited children had a chance to tell him about the gifts they hope to get on Christmas Day, and had their photo taken with the big man and his elves.



At Mrs Claus' kitchen they were given a goody bag, refreshments and a festive book.

### Strabane Ethnic Community Association (SECA)

SECA held a 'Summer of Fun' summer scheme over four weeks, three days a week. The children were involved in Garden Therapy, where the children completed workshops in garden crafts in the local community gardens, Mindfulness Workshops, Sports and Arts and Crafts.



£4,590

Social Enterprise

15

Housing  
Community  
Network  
Meetings



Community  
Grants

£20,160



Community  
Safety

£34,999

19

Community  
Lets



Community  
Cohesion

£128,544



# Supporting Communities

## ANNUAL REPORT



### Chair's Introduction

**This year has been a transitional one in many ways as we navigated our way through the ups and downs of the COVID-19 Pandemic, gradually reinstating in-person services where possible and adapting to the needs and wants of our customers.**

We've also been making some significant changes internally to how we work through an ongoing programme of business transformation which will make us a more data-driven, sustainable, and streamlined organisation in the long run, but which is not without its hurdles and challenges along the way!

The Board of Supporting Communities is in transition as well. We have welcomed several new members this past year, and I have stepped down as Chair, although I will remain in my post as Interim Chair while we recruit the right person to take the lead.

All this is to say, we are truly working to 'build back better,' taking on board all the lessons we've learned to deliver for the communities we serve. This annual report touches on the past year's highlights and gives a flavor of all we do.

**LORRAINE CAMPBELL**  
**Interim Chair**

## The Supporting Communities Team

Supporting Communities is an independent charitable organisation that champions tenant and community participation by developing groups, supporting active citizenship, and building cohesive communities.

We promote best practice in community participation in Northern Ireland through a grassroots approach to community development. We provide tailored support, advice, information, and training to new and existing community groups and statutory and voluntary organisations.

We work to empower society through engaged, confident, sustainable, and inclusive communities.

- We have 11 Community Development Officers working directly with individuals and groups to enable full participation in their communities.
- Our Corporate Services team provides specialist help to groups and other third-sector organisations through funding support and advice, training on a range of community development topics, and building digital skills and confidence.
- The administrative team keeps everything running smoothly for our staff and provides a wide range of administrative and financial support services to ensure the organisation's smooth running of the organisation.

## Reaching Communities

We work directly with community and resident groups throughout Northern Ireland to ensure they can fully participate in matters which affect their lives. In practice, we offer a range of services, including helping new groups form, constitute themselves, and become sustainable and productive for the betterment of their local area.

We meet people where they are (both geographically and in terms of skills development) to give them the tools and support they need to make positive changes in their communities.

This year, we provided support to 525 community groups, including

- 3150 Check-in Calls and Support Meetings
- 295 one-to-one CDO training support sessions

## The Housing Community Network

The Housing Community Network (HCN) is the key community engagement structure that we work on in collaboration with our partner, the Housing Executive, and community groups throughout Northern Ireland.

Last year we convened 103 Area and Local HCN meetings in addition to ongoing regular Regional and Central Housing Forum and Working Group meetings. All of these groups were supported by our staff to get online and attend meetings on Zoom, as well as our usual role in facilitation and record keeping.

We sent 173 sets of minutes to 5300 recipients keeping the wheels moving and ensuring everything gets done.

## Inter-Agency Working

Supporting Communities helps residents' groups to take an inter-agency approach to identify problems and find solutions in a co-ordinated way.

We facilitate regular estate inspections and inter-agency meetings. The agenda is set by community groups and involves a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations.

This year we have facilitated 110 inter-agencies/housing forums and 147 estate inspections across all 13 Housing Executive areas supporting residents to improve their homes and communities.

## Funding Support

Supporting Communities' Funding Service informs groups of the most up-to-date and relevant funding sources and guides them through the overall fundraising process.

Our Funding and Social Value Officer and Community Development Officers helped groups access a total of £819,490.98 in funding last year.

We also responded directly to 84 funding enquiries from groups across 13 housing executive areas and provided support and guidance to 189 HCN member groups so that they could complete Community Grant applications.



## Training Courses

Online training continues to be a popular option for many groups and individuals. Our online series on community development and governance topics runs throughout the year.

Our longer, more intensive accredited courses are meeting the needs of our learners in a new way. Since going online, the number of participants has increased, and we are delivering more courses than ever. We are delighted to see more and more of our graduates going to Ulster University to do their degrees in Community Development.

Statistics about our training:

- 10 OCN courses delivered
- 76 individual training sessions
- 499 total learners
- 102 accredited learners
- 25 learner support sessions
- 100% satisfaction rate

We were also recognised as an 'Innovative Learning Centre,' winning a highly commended award at the recent OCN NI awards.

## Digital Inclusion

Digital skills continue to be a priority for us because they are essential to modern-day citizenship. Everyone must be confident and competent to use the internet to participate in many aspects of public life, not to mention accessing public services.

The COVID-19 Pandemic revealed the digital divide in a harsh new light, making this work even more urgent. Working with the Department of Finance's GO ON NI Team, we work to bring digital skills and confidence to rural and older people who need a helping hand to get connected and go online.

This year, we trained 544 participants in basic digital skills. We were delighted to partner with the Department of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs, who provided funding for a pilot project supplying tablets and training to 50 people from eight rural communities.

We had an overwhelming response from rural community members wanting to participate, far more than the 50 available places. There is a huge demand for this provision in rural areas and we hope to expand on this work in the coming year!

## The ONSIDE Project

ONSIDE is a cross-border project which aims to improve the health and well-being of disabled people living in Northern Ireland and the border regions.

Disability Action NI leads the project in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Independent Living Movement in Ireland, and Supporting Communities.

The project is funded by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Supporting Communities delivers the digital training aspect of the Onside project. Participants receive a free tablet device and six weeks of digital skills training covering everything needed to interact online, access services, and stay safe on the internet.

From the project's start until March 2022, we have trained 1945 participants across NI and ROI!

- 95% said they could do something after their training that they could not do before
- 92% reported that they had better knowledge and confidence in spotting scams and keeping safe online
- 91% said they had more knowledge and confidence to know how to improve their health and well-being

The project comes to an end for participants in September 2022.

## The Cushendun Project: Building Trust in the Trust

Our Cushendun Project, in partnership with the National Trust, also ended this year. Despite the COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions and the resulting changes to our original plans, our partnership with the Trust and the relationships we've built within the Cushendun community has been a great success. We have laid the groundwork for lasting change in the village.

## The Amp Survey

Our community survey series, 'The Amp,' ran two surveys last year. The most recent one in December helped gauge interest in a new type of tenancy for Northern Ireland.

The Amp Survey on Intermediate Rent garnered just under 100 responses in two weeks this December.

Our short survey touched on some of the main questions that the Department for Communities is looking at in its longer consultation process on introducing a new type of tenancy to Northern Ireland.

The Amp has the potential to be a valuable tool for landlords, councils, and community groups. We need to grow our mailing list to help amplify our voices.

## Raising the Standard of Tenant Participation (TP)

The TP Standards are a robust and structured process for assessing how well landlords involve tenants and residents in their services. Our assessment framework, adapted from our colleagues at TPAS Scotland, is designed to provide social landlords with an objective measurement of their Tenant Participation activities through three standardised accreditation levels: bronze, silver, and gold.

Our TP Standards officially began rolling out to our members, and we were delighted to award Radius Housing the first Tenant Participation Accreditation award last summer.

We are pleased to report that more housing associations are taking the plunge and embarking on the accreditation process. The TP Standards are already raising the standard of tenant involvement for tenants in Northern Ireland.

Our trading arm, Empowering Communities, has made great strides this year, adding more members to our ranks from the Republic of Ireland as our business grows.

Working with the Housing Agency Ireland this past summer, we delivered a series of workshops on tenant engagement and uncovered a vast demand for our services. We took part in wide-ranging discussions with approved housing bodies on the future of tenant participation in Ireland, especially the benefits of more active forms of engagement. These workshops revealed a strong desire among Ireland's housing practitioners to develop further their tenant engagement practices, some of which are already leading to exciting new developments.

This year we worked with Irish housing providers; Circle, Tuath, Fold, Respond, and Oaklee Housing to take their tenant participation practice to the next level.

## Customer Service Award

This past summer, we were delighted to be awarded the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation from the Centre for Assessment.

The CSE is a national quality mark that rewards organisations with a truly customer-focused commitment to all they do while providing a positive steer for customer-centred change. Certification takes place through a rigorous assessment process to establish whether an organisation meets the requirements of CSE.

We recently completed a short test of our standards with great results. We plan to continue to engage our customers in future testing of our services.

## Raising our Profile

After the previous year's rapid pandemic-related increase in online users, our social media growth has slowed somewhat but is still increasing steadily across our main channels. We have begun to make more use of LinkedIn to reach our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, which is reflected in the stats. The use of our website has remained relatively constant.

- 21% increase in Facebook followers
- 12% increase in Twitter followers
- 7% increase in Instagram followers
- 70% increase in LinkedIn followers

All our publications have gone entirely digital, including SCENE Magazine.

Our most popular publication, Ezine, continues to be sent fortnightly to over 1500 recipients and posted online and on our social media channels. We produced 24 packed editions this year.

Other publications include a 'How To' Series of help sheets on various community development topics, a monthly Funding Bulletin, and regular updates to the training calendar.

## Business Transformation

The COVID-19 Pandemic crisis challenged us to find new ways to serve our customers and communities, and Supporting Communities stepped up, made quick changes, and began performing at new levels. This all stemmed from our staff's genuine desire to be there for our customers and one another.

Now, as things return to 'normal,' we want to build on our momentum for growth and improvement. Supporting Communities has recently been awarded Dormant Accounts NI funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, which we are using to improve our ability to generate income and reduce our reliance on grant funding. We aim to become a more data-driven, sustainable organisation as we continue our mission to improve and empower communities across the island of Ireland.



# Rural Residents Forum

## REPORT

**This year the Rural Residents Forum (RRF) welcomed a careful return to face to face meetings for many of its members. While reminding cautious, and aware of the vulnerabilities of community representatives, it was great to finally be back together, face to face and beginning to share stories and support as we used to before we got siloed into zoom calls.**

Post pandemic we recognise that Zoom and technological advances have made life easier for us. For those who must travel long distances to get to Cookstown for meetings. The convenience of Zoom has reduced travel time and enabled participation on days when caring responsibilities, health, the weather or access to transport has been challenging. We are largely working on a hybrid 'room and zoom' model and members tell us this is working well for them.

The RRF is made up of residents and tenants of rural housing estates from across Northern Ireland. The forum is facilitated by Rural Community Network (RCN) Northern Ireland and meets monthly. The core focus of the RRF over the past number of years has been on raising awareness of the missed target for new build social housing in rural regions.

It is important that the demand for new build social housing in rural communities, which is greater than the annual target set, is achieved to meet the housing needs of rural citizens, benefit the rural economy, and contribute to sustainable development across the region.

We have worked hard to bring the issue to the attention of the Housing Executive, Housing Associations facilitated by NIFHA, all five political party spokespeople, Department for Communities, DAERA and Department of Infrastructure officials and as well as talking to local councils. Over the past year we have secured meetings with the Housing Executive Chief Executive and Chair, Central Housing Forum and the Housing Council.

In addition we secured quarterly meetings with the DfC Minister Deirdre Hargey and her officials on the issue of rural social housing need and the missed target for new builds. As the target was missed again this year it sometimes feels like a futile exercise, but the fact that political parties, councils and housing associations and now ministerial attention has been brought to the issue, we hope it will start pay dividends for rural social housing investment.



The RRF remains concerned that social and affordable housing in many rural areas has become a rarity and the very fabric of many of our towns and villages is threatened as rural dwellers are forced to find housing in towns and cities. Without a specific commitment to a rural new build target there would be a risk that the need for social housing in rural communities could be easily ignored and remain unaddressed.

One of the barriers to the development of new social housing in rural areas identified by the RRF is a lack of awareness of the social housing system. In areas where social housing has been owner-occupied and there is little tradition of social housing, people are less likely to come forward to put their name down on the waiting list.

Communities are unsure as to how they might go about identifying a local need for social housing and, raising awareness of the potential for its development. The Rural Residents Forum previously produced a leaflet to help rural dwellers and community groups to explain the purpose of social housing and to understand the process of enabling social and affordable housing needs to be identified in their area. In the past year we have supported and advised on the format of Housing Needs Test (Latent Demand testing) in a number of rural regions where need for affordable and social housing has been raised by community groups and local Councils.

In August 2021 the RRF worked with NIFHA and NIHE to host Rural Housing Week raising awareness of barriers to new social and affordable home development in rural areas and highlighting the importance and benefits to communities of new housing investment. Rural Housing week is an opportunity to highlight the positive contribution rural homes make to our society and to place a focus on the barriers to new social housing development including issues of infrastructure difficulties like waste water treatment capacity in many rural towns and villages.

We continue to look to colleagues in Scotland, England and Ireland to learn from the work they are doing on rural social housing. The COVID-19 Pandemic has prevented us from undertaking planned site visits but we will engage more fully with partners in the UK in the coming year.

The RRF has been an active and busy group of individuals over the past year. Emerging from the pandemic and dealing with the cost of living crisis, this group of committed community activists remain both vocal and active in influencing policy, grant makers and decision makers in relation to the needs of rural tenants.

Over the past year we have seen them respond to food poverty, fuel poverty, the cost of living crisis and the mental wellbeing of their own communities. The monthly forum provides a space for them to share their experiences and knowledge and to support each other in the work they do. But essentially they have also been a source of great knowledge and learning for officials and their feedback has helped us in RCN to actively feed into the work of the Anti-poverty strategy (which included a section on rural housing need) and the Integrated Care System reform of the health service which sought support for better quality homes and housing conditions in the private rented sector, better rent and landlord control in order to address health inequalities in rural regions.

The group have responded to consultations on Housing Supply, Homelessness, Welfare reform and PIP Claims processes, Discretionary Support payments processes and welfare mitigations. They responded to the Intermediate rent consultation too. They have been vocal about issues affecting access to advice service in rural regions and the need for greater awareness of support for benefit uptake among rural families and older people.

They were a great resource to Department officials and grant making bodies who were trying to secure support for families and individuals for emergency payment schemes as energy and fuel prices rose. They spoke directly to the Commissioner for Older People on issues of access to payments and banking for rural older people.

In all they are a busy and committed group of individuals who are not only affecting great changes in their own communities but who work together to provide an effective and responsive forum of rural voices for the Housing Executive.



# Disability Forum

## REPORT

**The Disability (Housing) Forum is a user-led group of disabled people who are representative pan-disability and geographically of all regions across NI.**

The Forum comprises individuals who are also members of the local and regional Housing Community Network and are represented on the Central Housing Forum.

This enables a two-way flow of information across the HCN and ensures that issues related to disabled people and housing are central to the work of the Housing Executive.

The Forum strongly believes that equality and disability rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) should be a shared responsibility across all HE services, and co-production enacted at the earliest stages of the development of new policy and practice.

Toward this the Forum has engaged closely on the development of the refresh of the Interdepartmental Review of Housing Adaptations and the work of the Housing and Health team within Regional Services in the Housing Executive. The Forum is represented on the Health and Housing Programme Board and the Adaptations Task and Finish Group.

Adaptations remain a key focus for the Forum and they discussed concerns with Housing Executive Chief Executive Grainia Long at a meeting in February. Notably their concern that the grants allocated toward housing adaptations do not meet the costs of the building work and that this is a situation that has become worse over the past two years with the increase cost of building materials. The Forum has welcomed the uplift on grant levy.

The Forum has also welcomed the news that Housing Executive would restart a new-build programme and have encouraged that new build social housing should be future-proofed for accessibility and ease of adaptation.

The Forum has encouraged that accessibility should take account not only of the features inside the home and around the home, but also location, to be best placed for access to transport and community links. Also that Housing Executive should embrace the potential of assistive technology in both new build and their existing housing stock to maximise independence within the home.



The Forum remained active throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, having adjusted to meeting remotely using video-conferencing technology. Members contributed to Disability Action research on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on people with disability.

The Disability Housing Forum are co-design partners on the ONSIDE Project. ONSIDE is a partnership between Disability Action (lead partner), Housing Executive, Supporting Communities and Independent Living Movement Ireland and has been crucial in enabling disabled people across NI and the border counties of Ireland to remain connected with their families and communities throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This included the Housing Executive Chair Professor Peter Roberts opening a cross-border event that included Matt Frazer who is a well-known actor and disability activist in February 2022.

# Youth Forum

## REPORT

**2022 was a great year for the Housing Executive Youth Forum (NIYF) as the project continues to go from strength to strength. The youth forum opened the year with great piece of work in collaboration with the University of Ulster, as fourteen of our members completed their level 4 Civic Empowerment qualification.**

The qualification was tailored around the topic of homelessness, a social issue which the group displayed great passion around. March 2022 saw an end to this element of their journey; the group engaged in a one day residential delivered by Northern Ireland Youth Forum staff in tandem with Tony from the Communities Team in the Housing Executive.

This was fantastic as the young people reflected on their achievements of the past year and highlighted some of the fantastic experiences they went through. It was evident that the project has made a big impact on participants on a personal level.

In April, it was decided that we would restructure the Housing Executive Youth Forum to allow development and succession planning for the future within the CHF and HCN structure. The existing group would become a year two working group. The purpose of this group was to further develop their learning around the Central Housing Forum and the Housing Community Network led by the Housing Executive across Northern Ireland.



This was achieved by engaging with Housing Executive staff and engaging with people who have sat on Central Housing Form and some of

the subgroups which stem from it. The young people were keen to engage in such strategic arenas therefore HE staff alongside supporting communities and the Housing Executive developed a two-day training residential at Greenhill YMCA in Newcastle.

This was an overwhelming success as the young people achieved the three learning points highlighted below:

- Code of conduct
- Committee Structures
- Community Development

The group gained great learning and confidence from the training and feel that they are now ready to engage in some of the strategic and policy areas, led by the Housing Executive .

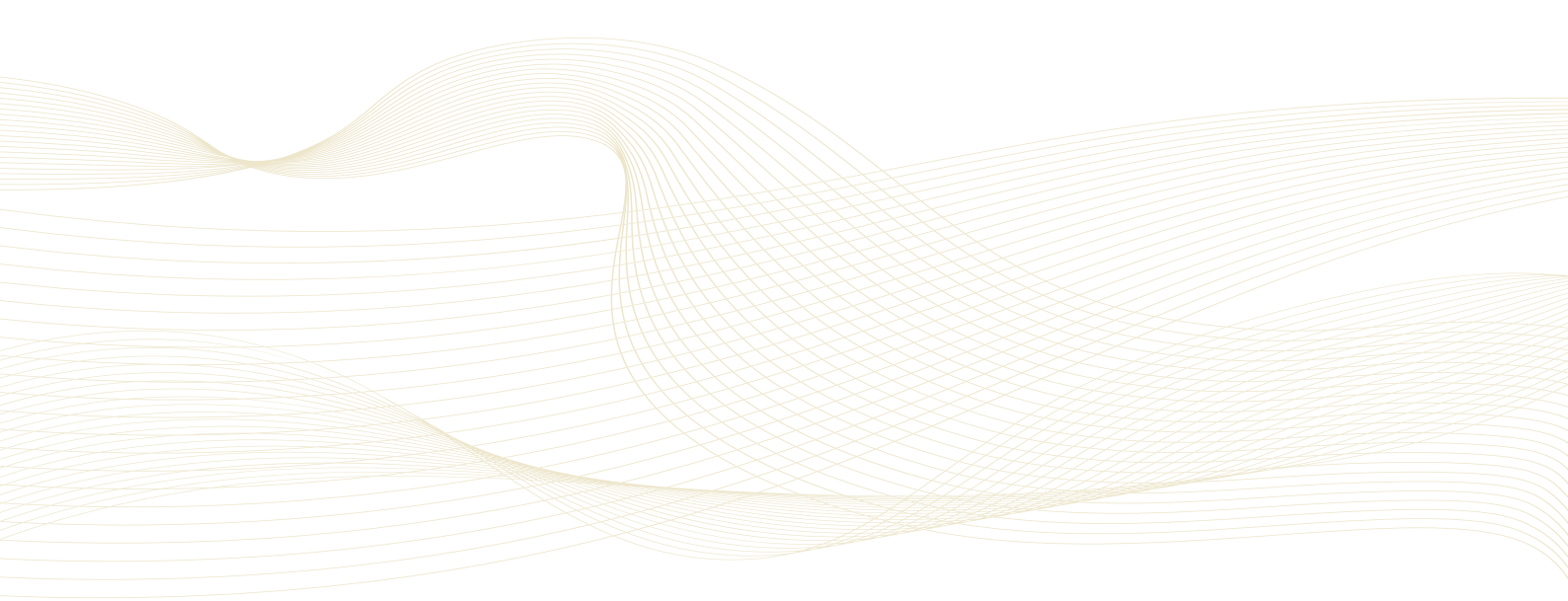
The second part of the restructuring included recruitment of a new developmental year one group. We began this process in September with our new project starting in October of this year. We are currently working with a fantastic group of 14 young people. The primary focus of the first number of months has been:

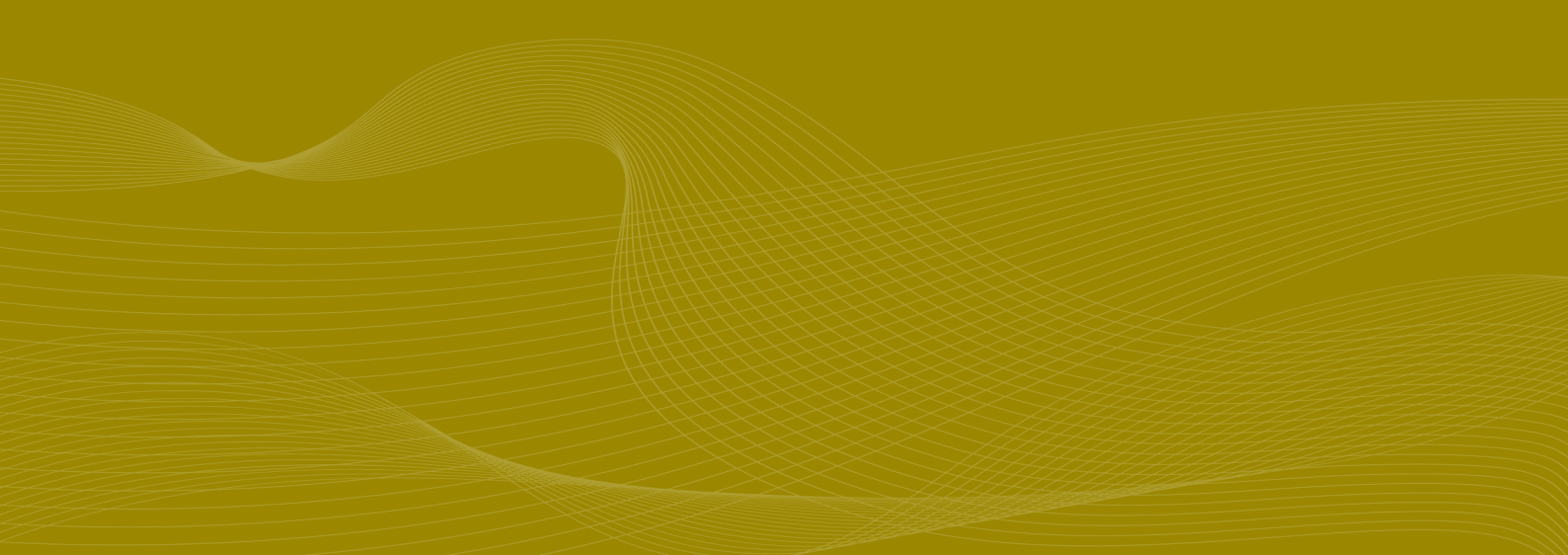
- Teambuilding
- Contracting and working agreement
- Understanding the Housing Executive
- Christmas social action
- Residential Planning

The long-term aim is that the year one developmental group will complete the adequate training and join the Housing Executive's various working groups.









This document is available in alternative formats.  
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