



*"Doors of Hope"*



P.O. Box 101529, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

December 2024



## CONWAY EDUCATION CENTRE

The new semester has started, and Conway is buzzing with new courses and new students.

Over the past year, Conway Education Centre has continued to flourish in spite of a challenging funding climate, providing essential opportunities for individuals in our communities to develop new skills, improve employability, and foster greater community cohesion. Through the delivery of a comprehensive suite of 11 accredited courses, including core subjects such as GCSE English, GCSE Maths, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), we have empowered learners with practical qualifications that are both recognized and valued by employers. Additionally, our offering of 10 unaccredited courses has allowed individuals to explore a wider range of topics, from arts and history to Spanish Conversation and Tai Chi, enhancing their personal development, wellbeing and confidence. In all, 244 adult students with 13 different nationalities, have enrolled in our courses this September 2024 semester, with 37 people on our waiting lists.

Thanks to the financial support of Conway Mill Trust, we have been able to keep our prices low and this has allowed more people to access a course at Conway.

The benefits of our education program extend well beyond academic achievement. Many of our participants come from challenging socio-economic backgrounds, and access to high-quality education in a safe and supportive environment has provided a vital boost to their sense of agency and wellbeing. For individuals who may have struggled in traditional educational settings, our courses offer a second chance at learning, with smaller class sizes and dedicated tutors who are committed to meeting each learner's unique needs.

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This personalised approach has been instrumental in building participants' self-confidence and their ability to take positive steps toward employment or further study.

One of the most notable impacts of this program has been in enhancing employability. With the inclusion of practical courses such as ICT, learners are gaining skills directly relevant to the modern job market. Employers increasingly demand proficiency in digital tools, and our ICT course equips participants with these essential skills. Furthermore, the English and Maths courses have been critical for many who aspire to roles requiring foundational literacy and numeracy.

Beyond individual outcomes, the program has had a positive effect on community relations. By bringing together learners from different backgrounds, our courses have fostered dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect among participants. In a community still affected by the legacy of the past conflict, the opportunity for positive interaction has contributed to a more connected, resilient West Belfast.



Meanwhile, the Homework Club team and its dedicated group of volunteers are continuing to provide 75 refugee families with quality education and study skills support. Through the Homework club, a trust relationship is built between newcomer families and local residents, allowing people to make friendships, develop social networks, share skills and learn about each other's cultures.

Support from Conway Mill Trust has been instrumental in sustaining and expanding our services at Conway Education Centre, allowing us to reach more learners each year. The transformative power of education in West Belfast is clear, and as we look to the future, we remain committed to expanding our course offerings, further developing our community relationships, and helping more residents achieve their personal and professional goals.

Warm regards, Pauline Kersten, Centre manager





# Dove House

By: Jayne Quigg

The Centre has been very busy over the past few months delivering welfare advice, offering support to survivors of domestic abuse, training & education programmes, health and wellbeing programmes and money management & cooking on a budget programmes.

Like most community & voluntary organisations in the north of Ireland we have been affected by the uncertainty of governmental budgetary cuts and at present are still

unsure of our position past March 2024, but bearing in mind our community development and capacity building ethos, we will power through and continue to offer front line services to the people of the Derry City & Strabane Area.



## The Donncha Mac Niallais Award

The positions have been secured for two children to attend, the panel will meet before Christmas to decide on the prize winners.

A presentation event is to be held here at Dove House in January, with members of Donncha's family presenting the awards.

## Dove House Advice Services

From April through September 2024, the advice project dealt with 1885 beneficiaries of advice services with 3937 issues. 48 Appeals were also heard.

Advice clinics continue to be offered across various community centres in the DCSDC area and Information sessions/workshop was delivered to Health Forum, Action Mental Health, Foyle New Horizons and the team attended the ARC More than Health Fair. We have also added a drop-in service on Tuesday and Thursday mornings where clients can simply drop in without an appointment on issues of welfare rights. This has allowed a further 60 people seen weekly!!

## The Advocacy Project

The project has supported clients on a one-to-one basis to assess risk from harm of violence. The project is sitting on the MARAC conference meetings to present their referrals to the Domestic Abuse Unit. The project takes part in the Family Hub meeting, the Sure Start Board meetings, and the Community Safety meetings. The Advocacy worker has updated her skills by attending 3 training courses on domestic and sexual violence run by the Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership.



Three groups have been facilitated in Dove House including the Hope workshop, the Arts and Crafts group and the 5 steps to Well Being course. These different groups have been to help people look at alternative ways of dealing with trauma and stress, learn new skills and meet new people to reduce isolation and encourage positive mental health and promote healthier lifestyles. Fortnightly coffee mornings take place in Dove House for survivors to meet peers for support in a safe place.

Information sessions have been facilitated by the Advocacy worker in the community to raise awareness of coercive control and reduce the crime of domestic abuse. These have taken place in Destined with women attending groupwork, in Dove House with staff and Sure Start staff and recently in Ashmore House with residents and staff of the Men's Mission and Ashmore. Information tables were set up in Creggan, Pilots Row, and the Millennium Forum to promote the service within the community.

### **Success NW**

During this period Success NW had 39 new registrations. These registrations were all completed face to face and needs assessments were also completed for each participant.

During this quarter out of the 39 registrations there was an achievement of 16 participants completing level one training and 21 participants completing non accredited training. The 16 participants who completed a level one- their training consisted of designated child protection and adult training, and level one food hygiene certificate. The 21 participants who completed the non-accredited training was in CSR card training.

There were also 9 participants from a local women's group from Triax area who completed a level one and two food hygiene certificate.

During this period there was 5 participants from the Skills NW project who successfully gained employment with 16 hours plus per week.

Due to the success of the Skills NW project funding has been reallocated through new stake holder funding the share prosperity fund and the new project name going forward will be Success NW.

### **Women's group**

Jayne Quigg has celebrated one year as Manager of DHCT. In her time as manager, she has brought many changes to the programmes and to DHCT. One of the successful projects she has brought to DHFT is the woman's group. 22 women from the local area meet each week in Dove House on a Wednesday. They meet and chat over a cuppa. Often Jayne has organised weekly facilitators and event for the women. The main aim of the programme is to diminish social isolation. For many this may be the only time they leave their home. This programme is under a severely tight budget and Jayne would ask the subscribers of Conway to look at this programme on the next round of allocation.

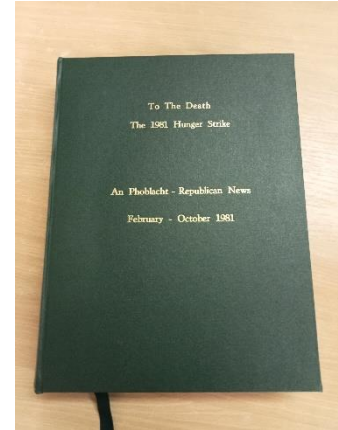


## **Eileen Hickey Irish Republican History Museum**

*By: Susan Hickey*

Firstly, we would like to thank all those at the Conway Mill Trust for your continued support and generosity.

Visitor numbers remain steady as does the donation of items. Recently we were gifted a bound copy of An Phoblacht/Republican News covering the 9 months of the 1981 Hunger Strike, which was made specifically for the museum. Following this we have decided to get our collection scanned and bound as well. This will not only save the originals from wear and tear, but it will be more convenient for anyone who wishes to access them. This way we can store the originals more safely but still grant access to anyone who requests them. While this option is costly, we believe it is the best one available.



We have also received a purse made by Republican P.O.W. Patrick Campbell (1895 - 1968) onboard the prison ship Argenta in the early 1920s, this is the first item we have received from the Argenta meaning we now hold items made on all three prison ships operating in Ireland during the twentieth century, the Argenta (1920s), the Al Rawdah (1940s) and the Maidstone (1970s).

Once again, we would like to thank you and we hope you have a great time over the holidays, from all the volunteers of the museum.

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## **Still Imprisoned Project**

**By: Peter Jones**

Hope I find you all in good health. Things are going along at a nice pace here, dealing with Republican ex-prisoners and their families who need our expertise and help with addiction issues. We are attending lots of events and taking the opportunity to advertise the Project and what help we can provide.

We would like to thank you and the sponsors who donate to your work on our behalf, which helps the Still Imprisoned Project prosper from week to week. Many thanks from me personally and from the other Still Imprisoned Project volunteers.

Wishing you and your sponsors a wonderful Christmas and New Year holiday period. Good health to all.

God bless.



## Springhill Community House

By: *Ciaran Cahill*

As we remember Fr Des on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing we continue to be inspired by his vision and foresight.

He saw the potential in everyone and everything and never took no for an answer. He believed that we must do things for ourselves when no-one else can or will, this is still the ethos of our work today.



In the days after the Ballymurphy Massacre, August 1971, he visited the site where Fr Hugh Mullan and Frank Quinn were killed by British soldiers, known as Finlay's field.

That evening he recorded an audio diary in which he said “ what a wonderful thing it would be if on that site we could put up some kind of memorial to all the people who have died and the names of everyone who has died on a wall like the war memorial, Catholic and Protestants and everybody and use that as a centre for everything and anything that would tend to bring people together, exhibitions of the great men and the good men and women of all sides Catholic and Protestant, whoever, a center for a reconciliation on that spot where Hugh Mullan died.”

While there he saw a 12-year-old boy arrive with a jam jar filled with flowers. The boy knelt down blessed himself and placed the flowers at the cross, he said a prayer, blessed himself, and went away.

Fifty plus years later a centre for reconciliation was built on that site which is now the impressive Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP).

The BMSSP staff were inspired by Des' recording and organised a stained-glass painting workshops titled “A Jam Jar of flowers” with artist Kerrie Hanna.

Kerry also unveiled her lasting memorial to Fr Des' premonition of having a centre for reconciliation built on the Finlay's site.

Kerry said Fr Des' peace building work and audio recording inspired her stained-glass sculpture and she incorporated elements that reflect his work and vision.



Her stained-glass sculpture represents the past and the present and begins with a jam jar filled with flowers. It represents a journey through conflict to peace. It incorporates an acorn which grows into a mighty oak. Kerry has fused different symbols that make us think about a troubled Belfast including barbed wire, contested space and wildflowers.



Kerry's piece tells a story of a divided city and of people with opposing views that through time come together and are rooted in peace represented by a dove at the top of the sculpture. This is reconciliation at its best, people coming together, acknowledging our past but looking forward to a shared future.

Fr Des' audio dairies are just one of the new discoveries in the People's Archive. Just last month photographs of Bobby Sands emerged after almost 50 years.

The photographs show Bobby taking part in an August 1976 protest against the withdrawal of political status for prisoners in Long Kesh.

They are part of a collection of photographs donated to the archive by Lelia Doolan, a keen photographer who chronicled life in Ballymurphy between 1974-77. Leila was a co-worker and personal friend of Fr Des who shared her experience in video, photography, theatre, journalism and television with communities across Belfast.

Bobby Sands, then aged 22, can be clearly seen carrying a flag as the protest makes its way down the Andersonstown Road and in a second photograph he is pictured on a platform in Dunville Park, alongside senior republicans, including Máire Drumm, Danny Morrison and Joe Stagg, whose brother Frank had died on hunger strike in Wakefield Prison six months previous.

Our long-term objective is the creation of The Fr Des Wilson interpretive centre, a permanent space for the People's Archive in West Belfast that would accept donations of personal collections related to the conflict and community activism. It currently contains thousands of documents, recordings, negatives and photographs. It is about: the role of the Catholic Church in the conflict; Fr Des' ecumenism; local activism; and his role along with others in international campaigns for equal rights and justice.

Collectively, this material tells the story not just of Ballymurphy, but wider West Belfast, and working-class communities in the North. It is valuable historical evidence that offers an insight into communities often rendered voiceless by the powers-that-be. It is important that the archive material is documented, recorded and preserved for all to see, we don't receive any funding for this project and appeal to your readers to support this valuable work by donating toward the project costs.

A selection of photographs and audio dairies can be viewed on our website [www.sch.ie](http://www.sch.ie) follow link to Blog.



## Altram

*By: Aisling Walls*

Altram is the support organisation for the voluntary and statutory Irish medium early years education sector in the north of Ireland. We continue to provide comprehensive services to the practitioners, children, and families who attend our early years settings. With regular visits throughout the year, training sessions, networking events, resources, and pre- and post-inspection support visits, we ensure that high-quality Irish language and learning experiences are consistently delivered to our children. Additionally, we actively engage



with the wider education sector and political representatives to ensure that the needs of the Irish immersion sector are met.

We've shared a photo of our manager Aisling Walls, and some of the Altram staff and board meeting with Junior Minister for the Assembly, Aisling Reilly. The meeting, held at Ionad Uíbh Eachach in West Belfast, discussed a range of issues including Irish-medium early learning and childcare provision. The key focus of the meeting was to highlight the needs of the Irish language community and the rights of our children and families to quality services.

Our financial situation continues to be unstable, as the organisation operates on a minimal budget each year, which limits our ability to develop resources and impacts other areas of our support services. We strive to provide all aspects of our support services and are seeking more funding to create materials that will help support children, their families, and practitioners in their Irish immersion education experiences.

Although this is a challenging time for Altram, the donation from the Conway Mill Trust has allowed our Early Years Specialist team to operate at full capacity. This enables us to deliver Early Years support services to Irish medium early years settings throughout Northern Ireland. As a result, practitioners in these settings are well-supported with expert advice and appropriate

training, leading to enhanced learning experiences and improved outcomes for children of high quality.

We are always very grateful for the ongoing and essential support from the Conway Mill Trust, which is a vital source of funding for our organization. We appreciate the community of donors that helps promote our work. With your assistance, our efforts directly benefit our sector, which includes children and families in some of the most deprived areas of the North. The invaluable contributions from the Conway Mill Trust not only support our initiatives but also enable us to advocate for the rights of the Irish language community and the rights of the children and families who access Irish medium early years services in the North. Míle buíochas!