In 1984, the Ballinderry River Enhancement Association (BREA) was established by four angling clubs on the Ballinderry River in County Tyrone in response to the dwindling numbers of native Dollaghan trout and issues around water pollution and habitat loss across the catchment. The aim of BREA was to ‘Restore the Ballinderry River to its former greatness’. In 2012, BREA changed its name to Ballinderry Rivers Trust – the Trust aims to continue to conserve, protect and improve the rivers and loughs of the Ballinderry River system.

As part of its activities, the Trust works with children from local schools – helping them to learn about how fish are born, how they feed and what keeps their water healthy. The children then given a fridge, holding tank, air blowers and thermometers to take fish eggs back to school and watch them develop until they are ready for reintroduction into the river. While only 2% of the eggs produced in the wild survive, 75% of all fish introduced to the river have survived. This equipment is provided for free, with the project intended to help children learn and care about the freshwater environment that surrounds them.

Village SOS supported the Trust to grow the project; involving 135 children from 7 local schools.

The Ballinderry Rivers Project team comprises the Trust’s staff – managed on a day-to-day basis by Lisa Kirkwood (learning and outreach officer), supported by Frank Mitchell (conservation breeding programmes coordinator) and Mark Horton (manager). The team are supported by a board of trustees made up of local business owners, conservation professionals, educationalists, local river and wildlife interest groups and community groups.

Lisa contacted Rural Community Network (RCN), Village SOS country partner for Northern Ireland, to see if the Campaign could help expand the project.

Action taken with VSOS support:

The project team met with RCN and described the high demand from 34 local schools wanting to participate in the project - and the lack of available funding to provide equipment for them all to do so.

Village SOS provided funding for the Trust to purchase seven mini-hatcheries leading 7 more schools and 135 children to participate in the project.
Funding the project...

Funding for the Trust’s project team comes from a variety of sources including the Department of the Environment, Nineveh Trust, Ernest Cook Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation and Community Landfill Tax.

Learning from others...

The project has been recognised by the Local Council, environmental agencies and Higher Education. For example, Queen’s University Belfast now sends postgraduate students to get involved in the mini hatcheries; and the Trust has been asked to assess the condition of three other rivers in Northern Ireland.

As a result of Village SOS support the Ballinderry Rivers Trust project has managed to grow the ‘Hatchery in the Classroom project, resulting in...

- An additional 135 children from 7 local schools have participated in the project - and released their first batch of fish into the river.
- The children’s enthusiasm has led 100 parents and guardians to become involved in supporting the mini-hatcheries in schools.
- Children with learning disabilities are now participating in the project – particularly enjoying the “hands on” nature of the activities.
- Schools in other parts of Northern Ireland (e.g. County Down, County Armagh) are interested in the project – with the Trust considering replicating and expanding their work.

What advice would the group pass on to others looking at similar projects?

- Look at what you are doing well but also recognise your weaknesses and any threats to your future existence.
- Contact and keep in touch with organisations that have established similar activities.

What comes next?

- The Trust would like to expand the project to support all schools in the Ballinderry River catchment area.
- The Trust is investigating if similar projects in other parts of Northern Ireland could be developed.
- The Trust is considering where investment to expand the project might come from and whether a social enterprise /community business model could be developed for the project. As part of this, the Trust would like to further improve the marketing of the current project and develop a business plan.

Other useful sources of support...

Nineveh Trust
www.ninevehtrust.org.uk

Ernest Cook Trust
www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk

Rural Community Network
www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org

Garfield Weston Foundation
www.garfieldweston.org

RCN NI
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