

# Annual Report 2019 - 2020

## Rural Community Network (NI)



**Rural Community Network**  
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES



## Chair's Report – John Waddell

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I am delighted to once again introduce the Rural Community Network Annual Report; and while the report reflects the work undertaken by the organisation up to the end of March 2020, I am conscious that as I write this we are in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and I want to start by wishing you and all your families well. The world as we know it is changing, perhaps for ever, and the coming year will

present new challenges for us all. No doubt next year's annual report will reflect the detail of our response to the pandemic but I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all of the RCN staff for their amazing and speedy action in supporting rural communities at this difficult time.

Overall this has been another successful year for the RCN given that we are operating in an uncertain financial environment which has impacted not only on ourselves but all of the voluntary and community sector. However, I am pleased to say that we are beginning to see some positive outcomes arising from the process of strategic reflection and change that we undertook last year as part of a proactive approach to organisational stability. We will continue this journey throughout the coming year with the development of new ways of working. Even without the current health crisis the uncertainty around our planned exit from the European Union at the end of the year will without doubt be of concern for many who live and work in rural communities; and the role of the RCN in supporting our membership will be of vital importance as we do our best to help manage this transition. On a positive note it is pleasing to see the restoration of the Stormont Executive and I hope that they will recognise the value of our work and the importance of rural in wider society. As in previous years it is more than often the case that the RCN is the only rural voice at the table in engagement with Government, representation on public bodies, and membership of voluntary and community sector forums. We continue to try and influence rural policy guided by the expertise and experience of our membership,

Throughout the year the staff team have made considerable efforts to engage directly with our membership and reflect the needs of rural communities making increasing use of the opportunities presented by social media. I hope you feel that we have been successful in engaging with you, keeping you informed, and listening to you. The success of the RCN is only made possible by reflecting the views of its membership and striving to meet the needs of rural communities.

Details of the work undertaken by the RCN are contained in the body of the report, for example, continuing the relationship with NICVA and DfC to deliver the rural element of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) and participation in the Faith Forum. The RCN has also continued to work with The Executive Office and Communities Relations Council in providing an extensive range of equality and peace-building programmes. The staff team have supported health and wellbeing programmes and lobbied for increased levels of social housing in rural area through participation in the Rural Residents Forum. None of the work that the RCN undertakes on your behalf would be possible without a highly skilled, experienced and motivated staff team. I would once again wish to thank them for their professionalism and enthusiasm. A special word of congratulations goes to Charmain Jones who was awarded the CRC exceptional achievement award for peacebuilding across NI – a great honour.

Our active regional membership base underpin all of our activities and I thank them for their continued commitment to the RCN. This has been my first year as Chair and I want to express my personal thanks to the Board for their wisdom and guidance as we have together tried to make decisions which represent the views of our members and secure the organisations future. I would like on behalf of RCN to offer sincere thanks to all our funders for their support and hope that we can build on developing our relationship over the coming year.

Normally we would present the annual report at our Annual General Meeting, but I expect that the celebration of our achievements will be different this year. I commend this annual report to you and look forward to meeting you again in person when this becomes possible.

Until then please stay safe.





## Background

Rural Community Network is a voluntary membership-based organisation supporting rural communities across the region. RCN works with rural communities to address issues relating to poverty, inequality, community and good relations.

RCN adopts a community development approach to its work. Areas of work include community development training, action research, policy analysis, peace-building, strategic planning, consultation, mediation and facilitation.

### OUR VISION

is of vibrant, articulate, inclusive and sustainable rural communities whose contribution is valued across Northern Ireland.

### OUR MISSION

is to provide an effective voice for and support to rural communities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged and excluded.

### OUR VALUES

are set within the context of community development which is a long-term value based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion. The values we bring to our work are:



- Community Empowerment
- Social Justice
- Collective Action
- Working/Learning Together
- Equality and Anti-discrimination

## Trustees' Report

RCN continues to be in a consortium with NICVA, CENI and CO3 in the extension period of the Generic strand of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) funded through DAERA and DfC to deliver key services to community and voluntary sector groups throughout Northern Ireland with a strong rural presence.

Rural Community Network (NI) currently uses the RISP funding to part support a Director's post, a Policy and Public Affairs post, a Community Learning and Skills post and a Finance and IT post. Rural Community Network (NI) currently has two staff employed through a Community Relations Council Core funded programme. In addition, RCN has secured significant contract and tender work through bids to undertake work in relation to poverty research, facilitation, housing, education and peacebuilding.

The following report gives a snapshot of the achievements of Rural Community Network during the reporting period under our 4 strategic aims to illustrate how we are meeting our targets across the aims and objectives of our strategic plan.

Our fifth aim in the Strategic Plan concerns board and staff development and organisational policies and procedures and is not reported on in this document.







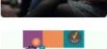




## Aim 1 Empowering the Voice of Rural Communities

- **Face to face bespoke training** with 5 groups to support them to raise rural issues with local Councils and statutory bodies.
- **Rural Needs Act** - 2 awareness training sessions with MUDC. Represented RCN on DAERA working group on Rural Needs Act Implementation Review.
- Meeting with **Secretary of State**, Julian Smith, to talk about the lack of an Assembly, civic voices and Brexit and key issues facing rural and border communities.
- Evidence to **AERA Committee** on the UK Agriculture Bill and Rural Connectivity Sub group working on proposals for a future Rural Development Policy Framework.
- **10 consultation responses** submitted.
- RCN co-ordinated NI delegation to the **European Rural Parliament** in Candás Spain.
- Presentation to NI Federation of Housing Associations annual conference and panel discussion on challenges of providing new **social housing in rural communities**.
- Supporting **the Rural Residents' Forum** through presentations to Housing Associations and Housing Executive staff to raise awareness of Rural New building targets, Personal Independence Payment, Rural Needs Act.
- **Local area profiles project** 2 seminars delivered and 3 local groups supported.



## Aim 2 Promoting, supporting and celebrating community development practice in rural communities

- **14 training sessions** on Fundraising, Social Media, Succession Planning, Impact Measurement, Social Value attended by **103 groups**
- **87 enquiries** from rural groups
- Engaged with **Rathlin** regarding its lighthouse redevelopment proposals and community consultation process.
- Worked **PHA** for Community Development Approaches to Transformation in Health and Social Wellbeing and Bengoa Report Community Development Implementation and Transformation.
- Involved with **Lottery** on succession planning, community education and support and development of a regional support service for rural groups.
- **5 case studies** on **reflective practice** produced with CDHN Elevate Project on the delivery of a Regional Health and Community Development mentoring programme
- Worked with BCRC on a second round of the '**Getting to know you Institutions'** course.

Event	
	<b>Faith in Fundraising</b> Rural Community Network 5 March 10:00
	<b>Dormant Accounts Fund-Consultation Event</b> Rural Community Network 28 Nov 2019, 14:00
	<b>Environment Strategy for NI Discussion Workshop with DAERA &amp; NI</b> Rural Community Network 21 Nov 2019, 10:00
	<b>Rural Community Network NI-Annual General Meeting</b> Rural Community Network 14 Nov 2019, 12:00
	<b>Measuring Social Value in Northern Ireland</b> Oxford Island 23 Oct 2019, 10:00
	<b>Succession Planning for Community Groups Seminar</b> Rural Community Network 16 Oct 2019, 19:00
	<b>Better Funding Applications Workshop</b> Rural Community Network 25 Sep 2019, 19:00
	<b>Rural Area profile development workshop</b> Rural Community Network 9 Jul 2019, 14:30
	<b>PIP Awareness Session</b> Rural Community Network 28 May 2019, 10:00

### Aim 3 Actively working towards an equitable and peaceful society

- 75 people completed **OCNs** in Dealing with the Past, Participatory Democracy, Gender Based Violence and Culture, Good Relations, Ulster Scots, Practising Reconciliation through Remembrance.
- 8 rural women were engaged with a **SEW programme** funded by Ann McGeeney Trust and a peace quilt completed.
- 66 photos displayed from **War to End all Wars** exhibition funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund programme, with over 1000 visiting.
- 15 places were filled for **'The Tracing Our Family Roots'** programme. with rural participants.
- 25 completed the **Troubles Art** programme with National Museum Services who designed an art piece and 25 canvases which were displayed in the Ulster Museum and included a site visit to Seamus Heaney Centre to reflect on the Troubles.
- **Other programmes** included 'Rebels, Radicals, Royalists and Loyalists'; 'Shared History Tour'; 'Ireland 1919 – 1921'; 'The Ordinary Women in Extraordinary Times'; 'Flags and Emblems'; 'International Peace Summer School'; and work with migrant support groups.
- **Informing** policy makers and those engaged in supporting peace building through working with CRC, Beyond Belfast practitioners, Confederation of Ulster Bands, DOJ Fresh Start, Sir George Quigley Foundation, Senator George Mitchell and others regarding Sectarianism in NI.



### Aim 4 Supporting rural communities to realise their potential and ambitions

- Supported the Faith Sector Forum to develop an action plan, to use the GrantTracker programme and develop a programme in leadership in peacebuilding.
- 56 support cases from groups (Funding 40, Strategic Planning 6, Social Media 1, Governance 1, misc 6)
- 36 individual support sessions with groups on Fundraising, Social Value, Impact Measurement, Strategic Planning)
- 9 groups that underwent a **social value analysis**
- 6 meetings held with Statutory Services on Funding Consultations & Social Value
- A **Social Value Conference** attended by 53 people from 35 organisations
- 3506 followers on **Facebook**, 2245 followers on **Twitter**



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## Summary of Financial Activities

(incorporating the summary income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 2020)

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2020 Total £	2019 Total £
<b>Incoming resources from generated funds</b>				
Voluntary income	5,565	97,049	102,614	102,151
Investment income	123	0	123	109
<b>Incoming resources from charitable activities</b>				
Charitable projects income	94,675	69,903	164,578	142,947
Other incoming resources	9,413	0	9,413	8,359
<b>Total incoming resources</b>	<u>109,776</u>	<u>166,952</u>	<u>276,728</u>	<u>253,566</u>
<b>Resources expended</b>				
Charitable activities	122,469	175,459	297,928	308,929
Governance costs	1,150	2,250	3,400	4,268
<b>Total resources expended</b>	<u>123,619</u>	<u>177,709</u>	<u>301,328</u>	<u>313,197</u>
<b>Net incoming/(outgoing) resources</b>	<u>(13,843)</u>	<u>(10,757)</u>	<u>(24,600)</u>	<u>(59,631)</u>
Total funds brought forward at 1 April 2019	448,259	17,676	465,935	525,566
<b>Total funds carried forward at 31 March 2020</b>	<u><b>434,416</b></u>	<u><b>6,919</b></u>	<u><b>441,335</b></u>	<u><b>465,935</b></u>

The statement of financial activities has been prepared on the basis that all operations are continuing operations. There are no recognised gains and losses other than those passing through the statement of financial activities.

	2020 £	2019 £
<b>Fixed assets</b>		
Tangible assets	322,743	329,696
<b>Current assets</b>		
Debtors	1,102	1,248
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>120,300</u>	<u>137,341</u>
	121,402	138,589
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	<u>(2,810)</u>	<u>(2,350)</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>	118,592	136,239
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	<u>441,335</u>	<u>465,935</u>
<b>The funds of the charity</b>		
<b>Restricted income funds</b>	6,522	17,676
<b>Unrestricted income funds</b>		
General funds	32,206	38,699
Designated funds	<u>402,607</u>	<u>409,560</u>
<b>Total unrestricted income funds</b>	<u>434,813</u>	<u>448,259</u>
<b>Total charity funds</b>	<u><b>441,335</b></u>	<u><b>465,935</b></u>

For the financial year ended 31 March 2020 the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies. The Trustees acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of financial statements. The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its financial statements for the year in question in accordance with section 476. These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime. The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees and authorised for issue on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and are signed on its behalf by:



John Waddell (Chair)

Company Registration No. NI31418

## Funders

Our thanks to our funders this year.



Community Relations Council



**John Waddell**

*Chair*

**Aidan Campbell**

*Policy & Public Affairs*

**Kate Clifford**

*Director*

**Charmain Jones**

*Community Relations*

**Teresa McKernan**

*Administration*

**Conor McGale**

*Community Learning and Skills*

**Not included - Kathryn Kerr**

*Finance and IT*

