



Chartered  
Institute of  
Housing



**ALL-IRELAND  
HOUSING  
AWARDS  
2022**

# Good practice compendium

Sharing the lessons learnt from CIH 2022  
Housing Awards

Sponsored by:

**choice** 

The logo for 'choice' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by a graphic of white dots arranged in a grid pattern that tapers to the right.

Choice are delighted to support the CIH Housing Awards 2022 as the sponsors of the Good Practice Compendium



Our mission is to enrich lives through great homes, services and communities

Choice Housing Ireland Limited (Choice) is a registered voluntary Housing Association and charity. We are a 'profit for a purpose' social enterprise established over 40 years ago to provide decent housing and tenant support services at an affordable rent. We work with a whole range of like-minded partners to bring about positive change for our tenants and their communities.

Today, Choice has over 13,000 homes and employs over 400 people in a Group structure that includes:

- **Choice Services** - our in-house repairs and maintenance service provider
- **Maple and May** - a professional landlord improving standards for private tenants as well as increasing the supply of affordable housing for sale
- **Oaklee Housing** - a leading Approved Housing Body in the Republic of Ireland providing customer focused housing and support services
- **Comhar FM** - a consortium encompassing the financing, design, construction and maintenance of six social housing development sites located in and around Dublin

Through our Group structure we are committed to using our significant resources and expertise to deliver more and better homes and services for all.

# Welcome

Welcome to the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) 2022 All-Ireland Housing Awards Good Practice Compendium.

I want to take this opportunity to commend and thank you all for your incredible efforts over the past two years. The pandemic has continued to place greater calls on the housing profession, with acute pressure placed on an already stretched workforce. Housing can be a tough career, and yet your professionalism and perseverance in going above and beyond for residents and customers shows why housing is one of the most critical professions. Your work helps to ensure we have healthy communities where people can feel safe, secure, and can thrive.

This publication showcases exemplars of best practice from the last 12 months. There was certainly no shortage of this during the public health crisis, during which people went the extra mile. Sharing these examples is more than a celebration of what we do, it is an opportunity to learn from each other's work. Such learning is important as we take tentative steps in emerging from the pandemic; we face fresh challenges such as finding new ways of working that meets the needs of staff and residents. But we also face challenges from before, like how to address high levels of housing stress while building sustainable communities, and how to achieve net-zero carbon emissions in our homes.

Despite the disheartening decision to collapse the NI Executive, there is cause for optimism when looking at the landscape ahead. Housing is increasingly a

political priority, in no small part due to your work through CIH and our partners to ensure that housing is elevated on the political agenda. Challenges remain, not least around securing funds to match ambition, but there is a direction of travel to address long-standing barriers that hinder us from meeting people's housing needs.

Providing the right number and type of homes in the right places is certainly a challenge in the south of Ireland. Moving forward we will be working with our new Board in Ireland to make sure that housing professionals have the right skills and knowledge to play their part in tackling the housing crisis, and to help deliver the Irish government's new housing plan "Housing for All".

Now in its thirteenth year, the standard of nominations for this year's awards was high and continues to demonstrate the ongoing innovation within the housing sector right across the island. And where there is such a high standard of work, it was no easy task for the awards judging panel to decide the finalists and the winners. I would like to thank all our judges for their time and contributions.

I would also like to thank our headline sponsor, Circle Voluntary Housing Association, and all the sponsors of the individual awards. With your support we have been able to share this fantastic content.

And finally, I'd like to thank you - for your ongoing support of CIH and for professionalism in housing.



**Justin Cartwright CertCIH**  
National director - Northern Ireland  
Chartered Institute of Housing

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*In order to keep the authenticity of these projects, and to convey the passion felt by those involved we have not altered any of the text submitted to us as part of these entries.*

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# BEST HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

This award recognises developments that provide desirable and sustainable places to live, improving the lives of people within the community. The well-designed development will demonstrate creative approaches and excellence from concept to delivery.

## Girona Close, Portrush

Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd



### Statement of support

Habinteg's Girona Close represents the very highest standards in social housing. It is a modern and stylish mixed development of houses, bungalows, and apartments including properties specifically designed for wheelchair users, nestled in an area of predominantly privately owned housing on the south eastern edge of the small seaside resort town of Portrush, County Antrim.

Girona Close is a 'Housing for All' scheme under the NI Executive's T:BUC strategy (Together Building a United Community), aimed at improving community relations and moving towards a more united and shared society in Northern Ireland. The scheme and surrounding area is a recognised Shared Neighbourhood, with funding provided to develop and deliver a Good Relations Plan, including bridging and bonding projects for the residents of Girona Close and the surrounding communities.

Habinteg initially identified the site in 2016 as an opportunity to provide quality new build accommodation in an area of high housing need, close to amenities, facilities and public transport. Consultation prior to construction was extremely positive, reinforcing the Association's strongly held

belief that the site represented both a good news story for the town and a chance to demonstrate the very best of the social housing sector.

A Design Competition was held, from which GM Design Architects were appointed for their proposal of an attractively grouped mews development, with aesthetically enhancing coloured cladding to the upper floors of properties. Together with GM Design Architects, Habinteg refined the scheme noting development, housing, maintenance and community comments. The project was tendered in February 2019, commencing on site shortly afterwards with Andrew Bradley Ltd and completed a year later, in March 2020. Funding was provided by Housing Executive and delivered through the Department for Communities, with a site cost of £270,000 and a construction cost of £1,330,000. As a designated Housing for All scheme, additional funding of £139,000 was received for staff resourcing and community involvement.

Girona Close sits among existing housing, sensitively enhancing the surrounding area, close to a renowned golf course and beaches, adjacent to local amenities, schools and churches and is well served by local transport routes. The development is set along a small cul-de-sac, with properties having parking spaces and individual gardens. The attractive and sympathetically designed buildings feature modern styling, with some feature corner windows, extensive use of a warm brick and pale green or blue cladding to upper floors.

Girona Close offers high quality, thoughtfully and stylishly designed general needs and wheelchair accommodation. The dwelling mix comprises three 5 person 3 bedroom houses, four 3 person 2 bedroom apartments, two 3 person 2 bedroom wheelchair bungalows and one 5 person 3 bedroom wheelchair house. Each of the properties conforms to Lifetime Homes and Secure by Design requirements with energy measures as 'fabric first'. The overall building construction is of brick and block walls, concrete floor

slabs and stairs, flat roof, aluminium window and door frames, quality thermal and sound insulation and appropriate services.

Community Involvement projects were undertaken throughout the construction process and continue under the Housing for All initiative. High levels of satisfaction were noted among tenants and the community on completion. 'Such comfortable

apartments, so glad we got a place here', said one tenant while one local Councillor added 'it is a pleasure to see such a positive change for this site by Habinteg'. The scheme has received praise for the attractiveness of the architecture and the ease of which the homes are heated. The association had numerous calls within the construction period from private owners wanting to buy these homes.

## Outcomes and achievements

Girona makes an innovative and ongoing contribution to Portrush with its attractive design and Housing for All approach. It is a tasteful and positive addition to the environment and benefit to the local community, providing much needed quality housing and continuing bridge building projects.

Outcomes include:

- Sensitively developing a vacant site
- Quality new housing for up to 38 persons / 10 households
- Innovative design to challenge social housing stereotype
- Appealing features including dark coloured window frames, warm buff brick walls, and coloured cladding to the upper floors
- Quality dwelling layouts and specifications
- Attractive streetscape
- Working with and consulting with neighbours regarding the new boundary
- Working with MLAs and Councillors
- Substantial investment of £1,704,080
- Very satisfied tenants and local community
- Ongoing culture and diversity partnership projects with local schools and other housing providers
- Community involvement plans together with new tenants and local community
- Huge opportunity to make a difference under Together: Building a United Community to provide properly resourced Housing for All.

# Tooting Meadow, Scarlet Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth

**Lead organisation: North & East Housing Association CLG**

**Partner organisation: Louth County Council**



## Statement of support

The design concept for Tooting Meadow was to open the site to provide a visual connection between the street and the mature trees and pocket park on the grounds of the Sienna Convent to the rear, and to respect the established building line on Scarlet Street. The previous fire station building broke the building line and the current development seeks to repair this urban edge.

The development respects the design, scale and height of the surrounding development. The apartment building replaces one tall building with another, and the scheme has been designed so that the lowest parts of the development are closest to the boundaries and the tallest part is in the centre of the site. The development is lower than the previous fire station tower and consists of 2 buildings, comprising a 2-storey terrace of townhouses and a 3-storey apartment building which steps up to 4 storeys at the centre of the site. This step up in height at the corner helps to create a significant new landmark and sense of identity for the neighbourhood. Building heights are in proportion to the street widths.

Many of the mature trees on the grounds of Sienna Convent are visible from Scarlet Street. The development opens the site to these mature trees and the pocket park behind the site. A strong visual connection is created from Scarlet Street to the Sienna Convent lands through the main public realm of the site. Pedestrian links, with tactile paving exist across the centrally located public realm.

The urban design approach responds to the site's distinct character by retaining the existing cut-stone wall from the old school yard, which dates to the

1840s and provides links with the past and preserves the historic fabric of the site. The site boundary is a recognisable feature of local and historical significance and recognises the role former institutions have played in the town. The scheme is a positive addition to the identity of the locality by creating memorable and distinct buildings of high-quality design and finishes.

The scheme has facilitated the provision of quality homes to a range of family categories and needs. In addition, it has allowed urban living for a combination of family types, with secure open green areas and ready access to the services of Drogheda town centre. The development houses growing families in three-bedroom homes with a larger adult family unit in a four-bedroom home, each with its own private back garden. The apartments comprise wheelchair user level access properties at ground floor level. It further provides homes for predominantly single tenants with the added security of private courtyard balconies.

The apartment building has been designed to be fully accessible and adopts best practice in terms of universal design and access. Internal spaces are more generous than the sustainable guidelines to

ensure that occupants' well-being is placed at the fore. An emphasis has been placed on being able to accommodate single tenants and families, and any primary or secondary mobility needs of these tenants or their families. In this regard internal room sizes and corridor widths have been designed to reflect user requirements ensuring easy access and circulation by all. The apartment building has a lift and a staircase which has been designed to accommodate ambulant disabled people. External private and public space have been incorporated to ensure amenities can be enjoyed by all users of the scheme.

Scheme Data:

A2 BER rated homes benefiting from renewable energy sources

Practical Completion: February 2020

Site cost: Nominal through Local Authority

Average cost per home: €246,125.00

Funding: Capital Advance Leasing Facility/Housing Finance Agency

Designed By: McKeivitt King Architects

Contractor: Ganson

## Outcomes and achievements

Tooting Meadow Scarlet St. is a high-quality development located in the centre of historic Drogheda. The original site housed a disused fire station. In 2015 Louth County Council tendered for the development of the site. Given the regeneration objective for the site, the project required an innovative design that enhanced the streetscape of a neglected town centre site. The scheme demonstrates a strong partnership and collaborative approach to housing delivery on local authority lands, with an outcome that has provided for meeting a mix tenure need in delivering both apartment and housing accommodation.

In 2020 the development won the prestigious Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) Peoples'

Choice Awards and was recently shortlisted in final 3 of the ICSH Community Housing Awards 2021, Most Creative Supply category.

"Delivery of this 15 Unit scheme has made a real difference to the lives of the tenants who enjoy not only their homes but also the open space and recreational facility contained within the scheme. The accommodation in the scheme has provided for a wide spectrum of needs to include families, older people, homeless households, people with physical disabilities and people with learning difficulties"

-John Lawrence SEO - Louth County Council

# Cluain Fraoigh Roscommon

**Lead organisation: Roscommon County Council**  
**Partner organisation: Sweeney Architects**



## Statement of support

### Introduction

This is a 7-house development to rear of existing established estate. The challenge was to provide a distinct neighbourhood on a gently sloping site, allowing for linkage to existing estate and area under development to west. The houses are developed along a linear shared surface pedestrian street with a communal parking area close to estate entrance. The open space to front minimises the impact of cars on site and allows residents to enjoy the front open area without interference of cars. The materials and form of the houses are distinctive creating a sense of place for the residents.

The following factors were all carefully considered and in turn helped shape the design and contributed to the success of this scheme.

### Context

- A High level of permeability through existing/proposed residential housing estates and neighbourhoods was achieved.
- Cycling & Pedestrian Paths were integrated with the intention of future expansion into neighbouring developments and to link up with adjacent main roads into town
- Resident cars corralled at entrance with centralised bins store - maximizing public realm space, additional space for tenant's homes and their curtilage and eliminating associated issues of noise and child safety
- The Pattern and Grain of existing housing developments was maintained with the use of front and rear private terrace.
- By designing and constructing Single Storey Dwellings the following benefits were gained; whole floor area is utilized, it's accessible, provides suitable and inclusive accommodation for all

### Usability

- The Houses lifecycle was considered and their ability to adapt to all stages of life
- Functionality was considered and generous storage spaces, built-in wardrobes & utility spaces were provided
- Disability parking provided universal access for residents and visitors at all stages of life
- The main WC with bath and shower is located near the entry, off the bedroom corridor & is central to the house. The master bedroom and WC share a party wall allowing the option of direct access in the future.
- Design allows for easy future installation of level access walk-in showers with adequate wall strength for fitting.
- The L shaped plan maximises the distance of windows from boundaries ensuring privacy from the street for residents.
- Passive supervision was achieved by additional windows at the front façade to allow for the passive surveillance of communal areas.

### Management

- The Public Open Spaces encourages positive community spirit and interaction. Collective efforts to maintain and clean these shared spaces help achieve this.
- Tenancy Agreement and Handbook are in place to ensure collective and individual responsibilities are fulfilled.
- Selected External and Internal Materials are robust, practical, with long lifespan and no external maintenance requirements. (Roof finish, stone cladding to front facade, brick front walls, gabion retaining walls and pre-pigmented render, Underfloor heating, joinery designed to last, selected tile had increase durability over vinyl, varnished open ceilings with no maintenance)

### Sustainability

- L shaped layout promotes cross ventilation. Additionally dual aspect windows enhance the amount of sunlight in these houses.
- A3 rating with an Air Tightness of 3 achieved reducing heat loss, energy running costs and tenant's carbon footprint. This helps to resolve the Issue of Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability.
- Selected Air-to-water heat pumps & Demand Control Ventilation systems are highly efficient and low carbon.
- South facing orientation & large windows - maximise natural light, solar gain, and ventilation

- Centralised Corridor - reduces noise transfer, increases availability of external walls for habitable space.
- Utility provides a natural wind lobby to kitchen reducing heat loss from main living space
- This social housing infill project could be replicated - utilising small plots of land across the country to help the supply of suitable family accommodation.

## Outcomes and achievements

This project created 7 dwellings for social housing for Roscommon County Council on time and on budget.

### Context

This project successfully integrated a new housing scheme with its own identity and character into an already existing housing scheme to the south and a proposed housing scheme to the west. The existing linear pattern and grain of the existing site was maintained while introducing new pedestrian & cyclist links throughout the scheme.

### Usability

Constructing a lifetime adaptable, age friendly home was essential when designing this project. Equally important was maximising functionality with generous storage spaces. The L shaped houses provided privacy in front gardens and the additional gable windows facing the street generates passive supervision.

### Management

This scheme strove to create a community. The design has a centralised open shared area, integrated pedestrian and cycle paths with communal cycle racks and parking, a common bin store promoting a mutual sense of ownership, pride and community.

### Sustainability

Sustainable design solutions, selected materials and systems helped to achieve an A3 rating with an Air Tightness of 3. These measures increase natural light & ventilation while reducing energy running costs and tenant's carbon footprint. This helps to resolve the issue of fuel poverty.

# BEST HOUSING STORY

Sponsored by: **Housing Executive**

This award celebrates contributions that have made a positive difference to the lives of tenants, residents or communities.

## 9 Houses at Railway Ave, Borris

**Carlow County council**



### **Statement of support**

These local authority houses were designed to comply with Quality Housing for Sustainable communities which took in to account energy efficiency measures and eliminates the use of fossil fuels, therefore in line with the climate action plan for Carlow County Council. The houses were face with stone in keeping with the heritage of the town.

This development has help maintain and grow the social economic fortunes of the surrounding locality. Especially during the construction phase which

resulted in much needed employment across various trades such as plumbing plastering block laying Electrical etc. which had a knock effect for material providers, building providers and retail units in the area.

The construction of the section of the walkway along the old railway line provides a recreational facility for the people of the town and encourage tourism in to the area.

In this scheme and in collaboration with Borris Men's Shed, Borris Tidy Town's and Borris Community Employment a community Orchard was established. Borris Men's Shed Group constructed individual planting boxes for each household to plant vegetables. Borris Tidy Town's, Borris Community Employment Scheme and Carlow County Council have planted black berries, gooseberries, black currants, raspberries and apple trees in the Orchard. It is anticipated that these fruits and vegetables will be harvested for consumption or for sale in the Borris Farmers Market which takes place every Friday morning. This Community Orchard will help make this community more sustainable in to the future.

Throughout the estate wild flower has been planted to increase the biodiversity in the town

## Outcomes and achievements

The dwellings are designed to meet the needs of the variety of tenants housed, through ease of access within the building- single storey house for the elderly and disabled provides universal access throughout, accessible bathrooms with thermostatically controlled showers and anti-slip flooring.

This development responds to the needs of the local community which are of mixed tenure, traditional families, lone parent families, the elderly, homeless and disabled people through its excellent footpath network and cycle facilities mainly due to its close

proximity to facilities such as school, Shops, Church, Medical Centre, Sports facility including GAA pitch, golf club and railway walkway.

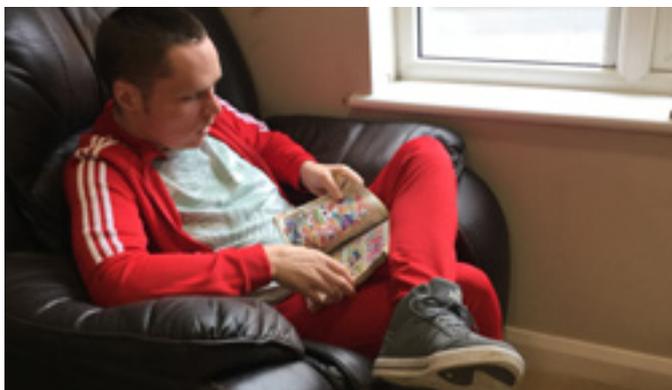
The development is designed to overlook all public areas and open spaces which will help prevent antisocial behaviour and help provide security to the elderly and the vulnerable.

As described above the Community Orchard has been put in to meet the needs of the tenants and the local Community.

# The Heathers Armagh

**Lead organisation: Choice Housing**

**Partner organisations: Inspire Wellbeing**



## Statement of support

The Heathers in Armagh is a Choice supported living complex in partnership with Inspire Wellbeing. The scheme comprises of three bungalows each having 4 bedrooms for adults with learning disabilities and challenging behaviours. This story relates to one of the bungalows within The Heathers and illustrates how a creative approach to a significant supported living challenge can bring stability for individuals as well as the immediate community.

JW was referred to The Heathers in 2014 after previous placements had broken down and following a lengthy stay in an acute inpatient setting. Unfortunately as a result of JW's complex and challenging behaviours it became evident that compatibility was going to be a long term issue. This ultimately resulted in long term void issues at the bungalow. All other housing options had been exhausted. All the agencies involved were keen to prevent a re-admission to hospital which was believed to be a damaging regression. The staff at Choice, Southern Health & Social Care Trust and Inspire Wellbeing were determined to ensure a positive outcome for all tenants on site. The partners worked together to find a solution and after months of planning, Choice put forward the capital investment required to remodel the bungalow to provide JW with a self-contained unit specifically designed to meet his specific needs.

Following a process of extensive consultation with relatives, carers, health professionals and Inspire, Choice were able to separate a portion of the bungalow to create a bespoke and private space with its own external access. 'The Annex' as it has become known includes a double bedroom, shower room and a lounge with kitchen.

To ensure the overall capacity of the service was not reduced Choice redesignated surplus common space to ensure the accommodation still has three sharing tenants in the main bungalow plus one tenant in the adjoining annex.

Following completion of the works the Association have been able to reopen the referrals process for the shared bungalow and provide much needed accommodation in an area of high

demand. This was welcome progress for all after a period of significant void loss. Most importantly however, the remodelling has enabled JW to remain in an environment where he is secure, supported and settled within the community.

The impact on the tenants throughout the service has been incredibly positive. Inspire staff have recorded an astonishing zero incidents. This is in stark contrast to the former situation. On an individual level, JW's medication has been decreased as a direct result of his continued settled behaviour which speaks volumes on the impact on his wellbeing.

John Quigg Team Leader at The Heathers:

"We've seen a massive reduction in incidents and no need to use PRN medication for agitation. There is no longer tension between co-tenants as JW has more choice now over what's on TV and is enjoying his one-to-one activities in peace. JW has been able to set up his own herb garden in the yard which he enjoys for sensory purposes and the herbs can be used in his meals."

Michael Littler Support Worker at The Heathers:

"JW moved in when the weather was nice, this was good as JW was able to make use of the back yard area which is quite big. JW seems more content in the single dwelling area, there has obviously been no concerns over behaviours from or towards co-tenants."

Staff at Choice and Inspire Wellbeing used their considerable skills and experience to influence this positive outcome. However, the end result is not just down to the staff's dedication and positive attitude but also that of the entire community at The Heathers.

### Outcomes and achievements

Prior to the undertaking of this remodelling work at The Heathers, JW presented significant demands on staff resources and was negatively impacting the enjoyment of the home for the other tenants. The recognition that an innovative approach was required and the drive from all involved partners to identify the best possible solution for the tenants, partners and the community has resulted in a settled scheme with content tenants. The continuous voids at the service was due to JW's challenging behaviour were to the

detriment of all three agencies, most worryingly a loss to individuals who needed this valuable supported housing. All partners have witnessed a reduction in voids at the scheme as well as a reduction in challenging behaviours/incidents recorded by staff. Most importantly, JW is thriving in an environment which meets his needs and provides a safe place where he can be supported and, is welcoming to those who need supported living.

## Killarney Court and Dezi Jay M

### Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Located in the heart of Dublin 1, The Clann Housing Scheme, within Killarney Court is unique, as it is the only Clann Scheme in Dublin, which is mixed with the General Needs Housing provided by Clúid Housing. Since coming to work here in June 2021, as the Clann Scheme Manager, I have been overwhelmed by the sense of pride and community all the Residents, both Clúid and Clann alike, have for Killarney Court. As one of the Clann residents told me, "It is an oasis in the middle of Dublin". Another proudly professed that if "he was to win the lottery, he would still not leave". Whilst another told me "They would not want to live anywhere else, for all the money in the World". With 57 Clann homes and over 65 residents, it was a difficult choice to try and figure out who to talk to about life as a Clann Resident, as so many have had lived lives which mirror one another's and are as equally colourful.

Clann Resident Dezi Jay M in his own words, is a musician, stand-up comic, actor, playwright and poet and has lived in Clann Housing in Killarney Court since August 2020. Homeless more or less from 1975, I was often advised that I was 'voluntarily homeless', whatever that means? I was diagnosed with mental health issues, and I had to learn to overcome these myself, as well with a substance misuse issue I was not aware of for 13 years. I can now happily say I am 37 years sober. Dezi explained that some say life is a gamble. I would prefer to say that in my life, one may take risks. Tragedy fell on my life and my family's life on more than one occasion. Much of my work is about getting through difficult situations and turning it around. Each poem, each story has meaning to it, has a consequence. It has vindication and most importantly, the essence of Love". I remember Pierce Brosnan being interviewed and asked how he survived being an orphan at such a young age. "Comedy" was his reply. This one-word response struck a chord in me. As a child, in the street however, despite the name calling and the odd fist fight, in one sense we raised each other. We travelled for miles through the then countryside of the North Dublin suburb of Coolock. There were so many natural amenities within reach of us. We did not mind the walk to Bull Wall, where we either paddled or swam. We loved St. Anne's Park and the wooden bridge of Dollymount. Laughter was something that kept us going. I was certainly the kingpin in that area. I was an entertainer by the time I entered adulthood and I still carried comedy everywhere I went although life may have been at times confusing, but then I realised I was on the autistic spectrum, and this was a gift and not a disability.

Coming to live in Clann Housing has not been without its challenges, Covid-19 impacted on my ability to settle in, in the manner which I would have liked to. Equally, I have been grateful for the support I had. When I myself contracted the virus, people rallied around and dropped off stuff to my apartment door to make sure I had provisions. The things I have come to appreciate whilst living here are the communal

facilities, which are far superior compared to my previous accommodation. Clann Housing offers so much more, the communal gardens, security, a safer home, the library and of course the community spirit.

### Outcomes and achievements

I felt part of a community and that I mattered to others. People cared about me and my wellbeing. I have been able to stay connected to the wider community which has been a life line especially during the pandemic and helped me combat loneliness and isolation.

I was able to meet up with other residents and just

have a social chat and to be able to actually meet people face to face was so important as so much of life involves interacting with others through music, and the arts it was crucial to have that lifeline in place.

I truly felt that my life was of great value to me and to others.

# EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATIONS

Sponsored by: *We are*  
**resource**

In challenging times, being there for your community is exceptionally important. This award recognises landlords whose communication with their tenants and residents has been outstanding over the past year, keeping them fully informed and supported.

## Lonely Lockdowns Animation: Children Living with Domestic Abuse during Covid-19

**Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid**



### Statement of support

In the past 12 months Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid have continued to support women and children through community outreach and refuge accommodation services despite Covid-19 restrictions, including regional lockdowns. Women and children have been supported through various programmes and sessions, as well as being supported through emergency accommodation in three locations in the Belfast and Lisburn areas. As a homelessness prevention service funded by the Supporting People programme Northern Ireland Housing Executive, it was vital that the organisation continue to reach and provide support to potential and existing service users despite the ongoing restrictions. During all lockdowns Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid remained open and accessible, and worked closely with the Homelessness Prevention Teams in the Housing Executive to ensure domestic abuse victims were housed.

The isolation of lockdowns exacerbated exclusion from certain services, particularly those most vulnerable to homelessness due to domestic abuse who are unable to advocate for themselves, so it was vital that this project remind those women and children who are

most at risk of becoming homeless because of the abuse they face at home that Women's Aid can offer support, including emergency housing.

In August 2021, a report from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People was published, highlighting the many ways in which vulnerable children and young people had suffered due to the restrictions in place due to the pandemic. Prior to this publication, the Women's Aid team noticed the impact that the fear and isolation of lockdowns was having on children and young people in the community and living in refuge. The Commissioner's report emphasised the need for a clear message of support to be spread to children, young people and their mum's, and thus Women's Aid commenced planning the 'Lonely Lockdowns' animation campaign.

In a world now more online than ever, Women's Aid sought to take this shift to the digital space as an opportunity to roll out an engaging campaign with a clear message that could be shared and heard by their target audience at the click of a button. Using funding from Belfast City Council, the organisation commissioned the 'Lonely Lockdowns' animation. It features verbatim quotes from the children and young people of Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid from support sessions delivered in the past year, and was voiced by children of staff in the organisation to powerfully convey the realism of the words being spoken.

The primary aim of the campaign was to capture the specific and unique experience of child victims of domestic abuse, which Women's Aid sees as essential in their effort to raise awareness of the devastating impact experiencing abuse at home has on the lives of children. By describing what life has been like for these young people during the pandemic, Women's Aid sought to; help them and their mums recognise themselves reflected in the animation; to produce

a piece that women and children alike could relate to; and to encourage them to reach out for support, ultimately helping towards preventing homelessness.

This campaign complemented the wider communications approach Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid has taken over the past year, which has

sought to raise awareness of many different forms of abuse and convey the positive impact their outreach and accommodation services has on service users, as well as amplifying the voices of women and children, acting as their voice and encouraging others in need to reach out for support.

## Outcomes and achievements

Since its launch on October 26th 2021, the 'Lonely Lockdowns' animation campaign has been seen 23,145 times across Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid's social media and web platforms. It was also launched live at the Strand Arts Centre in Belfast on the 26th October; this launch was attended by survivors, local activists and professionals working with children, as well as the Women's Aid children's team.

Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid know that their delivery of preventative education workshops in schools plays a vital role in working to prevent homelessness as a result of domestic abuse

by teaching healthy relationship practices and raising awareness of the signs of abuse, as well as encouraging children and their mums to access support. They were therefore delighted when following the success of the campaign launch, they were approached by a member of the Child Protection Team of the Education Authority in Northern Ireland for permission to share the animation with safeguarding teams in all schools across the region.

The animation can be watched here [www.youtube.com/watch?v=653VklSxEU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=653VklSxEU8)

# Cost Rental Housing Launch

## Clúid Housing



## Statement of support

In partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Housing Agency, the Housing Finance Agency, and home builder Glenveagh, Clúid Housing delivered Ireland's first cost rental homes in July 2021. A second development was officially launched in October bringing the total to 81 homes. Given that cost rental is a new tenure in Ireland, there were significant challenges in ensuring Clúid Housing both attracted the right type and the right amount of candidates to these new cost rental homes. Preliminary research was conducted by the Communications Team and it was established that there was little or no awareness of the cost rental housing model in Ireland.

To ensure the customer's voice was at the centre of our communications campaign, a dedicated inhouse team was established across Housing, Communications, Policy, and Customer Services. The Communications

Team then created a multi-channel communications and marketing campaign designed to reach the target audience whilst remaining vigilant of the eligibility criteria for the Government-led scheme. The key message of the campaign was simple - cost rental is not for profit housing backed by the Government and delivered by a professional landlord. The main goal of the campaign was to reach as many suitable applicants as possible to ensure they could access a new rental option that had been created to meet their specific socio-economic needs. Campaign KPIs were determined based on these desired outcomes.

The campaign focused on the customer journey to a dedicated web page that was clear and concise, that informed the public about cost rental, and that answered as many questions as possible for our new residents. This web page was designed as a 'one stop shop' for cost rental queries and applications. Dedicated visual assets were created to support the visualisation of the new tenure type.

The campaign ran across local and national media, social media, and online advertising. In-house training was provided to ensure Clúid's Customer Service Team were fully briefed on the new tenure model and could effectively communicate key messages with applicants. A dedicated web chat function, email address, and phone number were also made available to support new resident queries.

To ensure accessibility, the team ensured Plain English was used across the campaign. Minister for Housing, Darragh O'Brien TD agreed to launch the campaign and close collaboration with the Minister's team ensured broad exposure to housing influencers

and the public through both social and traditional media outlets. The media were engaged early in the campaign as a significant amount of knowledge development was required for this new tenure. National media outlets (incl. The Irish Times and RTÉ Radio/Television) and local media outlets (newspapers, websites, social channels, and radio) were all engaged in advance of the launch and agreed to inform the public about the new tenure.

The communications campaign was rolled out in a relatively short period of time, one week, but the preparation and pre-engagement initiatives with key

stakeholders (incl. media, Minister, Housing Agency etc.) ran over three months and included face-to-face, telephone and email correspondence. In recognition of the need for broad public engagement with the new cost rental model, Clúid also shared the outcomes and learnings with fellow housing associations Tuath Housing and Respond in anticipation of their own cost rental housing launches later in the year.

## Outcomes and achievements

The campaign exceeded all predefined KPIs. The campaign attracted more than 1000 applications. The majority of applications met both the eligibility and unit size suitability criteria set out in the campaign. This meant a high number of quality applications for this newly launched tenure and demonstrated the campaign's success in engaging and informing the target audience with the key message.

Target media coverage was exceeded with feature items across national/local print, online and broadcast media outlets. The campaign also featured in the top ten most read items of The Irish Times website. Social media exposure achieved significant traction too. As a combined result, website traffic to [www.cluid.ie](http://www.cluid.ie)

increased by 4,000 users week-on-week during the campaign. The combined total reach of the campaign was 6 million, the advertising value equivalent was est. €60,000, and the total number of articles generated was 197.

As part of the campaign review, the Team determined that engaging trusted influencers early in the campaign multiplied the value of our reach and increased the number of quality applications. Clúid Housing's newest residents would never have heard of Ireland's new cost rental model if not for this communications campaign. Instead, they are now looking forward to their first Christmas in an affordable, secure, good quality cost rental home.

# Think Again Brand Campaign

## Co-Ownership



## Statement of support

Co-Ownership has been the regional provider of Shared Ownership in Northern Ireland since 1978 helping over 30,000 people into home ownership. We currently have 10,000 co-owners. Co-Ownership has 2 specific audiences:

1. General public predominately consisting of first-time buyers. With this cohort of customers, we also communicate to their influencers (parents). We found that when we ran events potential applicants would bring their parents along and actively ask for their advice.

2. Stakeholders play a crucial part in the customer journey as they signpost, advocate, and provide services for our customers. Stakeholders include mortgage lenders, financial advisers, estate agents, house builders and politicians.

From conversations with potential customers, we learnt that people's knowledge and understanding of the organisation was outdated or incorrect, and brand awareness was poor. Omnibus research conducted in 2020 supported the general public's lack of understanding and knowledge of Co-Ownership.

Covid-19 significantly impacted the housing market (the housing market was closed for 3 months followed by a sharp increase in house prices, and the requirement for bigger deposits). People who hadn't needed Co-Ownership's help previously to buy a home now did. Co-Ownership needed to develop a strategy to communicate our support of the housing market given the impact of COVID-19. It was therefore agreed to develop a campaign to amplify our brand messages and remind people we are here, and that we can help people into home ownership who otherwise might be unable to access it.

## Planning the Campaign

The focus of the campaign was to increase people's knowledge, understanding and trust of Co-Ownership, enabling us to help more people across Northern Ireland into home ownership and build relationships and trust with our stakeholders who can advocate on our behalf. Information from a variety of sources such as quantitative data from the Omnibus Survey, qualitative data from customer feedback forms and discussions with stakeholders, it was agreed that the campaign messages would focus on the following:

- We're not for profit - any money we make helps someone else start their home ownership journey
- We have more than one product to help people into or stay in home ownership
- Not just for young people
- You can buy us out and own the home fully yourself

### Campaign specifics

(An example of the campaign creative has been submitted with this application via email.)

We partnered with marketing agency Navigator Blue to produce the creative assets required and deliver the media campaign. The campaign was titled 'Think

Again' and consisted of 2 three-week media bursts of activity between March and May 2021 across TV, Digital, Billboard advertising and PR activities, a summary of which is provided below.

**TV Campaign:** 30 second TV ad shown on UTV and Channel 4. We forecasted that the ad would reach over 70% of adults within our target market, with 35% seeing it at least 4 times.

**Outdoor:** Consisting of billboard (48 sheets) sites across Northern Ireland. We forecasted that at least 36% of adults will see it with an average frequency of 8 times. Core messages from the TV ad were used for the creative.

**Online Activity:** Advertising on NI's two largest property websites in addition to Display advertising, Search advertising and social media. Online reaches around 86% of adults with a high frequency.

**Public Relations:** Using the campaign messages our PR team devised several opportunities including:

- Launch photography and national press release using Co-Ownership data.
- Several thought leadership opportunities
- Broadcast media opportunities

## Outcomes and achievements

We commissioned an omnibus survey after the campaign finished and it found a positive shift in knowledge of Co-Ownership. A summary of these results has been submitted with this application. Agreement levels of people who saw the campaign are significantly higher than those who didn't, showing that the campaign is working.

- Before the campaign the statement, "Co-Ownership has been helping people buy their homes in for over 40 years" scored an agreement level of 37%. After the campaign it scored 49%, with a 64% score from people who had seen the campaign.
- Before the campaign the statement, "Co-Ownership is a trustworthy organisation." scored an agreement level of 46%. After the campaign it scored 46%, with a 60% score from people who had seen the campaign.

- For the statement 'Co-Ownership is just for young people' we measured levels of disagreement rather than levels of agreement. The level of disagreement with this statement has increased from 27% to 37% for those who have seen the advertising, and to 34% for those who have not seen the advertising, showing it has also improved.

The research showed that the campaign performed very well both in bolstering brand awareness and generating positive attitudes to Co-Ownership, leading to overall reputation building. Co-Ownership brand awareness increased from 66% to 70%. Furthermore, the advertising campaign was recognised by 38% of the population which, for a new, medium weight campaign is a respectable awareness rating.

# Radius Rangers App

## Radius Housing



### Statement of support

Lockdowns and restrictions introduced across the community in response to the Covid pandemic required many organisations to look at how they interact with the local community, and how they can support activity to improve people's physical and mental wellbeing, safely.

For Radius, as a housing association managing more than 13,000 properties, as well as providing support and care services to thousands more, it was important that the work we undertook had a positive impact. Radius adapted working practices to deliver on its commitment to support and empower tenants and build strong communities and the development of the Radius Rangers App was an important element of that work.

In the early stages of the pandemic, Radius' community teams were working with tenants and local communities on outdoor projects, particularly with young people and children. Central to the work of Radius is the development of community cohesion, education, and health and well-being targeting, as well as increasing understanding of other cultures. With these themes running through community investment programmes, the Radius team saw the opportunity to bring these core elements of work together in a place which was free and accessible to as many people as possible - through an interactive and engaging app which called Radius Rangers.

In the absence of travel or our ability to go on holiday, the aim of the app was to bring learning, culture and experiences from across the globe to local people through their phone or tablet and also to encourage them to explore places closer to home.

The app was developed with local design company Brilliant Trails, as well as support from a range of cultural organisations and individuals, to enable people to find out more about the wide range of cultures of those who now live in Northern Ireland and who represent the diversity of the society we all share.

The 'Where in the World' experience on the app brings a range of countries to life, sharing information about the local history, cuisine, lifestyle and customs of places right across the globe. For those more interested in visiting places closer to home, the app allows the exploration of 360-degree photographs that include Dungannon and Coleraine, and Cultural Trails which follow a clue based guided walk of Newry and Belfast, as well as Halloween trails. These themes both reflect the type of positive work Radius undertakes in local communities and provides learning experiences and local activity.

The Radius Rangers App is supported by the NI Executive as part of the T:BUC Strategy and Programme for Government 'Housing for All' Shared Housing Programme.

As the App was prepared for launch, Radius considered the best method of sharing and promotion to ensure that those who would benefit the most were reached. Key audiences were identified as young people and young families, as well as those living in Radius schemes across Northern Ireland and those who may be particularly isolated. With these target groups, Radius decided that a mix of social media and direct marketing was best suited to maximising news of the launch of the app and encouraging downloads.

To reach target groups, Radius:

- Organised a creative launch photo with a local child to promote the App
- Developed Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn activity
- Featured information about the App in tenant newsletters
- Issued a press release - targeting online news sites with significant social following
- Organised group walks in some of the featured parks

The App was launched during Good Relations Week in September 2021, to capitalise on the increased awareness of culture, tolerance and the need for strong community cohesion.

## Outcomes and achievements

The key measurement of the success of the Radius Rangers App is the number of downloads across Android and Apple platforms. Following launch in September 2021, there have been 1168 downloads to date, a figure increasing every week. The Cultural Tails has had more than 1500 scans, mainly by families and groups, while the Halloween Trails were used more than 360 times.

In promoting the app on Radius social media channels, the combined audience was more than 8000. The digital nature of this activity and our online strategy in sharing information around it also increased the Radius presence on social media.

The central media target was LoveBelfast, given its focus on promoting positive activities and events, and its reach across social media channels. LoveBelfast carried the story, which helped bring the app to a combined social media audience of more than 259,000. The story was also carried on Housing Digital, which helped bring this work to housing sector professionals.

In addition to the media and social media coverage, the success of the App in encouraging positive community relations, improve health and wellbeing and increase education on cultural diversity has been seen through local programmes and feedback from tenants.

# Good Neighbours make Great Neighbourhoods campaign

## The Housing Executive



### Statement of support

#### Rationale

The Housing Executive is the largest public sector landlord in western Europe, with over 170,000 tenants living in our 85,000 homes across Northern Ireland. We are passionate about creating happy, thriving places where people want to live.

We believe that home is about much more than the property we live in, it gives us our sense of identity and place. This is why it is so important that our tenants feel safe, comfortable and well, in the homes and communities that they live.

As this year is our 50th anniversary, we wanted to thank and celebrate the amazing tenants who make living in our neighbourhoods so special. This gave us an opportunity to recognise those tenants who went above and beyond to support their neighbours during the coronavirus pandemic.

It is for this reason, that we developed a multi-channel 'Good Neighbours make Great Neighbourhoods' campaign.

#### Objectives

The campaign's 5 objectives were to:

1. Demonstrate that social housing tenants are individuals not stereotypes.
2. Show that our estates are attractive and safe places to live.
3. Celebrate those living in our homes who make a difference in their community.
4. Raise awareness of how we can support tenants to tackle low level anti-social behaviour.
5. Encourage tenants to take small steps to reduce low level anti-social behaviour.

#### Strategy

A key part of the campaign was to give tenants a platform to tell their stories, and to demonstrate that our work is about more than bricks and mortar. We asked our staff and our tenants, through our Housing Community Network structures, to nominate tenants who have made a positive impact on the place that they live and on the people who live there. A cross-divisional panel selected 16 Good Neighbours, from the dozens of nominations, to celebrate on our social media channels and in the local media.

The 16 Good Neighbours chosen lived in rural and urban areas across Northern Ireland. We were keen to reflect the diversity in our communities, so our Good Neighbours had different backgrounds, life experiences, and cultural beliefs.

We visited each Good Neighbour in their home, interviewing them to find out why they are passionate about helping people living in their community. These real-life stories, told through a series of short films,

press releases, and striking photography, were pivotal in demonstrating how good neighbours make great neighbourhoods.

We also wanted to demonstrate that we support people to become good neighbours and take the issue of anti-social behaviour seriously. Throughout the campaign, we shared Good Neighbour tips, promoted the range of ways that we tackle anti-social behaviour, and posted success stories from our Community Safety strategy on our social media channels.

#### Implementation

In order to reach a wide audience, including the media, the wider public, and our tenants, we used consistent branding and copy across all content.

Our strong impactful photography was people-focused, so we could pull readers in to find out more about each Good Neighbour. Our in-house Graphic Designer applied an eye-catching typographic strapline, along with user-friendly infographic style imagery to convey a softer approach to the message. The campaign had a distinctive look and feel and we developed a vibrant, colourful template so our content made an impact on our social media channels.

We also produced press releases focusing on the experiences of our Good Neighbours, giving readers a real sense of what it is like living on our estates. We issued these to each neighbour's local paper and to Northern Ireland-wide online publications.

### Outcomes and achievements

There was a phenomenal response to the campaign on social media with our posts reaching 307,884 people across all our platforms.

As we wanted to engage primarily with our tenants and customers, we chose Facebook as the main channel. This is because it is the most used platform by this target audience. Our Facebook posts:

- reached 243,074 people
- were liked 719 times
- received 166 positive comments
- were shared 249 times

We also posted content on Twitter, a platform primarily used by our stakeholders, community representatives

and the media, as a key objective of the campaign was to show that our estates are safe and attractive places to live. These posts reached 59,239 people, were liked 340 times and received 180 retweets.

Relevant content was also posted on LinkedIn, to reach our staff and employees within the wider housing sector, and Instagram, so we could engage with younger customers, throughout the campaign. These reached 5,571 people and had 75 positive reactions.

Our press releases were also featured in 12 local newspapers, whose readers live across Northern Ireland, and the online publication Belfast Live.

# EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Sponsored by: **apex**

This award recognises organisations who can demonstrate customer service excellence in both practice and innovative approaches.

## Choice Services Ltd Repair Appointment Process

**Lead organisation: Choice Services Ltd**

**Partner organisation: Choice Housing**



### Statement of support

The Choice Group values focus on delivering high quality homes, better services, and stronger communities. These values commit Choice to shaping new standards of excellence. Choice understand that providing great services can only happen if the needs of tenants are understood.

Choice Services are the in-house service provider for Choice Housing and have continued to grow, meeting the challenge of maintaining over 4,700 homes. Choice Services' success is directly linked to a strong "tenant first" culture. Extensive engagement with tenants highlighted the need for improvements around repair appointments. The team understood that improving this customer journey would benefit tenant and business alike. A new system and processes were implemented to give tenants more control over the repairs process, and in doing so reduce complaints, increase efficiency and raise service delivery standards.

The key challenge to offering a customer focused repairs service to tenants is good communication.

Choice Services utilised a robust IT system to offer suitable appointment times, confirmed by text or email. Reminders are sent by text the evening before the appointment and on the morning of the appointment. The last message is sent when the engineer confirms that they are enroute and this message includes the first name of the engineer. This level of personal detail offers further assurance to tenants who can validate the ID cards of any engineer. Choice Services send on average 4500 texts per month in relation to appointment co-ordination.

Once the task is complete and the engineer has left, the tenant receives a text, with a link to complete a customer feedback form. This allows the tenant to complete the form in their own time and reflect on the full service they received, including;

- The first contact with Choice Housing's Service Centre,
- the appointment process,
- the attitude of the Engineer,
- the quality of work and
- if the work area was left clean and tidy.

The assessment is simple with 'smiley faces' representing satisfaction levels. The tenant is encouraged to add free text to capture feedback which falls outside the set questions.

Feedback returned with less than a score of 6 is flagged to our Performance Management team who contact the tenant to address any issues. Actions for every such contact are recorded and communicated to management. Choice Services have found this proactive approach ensures any problems identified are less likely to escalate, and more likely to be resolved to the tenant's full satisfaction.

Examples of tenant feedback include:

"The guy was very helpful and cleared the problem promptly."

"Very friendly helpful staff John couldn't have been nicer."

"Very good same day service worker very pleasant and clean work."

The Repairs Appointment process has been transformational on the service. There is cohesive communication between Choice Services and tenants, reduction in repairs "No Access", increased levels of satisfaction and improved customer service. Choice Services currently receive 120 - 150 feedback surveys each month. Where the tenant also raises an issue

not directly linked to the repair, this is passed to the Housing Officer.

Choice Services values this integrated approach and will build on it to continue to lead the way.

James Sterling Managing Director Choice Services:

"Tenants are pleased with the service as they have more ownership of the process; get appointments at times that suits; and can raise other issues that can be addressed quickly and to their satisfaction. Choice Services are happy with the resulting reduction in complaints and no access visits as well as the increase in customer satisfaction. Staff are happy because our tenants are happy and we look forward to extending this service to more customers".

## Outcomes and achievements

The Repairs Appointments process has provided a 40% reduction in service 'No Accesses' which has had a significantly positive affect on the organisation and the standard of service. Choice Services also provide tenant feedback to engineers which see them take greater pride in their work. Choice Services rolled out a Customer Service programme for all staff and engineers which again focussed on meeting the needs of tenants.

The approach has also reduced the volume of complaints received and offers assurance to the tenants that their views and opinions are important and not only heard but acted upon.

Example of tenant feedback:

"Received texts which kept me updated with arrival time, engineer polite and got the job done, explained what he had done. Excellent job."

Tenant feedback is circulated to both line management and the engineer to support overall business performance. Further to that, the insight from this feedback informs structured staff training and influences strategic decisions and investments.

The success of the communications process with tenants and the positive feedback received from them has led to further expansion now being considered.

# Co-Ownership's Customer Service Journey

## Co-Ownership



## Statement of support

Co-Ownership is the regional provider of Shared Ownership in Northern Ireland and to date has helped over 30,000 people into home ownership, with a current customer base of 10,000 co-owners. Since 2017 Co-Ownership has been on a journey towards a truly customer centric culture with the introduction of our online application and further digitisation of our service. We've redeveloped our purpose, vision and values with full staff engagement in order to put

the needs of our customers first. We're here to help people to become homeowners.

We want to lead the way on excellent service and innovation and believe that to do this we need to listen to our customers and stakeholders whilst benchmarking ourselves against the best at service delivery. For us, this process gathered momentum when we joined the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) in March 2020. ICS is an independent professional membership body for customer service, working across all sectors to drive business performance through service excellence. Throughout the pandemic we have been embracing our membership by challenging ourselves to be the best.

## Customer Service Professionals

In late 2020 we undertook the ICS virtual First Impressions Course and through this have identified 14 service improvement opportunities which have been fully implemented. Examples include:

- Improving our application portal to make it easier for customers to apply to Co-Ownership and track their applications

- Creating a knowledge sharing hub for team members so that everyone understands the end-to-end process. This will help improve the service for our customers, increase the quality of our contacts and information provided, build trust and confidence in the teams, improve understanding across teams.

Developing our team into customer service professionals is a fundamental requirement of the ICS, with Co-Ownership fully embracing this by investing in a Third Level Managerial Qualification in Customer Service for our Customer Service Manager. Co-Ownership has invested both time and financial resources to train two senior members to become ICS Accredited trainers, enabling us to train all our staff to become accredited Customer Service professionals over the next few years.

We spent time focusing on the fundamentals of customer service throughout the whole organisation as part of Customer Service week in October 2021. This included the launch of the 'Service with Respect' campaign, an ongoing campaign ensuring that our people are treated with the same respect that we show our customers.

#### What Our Customers Say

As part of our journey with ICS we undertook benchmarking studies with customers and staff.

In the Business Benchmarking customer survey we scored 86.6 on the Customer Satisfaction Index. This is an extremely high score, the UK all-sector average is 76.8, and Banks & Building Societies, who we would compare our service to, scored 78.3.

In the ServCheck staff survey, 87% of staff completed the survey, and we scored 76.52. Again, this is a very

high score, with the All Sectors ServCheck Index being 75.09, and Banks & Building Societies scoring 81.41.

Whilst we were pleased with the survey results, they also provided us with valuable insights into areas we can improve upon, and we have developed an action plan for each. Some areas we're looking to improve for customers are more information and updates on applications; review of criteria; relook at complaints procedures; and our valuations process.

We also want to ensure we get regular feedback across different customer groups, such as those new to Co-Ownership, those declined by Co-Ownership, those who have been a customer for many years. We have implemented processes to help us understand the customer journey and experience in greater detail.

- Declined customers: We now survey declined customers quarterly to see what we could have done better. The feedback has been enlightening and has enabled us to change our approach to deliver a better service.
- Customers who don't like to complain: Hidden complaints were an area that we have identified where customers were disappointed but didn't tell us. We have delivered training to all our customer advisers to help them identify these and to respond to it.
- Deceased customers: This is a highly emotive time for family members of our deceased customer. We reviewed the process end-to-end and significantly enhanced our approach and communications to make their interaction with Co-Ownership as easy as possible.

### Outcomes and achievements

As mentioned above, we are proud of the results we achieved in the ICS Business Benchmarking survey (86.6) and the ServCheck staff survey (76.58). Achieving these scores at our first assessment is exceptional as we rank amongst the best in the UK. Co-Ownership has now been invited by the ICS to go forward for full accreditation in December 2021 and if successful will become the only ServiceMark organisation in NI.

Our current Net Promoter Score is 82 with the organisation having over 500 customer reviews on Trustpilot with a Trustscore of 4.8. Comments from customer regularly talk about how they wouldn't have

been able to become homeowners without our help, the great service they receive, and the impact that it has had on their lives.

"Honestly cannot believe how straight forward and simple the process was. Anytime I spoke with anyone they were always very knowledgeable, helpful and friendly. Cannot recommend enough. 5\* from me every time." Nicholas

"The lady I spoke to on the phone just kept telling me that everything would be ok and that Co-Ownership would help us in any way they could. She really helped calm me down." Chris

# South Down Patch and Accounts Team

## Housing Executive



### Statement of support

On 23rd March, 2020, as a result of the Covid pandemic, Boris Johnson announced that people "must stay at home".

Thousands of NIHE tenants were affected with a substantial number losing their jobs overnight. Those particularly affected were the self-employed and those working in the hospitality industry. The furlough scheme was not yet up and running. All NIHE income collection and arrears recovery was suspended in an attempt to relieve stress and anxiety for those tenants who were affected.

In accordance with Government guidelines South Down Staff were instructed to work from home and where possible were provided with appropriate IT equipment to carry out their duties. However, it was evident from the outset that our staff wanted to

reach out and help our tenants who were struggling financially.

The Accounts Team Leader in conjunction with the Area Manager agreed Accounts Staff and Patch Managers could contact tenants in arrears, not to chase debt, but to offer advice and support. A lot of our tenants were distressed and anxious for the future and had never claimed benefits before. They were extremely grateful for the support and financial advice provided by a friendly Accounts Officer or Patch Manager over the phone.

During this contact staff provided links to UC applications/Rate Rebate, signposted to government websites for available grants/emergency payments and foodbanks. They ensured tenants who needed an emergency payment applied for Discretionary UC Grant and not an Advance which had to be paid back.

Each tenant which appeared on the NIHE arrears recommendation list - normally used to identify tenants in arrears (approx. 750 per week) - were contacted by telephone followed by text/e-mail or WhatsApp providing the necessary information/links.

The Team used a WhatsApp Group chat, WebEX and e-mails to keep up to date with the ever changing benefit system and government support. This group also offered peer support and encouragement to our staff working in isolation.

We as a Management Team are VERY proud of them and believe they should be recognised for their EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE.

### Outcomes and achievements

The outcomes achieved from this exercise not only benefited those in need at a distressing time but showed the Housing Executive in an extremely positive light. This early intervention in debt prevention played out both as a positive for the tenants involved and the organisation as a whole.

The collectable rent/rates income for the South Down Area for 2020/21 was just over £21M. (£21,326,829). We were able to collect 99.8% of this figure which was well within the set target of 98.7%, the overall

average for NI being 99.2%. This strong result must be attributed, to the hard work and dedication of Patch Managers and Accounts staff, who went above and beyond in this emerging situation, to assist and support our tenants, who were struggling during this extremely troubling time for humanity as a whole.

As a result of their achievements South Down Area were able to surpass our arrears target - coming in at 8.9% under (£55,000 in monetary terms).

# EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH & WELLBEING

Sponsored by:

**VELUX®**

This award will focus on excellence in the areas of fit for purpose housing, adaptations and services.

## Intervention Support Project

**Lead organisation: Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid**

**Partner organisation: Northern Ireland Housing Executive**



### Statement of support

Intervention Support Project (Funded by Homeless Prevention Fund NIHE)

Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid (BLWA) identified a need to support women who have experienced domestic violence but at the forefront of their situation is addiction and/or mental ill health. These women are often homeless, or at risk of homelessness, not only due to domestic violence but often because they are not suitable for communal living due to additional needs around mental ill health and/or addictions. Unfortunately, this is a gap many of the women we support fall into. Trauma and abuse impacts on a victim's mental health often resulting in anxiety and depression. Many abuse alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism to deal with the pain of the abuse. This is frequently the case with many young women we support. From September 2019-20, our South Belfast refuge supported 119 women, 55 women with mental health needs, 10 with alcohol support needs, 14 with drug support needs, 15 with both mental health and alcohol & drug needs. For the same period last year, our South Belfast refuge had to refuse refuge 98

women in the same period last year. Of these refusals 13 were not suitable for refuge living, 7 had needs better met elsewhere, 5 we were unable to meet need around drugs & alcohol, and 2 we were unable to meet needs around mental health.

These numbers demonstrate the number of women who have additional needs in addition to their having experienced domestic violence. Often these women fall into a cycle of homelessness as their addictions and/or mental ill health prevents them from being able to access support around their domestic violence, which is at the core of their trauma. The combination of these issues results in their being unable to maintain a tenancy and results in homelessness. Many of these women are sofa-surfing for long periods of time or move from hostel to hostel. Often, they may be accepted into refuge and support is offered but they are unable to remain in refuge because their addictions prevent them from fully engaging, makes them too much of a risk to other vulnerable women and children, or after a trial period they are not suitable for communal living.

The project drew upon the expertise and experience of highly specialised counsellors focusing on mental health and/or addictions issues. We have named these Intervention Support Counsellors (ISC) and a number of ISCs have been carefully selected by Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid for this project.

This project features an intensive intervention model in which BLWA provide counselling services from ISCs to empower and equip women with mental ill health or addictions, who are at risk of homelessness and have experienced domestic abuse. The intensive support work with the ISCs resulted in an increased likelihood that a woman will be able to maintain her housing and decrease her risk of homelessness.

From January to March 31st over 33 women took up the service. It was considered by all to be very successful and many women, as well as the ISCs

and our support workers, requested the project to continue as it was proving so beneficial to the women taking part. According to the women's feedback, 75% of those considered at risk of homelessness stated the counselling they received helped them to remain in their home. 87% reported improvement in their mental health and wellbeing. BLWA were successful

in the 2021-2022 Homelessness Prevention fund have continued to offer the Intervention Support Service through the Intervention Support Counsellors. This started in September 2021 with 18 women currently receiving service, with 80 women expected to be part of service by March 2022.

## Outcomes and achievements

One woman who used the services in 2021 was "Amy". Amy had suffered very violent attacks from her partner and been in refuge several times previously but was unsuitable due to mental ill health/ addictions. The ISC working with Amy reported that she had abstained from alcohol and drugs for the entire three months of counselling. Amy was managing her addiction, and in doing so was able to re-engage with BLWA for support around her experience of domestic abuse. The data shows the recipients greatly benefited from the counselling, as 87% of those women reported an

improvement in their mental health state. Feedback from ISCs shows how with specialised support women were better able to integrate into their communities, felt safer and had increased self-confidence. The woman was more likely to be able to stay in her tenancy as she did not feel isolated; "She went from being scared to leave the house to getting to know her neighbours and going out walking to get to her know her new neighbourhood." This enabled the woman to feel more secure in her new home and more able to maintain her tenancy.

# The SPRING Social Prescribing Project

**Lead organisation: Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum**

**Partner organisation: Northern Ireland Housing Executive**



## Statement of support

The SPRING Social Prescribing project is a community led initiative which assists people in improving their health and well being by making connections with sources of support within communities. The NIHE has teamed up with SPRING to provide support to vulnerable tenants, particularly those transitioning from supported accommodation to a community setting. SPRING adopts a person centred bespoke approach involving the NIHE tenant and local communities so the service need can be designed and implemented. By adopting this approach means that our skilled social prescriber utilise their listening ear skills from the onset and creating interventions to reflect this. They listen and respond to presenting issues from NIHE, for example: rent arrears. SPRING Social Prescribing has recently hosted an online Finance and Benefits Workshop for

Housing Executive tenants which was available to all tenants in the DCSDC area. Additional factors such as social isolation, low mood, mild depression, physical inactivity and chronic pain have also been dealt with. One major advantage is SPRING ability to work in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory bodies. This provides local residents with valuable service delivery on their doorstep. For example: Chronic pain support group for those suffering long term chronic pain and partnerships with AWARE to deliver in house programmes such as Mood Matters and Living Life to the Full. 'I have received a lot of support from the SPRING Social Prescribing Project and Oonagh. I attend a weekly walking group which I get great benefit from. Oonagh keeps me informed of other programmes that are running' - Philip (HE Tenant).

SPRING developed referral pathways with local Housing Officers and Patch Managers where referrals are made for non medical needs. These pathways have been extended to MDTs based in GP Practices in Derry and Strabane Area with a data sharing agreement in place. 'The SPRING service is excellent and has made such a positive difference to the HE tenants that we have referred from Quayside Medical. Thanks so much to you and the Team' - Caroline Moorwood, Social Worker at Quayside Medical Practice.

SPRING has worked closely with The Supporting Communities, Community Development Officer where support was given in making connections with the Local Housing Community Network representatives. Oonagh Quigg, the social prescriber for NIHE, has been attending Housing Community Network meetings in the Derry and Strabane areas. This has proven positive in terms of merging working

partnerships with community representatives and ensures that those most hardest to reach can avail of SP.

SPRING has a leading role in the All-Ireland Social Prescribing network, which is a platform for shared learning and influencing at a strategic level. The project has contributed to the long term strategy of the Network and will continue to steer the future direction. 'SPRING has helped to demonstrate a practical way that we could do better around non-medical health interventions. I think it has also helped to shine a light on the great work that does go on within local communities and voluntary organisations to make better use of the resources that are there' - Sinead Malone, ICP Business Manager, HSC Board.

During COVID, SPRING adapted front line response where NIHE tenants were given an entire all round helping hand in terms of Connect Well services, online support, food and prescription deliveries, digital supports, isolation packs and meaningful

conversations. For tenants that did not have access to technical devices, SPRING secured funds in sourcing tablet devices alongside additional support with utilisation via telephone call and/or at the garden gate. When carrying out meaningful conversations, SPRING applies Motivational Interviewing and intervention skills to support tenants to achieve their goals and obtain outcome gains. Social Prescribers spends time building a relationship with the tenant, applies listening skills and behaviour change techniques and helps the tenant set goals and provides encouragement. 'The Social Prescribing Project has been more than helpful. Support was there for me when I got out of hospital during lockdown. There was weekly telephone support, isolation packs, help with meals and assistance with food parcels through the local community response team. Oonagh encouraged me to go out when restrictions lifted and has provided me with a device to access courses online' - Mary (SP participant.)

## Outcomes and achievements

To date, there has been 87 NIHE tenants referred to SPRING Social Prescribing with a total of 204 social prescriptions. A breakdown of these prescriptions are as follows:

Physical activity - 9

Mental Health - 22

Diet and Nutrition - 7

Social Support - 15

Financial Support - 3

Education - 2

Health and Well Being - 29

Advice - 15

COVID-19 - 98

Pain Management - 4

Of those who participated in the monitoring sample of the Warwick Edinburgh scale measurement tool, 100% showed an improvement in their health and well being. Likewise, 100% of people who completed the Outcome Star monitoring tool showed an improvement in their health and well being. Positive and supportive relationships were developed with SP during this time.

Housing Executive tenants reported greater access to other services, for example: benefits help, counselling, energy advice, health and well being activities and disability support.

# Oriel Lodge's Room to Improve

## Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Covid-19 has had a major impact on everyone's lives but no demographic of people has been more affected than the older population. Clann housing provides age friendly social housing across Ireland. One of these schemes is Oriel Lodge, which is in Belturbet, Co. Cavan. Oriel Lodge is an apartment complex with 34 -1 & 2-bedroom apartments with various communal rooms.

Most of the residents in Oriel Lodge live alone. Many of the usual local outlets for social interaction for the residents were closed due to Covid restrictions since March 2020. Oriel Lodge with its communal rooms provided a welcome relief for residents to enable them to have some form of social engagement with neighbours.

One such room is the activities room which is located on the lower ground floor. Elizabeth O'Prey who was the first resident to move into Oriel Lodge, had the idea to use the room as a library with games and jigsaws. Elizabeth has also over the years given art classes to other residents. The room was a mismatch of furniture which had been donated by residents over the years.

With the residents spending more time in Oriel Lodge, it was agreed that it was time to give it a makeover. Once new restrictions were announced in January 2021 residents approached Clann through their scheme manager. It was then agreed that the Oriel Lodge residents would work in collaboration with the Belturbet Men's Shed on the project. The Men's Shed organisation provides an opportunity for men to come together to learn not only a skill but also to provide social support for its members. Like many other voluntary organisations, the Men's Shed has been hit hard by Covid 19 both financially and through how it offers support to its members. This project came at the perfect time for both the residents of Oriel Lodge and Belturbet Men's Shed.

With the support of their scheme manager, the Oriel Lodge residents applied for and were awarded monies from Cavan County Council through the Covid-19 Emergency Fund. Through mutual collaboration, the residents and the local Men's Shed worked together to design a suitable shelving unit which would be able to store both books, jigsaws, and board games. The funding from Cavan County Council also enabled the residents to purchase new games and jigsaws for use by the residents.

Once the Men's Shed had installed the shelving unit, Niall Small one of the residents of Oriel Lodge who had been a professional painter before he retired, painted the unit. Once all the work on the unit was completed, Clann provided furniture for the room such as armchairs and coffee tables. There was also a donation from residents in Oriel Lodge to buy soft furnishings such as a mirror and clock.

The makeover was completed in early May. This project would not have been able to proceed without the support of Cavan County Council through the Covid Emergency Fund and Clann Housing but Belturbet Men's Shed and Oriel Lodge Social Club were the main driving force behind the project.

### Outcomes and achievements

The room is now warm and welcoming which has resulted in it being used now on daily basis. One resident recently stated "he would be lost without it" as he lives alone, and he knows that if he pops into the room, he will meet some of his neighbours. Another lady, who mostly keeps to her own home, has taken to sitting in it in the evening time, with the doors open for fresh air as she is unable to go outside. The residents play weekly bingo and residents also use it with their families. One of residents who had previously taught English as a foreign language now

teaches English to a Syrian family who recently sought asylum in Ireland. The family were unable to source English classes anywhere else locally due Covid 19 restrictions, so the activities room is a safe space for the classes to be taught in.

Most importantly, the project came at the perfect time in January 2021. With the government announcing new restrictions, it was morale boost for both the Belturbet Men's Shed and residents of Oriel Lodge. It provided a focus for both groups in those dark days.

# Holy Cross Health and Wellness Garden

## Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Holy Cross Gardens is an Age Friendly Housing scheme located in the picturesque town of Killarney, Co Kerry, owned and managed by Clann Housing. Holy Cross Gardens has 45 units with 47 residents currently. Residents are very lucky to have the expansive Killarney National Park within walking distance of their homes and frequently used it until Covid19 struck in March 2020. Unfortunately, most of our residents had to cocoon so the National Park was no longer an option for recreation for our residents. In response we set about making our own recreational outdoor space on the scheme where residents could come and go and feel safe in their own environment and community.

Clann decided to plan and develop a small-scale sensory garden for the community. We contacted Kerry County Council and advised them of our plans, and they agreed to help us in with the project which was fantastic. We worked in partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development and Kerry Local Community Development. They

provided advice and information. We enlisted the help of a local contractor to do the grounds work and so work began. The key focus of our sensory garden was to cover all the five senses i.e., touch, smell, sound, taste, and sight. We installed a carefully chosen water feature for sound. It was important to residents to be able to see the water trickling from the fountain from anywhere they sat. The water feature was set upon circular paving for ease of access for our older residents. We sat apple trees, raspberry, and blackberry fruit trees for taste. We planted some brightly coloured and highly scented plants for sight and smell. We strategically placed some rocks and small stone chips on the area for touch and texture. Lastly, we surrounded the area with some purpose-built seating so the space could be used to its fullest potential.

This space provides solace for residents, a private, calm space set back from the busy town centre road and the deafening sound of the traffic. Here residents get the opportunity to unwind and relax and listen only to the sounds of the birds and the gentle hustle of the leaves on the trees. It's at the entrance to our scheme so it's a pleasure and a surprise when you come across it for the first time. Everyone who visits our scheme is naturally drawn to spend some time there sitting quietly and letting the world pass them by. It's calm and restful and one can quickly get lost in their own thoughts while listening to the water run free. When you've had a stressful day or a long drive it feels restorative to spend a little time here. It's a real suntrap and a beautiful spot to sit and chat with neighbours or to greet them as they come and go. For residents who do not like the full sun, there is a lovely cool spot under our long-established cherry tree. There is a seat for everyone in our sensory garden.

### Outcomes and achievements

Residents are delighted with their new peaceful, inviting space. It is a huge source of enjoyment for them during difficult and uncertain times. It's a focal point for the community. Residents come here to chat with each other in a safe secure environment. It's accessible and open to everyone. It's a welcoming place for residents to spend time outdoors. They can breathe in the fresh air and experience the seasons at their ease. It is one of those places you need to visit to see and feel to truly appreciate its worth. It is priceless to our residents

It provides sensory stimulation for our older residents when many people feel isolated from the outside

world. It made them feel alive. Moving around in the sensory garden was extremely beneficial to promoting and aiding physical activity, which was of the utmost importance for our older residents while cocooning. Residents could drop by as they please and relax while also enjoying the views of the mountains. The Garden encouraged community participation and cohesion. During the lockdowns many residents found cocooning stressful and so this new space helped in reducing any anxiety they felt allowing them to reflect in a peaceful, tranquil setting.

# Keeping Connected

## Connswater Homes



### Statement of support

Connswater Homes recognises, especially during the last two years, that tenants' health & wellbeing is important and requires investment. It has been proven that following the COVID-19 pandemic individuals' mental health, social skills, and physical wellbeing have been impacted.

Although during lockdown there was no face-to-face activities, the Association continued to support its tenants, embracing new forms of communicating and getting individuals together, albeit virtually.

Connswater Homes recognised that it needed to continue supporting tenants, taking into consideration Government guidance in relation to social gatherings and keeping everyone safe.

In partnership with Youth Initiatives 90 care packs were delivered to young people living in east Belfast. This initiative took into consideration the impact of the lockdowns and how Government restrictions had impacted on young people. The care packs were designed to promote positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. Aware NI hosted a 'Mood Matters' online workshop, aimed at providing individuals with the skills to regain good mental health and build resilience to deal with life's challenges.

Twenty families participated in a 4-week programme of Sensory Activities delivered by east Belfast SureStart. Each family received a pack delivered to their door which provided items for the weekly online sessions. These sessions provided advice videos and Facebook posts aimed at promoting children's development through sensory play.

Working with Sport Changes Life a weeklong summer scheme was held with 45 primary school children

participating. The Summer scheme was delivered in partnership with Seymour Hill and Conway Residents group.

Working in partnership with the Co-op, phase 2 of the Mersey Street Garden makeover was completed. Young people from Youth Initiatives and residents got involved in painting flowers that were mounted to the wall.

One tenant from the Mersey Street area commented, "I personally benefit from the small, raised beds behind Mersey Street school, and the help and input from Tammy. I appreciated the packs which were sent out."

Children's Mental Health week was promoted in the Abbeyville Place area with children aged between 7-12 years old receiving a gift, which included a personal 'Happy Confident Me' journal, mindfulness colouring, activity suggestions and a copy of the Action for Kindness calendar.

As part of the 'Housing for All' Healthy Homes project, aimed at supporting the 'COVID Wellbeing NI Partnership', and Northern Ireland's Mental Health Champion's campaign 'We'll Get Through This Together', packs were delivered to 20 homes in Abbeyville Place, Newtownabbey. Each one was full of activities linked to the 'Take 5' campaign. Families were encouraged to connect with each other and as a neighbourhood. Tenants were also invited to play online Bingo, which was a very popular event with 20 tenants playing along and requesting further bingo nights.

The Association arranged for tenants who lived alone or socially isolated during the lockdowns to receive a phone call each week from a member of staff to ensure that they were safe and had all that they required for the week ahead. Many tenants and staff have built relationships from this and in some instances the communication has continued. One tenant commented, "My Housing Officer Siobhan was amazing when she visited me in July. Very kind and helpful. I can find it difficult to talk to people, but she was very understanding and helpful."

Connswater Homes recognises that the needs of tenants have greatly increased following society changes as a result of the pandemic. Tenants are feeling the pressure following the increased number of redundancies, the decline in good mental health and supporting individuals integrating back into society. These are all areas which Connswater Homes will continue to support and build on moving forward.

## Outcomes and achievements

Connswater Homes have been proactive in remaining in contact with its tenants, offering a range of activities for all age groups, ensuring inclusion for all. The successfulness of these activities can be demonstrated in the increase in the number of tenants who actively engaged in Health & Wellbeing initiatives. In 2019/20 there were 193 tenants who engaged compared to 394 tenants in 2020/21, an increase of 201 tenants. There was an increase of 160 engagements made in Housing for All Good Relations activities, in the Associations T: BUC scheme Abbeyville Place,

Whiteabbey and the surrounding area. There was also an increase of 62 tenants who participated in scrutiny activities.

It offered the communities team an opportunity to evaluate how it was engaging with tenants and evaluate how these could be improved, giving the restrictions that were in place, and ever changing. It included hosting virtual events, such as online bingo, which was offered to the tenants in Abbeyville Place, with an aim of keeping tenants connected and engaged whilst following Government guidelines.

# Health, Wellbeing & Homelessness

## Simon Community NI



### Statement of support

With a vision of a society where everyone has a home, Simon Community NI's mission is to end homelessness for people who need help.

Currently supporting up to 636 adults, young people and families daily across 25 accommodation projects and 13 support services, in 2016, the charity began to identify a growing number of Multiple Needs Individuals accessing services i.e., clients with health, wellbeing and substance dependencies that are further complicated with experiences of trauma including time spent in prison or journeys through the care system. The charity noted that these clients experienced challenges in sustaining tenancies and accessing or maintaining contact with treatment services. In addition, for those who had accessed treatment services, their expectations were low to non-existent based on their past experiences of it as many mental health treatment services often would not assist service users with substance use issues while drug treatment services had difficulty engaging with people who had mental health issues.

At Simon Community, this left around 1,000 Multiple Needs Individuals each year with Simon staff as their only consistent support available – staff that were not well enough equipped to carry out this work effectively with clients who consumed most of their support time. This increase in client type began to

result in conflict with other clients, high risk substance use, volatile and disinhibited behaviour, self-harm, and suicide attempts.

In 2018, Simon Community began to explore ways to support Multiple Needs Individuals better and introduced an 18-month wellbeing pilot programme with wellbeing practitioners placed into three of the charity's temporary accommodation projects. By listening to clients and staff, the charity knew that any eventual health and wellbeing service would only succeed if:

1. delivered in an environment that clients would be comfortable in (non-clinical setting),
2. it was flexible about times and doesn't require abstinence.

This new type of service would allow clients to take ownership over the pace of support, help increase engagement and reduce the pressure on existing support staff in projects.

Throughout 2016 to 2018, regular client surveys and focus groups were conducted, an external evaluation of the charity's Harm Reduction Service (HRS) was published by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) which recommended that this service evolve to reflect the needs of a more complex client group, and the charity discovered that 29% of a sample client group reported mental health and substance dependency issues compared to 10-20% reported in most studies on homelessness populations.

Connectivity was important to the pilot and that is why Simon Community worked alongside the homelessness and health and social care sectors. Gaining support from the Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drug Alliance, members believed the project would complement their own services:

"Our Dual Diagnosis Street Team could directly complement the service by working together to transition clients from the street into temporary accommodation with Simon Community. Their Wellbeing Programme would ensure a continuity of support." - Mal Byrne (Assistant Director, Extern)

Finally, in 2019, the charity was confident in applying to the National Lottery Community Fund NI and in 2020, successfully received £500,000 to develop a three-year project operating across 14 of the charity's temporary accommodation projects. Launched on World Homeless Day and World Mental Health Day, 10th October 2020, the charity's Health & Wellbeing Service, which is unique to Northern Ireland, utilises a range of new and innovative approaches to respond to a growing trend in homelessness, approaches like:

- An Integrative Model that allows support flexibility based on a client's particular need
- Motivational Interviewing
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Dialectical behaviour therapy
- Solution Focused Brief Therapy
- Harm Reduction
- Strength-based methods.

## Outcomes and achievements

"The Wellbeing Practitioner's role will provide support, intervention, advocate on behalf of the service user, and ensure clients can access appropriate treatment. It will integrate with my current work by providing continuation of support and it would be reassuring to offer these patients specialised support and the prospect of co-working on cases is an exciting development. The Wellbeing Programme would mean Simon Community could demonstrate leadership in this sector and provide valuable insights and learning to practitioners within the Trust." - Pauline Murnin (Dual Diagnosis Senior Nurse Practitioner in the South Eastern Trust)

Now in operation for 12 months, the service is embedded across the organisation with positive outcomes including:

- 237 clients supported
- 949 sessions delivered
- 65% of the 101 clients who completed the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Measurement Scale reported a positive meaningful change.

Speaking about their experience, a client who accessed the service because of anxiety that resulted in alcohol, medication, and cannabis use commented:

"I now have plans and recognise the direction I want my life to take. The support I have been given has enabled me to look towards my future and provide me with the tools to live life securely and with independence." - Caolan

# EXCELLENCE IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Sponsored by:  Department for **Communities** | An Roinn **Pobal** | Department for **Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

This award recognises organisations or individuals who provide a quality service within the private rented sector.

## Smartmove Housing

### First Housing Aid and Support Services



#### Statement of support

As we continue to witness increasing levels of demand for affordable housing, more and more people are turning to the Private Rented Sector as an alternative source to meet their housing needs. Smartmove Housing continues to lead the way in customer service, innovation and promoting good housing practices within the sector.

With its dedicated, highly trained team providing on-going individual tailored floating support, benefit advice and by offering financial solutions through its deposit bond scheme to its clients, Smartmove Housing continues to promote the sector as both an affordable and sustainable housing option for those who would otherwise face limited housing choice and common access barriers.

It has been a challenging time for the sector throughout the pandemic and as we adapted to necessary changes, Smartmove continued to put its service users at the centre of its delivery. Through times of uncertainty, Smartmove recognised the benefits of increased levels of engagement between service users, tenants and frontline staff. Inspired by the successes of the Tenant Participation strategies for social tenancies, the project designed and launched its own tenant and landlord involvement strategy. Although not a regulatory requirement, it is the first of its kind within the private letting sector in Northern Ireland. Since its launch, the project now holds annual landlord forums and has a selected tenant services committee. This has allowed parties to discuss housing

matters important to them, raise concerns and provide suggestions on how the project can better meet their needs within the changing times.

It has seen the creation of our tenant/landlord 'E-Newsletter' containing relevant up-to-date information on the organisation services and performances, along with updates on changes to housing policies. It also provides an opportunity for external organisations to promote their own services directly with our clients and thereby increasing partnership engagement.

The increased levels of engagement have seen an overall improvement in the relationships between landlord and tenant. It has resulted in a number of landlords agreeing to increase tenancy contracts from the standard 12 month- periodic format to extended 2/3 year fixed term agreements, creating better peace of mind for tenants with reassurances that there will be no rental increases throughout the extended terms. The project hopes to build on these positive changes by introducing the offer of extended contracts into its standard practices.

The participation highlighted the need to engage differently with our service users. It provided opportunities to discover new ways of engagement and has driven changes in its delivery. The project has since introduced new and updated technology systems with clients now having more options in how they wish to interact with the service, including live video chats, instant messaging and information sharing as well as the capability to attend virtual property viewings in real time and the ability to access their rental accounts. These improvements have also resulted in the project operating 100% paperless.

Testimonial from Smartmove Landlords:

"The landlord forum has allowed me to gain a better understanding in how to maintaining a happy tenant and is good for my long term investment in property"

"The News-letter has been brilliant for me to get a clear, straight to the point, overview of the recent changes in housing laws and how it affects me, especially since the COVID outbreak"

Testimonial from Smartmove Tenants:

"Getting involved in discussions has seen me secure a new 3 year fixed term contract, providing me with greater peace of mind"

"Collecting my keys from you and closing my own front door with the realisation that I was no longer homeless. Even now nearly 6 years on, it's such an emotional memory!"

## Outcomes and achievements

Smartmove Housing has developed a successful practise, filling a very particular niche supporting those who would find it particularly hard to navigate the complexities and requirements of accessing what is an increasingly competitive market. Putting client welfare at its core, it has set an ideal operation model of which those working within the private lettings sector can inspire to achieve.

Due to its unique relationship based model and bespoke floating support services, the project has continued to maintain minimal rental arrears cases despite the challenges of COVID and welfare reform. Its precipitation strategy has helped develop and improve relations between landlord and tenants while also introducing several changes to its internal procedures.

Latest evaluation found that:

- Approximately 96% of service users were pleased or very pleased with the service provided
- The capacity to facilitate support with deposits and rent in advance, ongoing tenancy sustainment support - were among those most highlighted.

Our latest landlord evaluation of our services found that;

- Over 92% of landlords rated the services as good or above.
- Value for money, highly trained staff, tenant care with on going floating support -were among those most highlighted

# EXCELLENCE IN HOUSING INNOVATION

Sponsored by:

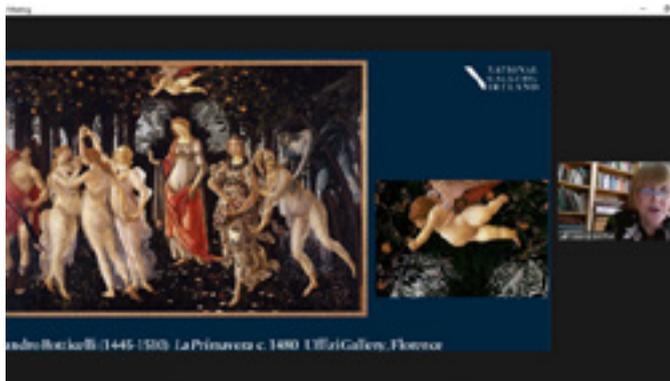


An Ghníomhaireacht  
Tithíochta  
The Housing Agency

This award is aimed at programmes or projects which can clearly demonstrate how they have developed an innovative approach which has made a real difference to the lives of tenants and customers.

## Have Armchair Tour of the National Gallery of Ireland

### Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Clann Housing is uniquely placed to work with older residents in promoting their wellbeing through innovative projects and use of technologies.

Since many residents' opportunities to socialise and get out and about has been severely impacted over the last year, the Clann Team provided the opportunity to bring social activities and events into each residents' home across the country. This was done through organising weekly social events via Zoom. Every week a text would be sent to all older residents with the link, date and time for the social event. Events were organised in partnership with many external partners / organisations and included chair yoga, breadmaking class, storytelling, photo competitions, Valentine's Day celebration, etc.

The most successful series of social events was one organised in partnership with the National Gallery

of Ireland. The Clann Team contacted the National Gallery of Ireland and they assigned Clann with a Tour Guide who was willing to run a series of Virtual Tours for Clann residents.

The National Gallery of Ireland ran four Virtual Courses which covered the following topics:-

- 1) Highlight of key pieces in the National Gallery museum
- 2) Irish History depicted through art (Part 1)
- 3) Irish History depicted through art (Part 2)
- 4) Development in modernist movements, impressionism, pointillism, cubism etc.

At the end of each Virtual Tour, there was a Q&A session. There was no stopping residents from sharing their love of each piece of art and at times, picking off a picture on their own wall and sharing it with other participants in the Zoom session. Every Virtual Tour overran due to residents' interactions with the Tour Guide and fellow residents. After every Tour residents would say, "When is our next one?"

This then prompted Clann Housing to run their own series of in-house Zoom art events, where residents spoke about a piece of art created themselves, or shared a photo of a piece of art they love (some of which were from their local area) like. There was an overwhelming response to this open call from residents - they showcased their art, shared poems the love, shared stories and photographs and also shared a little bit of their own vulnerabilities, through their personal life stories.

The word "crisis" in Chinese is composed of two characters—one representing danger, the other opportunity. This is particularly true today. This innovative project was created and delivered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It upended nearly every aspect of life for our older residents, however innovative projects like 'Have Armchair Tour of the

National Gallery of Ireland' brought bit of normality and craic for residents during a challenging time.

To Clann residents, Covid was not a crisis, it was also an opportunity.

## Outcomes and achievements

**Increased Social and Cognitive Health** - This innovative project gave residents the chance to socialise and interact with other people at a time when it was difficult to do in person. It was interactive, educational and informative.

**Partnership Working** - This collaboration with the National Gallery of Ireland gave Clann Housing a chance to promote its work with such a prestigious organisation and the opportunity for them to share their expertise, knowledge and passion of Ireland's history through the Arts.

**Sharing is Caring = Stronger Bonds = Stronger Communities** - The Virtual Tours gave residents the

chance to spend time bonding with each other, talking about their wonderful memories after reading a poem, sharing a photo / painting, etc. New friendships were formed and built on at every tour attended.

**Promoted Ireland's Heritage** - This project reignited residents love for the Arts as well as their heritage. Residents shared knowledge they knew of Irish Artists as well as many other Irish art forms.

**Promoted and Showcased Residents' Art and Craft Skills** - The follow up Zoom sessions gave residents the opportunity to showcase their art, many of which have been framed and are now showcased in communal spaces within the schemes.

# Innovation for Excellence

## Connswater Homes



### Statement of support

During the recent lockdowns Connswater Homes recognises the need to be innovative and continually review its forms of communication to ensure that it is meeting the needs of tenants.

As a result of the current pandemic there has been limited face to face meetings, however the Association has continued to support tenants, embracing new forms of communication to ensure they were kept fully informed and supported.

One of the main initiatives recently developed was the launch of a tenant's portal- called My Connswater. The benefit of the portal allows tenants to:

- Make changes to your contact details and household

- Join a paper free service to receive documents via email
- Apply to keep a pet
- Apply to make an alteration to a home
- Get Advice and Information on tenancy
- Register a comment, compliment or complaint
- Log a repair or get an update on a repair status
- Upload documents relating to a property
- Participate in online surveys and consultation
- Review any letters or documents issued
- Review a rent account or make a rent payment

This portal is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Whilst face to face appointments are limited, we have been able to offer virtual appointments and offer the opportunity to digitally sign for a property.

During the last year, the sector has seen an increase in anti-social behaviour, partly attributed to the difficult situations presented by the pandemic. To help improve our understanding and communication with tenants, the Association worked collaboratively with Alternatives NI to complete a training programme with staff in respect to restorative practice and mediation.

Connswater Homes are the first Housing Association in Northern Ireland to undertake this training. The programme was called STARS- Striving To Achieve a Restorative Society. We made the commitment to provide all staff with an overview of restorative

practice, which is a practice to provide those involved and impacted a voice, providing a platform for listening and an opportunity to heal relationships.

Following the Stars Training the Association then committed to staff completing a six week mediation programme.

The training provided staff with an opportunity to:

- To review the basic assumptions and practices underpinning mediation and associated disciplines
- To understand the Mediation process and when it is most appropriate
- To learn the skills and practices of Mediation
- To have an opportunity to practice some of these skills

The training was across all departments, and as a result staff have been able to improve their forms of communication with stakeholders and tenants. Following the training a review of correspondence in relation to anti-social behaviour was carried out, seeking feedback from tenants. Correspondence has

been restructured and amended accordingly.

Staff are better skilled to offer mediation at an early stage of any anti-social behaviour complaint. They have been able to mediate with tenants and resolve issues, which in turn has ensured tenancies have been sustained and relationship reinstated. This provides value for money to the Association as it is a form of sustaining tenancy's.

An employee noted:

"Very useful course and applicable to job role. Useful techniques learned and practice of these was offered. I can use the skills learned for dealing with tenants and ASB cases. Trainer was very knowledgeable, and the course was interesting."

Connswater Homes knows the importance of having to adapt its forms of communication in a changing environment. The technological world is advancing, and the Association needs to continue to be innovative and regularly review and update its forms of communication to ensure it is reaching its tenants in the most appropriate manner.

## Outcomes and achievements

The Association employs thirty staff, all of whom received an overview of restorative practice. Ten employees went on to complete an OCN level 1 in Restorative Justice.

Ten staff completed the 6 week mediation programme, which was an investment of 180 hours of training as an organisation. The training was subsidised and therefore we did not incur a financial cost for this training, and more staff were able to avail of it.

Since the training, staff have been able to actively deploy the skills, including co-mediating two anti-social behaviour cases, which have successfully helped those tenants involved to sustain their tenancy.

The Association also recognises that investment in technology provides value for money, with the cost of postage has decreased by 30% in the last year. The portal has just over 25% of tenants as active users, we aim to increase this further by the end of this financial year.

One tenant noted:

"The portal is really easy to use, and I like being able to make a rent payment or log a repair at a time that is suitable for me"

To complement the portal the Association has introduced a tablet loan scheme to enable tenants to get online.

# “Safe Homes, Happy Homes” – Innovative tech solutions for safe services

## Grove Community Housing Association



### Statement of support

Grove Community Housing Association like many has been deeply impacted over the last year and half. Covid-19s has had an impact of all of society especially tenants leaving some unsure of what to do. With many business closing doors and lockdown unfolding it was important to Grove to maintain communications with tenants in these uncertain times. While these unexpected events began to unfold Grove immediately looked at technology as its saviour and adapted like many to working in the digital and remote sphere, a new and daunting change to the organisation. While a small community organisation with many vulnerable tenants Grove initiated online community group to support Grove tenants and those in need, especially those with less modern-day methods of communication. Grove sought to contact vulnerable tenants and assist via social media and support of more tech savvy tenants to help assist those in need, tenant communication reached out via social platforms such as Facebook and set up a process of communication to help the wider community. This use of technology was the quick transition of Grove to a more modern and digitised process of working. As a housing association we quickly realised that we had to meet our regulatory requirements and maintain the high level of service our tenants expected.

Grove expedited our long terms objectives within a matter of weeks implementing new approaches in delivery necessary services and communication with tenants. Grove is the first housing association to implement Plentific X Tag a real time gas servicing process in which the association is updated in real time as an engineer service's a tenants gas boiler. The enhancement goes beyond normally routine service

and provides an enhanced service requirement providing a more robust and diligent service and protection for tenants. As we embraced technology the association went further to ensure we delivered our promises and maintained our service to tenants by implementing Host.com to enable maintenance teams to access and evaluate reported issues by tenants, with Live feed allowing the maintenance team to put the right contractor in place and resolve the issue quickly. Not only have we used it for 'real time' management of gas servicing and gas repairs but also have rolled it out across the 'Big Six' Home Safety areas - electrical checks, asbestos management, legionella management, fire safety, lift servicing. Delivery 100% compliance across all sections and delivery a single source of truth for compliance.

The use of technology helped and reassured tenants that Grove was delivering its service as a housing association and meeting its regulatory requirements along the way. The dedicated service of the team shone through it support for tenants setting up calls to help those less able and responding to the tenants forum set up to support tenants online as they no longer could avail of calling into the office. The use of technology and dedication of staff provided additional support in helping tenants benefit applications, maintaining rent payments (rent collected 99%) so tenants did not fall into arrears. Grove also set up virtual viewing for any vacant properties and adhered to government guidelines on meetings. This included the need for staff and board members to meet online.

### Initiatives:

- Covid- 19 tenant information page <https://groveha.org.uk/covid-19-information/>
- Grove community housing tenant voice group
- Tenant calls - use of old fashion technology the telephone
- Facebook tenant page
- Plentific X Tag - Compliance Manager | Plentific - Property Management Software
- Host.com - remote Live assessment tool
- Virtual viewing
- Face to face tenant calls
- Decision time
- Microsoft teams (staff & board meetings)

## Outcomes and achievements

The accelerated use of technology has improved our service level and ability to deliver a more efficient service meeting all the regulatory requirements. The execution and pace of introducing new technology and improved service has rewarded the association and staff with a more streamlined service and improved time management; providing staff with real time information on the service provided. Improving the associations KPIs at all levels from staff to board level. The knock-on effect of these has improved tenant's lives within our organisation and increased tenant participation, with improved tenant satisfaction ratings. The use of technology has helped give tenants a voice and access to resources they may not have had previously available. The quick thinking and action taken at Grove with implementing had seen a change

in culture for the better among staff and tenants and streamlined services. The investment in new procedures is shining through as tenants are happier, staff have more available time to improve services further, board and management have real time data at their fingertips to make decisions quickly. The implementation has reduced costs, provided accurate analysis, expedited response times to maintenance issues, reduced staff travel time and cost, improved contractor responses and delivery of services.

Tenant survey:

- 94% of tenants overall feel that Grove are brilliant
- 83% agree that Grove has improved its services over the last 12 months

# MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR



Sponsored by: **North & East Housing Association**  
Building & Supporting Communities

This award recognises organisations or projects that have demonstrated commitment to tenant involvement, to help improve services or neighbourhoods.

## A greener environment and stronger community in Creggan

**Lead organisation: Apex Housing Association**

**Partner organisation: Bogside and Brandywell Initiative**



### Statement of support

#### Background

When Apex purchased land for housing development in Magowan / Ballymagowan, Derry~Londonderry there were 12 acres that could not be used for housing. An elevated site at the top of the Creggan estate, it has beautiful views of the city and Co. Donegal.

The area is ranked fourth in Northern Ireland for mood/anxiety problems (320 people per 1,000) and has high unemployment and low educational attainment rates (44% unemployed and 43% with no qualifications).

Apex worked with local tenants to develop four main objectives for the land:

- To reduce anxiety and social isolation by providing a facility where people could meet and benefit from fresh air, exercise and conversation

- To ensure environmental outcomes from the land
- To allow local people to benefit through growing their own organic food, reducing food poverty and benefitting from the consumption of less pesticides
- To increase knowledge of the environment by local adults and children

#### The project

With 9.9 acres of the land, Apex worked with residents to develop an urban park and with the remaining 2.1 acres we developed allotments.

Once the infrastructure was in place, residents felt it was important for local people to develop the project rather than a large landlord such as Apex. Two local people were recruited into paid employment and Bogside and Brandywell Initiative (BBI) was appointed to oversee the project. This ensured that:

- an existing community group within the area was strengthened
- local residents would be willing to take ownership and volunteer

For the same budget as it would take to simply maintain the land, Apex provides funding for BBI to oversee the project.

#### Ballymagowan Allotments

The allotments provide growing areas for residents, but also incorporate education, healthy eating, mentoring, environmental awareness raising and a range of activities for the wider community in Creggan. Users also supply excess vegetables to Apex Community Supermarket to benefit people in food poverty in Co. Derry~Londonderry.

Despite Covid-19, and due to the excellent working relationships forged and sustained between BBI and Apex, services have continued to be provided and the allotment site has been used by around 15 people per day and the urban park by around 100 people per day.

#### The Urban Park

The urban park has inspired a number of community activities focused on resident engagement, environmental awareness, service provision to the wider community and education activities for local schools and youth clubs.

The site has also enabled a number of community based organisations to develop services and activities in the past year including:

- Christmas in Creggan - a supervised Christmas trail with Santa
- Halloween Pumpkin Patch & Trail - a supervised programme involving story-telling and pumpkin carving
- Community assistance services - the provision of gardening services and severe weather support

- Schools programme - the provision of planting and educational materials to local schools
- Continued support to other community groups on site

During the year a project to improve unsightly mews lanes within the area was also developed, helping residents reclaim their lanes and make positive use of them.

In addition, the Ballymagowan Fairy Trail was established; which is a Gaelic themed bi-lingual trail that draws upon Irish folklore as well as the more modern fairy traditions; and combines these with a focus on the trees that are growing on the site.

#### The future

There are exciting plans for the future including the development of an inner city sanctuary and equine enrichment project which will improve mental, physical, and social well-being through equine assisted activities and therapy programmes.

Although the area is extremely deprived, this beautiful community space and innovative project have significantly improved the area and delivered positive and sustainable outcomes.

## Outcomes and achievements

Between April 2020 and March 2021:

- In an area of high economic inactivity, the project employed two full-time and three seasonal staff; and provided work experience for four young people and seven regular volunteers.
- Approximately 100 allotment users reported a 'significant' improvement in mental health.
- 94kgs of produce was supplied free of charge to Apex Community Supermarket, providing organic vegetables to people in food poverty.
- An onsite horticultural adviser provided expert advice to allotment users and the wider community.
- Three polytunnels ensured year-round activity and provided flowers for hanging basket workshops for residents.
- A grass cutting and home assistance service was provided to local residents.
- 200 residents availed of flower trays, hanging baskets and window gardens improving the appearance of the local estate.
- Over 40 allotment holders and their families gathered for an 'end of harvest barbecue' which was used as a team building exercise.
- An educational classroom was provided for local schools and groups.
- 4 local schools engaged in planting projects, with 70 primary school children planting flowers and two secondary schools planting trees in their school grounds.
- During lockdown, 400 local families received environmental and bird feeding packs.
- To date, 1,550 trees have been planted by local children.

# Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy

## Circle Voluntary Housing Association



### Statement of support

Tenant Engagement is, and will continue to be, at the heart of everything Circle does. Circle strongly believe that our tenants should have a real opportunity to influence and shape the services they receive.

This Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy focuses on effectively communicating and working in partnership with our tenants. To date, Circle have supported and encouraged the completion of tenant experience surveys in respect of services, along with open meetings, face to face interviews, regular updates and tenant meetings. However, Circle recognise that more needs to be done. Circle hopes that by setting out specific objectives in this Strategy and committing the resources necessary to deliver it, will achieve our ambition to have tenants at the heart of what Circle do as an organisation.

In March 2020 Circle engaged the services of Supporting Communities to support the development and implementation of a Tenant Engagement Strategy. The impact of Covid-19 resulted in delays to delivering the first phase of the project plan. The ongoing restrictions led to Circle and Supporting Communities having to revise the scheduled action plan to incorporate delivery via Zoom. Despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, phase one of the action plan was delivered in full and included:

- Tenant participation workshops for tenants and staff.
- Action planning sessions for tenants and staff.
- The establishment of a Tenant Steering Group.
- Workshops and action planning sessions to support development of the

Steering Group for staff and/or Board members.

- Development of the Terms of Reference for the Tenant Steering Group approved by tenants.

Since December 2020, tenants and staff have been taking part in training and focus group work to develop a common understanding of tenant engagement and how they wanted to proceed. Circle are delighted to report that our Board has approved a brand-new Tenant Engagement Strategy, written by the tenants themselves. This is a major milestone for Circle with many hours of work behind it. The Strategy is accompanied by a 3-year action plan, written, and designed by tenants and staff. The 13 sub-committees and groups listed in the Tenant Engagement Strategy are a priority for Circle and our Tenant Advisory group (TAG).

A call was made for tenants to become involved. The TAG was established in April 2021, with Steering Group members continuing to be involved. To support TAG to realise its purpose and function, the group received training on Circle's structure and governance, how Circle is financed and regulated, good governance and components of effective meetings. Now everyone involved has the tools and resources to enable a meaningful partnership between tenants, staff and the Board. A two-way process for communicating between Circle's Board and the TAG has been in place since then, and this has been championed by the TAG, our Chair and CEO.

On the 4th of November, Circle had the physical launch event for the Tenant Engagement Strategy and our founding TAG members spoke alongside the CEO, Chairperson, staff, and fellow tenants. It was a positive morning and really highlighted the progress made to date by all involved. It also reiterated the attention that will need to be given to ensuring changes take place and that tenant engagement is fully incorporated into all of Circle's activities.

Circle has committed to providing tenants with a choice of how they can become involved and recognise and utilise the value of their feedback. Circle recognise the importance of offering options for people who wanted to get involved from the comfort of their own homes, with our current focus being on delivering the 2021 action plan and developing our sub-committees and groups.

## Outcomes and achievements

Circle was the first Housing Association to join Supporting Communities from the Republic of Ireland. The outcomes and achievements of our TAG and Circle team to date are as follows:

Design of the new Tenant Approved Logo which is now used on all tenant related documents, policies, handbooks, and communications. It revitalised the Tenant Newsletter, published every quarter, and proofed the new Tenant Handbook.

The TAG meets quarterly to focus on the Tenant Engagement Strategy action plan. They reviewed and approved the Corporate Strategy, and Circle's Feedback and Complaints Policy. Input was also contributed to Circle's response to the government's

policy, Housing For All, and ABHRA's Draft Regulations.

Satisfaction surveys were implemented and the associated reports and actions to improve services are reviewed and approved by the TAG.

To encourage engagement, the TAG approved a leaflet that all new tenants get in their starter pack. Tenants are asked, as part of our surveys, if they would like to receive a call about getting involved. The TAG recruited and appointed their Tenant Engagement Officer.

There is now a tenant led, inclusive and sustainable tenant engagement structure which enables our tenants to hold Circle to account.

# Staying Connected - Member Engagement Working Group

## Co-operative Housing Ireland



### Statement of support

2021 was a challenging year to engage with Members of Co-operative Housing Ireland (CHI) across the country. The restrictions made it difficult, often impossible, to hold events and activities in person. This did not stop CHI and their Members connecting with not only their local community, but with the wider CHI network of Members.

Recognising the need for connection during such uncertain times, a CHI Member engagement Facebook group was set up to support the development of connections with other Members across the country at the beginning of 2020. On the Facebook page the Member Engagement Manager shared ideas with Members of activities they could do to celebrate annual events that were in line with government restrictions. As the group grew, Members shared what they had done with the national network and encouraged other communities to take inspiration from their achievements. An example of this was a community library set up in by Members in one of CHI's estates. This sparked several other CHI communities to set up one too.

In response to the ongoing challenges of Covid-19 and a need to engage more with members, CHI established a Member Engagement working group. The working group includes representatives from across the country and supports the Member Engagement Manager to develop activities that bring Members together. The focus of the group is to bring a sense of joy into communities during an extremely difficult period in all our lives.

Due to the national restrictions and the distance between each member of the 'engagement working group' they met on zoom. The group designed a calendar of events that would take place throughout the year. Recognising that a large minority of Members experience digital exclusion, the group decided that not all activities and events should take place online. Similarly, the group were aware that the activities needed to appeal to a wide audience with varied interests and demographics.

Members of the Working Group also coordinated and facilitated many of the events and activities held, which included:

- Weeklong events for International Women's Day
- Establishment of a national book club
- Family fun quiz
- Easter Bingo
- Walking challenge
- Photo competition
- Information session on how to support young people's mental health

Due to the technology divide between the members of CHI, events and activities were advertised using multiple systems to ensure that all members were

reached. Communication channels included a text message system, Mailchimp/CRM, the new Facebook page, and the quarterly hardcopy newsletter that is posted to all CHI Members.

Without the Members of the engagement working group and their creativity, determination, and motivation, reaching the wider CHI membership, building connections, and showing that you can describe a community in a different way, would not have been possible.

## Outcomes and achievements

The main achievement of this initiative was bringing a sense of community to both new and existing CHI Members during a time of uncertainty. Covid-19 presented many challenges to us as a growing organisation and there was a risk of disconnect due to restrictions. CHI ensured there were ways for Members to connect safely.

This was achieved through digital and traditional channels:

- Setting up a Facebook group that continues to grow
- Developing a member engagement Working Group
- Working with the Member Engagement Working Group to design and implement engagement events/ activities that brought the wider network together.

Testimonials:

'I don't think we have been this energetic in a long time and we have enjoyed every single minute of it and will most definitely keep walking together. Even my sons walk with me now and we talk without phones or any screens in the way.' Lisa, Walking Challenge.

'I really love that I got myself back to reading. It has opened a world up for myself that I forgot was there. I am motivated to read more books and to make time to. I sleep better too because I am not on screens as I read before sleep.' Jennifer, Book Club.

Activities incorporated in-person and virtual elements to mitigate the technology barrier.

64 people fully participated in the walking challenge, with the enthusiasm driving 'community connection hikes' in 4 locations in 2022.

57 people participated in the National Art Competition. The winners of the art competition featured in 5 local newspaper articles.

The establishment of a book club consisting of 20 members from CHI's National Membership. Such was the success another book club is being established.

2020 was a year that could have been fuelled with isolation, it wasn't, while we were apart, we were still connected.

## Loving Life Choir

### Foscadh Housing Association



#### Statement of support

In 2019, in response to the impact of violent crime in Drogheda, Foscadh Housing Association launched the community's first ever children's choir, the Loving Life Choir, through its housing management program at its Lia Bhrega estate. Foscadh Housing's proactive approach to housing management is based on effective housing maintenance, tenant support

services and a diverse range of community programs which continued uninterrupted despite the challenges of the pandemic. As a result, Foscadh Housing enjoys strong relationships with its tenants, providing a strong platform for new community initiatives such as the Loving Life Choir. This has also enabled the Association to grow the choir's reach beyond Lia Bhrega to the wider Moneymore and indeed Drogheda community, creating positive opportunities for youth participation that are so urgently needed in the region.

The Loving Life Choir provides people age 6 to 20 with a safe, friendly and inclusive environment that empowers self-expression, confidence and a positive outlook. Through a structured approach, support and encouragement, and the feel-good nature of music, the Loving Life Choir helps youth members learn to trust their own abilities, work together for a common goal and develop a positive mindset to help manage life's challenges. Inclusivity is among the keys to the choir's success. Membership is open to anyone that fits the age criteria, regardless of their background, ethnicity, ability, gender and so forth. Choir member

Tia says, "The young kids can get away from a lot of bad stuff that happens and they can just go to choir and it's also a place where they can be more social and make new friends."

Choir members are empowered to drive choir projects and they work excitedly towards each new goal set by their musical director. There is no cost to participate in the choir, making it very accessible to children from disadvantaged households. It is also easy for members to participate in choir activities which are located in their local area, or on Zoom during Covid-19 lockdowns. Communication is simple, effective and easily accessible via a WhatsApp group, email and also via Foscadh Housing's Facebook platform.

The choir is very active and has even written and produced an original song based on members' Covid-19 lockdown experiences. Under guidance from the choir's musical director and a composer and with support from Foscadh Housing's housing management team, choir members were encouraged to share their favourite genres and styles of music, through performances on Zoom or by sharing songs that

inspire them. The choir's musical director then created chord combinations which the choir developed further on Zoom according to what they liked best. The lyrics were then added to complete the group's song. The collaborative song writing project provided a vital group activity during the lockdown. Choir member Hannah says, "During lockdown there were really scary nights but once I went to choir it made me feel really good."

Healthy communities need empowering, sustainable and positive opportunities. In Drogheda, drugs and violent crime have afflicted the community and in particular, affected opportunities and the outlook of children and young people. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns have compounded challenges for young people. Despite these challenges the Loving Life Choir has continued to provide positive opportunities for members and foster a hopeful and inspired outlook. Importantly, the choir also offers a sustainable and scalable model for positive community outcomes, and crucially, a positive pathway for Drogheda's youth.

### Outcomes and achievements

The children of the Loving Life Choir have achieved much since 2019. They performed live in Dublin's Connolly Station, participated in the 24-hour sleep out Shine a Light Night event, raised almost €4,500 for homeless charities and worked through the pandemic to create their first Youtube music video.

In September 2020, the Housing Finance Agency's 'Social Investment Fund' awarded funding for the choir to write and produce a song reflecting their experiences of the Covid-19 lockdowns. With guidance from the choir's musical director and a composer, choir members worked together to create song lyrics, and chose their favourite chord progressions, rhythms and instrumentation for the

basis of a song.

In 2021, the choir has been featured on RTÉ (radio and television), has been invited to sing at the switching on of the Drogheda Christmas Lights, and on 26 November, will appear on Ireland's much loved RTÉ Toy Show. On 17 December the choir will launch their song, titled "Another Day".

The Loving Life Choir is a positive example of outcomes for the Association's tenants and the wider community. Importantly, the children have relished the opportunity to grow their confidence, express themselves freely and enjoying working together for a common goal.

# Radius Building Strong + Confident Communities

**Lead organisation: Radius Housing**

**Partner organisation: Numerous organisations involved**



## Statement of support

Radius has improved services and neighbourhoods through supporting local groups on the ground and through our Digital Inclusion Project

**Burnvale Community Association, Cookstown**

BCA, established 2017, and one of the first 10 T:BUC Developments in NI, have worked closely with Radius to develop their capacity, increase good relations and implement activities for the residents of Burnvale Crescent and wider Cookstown area. The group have attracted young people to be actively involved, and now fund and develop activities with minimal support from Radius. In lockdown they were a point of contact for tenants, providing information and signposting.

We know that our work has made a real difference to the local community. The support we get from Radius alongside donations from local business really allow us to make an impact on the ground.

**Social Change Group**

The Social Change Group are made up of tenants from Ravenhill Shared Developments in partnership with Apex. They participate in personal development, cultural awareness and social engagement training; working towards a more inclusive society within their shared developments and the wider community through planning and delivering events.

Radius have provided the group with support, funding and information. Training undertaken includes; Metal Health First Aid, Governance Training, Safeguarding, OCN level 1 Restorative Practices, First Aid + Defibrillator Certificate, ILM Level 3 Leadership and Management.

**Lower Oldpark Community Association**

Radius has supported LOCA to deliver several projects this year. Their alleyway and planting project, a partnership between Radius and LOCA, supported by training organisations from either side of the community, Impact Training (Shankill) and Springvale

Learning.

This project transformed an alleyway, and adjacent land which had become a no-go area into a safe space for residents to enjoy. It gave an opportunity for young trainees from across the interface to work together. The trainees cleaned the space of rubbish and weeds, and made the large raised beds and window boxes. Planting days for the window boxes engaged with the wider community.

**Beechmount Residents Collective**

BRC formed at the start of the pandemic sourcing food parcels for those in need. This generous act permitted the group to develop their scope of work in the wider Beechmount area. Radius have provided support and funding.

BRC reclaimed a derelict piece of land for the community. Rubbish was cleared and land reseeded. This open space now hosts raised beds, a Pergola, seating and painted walls. The space will be used as Santa's Grotto this year. In recent weeks BCR have been proactive in redirecting local youth away from the interface area on Springfield Road whilst engaging them to participate in projects that would be of benefit to the community.

**Radius Digital Inclusion project**

This project ensured continual engagement with tenants through ongoing covid restrictions. 10 Digital Champions trained and supported 70 tenants to get online. This gave tenants confidence to keep in contact with family and friends and avail of online groups to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Tablets with built in data were loaned out to digitally excluded tenants. They attended online events over the last year which included: biodiversity workshops, online coffee and quiz, monthly online readers book club, workshops, service improvement groups and area panel meetings. Our partnership with Advice NI supported 47 tenants in Basic Digital Skills to get online, use zoom, email, and the internet.

Getting online has transformed my communication and helped my mental wellbeing - thank you

These programmes have been funded through Radius core funding and the Department for Communities and Northern Ireland Housing Executive "Housing for All" Shared Housing Programme, which has its origins in the NI Executive Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

## Outcomes and achievements

### Burnvale

- 120 food parcels to the most vulnerable in lockdown (in partnership with SVP)
- 400+ people attended the Cultural Parade in September 2021 to enjoy dance and music from around the globe
- Organised a calendar of seasonal events in the community

### Social Change Group

- Seasonal events delivered; Easter / Summer Diversity Programme / Halloween Fun Day / Christmas Movie Night
- Environmental programmes included; Biodiversity Community Garden / Adopt A Spot
- Good Food Good Relations Programme
- Lincs Programme x160 hours with Alternatives + Indian Women's Association
- X9 training courses undertaken

### Lower Oldpark Community Association

- 48 wooden planters+ raised beds built by trainees

- 52 residents attended planting workshops
- X20 trainees
- A no go area turned into a safe space for residents to relax and socialise
- Nursery school to use space as an outdoor classroom

### Beechmount Resident's Collective

- Transforming a derelict wasteland into a community garden
- Promoting volunteering within the community
- Redirecting youth by involving them in the BRC plans
- Organising community clean ups.

### Radius Digital Inclusion Project

- 10 digital champions trained, who supported 70 tenants to get online
- 47 tenants undertook basic digital skills training with Advice NI
- 148 tenants took part in digital meetings, workshops and training programmes

## Renters' Voice

### Renters' Voice



### Statement of support

Renters Voice' is a project by renters for renters. Supported by Housing Rights and funded by the Nationwide Foundation, a core group of private renters are working to make private renting better for everyone in Northern Ireland.

### The beginning

Unlike in the social sector, there is no regulatory requirement for private landlords to engage with their tenants. Despite this, the sector increasingly provides a home for families, low-income households, and people whose circumstances make them vulnerable to homelessness. Against this backdrop, Housing Rights began a project to ensure private renters had an effective voice in the decisions government made

about private renting. Private renters were involved in the development of the project, the funding bid and the recruitment of the project coordinator. In 2019, Renters' Voice was born, and extensive planning took place to bring together renters for an inaugural session in March 2020.

On the eve of the first initiative, however, a government mandated lockdown was introduced, and the project was forced to quickly pivot to online. The move to online turned out to be the first in a series of innovative and agile responses made by the project to make renters' voices heard.

### Building participation

With fortnightly meetings held by a core group of 10-12 renters since September 2020, Renters' Voice has also regularly engaged with a much wider group of private renters. Surveys on every aspect of the renting experience inform the key asks of the project's campaigns. Surveys in March, May and October 2020 told the story of renters struggling to cope with the immediate and ongoing impact of a pandemic which had intensified the difficulties many in the sector were facing.

Emboldened by the experience of the renters in their surveys, Renters' Voice devised their 'Top 10 Asks' for government. A social media campaign and correspondence with the Minister for Communities followed.

## Harnessing skills

The people in the project are formidable; skilled and dedicated in their quest for improvements in the sector. The project has given them the opportunity to build and share knowledge with each other and to take part in a range of activities which build their confidence and skills in areas such as public speaking. Informal training opportunities have been bolstered by an OCN accredited bespoke training course which 10 tenants have undertaken to better understand both the private rented sector and models of tenant participation.

## Affecting change

Renters' Voice are affecting change at a regional level.

Their 'Notice to Quit' campaign, which has been running throughout 2021, ensured that the political spotlight remained on protecting renters from eviction. The Minister for Communities has twice extended the emergency legal provisions which give tenants an

enhanced notice period should their landlord wish to end the tenancy.

A new Private Tenancies Bill in the NI Assembly contains provisions which will give permanent effect to an enhanced notice period as well give the Minister powers to extend this notice period further to up to 6 months. In recognition of Renters' Voice influence on the Bill, the project was invited to provide testimony to the NI Assembly Communities Committee on the first day of the Committee's evidence sessions. Renters' Voice is helping to ensure the law in the private rented sector is informed by the experience of renters themselves.

As the Deputy Chair of the Committee, Kellie Armstrong MLA, remarked at the evidence session;

"Your evidence has been extremely useful. It has shown why it is so important in the Committee's scrutiny of the legislation that it hears from the people at the coalface – the renters."

## Outcomes and achievements

Amongst Renters' Voice's considerable achievements it is easy to overlook what is perhaps their most significant; the coming together of a diverse group of renters in a pandemic, to improve renting for everyone.

Other notable achievements include;

10 tenants have undertaken accredited training to increase their skills and knowledge.

Around 150 private tenants contributed to surveys to share their experience of private renting. The use of this evidence in correspondence with the Minister for Communities and in meetings with her officials.

Videos and stories to highlight the experience of renters and to call for a 6 month 'Notice to Quit'.

A campaign and information event for tenants due to be impacted by the end of furlough and the cut to Universal Credit in August 2021.

Influencing the extension of the emergency legislation to protect private renters (twice!) and at least 5 other policy recommendations in the last year.

Evidence to the NI Assembly Communities Committee in their scrutiny of the Private Tenancies Bill.

The establishment of a project Steering Group chaired by Professor Paddy Gray.

Links with other tenants - including those in the social sector via Supporting Communities and those outside of NI.

# Rural Housing's Digital Connections Project

## Rural Housing Association



### Statement of support

#### Project Summary

RHA's Digital Connections Project provides regular online sessions for tenant panel members, including the provision of iPads to those tenants with no previous access to this type of technology. The project encourages relationship building, social connections, digital skills training, and tenant empowerment, amongst isolated rural residents who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. This digital-focused programme provides regular online sessions where tenants can socialise, helping reduce the impact of social isolation, participate in skills development training, as well as providing an online think tank where tenants can voice their concerns on issues impacting them and their communities during COVID-19 and beyond.

The project, which commenced in Spring 2021, has seen the provision of 20 digital tablets to tenants living in rural locations in the Newry & Mourne, Fermanagh & Omagh, Derry City & Strabane and Causeway Coast & Glens Council areas, who had no previous access to this type of technology before the project commenced. (The project is also open to tenant panel members with access to their own digital devices.)

#### Tenant-led Approach

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic RHA hosted regular tenant information sessions, social and advocacy meetings, however following the outbreak of COVID-19 these face-to-face meetings were halted. Whilst it was not possible to meet face-to-face during the pandemic, Rural Housing staff remained in contact with tenants through regular phone conversations.

These conversations indicated there was a clear need to resume tenant meetings through an online platform, however there were some tenants who lacked the digital skills or did not have access to digital technology to enable them to participate in an online programme.

Based on this feedback from tenants, Rural Housing Association staff commenced the development of a tenant-led application to the National Lottery's Awards for All fund. In partnership with tenants, Rural Housing Association applied for an online tenant advocacy project that would include digital skills training, provision of iPads and a social/ training fund, through which tenants could work together to identify skills training or online social activities. The application was successful and since the project's commencement in March 2021, tenants have played a key role in the design of the project, helping identify tenant training opportunities, as well as online socials to help reconnect tenants from rural communities across Northern Ireland.

#### Skills Development

Rural Housing's Digital Connections project works to develop the skills of tenants in rural communities, ensuring the tenant voice plays a key role in shaping the services we deliver as an organisation and empowering tenants to play a more active role in their communities as they act as advocates for others in their community. Through this safe online platform staff support tenants to develop the skills to become community champions within social housing schemes, helping ensure we as an organisation continually adapt the services we provide to meet the needs of our tenants. The project has also partnered with Ignite IT to help improve the digital skills of those tenants who were previously unable to participate in a digital project, helping get some of our most isolated rural tenants online. Through one-to-one bespoke training we have helped tenants develop the digital skills to participate in online workshops and social events as well as equipping them to develop their knowledge of how to keep safe online.

As the project continues tenants will play a lead role in shaping online content for the project going forward, helping set meeting agendas, identifying training opportunities for tenants and planning online social activities.

## Outcomes and achievements

Rural Housing Association's Digital Connections project has been hugely beneficial to both staff and tenants. To date RHA have purchased 20 iPads for tenant panel members who were previously unable to participate in tenant panel meetings, as they had no access to digital devices such as iPads. Rural Housing Association staff members have also completed Digital Inclusion Training with Supporting Communities, ensuring they have the skills to teach tenants how to use digital technology safely and engage with tenants through online platforms such as zoom.

Rural Housing Association have also appointed Ignite IT to manage the security and safety of tenants online,

including working with tenants to safely set up iPads, email accounts, zoom accounts etc. Ignite IT have also delivered a range of training sessions requested by tenants such as shopping safely online, avoiding scams, using apps safely and keeping your iPad/ tablet secure.

Twenty iPads have been allocated to tenants with no previous access to this technology and bespoke one-to-one training from Ignite IT has enabled them to move online. A series of social activities such as wreath-making classes, gardening competition and tea parties have also taken place since the commencement of the project.

# PROMOTING SHARED COMMUNITIES

Sponsored by:

**Radius**  
HOUSING

This award recognises housing and related initiatives that encourage the integration of people and communities from different backgrounds.

## Cois Carraig - A mixed tenure age friendly housing scheme

**Lead organisation: Clann Housing**

**Partner organisation: Cois Carraig Residents Association**



### Statement of support

Cois Carraig is a retirement village of 56 homes in Clarina about 6 K from Limerick city. It is well connected to the small rural village with shops, community centre and local pub and it is part of a wider new community of new family housing. Whilst having its own identity as a retirement village - it is separate but connected which is part of its appeal to residents. It is predominantly private owners. Residents are people who sold their homes to 'right size' into smaller more manageable homes and more recently in January 2021 18 Clann housing tenants have moved in . Cois Carraig wasn't planned as a mixed tenure retirement village. The first private owners moved in over four years and the expectation of most owners was that all homes would be owner occupiers. The fact that it has evolved as a mixed tenure community presented a challenge for building community

cohesion. Residents were concerned about who would be housed and how it would affect their lives in a quiet, rural community. It was a good opportunity for the village to be accessible to lower income groups and better reflect the tenure of the wider community but communications needed to be well managed for it to be a successful community.

Clann's Scheme Manager met with owner occupiers immediately after acquisition before the houses were allocated to explain who Clann are and what we do. She attended several meetings with the well established Residents Association and talked about the work Clann do and how we support our tenants and the surrounding communities to build better and inclusive communities. Their priority was to be listened to and have their questions and concerns addressed. The reception was extremely positive when they knew we willing to listen to the needs and concerns of all in the community, not only our tenants and that we cared about our impact and footprint in communities.

The Clann scheme manager facilitated interaction between owner occupiers and the new Clann residents through meetings and newsletters. She included the Residents Association in the information going out to tenants so they could send it to the wider community. She also spoke with local Councillors in Clarina to tell them about Clann and to allay any concerns homeowners might raise with them. Cois Carraig private resident owners had a higher number of single women to men in the community. Clann have housed more single men and couples. Many residents have welcomed a better mix. The Clann scheme manager has facilitated meetings offering support to the Residents Association for grant applications,

buying equipment for the grounds maintenance and by a new seating area for the scheme.

The Clann scheme manager has supported Clann tenants in having an active role in their community and as a result two tenants have been voted in as members of the management committee of the Residents Association AGM in October 21.

The community garden is focus for companionship between residents. The majority are retired from work and want to stay active. Committee work and gardening provide this opportunity. Both the private

and Clann tenants are actively working on this together

The Residents Association recently held a community social event on the estate opening a new seating area. It was a great opportunity for residents to all meet up and get to know each other better. Clann worked closely with the Association on this event and provided funding and refreshments.

Cois Carraig is a mixed tenure scheme but is one community, all working together to make a better place for everyone to live.

## Outcomes and achievements

Cois Carraig has developed as a community over the last year. Clann tenants have made a full contribution and have been welcomed by owner occupier. The estate is better maintained now than before the Clann residents moved in. It's largely due to a group of tenants who have an interest in gardening and grounds maintenance. This has been welcomed by the entire village community and has contributed to the acceptance of social tenants. It has been a key focus for developing community cohesion. Gardening was an opportunity for residents from the two tenure types to get to know each other. The Residents Association recently held a community social event on the

estate opening a new seating area. This was another opportunity for residents to chat and come together.

The Clann Scheme Manager communicated with owner occupiers immediately after acquisition of the homes and has kept up those contacts linking up the owner occupiers and the Clann tenants at every opportunity. She built a relationship with the Residents Association and listened to them. Her intervention helped address concerns owner occupiers had at an early stage.

Cois Carraig is a good example of people from different backgrounds and experiences all working together to build a community they all want to live in.

# Lia Bhrega Estate, Co Drogheda

## Foscadh Housing Association



### Statement of support

Foscadh Housing's mission is to provide integrated and affordable social housing of the highest quality that builds communities. Nowhere is this more evident than at the Lia Bhrega estate in Drogheda, where Foscadh Housing has created one of the most integrated housing communities in Ireland. Lia Bhrega is home to people from more than a dozen different countries speaking 20 different languages. By finding common ground for the diverse population, Foscadh Housing has supported the development of a flourishing community.

From the very outset, the 69 turnkey properties at Lia Bhrega were developed with community in mind. The homes' lively colours also add character, with vibrantly painted red, green and blue doors dotting the estate and helping to bring a brighter, cleaner look to the estate and elevate the mood and mindset of tenants. The estate comprises 2, 3 and 4 bedroom units for all sizes of families that are adaptable for special needs, and three bungalows specifically designed for people with disabilities and special needs. Lithuanian, Nigerian, Pakistani and Vietnamese families live next door to Irish, French and Polish families in Lia Bhrega and with diverse religious and cultural differences they live, work, play and attend school together. Vast green areas are the lifeblood of community activity, games, meet-ups and children's play and have successfully facilitated cultural integration. Importantly, the green spaces are easy and cost-effective to maintain giving the community year-round and full access for their needs. To ensure new tenants feel welcome and supported, Foscadh Housing provides the assistance of interpreters when needed and arranges for letting contracts to be translated into the tenant's native language.

Foscadh Housing works closely with its tenants to develop community-led initiatives and events. The Junior Litter Picker Team is a community initiative for younger tenants that highlights the importance

of keeping the environment litter free. It is the only children's initiative of its type in the region and is so successful that it has even inspired neighbouring estates, with more than 100 people from the wider community attending Lia Bhrega's most recent litter pick day.

In 2019, Foscadh Housing also established the Loving Life Choir for children from 6 years of age to provide a safe and inclusive environment for kids to express their voice freely, make friends and build their self-esteem. Inclusivity is among the keys to the choir's success. Membership is open to anyone that fits the age criteria, regardless of their background, ethnicity, ability, gender and so forth. Youth members learn to

trust their own abilities, work together for a common goal and develop a positive mindset to help manage life's challenges.

Foscadh Housing has also helped to organise a range of social events for the Lia Bhrega community that bring families and cultures together to benefit the community as a whole. Tenants have enjoyed events including Neighbour Days, sports days, Easter Egg hunts, local parties and even day trips to Dublin Zoo and Tayto Park. These shared experiences have helped to build friendships, break down barriers and create a relaxed atmosphere where tenants now feel comfortable to greet each other, share a cup of tea and watch children play in the shared green spaces.

## Outcomes and achievements

In 2019, Foscadh Housing was announced winner of the Community Integration in Housing Award by the Irish Council for Social Housing at its Community Housing Awards. The award recognised Foscadh's achievements in community integration at the Lia Bhrega estate in Drogheda.

In 2021, the Association was again recognised by the ICSH when it was shortlisted in the biennial awards for the achievements of its Loving Life community children's choir. Since 2019, the choir has had an active schedule, performing live in Dublin's Connolly Station, participating in the 24-hour sleep out Shine a Light Night event, raising almost €4,500 for homeless charities and working through the pandemic to

create their first YouTube music video. In September 2020, the choir's greatest achievement yet was to receive funding from the Housing Finance Agency's 'Social Investment Fund' to write and produce a song reflecting their experiences of the Covid-19 lockdowns. The song will be recorded when lockdown restrictions have sufficiently eased.

Using the resources available, Foscadh Housing's programs at Lia Bhrega remain cost-effective and sustainable, proving a scalable model for community integration and a positive example of what can be achieved when housing associations and their communities work together for a common goal.

# Radius Good Relations Week 2021

**Lead organisation: Radius Housing**

**Partner organisation: Numerous organisations involved with various projects**



## Statement of support

Vibrant bursts of colour, sound and smells tantalised the senses and was the scene across NI over Good Relations Week 2021 when Radius Community Investment Team celebrated and demonstrated the wide range of cultural diversity within our cities and towns and promoted shared communities.

International Big Lunch, Ormeau Park

Ormeau Park was brought alive with an International Big Lunch in partnership with Apex Housing Association. It was attended by 210 participants and 14 community partners who all enjoyed a showcase of cultural performances, craft activities and sampling each other's cuisines in a safe space, building new relationships and learning about each other's cultures. It was attended by Minister of Communities Deirdre Hargey and Lord Mayor Kate Nichol.

Small Worlds Café, Ravenhill

Tenants of Ravenhill Shared Housing Development enjoyed an afternoon of cultural celebration, understanding, respect and interaction with a Small Worlds Café where 80 tenants engaged with individuals from 4 different countries in small workshops. They heard personal experiences and learnt to understand, remove myths and misunderstandings, and create connections.

"The Small Worlds Café was brilliant, I wish all the tenants would attend 1 of these, I have learnt so much about the journey of refugees and asylum seekers. I now have so much respect for people in their position."

## Youth Football, Clonduff

Clonduff Football Club Youth Teams experienced a week of cultural celebration, good relations awareness, and health & wellbeing awareness with a total of 111 children and 60 parents attending cultural drumming & crafts, cultural awareness and health awareness sessions.

## Cross Community alleyway project, Lower Oldpark

A partnership project with Lower Oldpark Community Association, and supported by training organisations from either side of the community; Impact Training and Springvale Learning. This project transforming an alleyway and adjacent land, provided an opportunity for young trainees from across the interface to work together, enhance the space with clean ups and planting and host workshops to engage the wider community.

## Cultural Parade, Cookstown

Over 400 people came together to celebrate and embrace the cultures that make up the community in Cookstown and wider Tyrone area with music and dance from across the globe. Tenants, young and old, spent several weeks learning how to play the Samba drums to perform in the parade.

This project was delivered in partnership with Clanmil Housing, The Hub, Cookstown and Apex Music Centre to deliver Cookstown's first Cultural Parade.

## Yallaa NI Programme, Portstewart

A partnership project with Yallaa to promote learning and provide experiences in the Arab culture. Yallaa Kitchen Cookery classes were followed by Cultural Awareness Workshops with the Be Safe Be Well Men's Shed and Portstewart Community Association. An Arabian Pop-Up Cultural Café was provided for primary schools. The programme taught an understanding of other cultural identities and provided an opportunity for diverse Arab cultural heritage to be shared and enjoyed by all.

"We are more enriched for this talk and it was great to learn about the culture of our Syrian Shed members."

## Connection Café, North West

Connection Café is an online platform for people who have made NI their home to provide a space to share in cultural exchange to help support people's mental health and wellbeing. This is a collaborative project with BCRC- Building Communities Resource Centre, Causeway Multi-cultural Forum and Verbal Arts. This café is a welcome and safe space for everyone in the community

These programmes have been funded through Radius core funding and the Department for Communities and Northern Ireland Housing Executive "Housing for All" Shared Housing Programme, which has its origins in the NI Executive Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

## Outcomes and achievements

Providing opportunities for integration

Creating better connected, cohesive communities

Developing understanding and respect for all

Celebrating difference

International Big Lunch

- 14 partner organisations
- 210 participants

75.68% of those attending feel more favourably towards others from different backgrounds

Small Worlds Café & GRW Awareness Event

- 80 participants

83.33% tenants learnt something new

Clonduff Football Club GRW 3 - 13 Programme

- X111 children
- X60 parents

92% feel more favourably towards others from different backgrounds

Lower Oldpark Community Association

- 48 wooden planters+ raised beds built by trainees
- 52 residents attended planting workshops
- X20 trainees
- A "no go" area turned into a safe space for residents to relax and socialise
- Nursery school to use space as an outdoor classroom

Cultural Parade, Cookstown

- 400+ participants
- First Cultural Parade ever held in Cookstown
- Young people learnt new skills

Yallaa Kitchen, Portstewart

- X119 participants
- 4 week cookery course
- Pop up Cultural Café for primary schools

# HOUSING TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: **Co/ownership**

This award is for teams that had made an outstanding contribution to their organisation and the delivery of its objectives.

## The Brickworks cross departmental team

### Choice Housing Ireland Limited



### Statement of support

The Brickworks, built by Choice Housing and completed in 2020, is a general needs scheme providing 42 homes in South Belfast. With almost 12,000 people on the waiting list for social housing in Belfast The Brickworks is a crucial urban scheme. Initially the community welcomed this development with a positivity. However, during the first phase there were issues of anti-social behaviour and stakeholders expressed concern regarding the second phase. Choice immediately engaged a cross-departmental team to tackle these challenges head on.

The challenges included:

- Waste management
- Anti-social behaviour
- High density of young children
- Community safety

The membership of The Brickworks Cross Departmental Team brought an array of exceptional skills and they worked collaboratively. Partnership working with statutory agencies, local community and political representatives was also a priority. Key

players of The Brickworks Team included those from Community Development, Housing Management, Property Services and Development.

A strong community network exists in this particular area of South Belfast. There was an intense focus on the development and initially there was hostility towards Choice staff as residents and the wider community were frustrated following a number of serious incidents.

Choice committed significant resources to working on an interagency basis to address the issues. This included fortnightly meetings attended by Choice CEO, managers, and housing staff together with key stakeholders including political representatives and PSNI. Residents could see that matters were being addressed and each resident received a weekly check-in to discuss issues and ascertain if any support or help was needed.

Additionally, intensive tenant engagement was provided by the Community Development Team focusing on building relationships with tenants. Tenant meetings were held and community relations events were hosted to bring neighbours together.

Choice facilitated a community information event for tenants at the scheme. Following an area clean up by Choice staff, local service providers set up stalls in the carpark area of the scheme to enable tenants to directly engage with them, find out more about local opportunities for tenants and families, and register for services and initiatives that were being delivered in the area. This was a hugely successful event and many families with hidden vulnerabilities are now receiving much needed support as a consequence.

Choice is pleased that the scheme is now a positive place to live where residents are enjoying getting to know each other and are actively engaged in the wider community.

Collette - Brickworks tenant:

"Choice have proved themselves to be excellent landlords offering fantastic accommodation - better than in the private sector. They have been very responsive in helping to get any of our issues addressed straight away. The teams within Choice work together to address problems and make The Brickworks a better place to live."

Michael George CRJ Ireland:

"The Brickworks had its fair share of early day issues and some quite serious ASB problems. The Choice team made themselves available and provided solutions. This is a model of good practice CRJI are pleased to be a part of. Finding solutions, with the community and the residents."

Maintaining dialogue with community sector organisations, stakeholder bodies and political representatives to build trusting relationships is vital in the process of creating safe and stable communities.

Gerard Rice, LORAG:

"LORAG welcomed the opportunity to work closely with Choice to support the many families at The Brickworks. Given the complexities of allocating and moving into a new home at the height of a pandemic this was no easy task for all those involved."

The cross departmental team worked hard in difficult and sensitive conditions to foster good relations and deliver a thriving community.

## Outcomes and achievements

The learnings from the Brickworks has informed Choice's approach to new schemes, on a practical and strategic level.

Strategically the Brickworks Team have demonstrated the importance of continued dialogue throughout the development of each phase of new schemes, the team showed that sustained effort to cement relationships with key stakeholders will lead to improved partnerships.

Intense housing management immediately following handover of a new build scheme will now be supported by intensive interagency partnerships supporting community development and tenant engagement initiatives. This will also facilitate early

identification of support needs of tenants and allow the appropriate partnerships with local community services to be developed. Choice acknowledge that this approach is resource intensive and have committed to provide sufficient resources to accommodate this approach.

Claire Conlon, Brickworks tenant:

"I have been blown away by the kindness of the team. With help and support from Choice, we at the Brickworks have managed to put together a committee that works together with Choice to provide the best services and support possible."

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# Clann Housing Team

## Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Clann's National Housing Team of 14 Scheme Managers and 1 Male Support Worker manage housing and organise support services to 800 residents on 23 age friendly housing schemes across the country. Pre Covid, Scheme Managers organised a regular programme of social activities and events with residents ranging from weekly coffee mornings to trips

out to Bunratty Castle, Fota Wildlife Park and Muckross House. Social events were part of daily life for many residents helping them to stay connected with each other and get involved. The Covid Pandemic took Scheme Managers off the schemes to working from home. Resident loneliness and isolation increased as they were asked to 'cocoon'. Family and friends weren't around anymore, no one was calling in and there were no activities or events to go to.

The Housing Team adapted and responded quickly to these changed circumstances staying in touch daily on the phone with residents who wanted to chat. Many residents live alone. They welcomed staff checking in with them. The team met to discuss how they could take activities and events on line whilst reaching a largest number of residents possible. They contacted residents to find out if they had devices which supported Zoom, they gathered information from residents on the type of events they would be interested in, they supported residents to get Zoom accounts set up and showed them how to use them

enlisting the help of adult family and grandchildren. The team designed a wide-ranging programme of events. Zoom links for each resident were sent to every residents mobile phone encouraging them to come along. Residents came forward to lead sessions on art and sculpture appreciation, photography and live monthly music sessions.

The team led sessions themselves demonstrating previously unknown talents for presenting online. They researched what was available and collaborated with organisations national to run activities and information sessions. Online events included: Chair yoga; baking, cooking demonstrations; Four seasons photo competition; recycling and health and wellbeing talks. Resident led activities included live music sessions;

resident photography, 'how Irish history has been represented through art: art appreciation. Desert Island Discs was very popular - 5 Clann residents choose either one recording each (usually music, but not always) a book or a luxury item that they would take if they were to be cast away on a desert island, whilst discussing their lives and the reasons for their choices.

The work done by the Clann Team over the past 18 months has been exceptional - They have gone "several extra miles" to continue to deliver an effective, supportive housing management service, keep themselves and residents safe as well as continue to build and enhance sustainable communities during a very challenging time.

## Outcomes and achievements

**Tackled loneliness and Isolation** - The team helped residents cope with loneliness associated with the pandemic with regular phone calls and a range of social events and activities. These connections were important for residents wellbeing. They had anxieties and fears for the future. People had lost their nerve. They needed small reassurances. Residents simply wanted to chat with Scheme Managers, other resident or be distracted for a short time from the pandemic. Many connections were made by Clann residents in different parts of the country through the social events programme.

**Built Up Team Morale** - Scheme managers were frustrated that they were unable to work on schemes. It's a hands on job. Online events were good for the teams morale. They were reassuring residents and keeping peoples spirits high.

**Opportunities to Share and Connect** - Residents

had opportunities to share their ideas, talents, life experience with many other people beyond their regular circle of friends and contacts. The team wanted a platform for residents to have talents and experience acknowledged. The sessions promoted value and self worth.

**Partnership Working** - The team have made new connections and partnerships nationally. They can offer a broader programme of activities in the future as some events were not available locally.

**Create a platform to build on for future Art & Social Engagement Projects** - Due to interventions made by the Clann Housing Team, there is a huge appetite for more art projects and social engagement activities. Staff have future proofed schemes should more lockdowns take place by installing Smart TVs in communal lounges for residents who do not have a device or find it difficult to use Zoom.

# Mimosa Court Derry

## EHA Group



### Statement of support

EHA Group recently completed a much needed and well received social housing scheme at Mimosa Court, Derry. Constructed for South Ulster Housing association, the new homes began hand over in

August 2021, 6 months ahead of schedule. This was achieved despite many COVID 19 restrictions, labour shortages and highly limited supply chain availability due to Brexit.

The scheme is located off the Strabane Old Road on the Waterside area of Derry. Mimosa Court consists of 9 one bedroom and 18 two-bedroom apartments, along with associated works and landscaping.

The project team at Mimosa Court delivered an outstanding contribution to EHA Group's delivery of organisational objectives.

Stated on the EHA Group website homepage;

"As a fast growing, full-service UK Construction firm, we are dedicated to delivering the highest quality projects, built on time and to budget."

The commitment, steadfast hard work and management on site ensured the scheme was delivered an exceptional 6 months ahead of schedule.

Therefore, not only did the team achieve the company objective of delivering on time, but exceeded the objective and client expectations by completing much earlier than anticipated.

This accomplishment was despite several exceptional issues through the build. The project was initially delayed due to the immediate COVID 19 lock down. When the team were able to continue, detailed site management was implemented to ensure all government regulations were adhered to. The site team were managed throughout each day so all social distancing was maintained when working and when at breaks at the workforce canteen etc.

Furthermore there were several labour shortages throughout the scheme as well as numerous procurement obstacles due to Brexit. Availability was a huge issue for the supply chain and required innovative thinking to procure the required supplies. This was due to the committed and diligent effort of EHA's Procurement Manager and Quantity Surveyor team.

Their solution focused attitude enabled EHA to continue work and deliver these much needed homes ahead of programme, housing families a lot sooner than predicted.

As also stated on the EHA homepage, working relationships are a priority. Subsequently EHA has developed lasting, multi-project relationships. The team at Mimosa Court developed excellent working relationships with the client South Ulster Housing, the design team at McGirr Architects and the labour and materials supply chain. Their effective management ensured best utilisation of suppliers and sub-contractors to achieve an early completion

date, enabling the organisation to achieve and exceed organisational objectives.

Mark Gilmore, Construction Director Ireland EHA Group said: "We have been at the forefront of social housing construction in recent years and pride ourselves on delivering high quality schemes on programme and to budget. The team at Mimosa completed their scheme in a timeframe that is virtually unheard of in the construction industry. It is a real testament to the contribution of each member to work collaboratively together."

During the build EHA collaborated with Peaball Creatives - an Art, Design & Facilitation group over the most recent COVID 19 lock down in 2021 with a local youth club in the Gobnascale area, funded by The Playhouse Theatre. The young people united to produce creative art work empowering young people to give other young people advice on our site hoarding which EHA was delighted to install along the boundary of the construction site.

The skilled work of the site team at Mimosa Court also enabled the site to achieve Performance Beyond Compliance in Considerate Constructor Scheme (CCS) Site Inspections, highlighting additional measures EHA implement well beyond minimum requirements of the scheme's Construction Code of Practice. This exhaustively covers; Care about Appearance, Respecting the Community, Protecting and enhancing the Environment, Caring about Safety and Valuing the Workforce.

## Outcomes and achievements

The team demonstrated competent management, efficiency and collaboration, delivering 24 weeks ahead of programme. This outcome had a cascading affect, allowing local families to be housed sooner and further improved the reputation of the client in the local community. EHA's a commitment to community relations and neighbourliness created a positive impact in the local area also for the construction industry as a whole from sub-contractor to client.

Being an exhibition space for young people to express their creativity will hopefully have a lasting impact on youth in the area.

Finally, James Wright - Head of Development Arbour/

South Ulster Housing said; "Arbour Housing are extremely grateful to the hard work of EHA Group who have completed 27 homes for our new Tenants, completed six months ahead of schedule.

EHA worked extremely well in partnership with us, providing great communication and management of a scheme during difficult times with many potential setbacks affecting the industry as a whole. Despite this the team were determined to hand over as soon as viable and 27 families are very happily housed in excellent lifetime homes. We have received great feedback from new tenants and neighbours, happy to have excellent new homes for the community."

# Supporting People Team

## Housing Executive



### Statement of support

Demonstrate what makes the Team outstanding

The Supporting People (SP) Team administers a complex regional grant-funding programme which enables organisations across community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors to deliver housing-related support to vulnerable people, to assist them to live more independently.

Over 19,000 people are supported each year through over 850 housing support services delivered by 84 Service Providers, within 15 primary client groups across four Themes of:

- Disability & Mental Health
- Homelessness
- Older People
- Young People

The programme is delivered through short-term accommodation-based services providing support for people in housing need; long-term accommodation-based services assisting people to maintain their tenancies (services range from providing low-level to greater levels of support based on need); and support delivered into people's homes through short-term Floating Support or longer-term Peripatetic Support for more enduring needs.

Evidence of a difficult task tackled well together

Remote working posed a new set of challenges that were overcome by the agility, perseverance and resilience of the SP Team and their ability to respond swiftly to working from home. An SP COVID-19 Contingency Plan was quickly developed and shared with providers and partners to ensure business continuity. SP adapted continuously to the rapidly evolving pandemic, mitigating the high risk posed to over 19,000 vulnerable individuals. SP responded proactively by engaging and regularly sharing relevant guidance with over 850 providers. Further support was provided through the COVID-19 Ring Around and the provision of 1,811,892 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all providers to

ensure safety of staff and service users; this included face shields, aprons, gloves, face masks and hand sanitiser. Regular updates were provided on SP's COVID-19 Contingency Plan through the quarterly SP Bulletin and information from the Health Trusts. The contingency plan also required providers to send frequent information to SP regarding the number of clients self-isolating, testing positive and passing away due to COVID-19 and the number of units currently vacant in order to maximise occupancy.

SP communicated with providers regarding the importance of their Business Continuity Plans in maintaining service delivery. Contract management activity (such as Quality Monitoring Tool and reporting) was suspended in March 2020 to reduce the administrative burden on providers and provide flexibility in their support of vulnerable individuals.

In line with the SP COVID-19 Contingency Plan a revised contract management approach operating a remote regime was adopted in Quarter 2 of 2020, and this has continued throughout 2020/21.

The SP Finance Team made vouching payments to allow for adaptations in service delivery whilst also securing additional funding to ease COVID-19-related pressures for providers.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic SP achieved significant progress in 2020/21, with completion of the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) and redrafting of the Supporting People Three Year Strategic Plan and COVID-19 Recovery Plan 2021-2024.

Of the eight Key Findings at Thematic Level, The SNA identified that; COVID-19 has impacted on how Older People services are delivered now and in the future, and that domestic violence is an area of increasing future need and was exacerbated over the COVID-19 period. It has also highlighted the need for a move from communal to more dispersed support models for Older People services as a result of COVID-19. The Strategy has been re-drafted through the perspective of a COVID-19 lens, with the addition of a COVID-19 Recovery Plan; reflecting the findings of the SNA.

Improvement of performance

SP provided an additional £11.563m to support providers facing additional costs due to COVID-19. Eligible expenditure included; Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), staffing costs, cleaning and infection prevention and short-term scheme reconfiguration. Supporting People-restricted reserves held by providers were also released to support on COVID-19-related pressures.

## Outcomes and achievements

The SP Team's response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed over 19,000 of the most vulnerable people in society to continue to be supported, through our constant engagement and flexibility with and support of over 850 services and our innovative adaptations to the way we work.

SP enabled providers to develop innovative digital support solutions and methods of communication e.g. virtual classes and befriending schemes through the Provider Innovation Fund (PIF), a competitive fund of approximately £0.5m. The PIF has enabled providers to excel in their response to COVID-19 and help ensure service continuity in the delivery of quality support to service users throughout the pandemic.

SP funding was ring-fenced for providers solely funded by SP to assist them to recruit new staff members on a temporary basis, to ensure appropriate staffing levels in services in the midst of the pandemic.

Another prominent achievement for the Team is the development of the SP Board 'Dashboard' to capture in real time the COVID-related information collated from the providers (i.e. expenditure, voids, positive cases and deaths). The Board Dashboard has enhanced information-sharing and monitoring, and is frequently presented to our stakeholders at various forums, including the Housing Executive Board.

# Homelessness Prevention Team

## Simon Community NI



### Statement of support

As Northern Ireland's largest and longest established homelessness services organisation, in 2020-2021, Simon Community responded to over 16,500 calls to its Freephone support line from people looking to access one of the 464 beds that the charity operates daily across 25 accommodation projects.

With demand for the charity's accommodation services witnessing a 20% increase in referrals during 2020-21, accommodation projects operating at a 96% capacity, and clients remaining for an average of 157 days due to lack of move on options, ways were examined to improve customer service and housing choices by bringing together a specialist team able to prioritise those most in need.

In early 2021, work began at the charity to create a Housing Prevention Team that amalgamated the existing and successful Central Access Point helpline team, Housing Options Made Easy prevention team and Volunteer team.

Providing a holistic approach to the prevention of homelessness at different stages of a client's journey, the Homelessness Prevention Team works across three key operational strands:

1. Partnership Working - building on the advancements made in previous years, an improved working relationship between the Housing Executive's Housing Solutions & Support Teams and the Homelessness Prevention Team had the aim of further reducing the barriers people experience when accessing temporary accommodation. Meanwhile, the delivery of housing clinics and shared housing plans would reduce the length of stay for a person residing in temporary accommodation projects.
2. Access to Private Rental Sector - the charity's existing Tenancy Deposit Scheme has now developed to accept referrals across Northern Ireland from both Simon Community and external organisations including the Housing Executive, Housing Rights, and a range of homelessness charities. Assisting people to overcome barriers to private renting, the Homelessness Prevention Team provides packages of support, financial deposit assistance, negotiation with landlords, advice on housing rights and assistance finding suitable accommodation to individuals who are ready to live independently.
3. Tenancy Sustainment - the team, assisted by Move on Coach volunteers, supports people in their first three months of living independently to help reduce the likelihood of someone losing a tenancy. Understanding the importance of the transition period, clients across Belfast, Lisburn, North Down and the North-West are supported in the community to manage a home, set up utilities, connect with local amenities and support services, reduce feelings of loneliness and worry, and promote the importance of physical and social wellbeing.

"I enjoy my role because I am helping people move on from temporary accommodation into a home. This means not only are we getting those able to live independently a home, but it is also freeing up an

emergency bed in our hostels for someone else in need. Someone who is rough sleeping or trying to flee domestic violence and has nowhere else to go." - Melissa Mallon, Housing Solutions Coordinator

The Homelessness Prevention Team, working in partnership with Simon Community colleagues and the wider homelessness sector, delivers a person-centred approach to homelessness support that contributes to several local and national strategies, including:

- The Housing Executive's 'Supporting People Plan 2019-2020' and 'Strategic Intent 2020-2022' by prioritising access to emergency accommodation for the most vulnerable.

- The Stormont 'Programme for Government 2016-2021' by providing support at the point of crisis and providing better outcomes for people who are homeless.
- The Welfare Reform Act for Northern Ireland by working with clients to educate on benefits reform, maximise personal income and increase access to financial assistance all with the aim of sustaining tenancies.
- The UK Government's 'Homes for Health' strategies by interacting with individuals and delivering support that will 'Make Every Contact Count' and provide positive changes to physical and mental health and wellbeing.

## Outcomes and achievements

Positive outcomes in the year include:

- 15,993 calls to homeless support line
- 1,187 clients supported to access accommodation
- 231 clients supported to maintain accommodation placement
- 174 clients supported to access health/social care services, addiction support or community amenities
- 119 clients supported with over £56,000 in private rental deposits
- 115 clients supported to access benefits or financial assistance
- 76 client housing clinics delivered to provide move on options
- 14 clients supported to enhance employability

- 10 volunteer Move on Coaches matched with clients
- 5 Simon Community private rental homes leased to clients
- Team profiled in homelessness and recruitment campaigns for Northern Ireland Social Care Council and Homeless Connect.

"When I phoned Simon Community, I explained my situation to them, and they got me a room. It was somewhere safe for me to stay until I sorted my situation out. When I was ready, the team offered to help me with a deposit so I could move into my own flat and did everything they possibly could to help including filling out forms. I'm back working again now and living in my own home, but I honestly feel that without Simon Community my story could be very different." - Client

# WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

This award commends collaboration between organisations or groups that achieve the best possible outcomes.

## Improving financial well-being, social inclusion and tenant safety in Skeoge

**Lead organisation:** Apex Housing Association

**Partner organisations:** Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (GSAP)



### Statement of support

Skeoge Community Hub has become the heart of the community in the Skeoge area of Derry~Londonderry; highlighting the effective partnership developed by Apex Housing Association (Apex) and the Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (GSAP).

Apex completed Skeoge Community Hub in 2019 and applied for joint funding from Nationwide's Community Grant Fund to employ a GSAP Community and Housing worker based exclusively in the hub. This has given Apex tenants the opportunity to develop relationships and improve their well-being in ways that would not have been possible without this innovative initiative.

With the completion of 760 new homes in this area, Skeoge Community Hub provides an invaluable service to the community. Apex has worked in partnership with GSAP to develop and deliver a package of activities, programmes and outreach to benefit those living in the local area; focused on financial well-being, social inclusion and tenant safety.

The weekly welfare advice clinic at Skeoge Community Hub is hosted by Apex's Welfare Advice Officer, Clodagh Holland, every Thursday morning for appointments and drop in advice. The clinic's ethos is to provide a holistic approach to money, budgeting and benefits advice for local tenants. Many of the people Clodagh assists have complex needs or vulnerabilities and very often have literacy problems. They include young single mothers, tenants with alcohol and addiction issues as well as older tenants.

A unique advantage of the clinic is that Clodagh can help tenants by working directly from the heart of their new community to help get them off to the best possible start; ensuring their benefits are in place and all claims are made. Clodagh also assists vulnerable tenants to apply for grants or charitable support to furnish their homes with essential items. Clodagh's advice helps alleviate tenants' worries so they can gain confidence with their finances, which in turn can benefit their overall mental health and well-being.

Another unique aspect of the welfare advice clinic is the fact that advice is delivered face-to-face. For more vulnerable tenants, remote delivery of advice is not always something they can manage. Having the option to see Clodagh face-to-face, a short walk away from their home, has greatly improved service delivery, helping tenants to engage and ensuring tenancies are sustained.

The clinic also provides tenants with the opportunity to get involved in their local community. In addition to the welfare advice clinic, the hub runs essential skills workshops, a health and well-being clinic and a number of classes for both adults and children. Tenants are signposted to other services where appropriate to ensure a holistic approach is met to improve the overall well-being of the tenant.

'Café Links', the community café in the hub, helps tenants make connections in their local community,

working to eliminate social isolation and ultimately improve the well-being of the whole community. It's also a great space for tenants to hear about the welfare advice clinic and even drop in for advice whilst they are in the hub.

Tenant testimonial

"As a new Apex tenant, I was very apprehensive about the changes that were occurring to my benefits

as a result of my change of address. Being new to the Skeoge area, I didn't know where to turn for help. I attended the welfare advice clinic at Skeoge Community Hub which is just a short walk from my home. Clodagh offered a kind listening ear and was able to help me with all the changes and new applications for benefits I needed to make. I went to the appointment feeling very anxious but left feeling at ease." Anonymous

**Outcomes and achievements**

Skeoge welfare advice clinic has secured grants of around £4,300 and made tenants better off financially by an estimated £22,000 per year through a variety of benefits claims.

With the completion of 760 new homes in this area, Skeoge Community Hub provides an invaluable service to the community. Activities provided include yoga, baby sensory, youth outreach programmes and dance classes; with the community café providing an excellent space for social interaction.

In response to vandalism at play parks in the area, Apex's tenant participation team facilitated meetings in Skeoge Community Hub with tenants and the PSNI neighbourhood team to jointly develop solutions.

Apex and GSAP successfully delivered a road safety project and fire safety workshop in collaboration with the PSNI and NI Fire & Rescue Service with the aim of keeping local children safe. This involved road calming signage and a leaflet drop to raise awareness.

"It's very beneficial for the community to come together and do something positive. Before becoming tenants, our understanding of social housing was you moved in, you paid your rent and there was no other connection. I love the way Apex and Skeoge Community Hub staff are supporting the community." Eilis Gill (Skeoge area tenant)



# St. Joseph's Court Staying Connected

**Lead organisation: Clann Housing**

**Partner organisations: Health Service Executive, Galway County Council, GRETB - Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board, Food Cloud, Active Retirement Group, St Vincent De Paul, FAS, meals on wheels, TUS, GRD - Galway Rural Development, Health Professionals, Local national and secondary schools**



## Statement of support

Clann Housing in St. Joseph's Court, Clifden is a dedicated age friendly housing scheme which comprises of 43 fully self-contained apartments and is open since 2004 and provides safe, permanent, and secure housing for older people who many have left insecure and challenging circumstances. There is a communal social room for indoor activities and social events, a gym, library, computer suite and smaller activity rooms along with an outside shed. All facilities are available to the tenants.

A scheme manager oversees the usual activities and services that one would expect to find in such a location. However, over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in other activities besides the general maintenance and welfare of the building and its tenants and this, in no small part, is due to the involvement of other organisations mainly the HSE, Community Employment Schemes and the GRETB (Galway Roscommon Education & Training Board).

In partnership with FAS and TUS which provide employees on community employment schemes who facilitate projects, events and befriending activities. Employees gain work experience and training which enables them to find permanent employment and tenants and Clann staff benefit from the assistance and enthusiasm that they bring to their roles.

St Joseph's Court also receives annual funding from the HSE which funds the provision of the services of a Male Support Worker who assists and advocates for older male tenants, assisting them to engage with local services, sustaining tenancies, encouraging and facilitating participation in events and befriending them. HSE funding also enables the provision of regular hairdressing, reflexology and chiropody services. These are always well attended and really boost the wellbeing of residents.

For the past few years, the GRETB has been facilitating a Computer Literacy class in partnership with Clann

Housing through the Moycullen Literacy Outreach Scheme. Clann hosts these classes in a dedicated computer room located in St Joseph's Court Age Friendly housing complex in Clifden. This is very accessible for the residents and provides a safe and familiar environment within their own housing scheme equipped with laptops supplied by Clann and iPads from the GRETB.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital skills have become increasingly important in staying connected with family and accessing services and information online. According to the 10-year Government Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy (2021), 47% of Irish adults lack basic digital skills, and this is a particular issue among older adults, especially in rural areas. GRETB Adult Basic Education Service and Clann Age-Friendly Housing in Clifden have sought to address this issue of digital exclusion through a partnership approach. The GRETB Adult Basic Education tutor facilitates Digital Literacy classes onsite for Clann.

The classes have been very effective in mitigating against social isolation during the pandemic as the residents acquired the skills and confidence to safely stay connected with family and friends online. This partnership has been a great success as it allows the learners to explore their digital needs and to set their own goals in a supportive, relaxed and familiar environment.

The class has continued to go in a direction of constant development and learning. The residents who attended are from a variety of backgrounds, but all have the same goal and that is to learn about computers. The weekly class is directed by the wants and needs of the residents and the teacher facilitates this journey.

While this class is currently only available to a small number of learners in a specific context at St Joseph's Court, it is an extraordinarily successful model that we would hope to replicate in other locations within Clann and in West Galway. The methodology and implementation of the Clann class reflects best practice in adult literacy provision as it;

- Addresses the everyday, functional digital literacy needs of the learners.
- Is an active and expressive process as it allows the learners to explore their digital needs and to set their own goals.
- Promotes the philosophy of lifelong learning in a supportive, relaxed, and friendly environment.
- Promotes personal development within a context of social action and interaction.

The residents have embraced the challenge of technology and have upskilled with a wide variety of skills including:

- Mobile Phones
- Facebook and Facetime
- email

- WhatsApp
- Zoom
- Shopping - including Supervalu online; ensuring their groceries are delivered to their apartments
- using PayPal and banking online

These are just examples of the topics that the residents have asked the tutor to facilitate in class. Each lesson is tailored for the individual needs of each learner, so teaching plans are personalised for the learner who may have aims in learning for personal development and this changes regularly.

### Outcomes and achievements

Since returning post Covid, the residents have started online accredited digital courses with NALA.

Also, as a result of Covid we now have a monthly group called "ITEA and Technology" which involves the home baking of a different cake for each meeting, drinking lots of tea and we pick a topic and cover all aspects of that topic. So far, we have had our first group which was a general Introduction to Technology. The second event focussed on mobile phone usage, this will be followed by a third event on phones as we have lots to cover and cake to eat!

Overall, this programme has been a great success and Clann and the GRETB has risen to the challenge and adapted classes in response to the functional needs of the residents of Clann. This amazing group of learners have embraced technology and adapted to the changing social climate despite the speed of change in technology and the restrictions of Covid-19. As a result of Clann's partnership with these agencies we were able to gain a total of 95 hours per week of support from Community Employment Schemes and through successful grant applications over the past two years we gained a total of €43,370 funding support.

While the Covid-19 restrictions have meant that art and hobby classes and spiritual gatherings previously attended by the residents have ceased, the tutor has

supported them in continuing with these aspects of their lives through:

- Creating gifts for family and friends using Apps (PhotoBox) with old photos, documents, and recipes to create new and personalised gifts.
- Ordering materials online for crafts and hobbies
- Accessing the weekly ZOOM local and national events for residents some of which were hosted by the Clann group in Clifden.

Some residents are using technology

- to learn new skills in sewing by downloading patterns and buying fabrics online
- Using YouTube for listening to music and watching cookery demonstrations.
- Lighting of candles, listening to and watching mass online.

These classes have given people the opportunity to come together and socialise in a different and new format giving them social interaction and tackled isolation in a very lonely & frightening time. It has given people a purpose in their daily lives and helped them immensely in staying connected to family and friends. It has helped people deal with issues like depression and loneliness by being connected to the wider community.

## Direct Labour Organisation

Lead organisation: Housing Executive



**Partner organisations: Choice, Alpha, Apex, Abbeyfield and Wesley, North Belfast Housing, Radius, Clanmill, First Housing, Salvation Army, Simon Community, Positive Futures, Rosemount House, Praxis Care, Women's Aid, Depaul, Farset International, Threshold, Morning Star House, Leonard**

**Cheshire Disability, Inspire-Mental Health, Mainstay DRP, Larne community centre, Camphill community, Harmoni, Link Family and community centre, North West Methodist Mission, Council for the Homeless NI and Homecare Independent Living**

### Statement of support

At the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive undertook the mammoth task of providing safe temporary accommodation for the many homeless in Northern Ireland. This was accomplished by utilising 100 void properties which were between tenancies across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Direct Labour Organisation worked in collaboration with Housing Services and various outside agencies to complete this task and provide a safe haven for the homeless during the Covid pandemic.

The role of the Direct Labour Organisation was multi-faceted. Their first task was to work with the NIHE Housing Services and make the properties safe and ready for the temporary tenants by carrying out immediate repairs. This was no easy task as the country was on lock down with many basic services unavailable. When the properties were ready and allocated to the homeless the Direct Labour Organisation operatives worked in conjunction with CHNI (Council for the Homeless NI - now Homeless Connect) to provide each household with a 'starter pack' containing the basics they needed to set up home e.g. cutlery, crockery, bedding, microwaves etc. These starter packs were provided by the Council for the Homeless and delivered to each property directly in order for them to have the basics to function. At the same time operatives from the Direct Labour Organisation collaborated with Homecare Independent Living, which is a support service who deliver support programmes across the Belfast and Southern Trust areas to prevent Homelessness, to collect furniture packs and deliver it to the properties then build the furniture for the new temporary tenants. They also delivered white goods and went the extra mile in installing these and wiring cookers. When any of these items needed replaced the Direct Labour Organisation also promptly delivered replacements and collected the unsuitable items for the householders.

Whilst this sounds like a simple process there was a lot of planning and programming of jobs involved. The DLO worked closely with NIHE Housing Services, Homecare, CHNI (Now Homeless Connect) and local

offices to arrange access to the properties and to coordinate deliveries to ensure the vulnerable clients were housed as quickly and easily as possible. All in all they furnished 100 properties for homeless placements.

The DLO also provide assistance to allow staff to requisition Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) around COVID19 requirements, this has involved the provision of personal hygiene packs and delivering supplies of PPE for NIHE staff. In addition the DLO supplied Personal Protection Equipment to vulnerable groups through the Supporting People structure. They were responsible for procuring the PPE, warehousing it and then distributing it to our partner organisations. This was an invaluable service which required much organisation and working in partnership with both internal and external stakeholders.

In addition to their day to day business and working collaboratively with our external partners the Direct Labour Organisation work daily to keep the regional NIHE offices safe, by installing mechanisms to make staff feel it's safe to return to their office base. Working with the Facilities and Health & Safety team and together with the wider business, installing Perspex screens, free standing and wall mounted hand sanitiser dispensers etc. to ensure our offices and public counter areas are safe spaces for our staff and customers alike.

## Outcomes and achievements

Whilst providing the service to rehouse the homeless into 100 void properties temporarily the Direct Labour Organisation continue to work closely with Housing Services to provide essential repair and maintenance services to the tenants in their area during the whole of the pandemic. Initially with a 24/7 emergency make safe service, our DLO continue to provide call outs to the homes of many, sometimes risking their own personal safety yet ensuring they follow guidance

and precautions to protect their own health as well as our tenants. They have found new ways of working by moving towards a more distributed workforce that's increasingly remote, yet continuing to provide a service to tenants in need. Whilst this has been a big change and challenge, the DLO have demonstrated a clear ability to deliver a vital and central role to our community whilst faced with adversity.

# Comhar Consortium Public Private Partnership Model

**Lead organisations: Oaklee Housing and Choice Services Ltd**

**Partner organisations: McQuarrie, Sisk, WSP and Choice Housing**



## Statement of support

Over the last 24 months the Comhar consortium (McQuarrie, Sisk, WSP, Choice Services, Oaklee Housing and Choice Housing) working collaboratively with the NDFA, Dublin City Council and four other Local authorities (Kildare, Louth, Wicklow & South Dublin) have developed six new communities well integrated into their environment, and delivered 534 new affordable rented homes from one bedroom flats to family houses.

In so doing it has proved the innovative SHB1 Public Private Partnership model for new social housing can deliver a great product provided the partners are right and the attitude remains focussed around doing the right thing to get the best outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

The homes, including a mixture of apartments and family houses, are built to high energy efficiency standards, with triple glazing, modern central heating, sedum rooves on the apartments and solar panels as standards. All homes meet the A rating of the Irish energy rating system.

Time and money spent on thinking through design considered just how the buildings in use would be able to create communities. It wasn't simply an exercise to achieve the numbers on site but instead how in practice will people in these communities interact creating spaces that work for residents, the

wider community and demonstrate a commitment for the longer term rather than just for the immediate. The commitment was for the longer term 25 years minimum.

So integral to the design and thinking was the needs of the wider community with play areas, community and sports facilities that work with the size of each of the developments which vary from 50 to 150 homes. And with a commitment to rehouse people from diverse backgrounds and some in need of support or entering permanent homes from being homeless.

The successful consortium brought together different skills, funding knowledge of the PPP/ PFI market, a trusted developer/ contractor, an FM services company operating as a subsidiary of a Housing Association and a Republic of Ireland Approved Housing Body delivering tenancy management. A great mix of the commercial and the social. And whilst the numbers had to be right the commitment was very much focussed on getting the product right both in development and then in services delivery, right for residents, the client and the local communities.

The homes were delivered in the most challenging of times during the Covid pandemic but flexibility was demonstrated by all parties, movement of delivery dates and the introduction of phased handovers to enable residents to start occupying and maintain social distancing saw occupation start in early summer 2020. The first homes were occupied in June 2020 and three of the six sites were fully occupied by Christmas with the final three sites coming into management from January to September 2021.

Community development was an intrinsic part of the offer and in Covid times we found innovative ways of arranging meetings through the use of Zoom to gain feedback and to get people to know others within their development. As things started to open up we combined digital meetings with an interactive and socially distanced events programme based outdoors. Testament to staff and residents willing to meet in the open and still chilly spring air!

Weekly construction and management meetings kept the projects focused as the consortium worked through delivery in a professional but friendly manner.

## Outcomes and achievements

534 new homes delivered for the first time in Ireland through a PPP model of funding based on a 25 year contract. PPP now signalled as a key route to future funding of further social housing in Ireland.

A thriving network of resident meetings in place with one Resident Association formally constituted and more on the way. One resident attended a senior Managerial Away day with Sisk and gave a powerful presentation on just what a difference at an individual level having her home had made to her and her family's life.

Positive outcomes from this partnership include:

- Extremely high service standards and response times.
- Good working relationships with all five Councils who see the new homes as integral to meeting their housing needs locally.
- Energy efficient warm homes that fit to their surroundings.

Most importantly satisfied residents. In June our first annual survey of residents returned the following impressive results 96% satisfaction with their home, 96% satisfaction with the repair service and 97% satisfaction with housing management.

# Brilliant Resilience Project

**Lead organisation: Rural Housing Association**

**Partner organisation: Community Arts Partnership**



## Statement of support

The Brilliant Resilience Project is a partnership between Rural Housing Association and Community Arts Partnership, funded by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Prince's Countryside Fund to "renew and inspire access to opportunity through creative skills training in photography, storytelling and crochet in Fermanagh." The project was shaped in response to the needs of particularly the older generation, with Fermanagh residents expressing a need to reconnect with others in their community following a long period of lockdown.

To ensure best practice, when designing this community focused project Rural Housing Association and Community Arts Partnership conducted extensive consultations with a range of Fermanagh based groups, meeting with older persons groups, community organisations, Rural Housing Association tenants and supported housing residents. It was the voices of local Fermanagh people from a diverse range of backgrounds that helped shape the project from the outset. Community consultations indicated that a project focused on reconnecting local people from across Fermanagh using a variety of arts-based activities could help address some of the social

isolation and loneliness that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but through which the stories and experiences of those who had lived through the pandemic could also be captured.

The project commenced in Spring 2021 during a COVID-19 lockdown and would continue throughout the summer of 2021, with a final exhibition in Autumn 2021. The changing restrictions required an innovative and flexible approach to project delivery, with the start of the project focusing on the delivery of 100 arts packs to the homes of older people, aimed at combating the impact of social isolation and loneliness. Alongside these art packs the project captured 100 doorsteps portraits of local Fermanagh people in the midst of a global pandemic, images which tell the tale of the resilience and strength of Fermanagh residents.

In June 2021, the project switched to face-to-face delivery (socially distanced), with the implementation of a range of arts-based projects including photography classes, storytelling sessions and crochet classes for older adults across Fermanagh. Connecting the process of 'creative making' with 'wellbeing' and in particular resilience was at the core of the project. By working together with local community organisations and older persons groups operating across Fermanagh, Rural Housing Association and Community Arts Partnership were able to deliver a partnership project that helped improve the wellbeing of residents across Fermanagh, by reconnecting older people who had been through a long and at times lonely period of lockdown.

A final exhibition entitled "The Good Room" took place in September 2021, it was a celebration of the resilience of Fermanagh people and celebrated stories, images and artwork created by older people from across Fermanagh, helping participants feel a sense of achievement as their work was showcased on a public stage.

Feedback gathered from project participants reflects the important role the project played in helping improve participants' wellbeing following the COVID-19 lockdown:

"This was not just a skills enhancing course but a restorative experience. Project staff brought encouraging words at the start of each day. Some of these applied to my personal circumstances and gave me a sense of being cared for and understood."

"Each participant brought their own skills, ideas and attitudes, which they freely and generously shared with others. Coming from different backgrounds and with different abilities, the chat among us was always friendly and informative. This reinforced the fact that when we meet together it is for our mutual benefit and we create a new community where difference is positive, and trust and respect can grow. This course provided the environment for this to be progressed."

## Outcomes and achievements

Key project outcomes include:

- Over 100 older people participated in face-to-face crochet, photography, or storytelling classes throughout the course of the project, helping reconnect Fermanagh people following a very challenging period of lockdown.
- In partnership with Belfast Exposed, Rural Housing Association and Community Arts Partnership captured over 100 doorstep portraits of local people during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the strength and resilience of Fermanagh people.
- The Brilliant Resilience Exhibition brought together local residents from across Fermanagh to celebrate the stories, skills and heritage of Fermanagh residents.

Surveys conducted by Rural Housing Association among a cross-section of participants indicate that after taking part in the project:

- 93% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they learned a new skill as a result of taking part in the project;
- 100% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt a greater sense of pride in their area after taking part in the project;
- 96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt more resilient after taking part in the project;
- 100% of participants surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that the project helped them feel less isolated through their participation in social activities after lockdown.

# Cost Rental Pilot Project: Enniskerry Road

**Lead organisation: Tuath Housing**

**Partner organisations: Respond Housing and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council**



## Statement of support

Working in partnership with a range of stakeholders has been the key to delivering this innovative 155 home development at Enniskerry Road, Stepside, Dublin 18. Located in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council area, the 155-home development is ideally situated close to a wide range of amenities, public facilities, schools, health services, local community and sports groups. The project includes 50 Cost Rental homes and 105 social homes which

will be managed by both Respond and Tuath Housing Associations. The homes have been delivered for Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council on land provided by the Housing Agency under the land aggregation scheme. The project is the result of an innovative collaboration between Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, the Housing Agency, Respond and Tuath Housing Associations. Funding for the development is being provided through the Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

This groundbreaking development was the first Cost Rental pilot project to go on site under the Irish Government's Rebuilding Ireland strategy offering a new housing tenure of a long-term, secure rental option that will contribute to the development of a healthy housing market in Ireland. The rent is based on the cost of building, managing and maintaining the homes which means it is an affordable housing option. The cost rental homes are set at a monthly rent of €1,200, a significant reduction when compared to market rents for 2-bedroom apartments in this location. The rent charged to tenants has been designed to only cover the actual costs and will not be driven by market movements.

Through effective collaboration, both Tuath, Respond and their other key partners were able to realise a shared vision of providing an alternative and secure option for low to middle income earners by implementing a housing delivery model never before utilised in Ireland. Despite the implementation of rent pressure zones in Ireland from 2016 on, which are intended to moderate the rise in rents in certain areas and create a stable and sustainable rental market, rents have increased across the country since. Cost Rental complements social housing provision and is targeted at households experiencing financial difficulty accessing housing or meeting the on-going cost of accommodation.

The delivery of the Enniskerry Road development involved many stakeholders sharing a common vision of delivering a new and innovative form of housing tenure in Ireland and taking ownership over elements of the project in which their skills, experience and resources would maximise efficiency during the project. It brought together a wide array of expertise and knowledge that would be needed to realise the progression of the Cost Rental project as it faced

certain stages of development

The Enniskerry Road Cost Rental development was delivered by:

1. Tuath and Respond (owners and scheme operators)
2. Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government (funding)
3. Dun Laoghaire Rethrown County Council (Design Development, Planning, Procurement)
4. Housing Agency (land, control over cost rents)
5. Housing Finance Agency (long-term finance)

The varying expertise brought to the table ensured key objectives would be met including the provision of a low-cost publicly owned site, design with long-term maintenance in mind, state contribution through development costs through the Serviced Sites Fund and the availability of low-cost, stable finance that is paid back over a long period of time and effective ownership by two approved housing bodies with a proven track record of managing sustainable homes and communities.

## Outcomes and achievements

Partnership truly was the key to the successful delivery of this development. Only through constructive collaboration could the network of resources assembled be utilised and implemented effectively. This innovative collaboration has resulted in improving the community and those living in the area by offering a form of tenure never seen in Ireland before the project began, with the overall goal of introducing affordability into the private rental sector having been achieved. Tenure at Enniskerry Road offers those living in the community rents that start at 25% below the average local area rent. The cost rental homes will be integrated as part of the full development which includes 105 social homes.

Tenants pay €1,200 per month to live in these

2-bedroom Cost Rental homes delivered as part of this project. The rent of €1,200 per month, which is based on the cost of delivering and maintaining the homes, is a significant reduction when compared to market rents for 2-bedroom apartments in this location. Funding has been provided through the Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The 105 social homes and the 50 cost rental homes come under the management of both Tuath and Respond housing associations and both organisations work together to ensure the tenants are fully supported in their new homes and their new community.

# HOUSING ORGANISATION OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by:



This award will recognise organisations who are leading the way in driving professionalism, learning and development and inclusion while delivering a great service for tenants.

## The Radius Way

### Radius Housing



### Statement of support

Radius provides housing and care & support to over 33,000 homes across Northern Ireland. A social enterprise employing 1,000 people and managing 12,500 tenanted properties in 80 towns across all 11 NI council areas. Radius completes 200+ adaptations annually for those who are in private accommodation and supports 21,000 customers through the Radius Connect24 personal alarm service.

Radius, puts its customers at the centre of everything they do. The Association's overall purpose is to make a positive difference by providing homes, support and care for people, building neighbourhoods and empowering communities. Radius values are aligned to this and focus on what the organisation is about. It is of paramount importance to Radius that staff display attitudes and behaviours that underpin its values and the Association's competency Framework 'The Radius Way' is specifically designed to ensure that

staff understand the behaviours and competencies required of them as housing professionals.

The competency framework is a bespoke model within Radius which broadly describes what performance excellence looks like within the Association. It is used as a tool to communicate the behaviours required, valued and rewarded across all 5 levels within the Association. It supports talent strategy and guides practice in areas such as recruitment, talent development and performance management. The success of this framework is that it accurately reflects the needs of the Association, stakeholders, tenants and service users as well as reflecting the organisational ethos and values alongside the skills, experience and behaviours of colleagues.

The Association employs a diverse range of people, at various locations and levels and recognises that irrespective of role or location, all employees have a shared objective of seeking to deliver quality services and performance against this is assessed as part of 1.1 supervision meetings and the Association's annual appraisal process. The appraisal has a specific focus on professional development and learning linked to an individual's role with required training solutions delivered either in-house or by linking in with external parties. A blended approach is applied to employee development bringing together traditional training methods, digital resources including extensive E-Learning programmes, workshops and externally facilitated training in order to meet the diverse needs and geographical spread of our employees.

Equality and Diversity is a mandatory training element for all staff and is delivered during induction with refresher training every three years. Given the diversity in the Association's customer base, neighbourhoods and in the organisation, Radius also provides bespoke

tailored and targeted training for front line staff. The services of CRAIC NI were procured to deliver a six week Diversity and Inclusion training course to 150 staff in the Association's Communities Directorate. The sessions engaged staff in exploring identity and culture, as well as identifying and addressing community and cultural issues and providing support towards cultural competency. Key areas covered included:

- Understanding of unconscious biases and prejudice
- Identity, assumptions, discrimination
- Immigration and migration information and myth busting

- Hate Crime
- Terminology - Inclusive Language
- Cultural Appropriation vs cultural appreciation
- Anti-racism practice

All of this insight and knowledge combined provides Radius staff with practical tools to use in their day to day work to challenge themselves and others, to ensure that services provided are inclusive and support the diversity of the people living in Radius homes and local communities, creating, safe, secure and inclusive environments where diversity is recognised and celebrated.

## Outcomes and achievements

In 20/21 Radius delivered outcomes to tenants and a social and environmental impact via:

- £1,632,477 additional annual income was identified for 650 tenants with the support of Radius Welfare Advice Service
- 66 groups received £35,501 through the Radius Community Chest Grant to deliver vital projects across NI.
- 148 tenants and 34 children engaged in digital events and/or training with support from Radius Digital Champions and 40 loaned tablets.
- Operation Christmas delivered 3,367 Christmas dinners to isolated Radius Sheltered Housing tenants across NI.
- 476 Family Festive Boxes were delivered benefitting 1,500 people in Radius local communities
- 1,080 cultural boxes promoting good relations were delivered to local communities in partnership with 10 organisations.
- £12,976,786 spent on Major Works to improve Radius homes in consultation with tenants.
- 297 adaptations completed to tenant's homes to help them remain independent with a value of £748,147
- £5,320,267 Disabled Facilities Grants completed for 209 private residents through Staying Put Service in 20/21.
- 4,300 Support Plans completed with tenants and service users through Floating Support and sheltered housing services.
- 16 schools, and 70 local groups across NI participated in the Radius Growing Wild Biodiversity Project in partnership with Keep NI Beautiful promoting health, wellbeing, gardening and environmental sustainability.

# Becoming Future Fit in 50th Year

## Simon Community NI



### Statement of support

From a handful of volunteers delivering soup to rough sleepers on the streets of Belfast, the charity has come a long way since it was established in 1971. Now, celebrating its 50th year, Northern Ireland's leading and longest running homelessness charity boasts a workforce of over 380 passionate individuals supporting up to 636 marginalised people each day across 25 accommodation projects and 13 support services.

Ensuring that the charity is well positioned to handle the demands of current and future homelessness, in 2021 a Future Fit of the organisation was carried out to establish Simon Community's capacity to deliver on the second half of its 2018-2023 strategic plan and on the projected impacts that Covid will have on homelessness across Northern Ireland. Delivering a refocus of resources at a senior level and an organisational design, Future Fit has provided new opportunities in areas of flexibility, innovation, and high performance.

"The project, 'Future Fit', demonstrated a willingness to think beyond the obvious and embrace innovation. The activity was focused on increasing capacity and the outcome of the work demonstrated that Simon Community is at the cutting edge of change, wholly driven by purpose and able to be courageous on behalf of current and future client need." Mark Glinwood, Partner at Distinctive People

With a vision of a society where everyone has a home and a mission to end homelessness for people who need help, Simon Community's Future Fit strategy touches upon each element of the Chartered Institute of Housing's professional standards tool:

- Integrity at the organisation is underpinned by key values whereby the charity, its services and staff are non-judgemental, trustworthy, and dedicated to people experiencing homelessness.

- Inclusivity is showcased in the charity's commitment to partnership working across the Homelessness, Housing, Health and Justice sectors to achieve tangible outcomes for clients. In 2021, this was seen by the charity's push to have the homelessness community and support staff prioritised for coronavirus vaccinations.
- Ethical Working is delivered through a refocus of person-centred work. A recent policy review has transitioned the organisation from a 'management of clients' to a 'working with clients' approach.
- Knowledge is a priority at the charity and, as part of Future Fit, a new Head of Research & Development role was established to work across the organisation, homeless sector, and academia to ensure advancements in homelessness support is research led.
- Skills & Training have always been a focus for the charity with 117 hours delivered across 28 modules in 2020. The Future Fit strategy committed to growing a culture of Coaching across the organisation and in May 2021, nine members of Management undertook training to receive an ILM Level 3 Coaching qualification with a new cohort expected to begin training in January 2022.
- Advocacy underpins the work of the organisation but in 2021, greater advancements were made in this area. By launching a new Health & Wellbeing service for clients with mental health, substance and pre-existing trauma issues, a new team was created to ensure individuals received the external services that they were entitled to. Meanwhile, in Autumn 2021, the charity recruited a Women's Advocate to provide a voice to female clients accessing the charity's services.
- Leadership was displayed when in early 2021, Senior Management made the decision to relocate the charity's Central Office. In Summer of 2021, the charity successfully relocated its business support teams to a modern office in Belfast city centre that facilitated the agile working that the charity now required. Secondly, the organisation's Board members supported a commitment to deliver housing solutions using £600K of unrestricted reserves to purchase rental properties.

## Outcomes and achievements

In less than 12 months, Future Fit activity at Simon Community has resulted in:

- New services launched including Health & Wellbeing, Children's Play & Learning, Women's Advocacy and a Transition Project
- 40 new staff recruited between November 2020 and November 2021
- 16 Health & Wellbeing staff champions trained to promote healthier lifestyles in the workplace
- 2 secondment opportunities for IT colleagues to project manage a new client management system, helping improve the quality and flow of homelessness data across the charity
- 1 Senior Operations Role created and recruited for internally, providing a promotional opportunity for staff
- 1 new Assets Manager recruited to help identify affordable homes for the charity to purchase and manage
- 1 new Maintenance Technician helping improve the quality of the organisation's temporary accommodation projects
- 1 Research Paper created in partnership with University of Ulster and Nationwide highlighting Hidden Homelessness.

"The opportunity to take part in the Institute of Leadership & Management coaching programme has allowed me to develop as a manager. In the last six months, I've improved my listening and questioning skills, which has helped me support colleagues to identify goals and solutions to workplace and personal topics." Ciarán Corr, Communications Manager at Simon Community.

# A Year of Resilience, Recovery and Rejuvenation

## Tuath Housing



### Statement of support

Tuath Housing as a professional housing organisation believe staff are its most valuable resource. The Association is committed to ensuring there is a clear alignment between new homes delivered, the services provided to tenants and the skills staff have and will require.

As an organisation Tuath has developed a learning and development framework across the business to support staff, who, as part of immensely busy team need the support, guidance, and clear direction in their own personal development to hone their skills to the tasks at hand.

Tuath invested in an on-demand learning platform through LinkedIn in conjunction with individual training plans to meet the demands of the business. They also have a "grow our own" programme with seven ambitious graduates, who want to make a difference, in a range of disciplines; they receive 1-1 professional mentoring and a lead representative to guide them. Tuath's aim is to create housing professional for the future in every discipline, they

believe they are achieving this.

Operational Managers completed a recognised accreditation in managing people and remote working to ensure the necessary skills were available during this unprecedented period of remote working. The Irish Centre for Diversity & Inclusion provided training sessions for all staff and in September (the month of diversity and inclusion) and culture themed engagement and inclusive wellbeing initiatives were undertaken.

October was Wellbeing Month and with the launch of the Associations monthly 'Tribe' magazine, the company wide Steps Challenge and the introduction of Mental Health Champions, the Associations wellbeing team worked tirelessly to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Tuath has employed and inducted over 50 new members of staff using virtual platforms. A very successful buddy system was introduced to ensure that new starters are engaged, included, and feel part of the Tuath community. A wraparound service is essential during these strange times to ensure our induction process meets staff requirements. This is proving to be effective.

The core values of Tuath underpin engagement across the business whether an employee, a landlord and a partner. "Our vision is to invest in people and places by providing more homes and more choice". This ethos reinforces the Associations commitment to do more, to do better, whether delivering more homes or delivering more services to tenants. The Association continuously seeks to improve the lives of tenants and their communities while continuing to deliver new homes at record levels. By working with its nationwide network of stakeholders, forming new partnerships,

and reinforcing old ones, Tuath remains focused on improving the services it delivers, building on its organisational capacity while fostering a culture of innovation, learning and development and inclusivity.

With the rapid growth of their stock, Tuath demonstrate a core value of adapting to the needs of its customers by continuous improvement and additional services and initiatives that ensure organisational efficiency. Tuath listened to their tenants and a dedicated Responsive Repairs team was created in 2020 to improve performance and achieve higher levels of satisfaction. The team strives to improve the overall customer journey by simplifying how to report a repair. Tuath also registered with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland as a Sustainable Energy Community and developed an Energy Master Plan which sets out medium- and long-term goals for upgrading its housing stock, to ensure their energy efficiency and sustainability. 50% funding under the SEAI's National Retrofit Scheme has also been provided.

Tuath has been continuing its progress on new and innovative housing delivery methods, as a dynamic and evolving organisation with the delivery of the first 50 cost rental homes in County Dublin and a further 118 due in Quarter 1, 2022. The rent charged to tenants has been designed to cover the actual costs and will not be driven by market movements. The introduction of the Cost Rental Equity Loan, and the selection of the AHB sector to deliver such projects, acknowledges the proven expertise and capacity of Tuath. Staff skills have been developed in this area to ensure organisational objectives around choice will be met.

With over 22,000 tenants Tuath believes that social housing should provide security and affordability to make seeking work and pursuing a career possible. By teaming up with local expert employment skills organisations, Tuath sought to help tenants along this journey. The 'Stand Out from The Crowd' programme, launched in September 2021, included a series of

webinars to assist Tuath residents build confidence and find supports in a competitive jobs market. With the support of expert speakers from Empower, Dress for Success, Carr Communications and Grow Remote, a series of free webinars ran for 4 weeks to help break down barriers into employment and help attendees with their job applications, C.V preparation, mock ZOOM interviews, learning how to dress for interviews and much more.

Tuath established their Community Covid-19 Emergency Fund to assist both residents' groups involved in the Tuath Housing engagement initiative and local not-for-profit community organisations providing support to Tuath Housing residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. Applications from groups providing education, diversity and inclusion activities, health, and wellbeing, essential services, or combatting isolation were awarded funds through the initiative. A second round of funding to support community groups is already ongoing.

The Association also delivered a digital inclusion initiative across our elderly schemes called "Be Connected". The initiative centered around providing tablets to our elderly tenants. As group tenant engagement initiatives moved online, it has been hugely beneficial for our elderly residents to have the ability to connect with family and friends and their communities. Tuath was awarded funding for the initiative as part of the Housing Finance Agency's (HFA) Social Investment Fund. Training on the use of the tablets was provided to older residents by Tuath's Tenant Engagement team.

Tuath tenant David, in Greystones commented on the initiative "I'm delighted to have received the tablet. It has opened a whole new world for me and brought me into the digital age. It really does help me keep in touch with everyone and everything that's going on. I'm learning things every day about how to use it and I never thought I'd be embracing new technology like this".

## Outcomes and achievements

Tuath will deliver over 1,700 new homes in 2021: a record for the Association (In the last three years they have delivered 1,000 plus homes annually) and will provide safe, secure homes to an additional 4,000 people across the country. Tuath achieve this high level of success year on year through the creation and maintaining of a cohesion forward thinking collective of people who have the skills, knowledge, leadership and want to do more. They support each

colleague by identifying their learning and wellbeing needs and adjust and adopt their developmental training plans to create a successful platform to meet individual and organisations objectives in line with the company's Strategic Plan and core values. This successful combination ensures year on year success where staff and residents are supported to achieve shared and focused objectives in line with the highest professional standards.

# EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

This award is for an individual, and its purpose is to recognise excellent leadership in the sector. It aims to demonstrate the quality of leaders that we have in housing, and to show the rest of the world how brilliant housing people are.

## Chris Allingham

### EHA Group



### Statement of support

Chris Allingham is a Contracts Manager and key member of senior site management at EHA Group. Chris was integral in the implementation of the first sites EHA constructed in the 1990's. Having continued his career around the world, he returned to EHA in recent years. Here he greatly contributed to the successful completion of our landmark project in Plymouth 2017-2020 and our highly successful social housing scheme at Mimosa Court, Derry 2020-2021.

At Plymouth Cross, this mixed use scheme boasts over 22,000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space providing student housing, hotel accommodation and retail space. The £48m project consisted of a major redevelopment; demolition, refurbishment, cut and carve, structural alteration and new build. Chris played a major role in competing this complex scheme, helping greatly with team collaboration and management, driving deadlines and having a committed and reliable attitude to all works involved to ensure completion to client satisfaction.

Chris's most recent leadership project was the completion of 27 social homes at Mimosa Court, Derry.

The scheme is located off the Straband Old Road consisting of 9 one bedroom and 18 two-bedroom apartments with associated works and landscaping.

Constructed for Arbour Housing (formerly South Ulster Housing Association), the new Lifetime homes began hand over in August 2021, a huge 6 months ahead of schedule. This was achieved despite many restrictions, labour shortages and highly limited supply chain availability due to Brexit.

In order to achieve this early completion several management and leadership skills were required by Chris including procurement completed in a timely manner liaising closely with the subcontractors and suppliers. Furthermore Chris oversaw careful planning of COVID 19 restrictions, with distancing on site and the general implications this took to continue the contract through very uncertain times.

As a leader Chris is very self-aware. Knowing his skill set and where he can benefit from others, showing reliability in getting the job done if sourcing input is required.

Chris is a highly positive leader and drives positive outcomes shown when several issues arose, through excellent leadership these did not impact handover. With the foresight to hire consultants to help navigate these issues, the outcome resulted in safely not requiring substation upgrades as instructed by NIE, structural changes to safely avoid an NI Water pipe redirection as well as innovative thinking to alter access routes. For example as the scheme neared completion, Chris lead detailed coordination to construct a soft landscaped access road to ensure NI Fire could gain access, an oversight in the pedestrian designed scheme. Had Chris not engaged expert advice on a positive alternative, the project would have cost more and been completion delayed affecting housing need in the area.

Being aware of his demeanour on site, approachable as well as being an on the ground leader has generated a great deal of respect from his colleagues and wider teams. He is admired for his hard work with a very upbeat attitude which is a great culture to instil.

Prioritising the team, Chris believes nothing could be achieved on his sites without a strong team with high morale. This was more critical during COVID 19 to reassure the team of job security and also positive mental health through this challenging time, being welcoming to any staff concerns.

Chris is very aware of taking full responsibility, he is always happy to get on the ground, work alongside the team and get the job done.

This is a skill which was recognised by the CEO who appointed Chris to complete Mimosa Court as an opportunity to show this positive attitude and our company value of teamwork to achieve excellent results for each client.

## Outcomes and achievements

Chris's leadership emphasises team work both direct and indirect, guaranteeing attention to detail and excellent housing as an outcome.

Chris previously won an NHBC Pride in the Job award as Site Manager and was delighted to assist Noel Logue, Site Manager at Mimosa Court to move forward with this national recognition.

The communities Chris works in also have a lasting positive impact. At Mimosa, Chris and the team worked closely with community organisations including an art initiative for young people promoting positive mental health over COVID lockdowns. This was displayed on site hoarding. Furthermore Chris lead the team to reach out to the local community and employ local labour which worked very well.

With every scheme Chris leads, he naturally has a clear vision of how and when completion will be

achieved. Each project he assess to complete on time, in a safe environment for the team and to the client's satisfaction. With Mimosa Court, the senior management team at EHA wanted to capitalise on this opportunity to utilise Chris's strong leadership so the project could be a benchmark to inspire other contract managers in the firm, to execute work in a safe and timely manner which has resulted in keen interest in the scheme internally and how it was run, as well as a very satisfied client that plans future work in partnership with EHA.

Chris's work clearly demonstrates EHA's vision to be recognised as one of the most reputable construction organisations in the UK, continuing to strive towards this by exceeding customer expectations while building fulfilling careers for their people.

# HOUSING HERO

clanmil  
HOUSING

Sponsored by:



This award celebrates outstanding individuals who have used new approaches to help solve housing problems they see around them.

## Seamus Crossan

Apex Housing Association



### Statement of support

Seamus Crossan is the manager of Belmont cottages, a residential facility for 16 people with learning disabilities situated in the heart of a local community in Derry~Londonderry.

Seamus is a very caring and compassionate individual who always has the interests of his residents at the forefront of everything he does. He has a very unassuming and humble manner but is always thinking of creative ways to support those who live in Belmont Cottages.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, providing housing and support for people with learning disabilities proved to be very challenging due to the restrictions imposed. Belmont Cottages was forced to restrict visiting by friends and family and most day activities were limited due to lockdown.

Equally, transport was limited as residents could not use public transport and other methods of transport were limited to essential travel only. As the pandemic continued, Seamus and his team experienced the daily difficulties this presented. Despite everything being done to manage these changes, residents' behaviour became more challenging with the inability to get out and about having a significant impact. It was at this point that Seamus decided he would do something that would help to alleviate these challenges and change things for the better.

Seamus had taken on a personal challenge in January 2019 to run for 1,000 days straight - running a minimum of 5km each day. During the first half of 2021, as he approached his 1,000th day of running, Seamus committed to running 100 miles in 24 hours at the end of September as a fundraiser to raise money for a wheelchair accessible vehicle for the residents of Belmont Cottages.

Seamus endured all weathers during his 1,000 days of running; but his determination and dedication to be ready for the 100 mile endurance run was immense. Seamus set a target of raising £10,000 and on the day of the final run he was supported by residents, staff, family, friends and the local community.

In Seamus's own words "there were many ups and downs during the run, hitting rock bottom then pulling it together again. I couldn't have done it without the support from the team and seeing the residents as I crossed the finish line made it all worthwhile".

## Outcomes and achievements

Following his 100 mile endurance run, Seamus managed to raise almost £25,000 through cash donations and his JustGiving page, smashing his original target of £10,000!

Seamus has gone above and beyond what is expected of him as a housing manager and in doing so can now secure a vehicle that will really enhance the quality of life for current and future residents of Belmont Cottages. The vehicle will positively contribute to the health and well-being of residents through enabling group and individual outings to take place

at times that suit residents rather than relying on time constrained transport.

In the eyes of all Seamus is truly an outstanding individual who has battled through many challenges to support the residents in his care which is why he is a true housing hero.

Heroism comes in many forms however a true hero doesn't always wear a cape and can often be someone unassuming that we see every day. In this case the hero wore his running shoes!

# April Gregg and Gerry Fleming

## Circle VHA



## Statement of support

Circle engaged the services of Supporting Communities to support the development and implementation of a Tenant Engagement Structure and Strategy. Covid restrictions led to Circle and Supporting Communities having to revise the plan to incorporate delivery via Zoom.

Our initial delivery of workshops and online sessions brought forward a core group of tenants who became the Tenant Steering Group. Their focus was to help Circle create a process that would eventually lead to establishing a Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) and development of a Tenant Engagement Strategy.

April Gregg, a Circle tenant for 7 years, and Gerry Fleming, a new tenant of Circle, attended these groups. They are our founding members and have ultimately driven this process. April and Gerry have together brought an honesty and openness in speaking of their own experience as tenants, whilst urging Circle to reassess how we listen and communicate with our tenants. They have attended, and delivered workshops and information sessions to tenants, staff and our Board members, challenging each to think differently and do better.

They led the drafting of the terms of reference for our TAG, increased membership, and were instrumental in Circle revitalising our Tenant Newsletter, which

now goes out to each tenant every three months. The newsletter is approved by the TAG. They developed a Tenant Approved Logo that only the TAG can authorise use of, and they have also reviewed policies and collaborated with our teams to write a new and improved tenant handbook.

They have set the tone of what tenant engagement means, and achieved full support not only from their peers on the TAG, but more widely with our Circle staff, teams, and Board. Scepticism within Circle and with our tenants was recognised as a barrier, but in April's own words, and as result of her and Gerry's focus and commitment:

"Attitudes have definitely changed! There are some high-up people that were kind of stern and standoffish when we first met. But now they're getting into the whole thing - we broke 'em! It won't be just for housing anymore; it will be a well-being housing body!"

Since its establishment in 2021, the TAG have developed a 3-year strategy and action plan that details the work Circle and the TAG will be undertaking. The Strategy was approved by our Board and makes a commitment that by 2024 our Board will include at least two tenant representatives. April and Gerry have, through the steering group and TAG, sought a commitment from Circle, one which we have been steadfast in giving. They have asked for resources, recognising that in order to deliver and not just pay lip service, more was required. On foot of this request, our Board committed to recruiting a full time Tenant Engagement Officer. April and Gerry in turn were asked to be part of that recruitment procedure. They led the interview process and had final approval of the appointee. Our new Tenant Engagement Officers first ever contact with Circle was via April and Gerry, ensuring there was no wiggle room or doubt as to our commitment to Tenant Engagement.

Launching the Strategy was a challenge brought to us by April and Gerry to look at how we could celebrate this achievement. In doing so we were able to let our tenants, partners and the sector know about the

TAG's work and how, together, we can communicate, learn from each other and bring about really positive improvements for all. We were delighted to join April

and Gerry, our founding members, the TAG and Supporting Communities on the 4th of November 2021, in person to launch our Strategy.

## Outcomes and achievements

The work April and Gerry began in 2020 and continue to lead on has delivered significant changes:

A tenant designed "Tenant Approved Logo" is now used on all tenant related documents, policies, handbooks and communications. A Tenant Newsletter was developed and approved by the TAG that goes out every quarter. In addition, the new Tenant Handbook was edited and approved by the TAG.

To encourage Tenant Engagement, the TAG developed a leaflet that all new tenants get in their starter pack. Tenants who partake in our satisfaction surveys are now given the option to get involved in the TAG or through the TAG's sub-committees and groups.

On the 4th of November, Circle had the physical launch event for the Tenant Engagement Strategy. April and Gerry launched the event and introduced John Hannigan Circle CEO, Chairperson, Chris Ellison, staff, and fellow tenants. It was a hugely positive event and really highlighted the progress made to date by everyone.

There is now a Tenant led, inclusive and sustainable Tenant Engagement Strategy and structure which enables our tenants to hold Circle to account. Tenants do so by advising and scrutinising our performance and behaviour, identifying areas for improvement and helping to improve services.

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## Patricia Husband

### Clanmil Housing



#### Statement of support

Patricia Husband joined Clanmil in June 2017. She initially worked as a Tenancy Support Co-ordinator before being promoted to Neighbourhood Services Officer in February 2019.

Patricia is a true housing professional who takes immense pride in her work and personal development. She shows outstanding commitment to the communities within her patch and always strives to ensure that the services and support she provides are tailored to provide the best possible outcomes for people living in our homes. Focussed, determined, tenacious, empathetic and humble, are some of the words we would use to describe Patricia who has an enviable knack of connecting with people, no matter who they are, and forming respectful and productive relationships

Patricia goes the extra mile for everyone and when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, she adapted quickly and really stepped up to support tenants, colleagues and the community in which she works.

During summer 2020, Patricia was asked to provide support for a colleague by covering sickness absence. Without hesitation, as a true team player, Patricia adapted to take on additional duties to support Clanmil, her colleague and tenants.

During this period, there were significant issues with serious anti-social behaviour (ASB) resulting in major disruption at the scheme. Patricia worked tirelessly to address the situation with professionalism and fairness and always with the aim of providing support to all involved. Patricia very quickly built strong links with local elected representatives, PSNI and community support and established protocols between all stakeholders to ensure that tenants had access to housing and community support and policing when they needed it, as well as meaningful engagement with elected representatives.

During this time, Patricia found herself managing a serious child safeguarding incident associated with the ongoing ASB. At a peak in the pandemic, when services across health and social care were at breaking point, Patricia navigated this case. Despite continuous delays, Patricia refused to take no for an answer. She overcame many barriers and hurdles to ensure the voice of the young victim was heard. When she felt it wasn't being prioritised, Patricia shouted louder until she was satisfied. The result was that a serious review was heard to ensure appropriate actions were taken to safeguard the young victim and other children within a household.

Patricia used her many skills to manage these cases, which frequently crossed over, causing conflict. She worked hard to ensure that a professional service was delivered at all times with compassion, resilience and no judgement of others.

This is just one example of how Patricia impacts lives through her work. There are many more that risk going unnoticed as she goes about her work with a quiet determination, never expecting recognition.

As a colleague, Patricia also continually proves herself to be a housing hero. As well as providing an outstanding service to the people who live in our homes, she provides immense support to her teammates both professionally and personally. She thinks

outside the box and is the first to remind us that often the best solution to a problem is the simplest, and

that sometimes all that is needed is some diplomatic straight talking.

Patricia is always the first to share her experience, especially with younger, perhaps more inexperienced colleagues, helping guide them towards solutions. She is also very self-aware and is never afraid to ask for help herself when she needs it.

In the diverse and challenging sector that is housing, Patricia never lets us forget the value of laughter. She has a fierce sense of humour and keeps the spirits of tenants and colleagues high without even knowing she is doing it.

## Outcomes and achievements

With regard to the safeguarding case detailed above, the result of Patricia's sensitive and tenacious approach was that a serious review was heard which ensured appropriate actions were taken to safeguard the young victim and other children within a household.

Furthermore, she has continued to manage significant levels of ASB and disturbance where tensions can be high, working to ensure minimal disruption to neighbours and working with stakeholders to ensure the area remains stable and a safe place to live. Patricia's credibility with tenants and other stakeholders is excellent meaning follow up actions

are responsive and prompt. ASB levels in the scheme in question have decreased by 89% in the past year.

The people who live in our homes connect easily with Patricia and feel safe and comfortable talking with her. These relationships are based on mutual respect, trust and professionalism.

Patricia has also been focussing on her personal and professional development having completed her Level 4 in Housing. She is prioritising her professional development not only to provide a better service now, but to further her quiet ambition to progress her career as a housing professional.

# Margaret (Peggy) Roche

## Clann Housing



### Statement of support

Ard Carrig in Carrigtwohill, East Cork is a Clann Housing age friendly apartment scheme consisting of 33 homes. It's a community where people look out for each other. However, the Covid pandemic resulted in many residents being more lonely and isolated as social contacts were restricted with cocooning and lockdowns. Residents were much more reliant on each other for social contact and practical help. Our Housing Hero, Margaret (Peggy) Roche supported her neighbours on a daily basis throughout the pandemic and found time to develop a community garden and raise funds for Age Action Ireland as well.

From her first day in Ard Carrig in 2019 Peggy became part of the community and has gone on to make a big impact by developing a stronger sense of place and community. She is active, resourceful and has a strong drive to get things done enlisting the support of others in these projects. She has worked in the following ways:

Set up a the Gardening Club - Peggy immediately rallied residents and organised weekly outdoor wellbeing days in Ard Carrig's communal courtyard and garden. Those days involved planting of bulbs / bedding plants, litter picking, painting of outdoor furniture and gazebo, social distancing barbeques and karaoke sessions.

Created a new garden - Whilst cocooning, Peggy looked out her window and saw the huge unused car park on the scheme and put forward a plan to Clann to create a garden at the rear of the scheme, with raised vegetable beds for residents to grow their own fruit, vegetables and cut flowers. Peggy spoke with other residents to get support for her idea. She asked one resident to help her draw up garden plans to submit to Clann. Clann approved Peggy's idea but the funds were not available to proceed at the time. Whilst this was a setback it did not stop Peggy. Ever resourceful, she contacted BAM Construction who were building

homes in the area and convinced them to donate all materials needed as well as the labour for the garden project! BAM provided Ard Carrig residents with topsoil, railway sleepers for raised beds, blockwork, an electrical connection of water feature (sourced by another age friendly scheme in Killarney) and lighting. Peggy also contacted Carrigtwohill Community Council for help. They donated benches and tables for the new garden - providing residents the opportunity to sit outside, socialise, enjoy the new garden. Peggy's vision and persistence has resulted in a new garden which is a hub for residents to meet up and socialise safely outside.

Several residents have said that without Peggy's tenacity and forthright attitude the Garden would still

be just an idea. She saw this project as a means for her and her neighbours to keep busy and focused in a positive way during the pandemic lockdown., it has become more than that now - it is the heart of the scheme where residents meet and new relationships are formed particularly for new residents moving in.

Checked in on her neighbours/ Cooked and baking for other residents - Over the last two years, Peggy has discreetly supplied vulnerable and sick residents with hot meals on a daily basis, helping them through periods of sickness or cocooning. Nobody would know what Peggy does for her neighbours if it was not for those residents themselves informing Clann staff of how they have recovered / got through a difficult time due to Peggy's support.

## Outcomes and achievements

Our Housing Hero' Peggy has:

Set up the Ard Carrig Gardening Club - Residents are active in the garden and are producing food crops for their own use. She has encouraged residents to get involved spending time outdoors in the fresh air.

Supported vulnerable residents at Ard Carrig throughout the pandemic - she has visited residents daily cooked meals for them and baked cakes. She has kept up contact with other residents who would otherwise have had few or no social contacts

Creation of New Garden - New outdoor communal space has been created so that older residents can

safely socialise and be involved in healthy, activities with fellow residents.

Raising of funds for charity which supports older people - €1,030 for Age Action Ireland during Positive Ageing Week (September 2021).

Raising awareness locally about the Age Friendly housing scheme. - She has raised the profile and awareness of the scheme and Clann Housing by building positive partnerships with Carrigtwohill Primary School, Parish & Community Council, Carrigtwohill creche, Centra, Carrigtwohill Community Centre, Tidy Towns, BAM Construction, Age Action and St Vincent de Paul.

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## Ken O Heiligh

### Foscadh Housing Association



#### Statement of support

Ken O Héiligh's commitment to Foscadh Housing stretches back to its founding members. As CEO, he works closely with the Board of Directors and the Audit and Risk Committee, and leads a dedicated team that underpins the Association's development, property management and community programs.

Ken is the driving force behind Foscadh Housing's strategy to develop empowered, integrated communities. He has played a central role in the

creation and implementation of programs that empower residents to make a difference to the health and sustainability of their community, resulting in the Association's 2019 award for Community Integration in Housing from the ICSH. From sports days and Neighbour Days to excursions to Dublin Zoo, Ken's commitment has resulted in practical, meaningful initiatives that have helped residents with diverse religious and cultural differences to embrace and support one another.

In 2019, in response to a period of violent crime and after discussing with Lia Bhrega's younger residents how it had impacted them, Ken conceived the idea of a children's choir that would provide youth in the area with a safe, inclusive and friendly environment where they could freely express their thoughts and feelings, make new friends and enjoy the feel-good nature of music. After many years of hard work establishing a strong and trusting relationship with Lia Bhrega residents, Ken launched the idea for the choir to an enthusiastic response. The very first choir rehearsal was, rather ironically, conducted under a marquee in the driving rain as choir members sang "Walking on Sunshine" as if they had not a care in the world. With Ken's guidance and support, the

choir has since gone on to perform live in Dublin's Connolly Station, participate in the 24-hour sleep out Shine a Light Night event, raise almost €4,500 for homeless charities and work through the pandemic to create their first YouTube music video. In 2021 they were also awarded funding from the Housing Finance Agency's 'Social Investment Fund' to write and produce a song reflecting their experiences of the Covid-19 lockdowns. They have also been featured on RTÉ (radio and television), is scheduled to perform at the switching on of the Drogheda Christmas Lights, and on 26 November, will appear on Ireland's much loved RTÉ Toy Show. On 17 December the choir will launch the song they have written and produced, titled "Another Day". Ken has been present at every choir rehearsal, performance and activity to ensure the smooth operation of the choir and that every member has the opportunity to benefit and grow.

Ken's initiative is a positive example of outcomes for the Association's tenants and the wider community. Importantly, the children have relished the opportunity to grow their confidence, express themselves freely and enjoying working together for a common goal.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, Ken has worked tirelessly to ensure services continued for Foscadh Housing's tenancies uninterrupted. This includes late nights and weekends when vulnerable residents required support and even at times simply someone to talk to.

Ken is deeply committed to ensuring Foscadh Housing's mission and values are inextricably linked with its corporate priorities and operational performance, with a key focus on continued investment in the Association's people, governance and frameworks, and stakeholder relationships that underpin the sustainability of its communities.

## Outcomes and achievements

Since joining Foscadh Housing, Ken has brought to practical completion a €12 million CLSS funded scheme in Drogheda, completing the final phases of the 69-home Lia Bhrega development with the introduction of private finance, CALF and the Payment and Availability Scheme. Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, he has continued to increase the supply of high-quality homes in counties Laois and Louth. Ken was also instrumental in securing Certified Body Status for Foscadh Housing from the Housing Finance Agency in 2016, and delivering the Association's first Mortgage to Rent scheme 2019. He was elected as a member the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)

in 2018 and is a representative on the Tier 3 HFA Approved Working Group.

Ken's commitment to Foscadh Housing's integrated and sustainable communities achieved the 2019 award for Community Integration in Housing Award from ICSH. The Loving Life Choir has also been shortlisted in the 2021 ICSH awards. Ken has been the force behind the choir's public performances and media appearances, which has not only grown members' confidence immeasurably, but developed a positive outlook and proven that against the backdrop of local violence, there really is "another way".

## Barry Shields



### Habinteg Housing Association Ltd

#### Statement of support

Barry Shields joined the Asset Management team at Habinteg in mid-2019. Barry is a very experienced Health & Safety Practitioner and leads on a number of projects to keep our tenants and staff safe. He is also been responsible for a number of new processes and measures to protect us all during the Covid-19 pandemic.

From day one at Habinteg, Barry has championed a 'tenant first' health and safety approach. He quickly seized the opportunity to facilitate and drive meaningful customer centred policy development, enabling Habinteg to move away from mere 'tick-box' compliance processes of the past.

As Health, Safety and Compliance Business Partner, Barry very quickly identified ways in which we could protect our tenants by rolling out defibrillator access to staff and community assistants. He also worked at pace with the Red Cross to provide training in their use and other advanced first aid skills. Alongside this, he initiated the introduction of ISO 45001 which signifies our organisation's excellence in occupational health and safety, and with members of the Assets Team, undertook lead auditor training.

Although the depth of Barry's abilities and experience was clear from the start, it was not until Covid-19 that his crisis management and leadership skills became so apparent.

Barry wasted no time in becoming the subject matter expert in all things Covid and housing. He quickly became a strategic advisor to our Senior Management team and Board, tracking the ever-changing government and housing sector advice, ensuring ultimately that our practice and delivery ensured the safety and wellbeing of our tenants.

To help staff through the last 18 months, Barry set up a confidential helpline service to advise and reassure staff who may be suffering as a result of Covid. As Covid is still with us today, Barry continues to use this platform to provide our team directly with up-to-date advice while signposting them on action required regarding self-isolation.

To ensure tenant safety, Barry created bespoke risk assessments for frontline customer-facing staff, allowing them to assess and complete essential maintenance safely. He worked closely with service providers to agree safety measures and relayed this to tenants, resulting in increased customer confidence allowing essential compliance inspections to take place.

Barry's empathetic leadership skills emerged in his direct engagement with tenants, calming fears and providing a listening ear. The 'listen and learn' approach at micro level is evidenced in the initiative to provide personal protection packs for tenants to use when contractors are in their homes. Barry's quick thinking also facilitated successful macro level responses in securing early procurement of PPE for the staff, ensuring service continuity.

To help mitigate risks for staff and tenants, Barry has provided advice and training around triaging calls by our call handlers. He also designed and implemented

a bespoke Covid tracker which actively tracks instances of Covid 19 and self-isolation cases in both staff and tenants. This allows the organisation to plan appropriate action in risk situations.

Barry continues to embrace the ever-changing society in which we now live. He constantly advises the SMT on best practice in keeping people safe. Barry has recently curated the new lone working devices in Habinteg which track staff movements. These badges enable staff to press a button if they have fallen or are in danger. This then sends an alert to the team informing them that the person is in danger along with their location. This is a modern approach to keeping staff safe in increasingly challenging situations.

While Barry has the leadership skills and ability to seek strategic solutions to difficult situations, he is also approachable, hands on and delivers well beyond what is normally expected. Barry takes all situations seriously, from dealing with a pandemic to personal safety, he has and continues to travel the length and breadth of Northern Ireland to ensure all staff have the appropriate PPE. He understands emphatically the link between health, safety and wellbeing and his ability to advance the latter during such trying times.

His selfless commitment to helping people and working for the safety of others has set him apart and is also evidenced by his work with outside agencies to risk assess and supervise H&S precautions in our community hubs, allowing the distribution of food parcels to those in need during this time.

## Outcomes and achievements

There is no doubt that while raising awareness health and safety across the organisation, Barry has also provided staff and customers with practical and innovative solutions keeping themselves safe.

This has resulted in a focused tenant safety approach to all we do. His communication skills have also brought an air of confidence to our frontline staff. This in turn has created an atmosphere which has allowed managed access to tenants' properties to carry out safety responsibilities and ensure the Health and Safety for them and their families.

Barry has and continues to go above and beyond in reassuring, supporting and driving meaningful change. His warmth, resilience and compassionate leadership – truly set him apart as a housing Hero.

Staff praise for Barry and all his work during this period of time has been easy to find; Habinteg's

Chief Executive Darren McKinney said: "Barry is an extremely approachable team member and takes all situations seriously from steering us through a pandemic to maintaining awareness of personal safety on a day to day basis. He is happy to do anything from advising individuals to get the right PPE for working outside, reviewing and delivering training across all aspects of Health and Safety in the workplace, and even ensuring people have the correct chair to sit on in the office or when home working. As CEO I have valued the support and expertise he gives the Senior Management Team in ensuring the workplace is a safe and comfortable environment, for all our staff."

A Habinteg tenant said: "Barry is always so helpful and kind. He really looked out for all of us over the last year and a half and so the housing hero award would be a very fitting accolade."

# Padraig W. Rushe

## Initiative Ireland



### Statement of support

In 2015, against a back-drop of the housing crisis compounded by a lack of affordable finance, Padraig Rushe established Initiative Ireland. As a values-based property development company and social enterprise, the company set out to provide honest, fair and flexible finance to small property developers and housing bodies alike, to support the delivery of new energy-efficient social and affordable housing nationwide. Backed by an Impact Investor Community, the goal was to enable both small and large scale Irish and International investors to access the market sustainably, to help unlock housing supply.

Over the last 5 years the company has grown, from a company with €10m to lend per annum when it began, to now being backed by global leading debt and investment banks, with capacity and targets to lend €900m over the next 3 years alone.

Initiative Ireland also recently partnered with the Credit Union Development Association, to launch a new fund, which will enable Credit Unions to provide development and flexible term finance to Approved Housing Bodies across Ireland. In so doing, Padraig has helped to unlock a sustainable domestic source of capital for the works of AHBs, while also addressing the challenge of under deployment of capital for Credit Unions. The Fund is designed to compliment HFA funding solutions, and support increased regional housing delivery, building on regulatory changes long introduced in the market but which otherwise remained unused.

Combined, the two funding models have capacity to fund the delivery of a 16% uplift in housing supply, backing projects regionally in underserved communities.

Everything achieved by Initiative Ireland to date has

been driven from a belief that finance could and should be ethical, fair and sustainable. Initiative Ireland has backed developments nationwide, while maintaining a zero-loss rate, even through the disruptions of COVID 19. Importantly, the company stands-out with a zero-enforcement rate also. This reflects the company's values-based, ethical approach, which stems from Padraig's own values as a leader and founder, to be honest, fair and inclusive. He has also challenged the team to seek solutions to issues, even where such solutions come at a cost, with the belief that long-term the company will gain more from acting with integrity.

In addition to his work to support property developers, credit unions and approved housing bodies, Padraig has published an Annual Housing Report each year for the last 5 years, advocating for sustainability and transparency within the sector in Ireland. He has also spent years raising awareness of the Irish Housing Market internationally, through talks and publications, in an effort to attract sustainable financing solutions to the market. In this regard he has succeeded.

As a small company, with limited resources, the company has achieved staggering growth and success despite a fair share of knock backs. Padraig has driven that success, promoted a culture of resilience, by always keeping everyone focussed on our mission, making personal sacrifices where needed and leading by example.

While the company has been recognised internationally and won awards for our innovative products, Padraig has never been recognised for his work or vision over the last 5 years. He is quick to praise our investor community, our borrowers and our team but slow to seek recognition himself. He is someone who backs and believes in others, seeing himself as an enabler of their success. Those who've come to know him personally, behind the scenes, understand that he is an unsung Housing Hero.

As Ireland's first peer to peer property finance

Positive contribution to their community or through their work in housing

Creative or ground-breaking initiatives led or implemented by the individual

Outstanding commitment and dedication.

Special consideration will be given to those individuals who have yet to receive formal recognition for their efforts, but who deserve to be recognised for their positive contributions to people, housing and communities.

### Outcomes and achievements

+€50m of new Social and Affordable Homes delivered Nationwide

+€900m secured to lend to developers over the next 3 years

+€600m Planned AHB Fund approved by Central Bank backed by Credit Unions

+Total Finance to deliver 16% Increase in Housing Supply Nationwide

# Stephanie Burns

## Radius Housing Association



### Statement of support

Stephanie joined Radius Housing Association in February 2019 as a part time scheme coordinator at Maine Fold, Randalstown and since this date she has made an immense difference to the tenants and families of those who reside at Maine Fold by providing essential support and advice to the tenants especially during the COVID19 pandemic.

The tenants of Maine Fold have been impacted by the restrictions that have been placed on us all over the last 20 months and Stephanie's willingness and ability to adapt has ensured that all tenants have continued to have maximum enjoyment of their home and surrounding environment in a safe way. Stephanie has a genuine desire to ensure that the tenants of Maine Fold have a real sense community spirit and belonging within the scheme and the local community.

Stephanie has established links throughout the community and within the statutory and voluntary sector and has worked in partnership including leading numerous projects to provide opportunities for the tenants, some of these projects include:

- The Maine Movers - a weekly walking club for the tenants and tenants of neighbouring Neilsbrook Fold to enjoy the local area and feel the benefits of exercise both physically and mentally. Stephanie and the tenants have also through this group raised funds for local charity Aware by completing 5kms walks through the month of September.
- Stephanie successfully secured funding through Impact Networks NI and a part of this organised and delivered tailored care packages of goodies for tenants of Maine and Neilsbrook Fold.

Stephanie's care and attention to detail were evident in this project as she tailored these packages individually to suit dietary requirements and considering any impairment's tenants had, an example of this was the purchasing of a meditation CD as replacement for colouring books that had been included for a visually impaired tenant.

- The tenants also were involved as part of the Linking Generations NI programme (Antrim and Newtownabbey Council) - and successfully completed projects with local primary school and hosted a Reminiscence event as part of Positive Aging week.
- Stephanie is also a keen participant in the gardening activities and can be found onsite when formally off duty along with tenants to play their part in the Tidy Randalstown initiative and as a result the scheme has recently hosted a team commissioned by the Royal Horticultural Society to tour the grounds and witness the outstanding work of the tenants.

These projects which Stephanie has played a central role in organising and delivering have had an immeasurable difference to the tenants during a difficult and challenging time. Stephanie's efforts have ensured that tenants have been given the opportunities to maintain a sense of normality through safely interacting socially with their neighbours and members of the wider community and as a result this has benefited the physical and mental wellbeing of the tenants.

Stephanie's genuine care and compassion for all the tenants in Maine Fold is paramount and she regularly goes above and beyond for the tenants. I feel to conclude this nomination a recent compliment which was passed to Radius Housing from a tenant's family member encapsulates the impact that Stephanie makes to the lives of tenants and families:

'I really wanted to get in touch about Stephanie Burns the Scheme Coordinator at Maine Fold in Randalstown where my mum lives. She is fantastic, honestly! My mums had a few issues recently and she has been amazing, very supportive but on top of that everything she does for everyone there and even goes over at weekends to do things around the garden or help other tenants. I really can't speak highly enough of her'.

### Outcomes and achievements

Stephanie's care, compassion and support has made a huge difference on the everyday life of the tenants of Maine Fold, she has helped the tenants to remain there independence and has promoted positive health both physically and mentally through the projects and events that she has organised.

Stephanie is always there for reassurance, support and guidance for the tenants and is great asset to the tenants families and her assistance to them is greatly appreciated.

Stephanie has impacted positively not only on the lives of all the tenants in Maine Fold but also throughout the wider Randalstown area.

# YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

This award will recognise and celebrate the successes of housing professionals who have been working in the housing industry for less than three years.

## Max Carberry

### Clanmil Housing



### Statement of support

Having previously worked as an estate agent, Max Carberry joined Clanmil in September 2020 as a Neighbourhood Services Officer (NSO), covering the North and West area.

Within Max's first two weeks, Northern Ireland entered a second COVID lockdown. While this was not a particularly positive introduction to the social housing sector, it didn't deter Max, who adjusted very quickly to working within a 'lockdown' situation.

Max's thinking is very much solutions focused. It's never a case of 'we can't do this', rather 'how can we do this?'

One of Max's first challenges was promoting recycling and reducing waste overflow at a general needs development. There had been an ongoing issue, which included bin contamination, fly tipping, and general reluctance to recycle, and on-site colleagues felt they were fighting a losing battle against waste. Max took a strategic approach and knowing that a long-term solution was required, he immediately

engaged with Derry City and Strabane District Council and held onsite meetings with council officials and local councillors to identify the issues and agree a solution. He also engaged with tenants and onsite colleagues asking what was stopping recycling, and what we could do to address the issue?

Max's determined and collaborative approach, along with a recycling bags scheme introduced by the council at this development, resulted in significantly reduced waste, increased recycling and reduced expenditure on clearances.

Max shows true leadership, involving his team in projects and initiatives, and is also a team player. In December 2020, while Northern Ireland was again under COVID restrictions, Max wanted to raise spirits amongst his tenants and ran a very successful 'Christmas Window Competition', involving his team in its promotion via flyer drops and on social media, and in judging the competition. Tenants loved the idea and their festive windows brought a much-needed 'feel good' factor to the neighbourhood.

Max has shown a genuine interest in how Clanmil operates. He has fully immersed himself in the Clanmil culture and shown tremendous aptitude and a willingness to learn in his role as NSO. He has an enquiring mind, asks thoughtful questions and has no fear of asking 'why' or constructively challenging the way things are done.

Within a few short weeks of starting with Clanmil COVID restrictions meant that Max was managing the North and West patch from home. He used his initiative to make the best of this situation, taking the opportunity to phone his tenants and colleagues and introduce himself, and spent time listening to, and discussing any issues.

Max shows confidence, maturity and competency in difficult conversations and situations. He uses emotional intelligence to achieve positive resolutions with customers, and in carrying out his line management responsibility around performance. He recognises that one size does not necessarily fit all, and he is willing to try and find a compromise.

Max shows initiative in engaging with social services when a tenant may be at risk. He follows Clanmil policies and procedures, and, with great self-awareness, knows when to call on peer support for direction or further knowledge.

Max understands the importance of relationships and is gifted at connecting with people. He is making positive contacts within the local community in his patch that will pay dividends in his work, including with the local Housing Executive offices, community groups, Omagh West Regeneration Group and similar groups in Derry, and with local elected representatives. He has been instrumental in establishing and building a Local Engagement Forum on his patch - a regular tenant meeting with Clanmil colleagues to discuss issues they are interested in and to develop a collaborative approach to help shape service delivery.

## Outcomes and achievements

Max is a true 'rising star' in every sense. There is really nothing that can hold back his enthusiasm, positivity and engaging 'can do' attitude, which he demonstrates with customers and colleagues alike. He always has a smile and something positive and constructive to say about challenging situations he is involved in.

Max is solutions-focused and has shown great initiative by working on the recycling problems at a large apartment development. He has progressed the recycling bags initiative along with Derry City and Strabane District Council, and there has been a marked improvement in this area in a very short time.

Max's approach to waste management and promoting recycling is being used as an example of 'good practice' to help colleagues tackle similar issues at other Clanmil developments.

Max engages with external stakeholders in a very professional manner for the benefit of his tenants. In addition to his work with the local council in relation to recycling, he is working with Community Safety Wardens around anti-social behaviour and is currently working to develop vocational/educational projects for tenants at a local further education college. He has also joined, and is contributing to, local community forums in both Derry and Omagh.

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# Chloe Wilson

## Connswater Homes



### Statement of support

Chloe Wilson joined Connswater Homes in March 2020 as a Housing Assistant. It was evident from the beginning that Chloe had a clear desire to learn and progress both on an individual and organisational level.

Joining a new team is never easy but Chloe joined at a particularly challenging time, weeks before the first Covid-19 lockdown. With working from home for a new organisation and then latterly hybrid working, Chloe took every opportunity available to upskill, attend training courses and enhance her personal

development with a very proactive mindset.

Colleagues hold Chloe in high regard and admire her work ethic and professionalism. She has always displayed a team centered approach and was an asset in the early days of the pandemic when transitioning towards home working, when staff were required to show a degree of flexibility. Chloe was always available and volunteering for tasks.

Her desire to improve services and the customer experience has been a real theme in her work ethic. Chloe has shown maturity in identifying areas that can be improved, offering solutions rather than framing things as a "problem". If Chloe recognises a process that may benefit from change, she provides a proposal which offers a solution that is thought out and achievable.

She is passionate about the service delivered to customers and continues to strive to improve and enhance these services. She has offered excellent ideas on streamlining processes within the housing department, improving efficiency.

Chloe is always willing to attend training and development programmes to upskill. She in turn shares any resources and information received at training sessions which would be of benefit to her

colleagues. She adds value to the organisation by ensuring that the learning at training is implemented. Chloe represented the Association at some training for the Housing Management Software, and was then able to feedback to colleagues ways to better use the systems, including the reporting function. Staff are now able to use the system better and cut down on unnecessary manual administration.

Chloe was selected as part of a team to provide calls to the Associations most vulnerable tenants during the lockdowns. Chloe was asked to take on this task because it was noted she had the empathy to provide a listening ear, coupled with the skillset needed to address any issues raised by the tenants.

Chloe is confident in the use of technology and embraces new opportunities. The Association

purchased an additional telephone package, based around the cloud. This allowed for remote calls and staff to be contacted no matter where they were based. Chloe was involved in demonstrating this new system to her colleagues in the housing team, showing how to operate the system to ensure a flawless communication system for tenants and outside agencies.

Chloe is keen to commit to the housing profession and is actively looking to enroll in a professional qualification, such as the CIH Level 5 Diploma in Housing.

Upon conclusion, Chloe has been an excellent asset to Connswater Homes. She has shown drive, ability, and a willingness to learn that will be sure to stand her in good stead as she continues her career in housing.

### Outcomes and achievements

Chloe undertook an in-depth mentoring programme with the housing officer in her patch. She has been hands-on trying new tasks outside of her comfort zone and has shown a commitment to her professional development.

Chloe volunteered to attend a six-week mediation course, aimed at helping to explore new dispute resolution practices. The facilitator of the training recognised Chloe's natural ability in the styles of mediation and provided a recommendation for her to proceed to the next stage, accredited mediation training. Since the training Chloe has successfully co-mediated anti-social behavior cases, which has assisted in resolving neighbour disputes and sustaining tenancies.

Chloe has played a leading role in a drive towards paperless working. Following her suggestions, the housing department has implemented more online processes.

Chloe is a strong advocate of the tenant portal, which allows tenants to manage their tenancy online. Chloe has completed estate visits, helping vulnerable tenants sign up to this service.

Chloe recognises the importance of customer feedback, and as such was keen to pilot feedback on the current sign-up process, which help shape the current process we use. 58% of tenants allocated a recent new build property completed their sign-ups via DocuSign, following Chloe's innovations.

## Seamus Watters

### Tuath Housing



#### Statement of support

Seamus Watters joined Tuath Housing in September 2019, through the newly established Property Services Graduate Recruitment Programme, which trains Building Surveyors from Graduate Trainee level to Property Services Coordinator (PSCO) Grade. Seamus embraced every opportunity presented to him

during the process and his recent recommendation and appointment to Property Services Coordinator is a testament to his competence, determination, and passion for all aspects of his role. Seamus has thrived in his performance with Tuath to date and is already a very competent Building Surveyor. Seamus' success has proven the Property Services Graduate Recruitment Programme to be an enormous success and he has provided a roadmap of professional learning and development for future Graduate Building Surveyors starting their journey with Tuath.

Seamus is managing the Radon Review Programme by assisting in drafting Tuath's Radon Policy and Procedures document, implementing the requirements of the policy and leading on required works. This is a significant safety project requiring the forensic review of nearly 8,000 properties compared to the Environmental Protection Agency's Radon Risk guidelines and mapping system. Seamus is responsible for engaging service providers to carry out testing on properties in high-risk radon areas, reviewing of professional reports, appointing

contractors following public procurement processes and managing remedial works when required. The first phase of the project has successfully been completed with the next phase up and running incorporating lower risk properties. Seamus carried his research diligently was proactive and professional in driving the project on and is now the Specialist Surveyor for any radon related queries in the organization.

Seamus has continuously progressed with his learning and development throughout the year, both through his work experience, and by undertaking structured learning and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. Through (CPD), Seamus has demonstrated his understanding of how self-improvement ensures he has the skills and knowledge needed to continue delivering the professional services and standards he has on his Tuath journey so far. Seamus has kept up to date on the latest courses such as Fire Safety Training, First Aid, Minute Taking, Business Writing and has also completed a Fire Warden and Short Public Works Contract course.

Seamus is diligent, affable and has quickly picked up how the Property Services Department functions. He is already successfully managing projects normally assigned to a fully qualified PSCO's, a remarkable achievement considering the challenges encountered over the past 2 years during the Pandemic. It is great reflection on Seamus' qualities that he is now advising and supporting new team members and passing his knowledge on without fuss. Seamus took the initiative and commenced his APC to become a Chartered Building Surveyor with the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (reciprocal with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors). As part of same, he has

given presentations on his work to date to his Tuath APC Supervisor, monitored and assessed his areas of competency, and requested changes in areas of work where it was considered that more experience was required.

Stephen Willoughby, Property Services describes Seamus as "a revelation since joining the Property Services Team in September 2019, following his graduation from Dundalk Institute of Technology. In a little over two years Seamus has developed and quickly rose the Tuath ladder from graduate to trainee level and has recently received promotion to the Property Services Coordinator grade. This is even more impressive when you consider the challenging restrictions on movement, support and contact over the past Covid hit 18 months. Seamus is a key member of the Property Services Team and is competent, diligent and a great role model for any aspiring professional".

Nick Sheward, Director of Construction and Property Services also noted how he was "happy to confirm that Seamus has been the perfect person to have as the inaugural recruit under Tuath's Property Services Graduate Recruitment Programme. Seamus has fitted seamlessly into the team, is already well respected by his seasoned peers for the contribution he has made as well as colleagues in other departments too. Probably the greatest compliment I can pay to Seamus is that based on the quality of his work and the contribution he has made since he joined us, we have incorporated a graduate training programme into a 'grow our own' recruitment policy' with the instruction to HR each year to "go and find another Seamus!"

## Outcomes and achievements

During the year, as Seamus was assigned to project manage various works, he proved himself to be very capable, able to take the initiative and to be energetic in completion of various roles during those projects. A great example of this has been the various projects given to Seamus to upgrade Mortgage to Rent Properties to ensure they are safe, compliant and habitable properties on completion. As part of these works Seamus had to review all existing documentation related to the properties, undertake surveys, identify and confirm the remediation works required, specify and tender the repairs, produce the preliminary health and safety plan and fulfill the Projects Supervisor Design Process roles, administer the contract, and ensure the works are completed to

a good standard and in accordance with the tender documents.

Seamus successfully managed various projects from inception through to completion as part of Tuath's Planned Works such as kitchen upgrading programmes, Radon improvement works, cyclical decoration programmes and servicing of fall arrest systems. All required building surveying, procurement and contract administration competencies. Seamus was also involved in preacquisition inspections of various large scale residential developments, which involved knowledge of current Building Regulations requirements, report writing ability, clear communication both internally within the company, and to external developers and contractors.