



*Karla Turner, Aidan Kearney, and Conor Flanagan at the OCNNI Awards at the Titanic Hotel*

## Celebrate Success!

Supporting Communities has had many good things to shout about in the past few months. Organisations are made up of people, and we couldn't be prouder of ours. We'd like to highlight a few of our staff and board members whose work has been recognised this past summer.

Our Chair, Lorraine Campbell, is having a banner year. In March, she was named Highly Commended Trustee of the Year at the CO3 Leadership Awards, a very hotly contested category! We were so pleased to get to celebrate with her at the Europa Hotel in Belfast.

Then in June, as part of the Queen's Jubilee birthday honors, Lorraine was awarded an MBE for services to the community in Northern Ireland. We're thrilled for her and so proud of her work, not just with Supporting Communities,

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#### TENANT PARTICIPATION AT NEWINGTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION



*Lorraine at the CO3 Awards*

but with many housing providers and charities in Northern Ireland working to build engaged, confident, sustainable, and inclusive communities.

Also, in June, our training team was awarded a commendation at the OCN NI awards for 'Advancing Learning through Innovation' for their work in adapting our training courses to an online service during the pandemic. Our training team has worked closely with OCN NI to assist in the development of 'Ambition', their new online platform



*Karla and Aidan at the OCN Awards ceremony*

that streamlines the delivery of our accredited courses, providing a complete learner experience, including virtual classrooms, online assessments, tutor feedback, and even a digital certificate when the course is completed.

We're delighted that the sector has recognised their hard work and terrific success with this transformation.

Finally, our Head of Corporate Services, Sheenagh McNally was Highly Commended at the Women In Housing awards at the end of June.



*Sheenagh McNally at the Women in Housing Awards*

We already knew she was a winner when we nominated her in the Professional of the Year category, so we're very pleased to see her recognised on the national stage for her life-long dedication to tenant participation and community engagement in social housing.

Well done to Sheenagh, Lorraine, and all of the Supporting Communities team.





**Save the dates!**

# *Mid-Ulster* **FUNDING FAIRS**

Meet funders face to face, find out what they have to offer & discuss your project ideas!

★ **Dungannon - 19 October**

10am -1pm at Ranfurly House

★ **Cookstown - 15 November**

10am -1pm at Killymoon Golf Club

## Meet the Funders

- National Lottery Fund
- Halifax Foundation NI
- MUDC
- Cookstown Western Shores Area Network
- Housing Executive
- Community Development & Health Network
- Children in Need
- John Moore's Foundation

and more to be confirmed!

For more information, contact:  
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## The Cushendun Project: Building Trust in the Trust

Our project with the National Trust in the village of Cushendun has wrapped up after three years of work from October 2019 to February 2022. It was designed to build better relationships between the residents of Cushendun and the village's principal landlord, the National Trust. Supporting Communities acted as an independent go-between to help kick start the process of healing the fractured relationships in the area.

Our Community Development Officer and Cushendun native, Christine McNeill, first conducted a baseline survey to understand better the issues involved. She worked closely with all community and stakeholder groups to build rapport leading to opportunities for the National Trust to be involved.

Despite the interruptions caused by Covid, we met our aims, including forming key partnerships with stakeholders, relaunching a Village Forum, and establishing Village Walkabout. We held multiple occasions offering everyone a chance to get involved, including coffee mornings, events with the local primary school, and seasonal activities, like the Christmas Lights switch on.

The National Trust now has a fantastic staff team based at Cushendun. We have worked together to ensure that the

community is aware of their roles and responsibilities within the Village, and we have proactively engaged with community groups and assisted them in identifying their key priorities, thus making all the difference to community relations.

Watch [our video](#) interviewing some of the participants in the project about the impact Supporting Communities was making in the area.

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*"Our relationship with Cushendun has changed tenfold for the better because of this project."*

NEO MCBRIDE, THE NATIONAL TRUST

# Whiteabbey Volunteers Awarded by the Queen

The Whiteabbey Community Group in Newtownabbey has been recognised by the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

Created in 2002 for the Queen's Golden Jubilee, QAVS awards shine a light on the fantastic work of voluntary groups all over the UK. Equivalent to an MBE, QAVS are the highest awards given to local voluntary groups and are awarded for life.

Our CDO, Lisa Clarke, joined the group for a special presentation of the award at Mossley Mill. Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of County Antrim, Mr David McCorkell KStJ, the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Alderman Stephen Ross, and Queens Award representatives all paid tribute to the group, their many successes and congratulated them on their award.

Margaret King, the group's chairperson, gave a speech and showed video testimony from the group's volunteers and committee members. At the event, young people from the community provided entertainment with traditional Indian and Irish dancing.

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*"The support and guidance we've received from Supporting Communities over the years has been invaluable."*

MARGARET KING,  
WHITEABBEY COMMUNITY GROUP



*Irene McCann (Vice-chair), Margaret King (Chair), Lisa Clarke (SC) and Debbie Sloan (Treasurer)*

SC has worked with Whiteabbey Community Group since they were first established in the early 1990s, providing community development support, training, and funding advice. The group's committee and volunteers have completed our OCN levels 1-3 in Community Capacity Building and Digital Inclusion training.

The community centre provides advice, support, and fun activities for all ages and abilities in the community, including a fibromyalgia support group, women's and men's groups, and a popular youth club. The group provides seasonal events to bring the community together and is open seven days a week and is entirely volunteer-run.

Chairperson Margaret King is also very involved in the Housing Community Network. She represents South Antrim and works closely with the Housing Executive and Housing Associations to help improve Whiteabbey and to ensure that all who live there feel welcome.

Margaret thanked Supporting Communities for our work with the group over the years. "The support and guidance we've had has been invaluable. As volunteers, it has allowed us to focus on the job at hand, knowing we always have help when we need it."







## Member Spotlight: Dungiven Men's Shed

Dungiven Men's Shed, one of Northern Ireland's newest charities, is off to a strong start with some exciting plans for the future! Granted official charitable status in June, the group aims to advance the social needs, health and well-being of men living in the Dungiven area.

The driving forces behind the project, Raymond Brady and Tony McCaul, first got talking after a Rannyglass Residents' Association meeting about the lack of activities for men in the area that didn't involve going to a bar. Raymond says he was particularly concerned about the rising number of young men dying from drug and alcohol-related problems.

"We had to do something," said Raymond. "There needed to be somewhere for men to go to escape that cycle of bad mental health and bad choices."

The men's shed concept seemed a perfect fit for what they were trying to do. After visiting the Shed in Limavady, the men decided they needed to start one in Dungiven. Despite a rocky start when planning got disrupted by the Covid lockdowns, they persevered, and with help from the council and Supporting Communities, the process of forming a committee went ahead and things started moving!

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*“We had to do something.  
There needed to be somewhere for men to go to escape that cycle of bad mental health and bad choices.”*

RAYMOND BRADY, DUNGIVEN MEN'S SHED

"Both Catherine Farrimond from the Council and I have worked closely with the group over lockdown to get them set up," said Gillian Forrest from Supporting Communities.

"I facilitated their first public meeting over Zoom, supported them with funding applications, and helped register them with the Charity Commission. We have all worked so well together, they are a lovely group of men!"

Raymond and Tony proved quite good at garnering support from all quarters. People in the Dungiven community really got behind the project to help them get things up and running. A local business provided a building they could use, and other charities and individuals donated money, equipment, and supplies.

The owner of a local gym even did a 40-minute ice bath to benefit the new project raising over £1200! A bar in town also came up with a different kind of fundraiser - a 'surstromming challenge' (eating fermented fish), and a local parish fund donated £1500 to buy a 3D printer and supplies, which everyone is very excited to try.

The Shed has 30 members so far, and they are currently open two afternoons a week, providing a social space, sports room, workshop, and a range of programmes, training, and events. Now that they have successfully registered with the Charity Commission, Raymond and Tony are looking forward to growing and expanding their work.

Already they have some fantastic evidence of their success. Supporting Communities ran a social value exercise evaluating the impact they made with some initial funding from the Housing Executive, and we determined that for every pound invested, the Men's Shed produced over £10 in social value - a very impressive result for any project!

"We were very pleased with the outcome of the impact evaluation! It's a great figure to be able to quote to potential funders," explained Raymond.



*Raymond thanks the Housing Executive for funding a sports room in the new Men's Shed.*



*Dream team! Raymond Brady and Tony McCaul with Catherine Farrimond, Causeway Council, and Gillian Forrest, Supporting Communities.*



*“We were determined to give the men an alternative to pubs, a safe space to come together.”*

RAYMOND BRADY, DUNGIVEN MEN'S SHED

Raymond tells us that the reactions from the men make it all worthwhile. “When someone comes in and says how fantastic it is that there’s something like this in the town now, it shows how much it was needed.”

Congratulations to Raymond, Tony, and all the folks working hard to make the Dungiven Men's Shed a success. We look forward to seeing what comes out of that 3D printer!







# New Scholarship Programme for Ballymena Students

Supporting Communities partnered with the Gallaher Trust for the first time this year to run a new scholarship programme for students in the Ballymena area hoping to attend university in Northern Ireland. The Fund targeted year 14 students who were applying to university to study a STEM or business degree.

The quality of the applicants we received was very high overall, and after a rigorous application and interview process, we were delighted to award scholarships to two deserving young men.



*Cameron McCaw (standing) and Alex Hamill are both starting university this year with support from the scholarship programme delivered in partnership with The Gallaher Trust and Supporting Communities.*

Cameron McCaw from Ahoghill is off to Stramillis University College to become a teacher of post-primary mathematics.

In his application, Cameron wrote that he has always been interested in becoming a teacher and looks forward to giving back to the next generation all the support he has received from his own teachers growing up.

He told us, "I am so thankful for this amazing opportunity. The financial support means so much to my family and will go a long way to helping pay for my fees and accommodation. Hopefully, when I qualify, I'll be able to do something I'm passionate about, which is teaching children the importance of STEM subjects and helping them prepare for their careers."

Alex Hamill, who comes from Broughshane, is working towards a Business and Economics degree at Queens University.

In his application, Alex detailed his extensive marketing and business experience to date, working with the Ballymena United Football Club, assisting with both of his parents' businesses, and working on the family farm.





He told us, "The scholarship fund has helped relieve the financial burden on me so much. It's very expensive to go to university now, and the fund will help me with the fees, books, and other bills."



*"The scholarship fund has helped relieve the financial burden on me so much."*

ALEX HAMILL, QUEENS UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Stephen Marks, our Business Development Advisor, who worked to put the scholarship programme in place, explains the importance of this new venture.

"Supporting Communities is committed to providing opportunities and creating pathways to education. Our partnership with the Gallaher Trust demonstrates that commitment in a tangible way. The scholarship programme is specifically designed to target young people who are facing financial barriers to higher education and support them in their educational journey.

We had a number of high-quality applications, but Cameron and Alex stood out as this year's scholarship winners. I am pleased to say this award will support them until the end of their degree.

From all of us at Supporting Communities, we wish them the best of luck at university!"

Cameron and Alex were each awarded £2,000 per year for up to four years of their degree. They will also receive £1,500 to buy IT equipment in their first year.

We are delighted to confirm that the scholarship programme will continue for at least three years. Two students per year will be chosen to participate.

Applications for the 2023/2024 academic year will open in the new year. Applicants must be studying a STEM or Business subject and be from the Ballymena area to apply.

Keep an eye on the Supporting Communities website for more news about the scholarship programme!



Alex Hamill, Stephen Marks (Business Development Officer at Supporting Communities), and Cameron McCaw.





# Newington Tenants' Forum: It's All About Teamwork

Carmel Grant has been a Newington Housing Association tenant for nearly 25 years. This summer, she put herself forward to be the first chairperson (it will be a rotating role) of the newly established Tenants' Forum.

Carmel tells us she first got involved after overhearing a woman in a local shop referring to her area as 'the dirty streets.' Looking around, she had to agree there was rubbish in the area, and it could do with a clean-up.

"If I'm living in this community, I want to make it look presentable, and I'm not having people coming in and calling it the dirty street!" she exclaimed.

Carmel started by organising a litter pick and other clean-up days, and when she heard about the new Tenants Forum starting, she was eager to join.

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*“The forum is all about teamwork. We all want the same thing; we all want to make Newington a better place.”*

Carmel Grant,  
Tenants Forum Chair

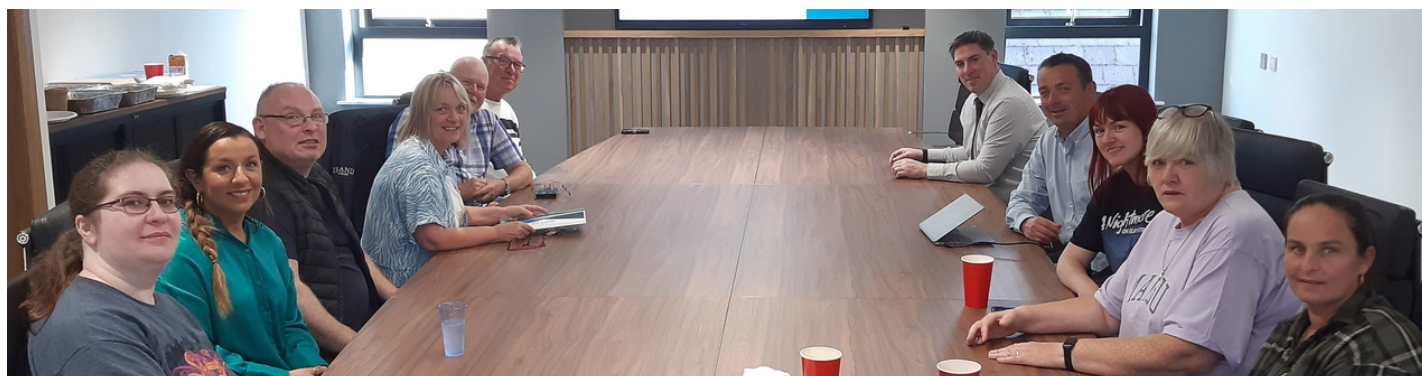


*Newington Tenants Forum members receive their training certificates from Supporting Communities.*

Supporting Communities helped the new forum to get started through a programme of training sessions aimed at giving them the skills and confidence to play an active role in influencing service delivery at Newington. The group covered topics such as Tenants Forum training, Team Building, Getting your Message Across, Effective Meetings, and Volunteering.

After meeting over Zoom for about a year, the group has made plenty of plans that they are excited to start putting into action now. Carmel is enjoying the work so far and she credits both her fellow tenants and Newington staff. "The forum is all about teamwork," she says. "We all want the same thing; we all want to make Newington a better place."





Carmel says repairs and maintenance are a concern for many residents after a recent delay in expected delivery times. She says the Tenant's Forum asked for an explanation and has been able to convey to tenants why the delays occurred and what they can expect now as part of their goal to improve communication with the housing association.

Anti-social behaviour is something else they'd like to address. They're planning to organise more events in the area that will bring people together to build a sense of community pride.

Michael Cunningham, the new Senior Community Engagement Officer at Newington, remarked that even though he's only been there a few months now, he finds that the organisation is very proactive in dealing with any issues. For example, when there were delays to the repair schedule, several of the senior management team including the CEO met with residents to discuss the problem and address their concerns.

"One of the things that comes back strongly from our tenants is the importance of being honest and managing expectations," says Micheal.

Newington is a small housing association that manages 719 homes in North Belfast. The organisation has been a part of the neighbourhood for over 40 years.

Michael says it's an interesting dynamic for him working with tenants. "The Tenants' Forum is there to hold us to account, to hold our feet to the fire. I'm very conscious of the need to empower Carmel and the other Forum members to do that. At the same time, over 50 percent of the staff and board at Newington are from North Belfast, so we are also invested in making this a better place to live both professionally and personally."

Being situated within the neighbourhood they serve makes Newington all the more accountable to its tenants. Carmel and Michael joked that staff have to go out and get their lunch sometime. Carmel laughs, "I live about eight doors down from the office, so I'll see them coming!"

Finally, we asked Michael and Carmel if they have seen a change in how things are done since the introduction of the Tenant Participation Strategy in Northern Ireland.

Going much farther back, Michael told us that his grandfather was actually the first trustee of Newington in 1975. That connection and the culture of the organisation are why he works there now.

He explained, "The ethos at the time it started was very much about helping people in this area, and it's still the same today. Newington was never dragged into tenant participation. If anything, I think they were ahead of the curve. We don't want tenant involvement to be tokenistic. We want it to be part of a structure that makes things better for tenants."

Over her 25 years as a tenant, Carmel has seen many changes. "They have got a lot, lot better. I think that has to do with the staffing. I couldn't fault them at all now. They are a brilliant housing association."



# Tenant Participation Standards & Accreditation

Drive your organisation forward and shape your services to meet the needs of your tenants and customers.

As the Independent Tenant Organisation for NI, we use accreditation to help landlords raise the bar for tenant participation and exceed the minimum standards as set out in the Tenant Participation Strategy NI. The Standards act as a benchmark against other landlords in NI, RoI and across the UK.



Learn [more here](#).

## Building a Culture of Tenant Participation

In June, I had the opportunity to speak at the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations' conference on the important topic of Building a Culture of Tenant Participation. It was wonderful to be back in person, addressing my colleagues in social housing.

The past few years of living through a pandemic have brought home the importance of community and the value of working together in new ways, so I was pleased to share my thoughts on how we can embed that further into all of our working practices.

Involving and listening to tenants is well and good but ultimately doesn't mean much if you don't believe at the core of your organisation that residents have a right to be involved and that they have something worth saying.

Building a culture that values tenants as your primary stakeholder is a weighty responsibility, and the first move belongs to our housing providers.

The ball is in your court!

My presentation discussed where to start and how to bring your colleagues with you.



Colm McDaid

I highlighted the Tenant Participation Standards and Accreditation from Supporting Communities - a process that can help landlords improve and benchmark their work against others.

A rising tide lifts all boats, and our work on the TP Standards is already impacting the culture of tenant participation. We are raising the standard for tenants in Northern Ireland and further afield.

If you'd like to see my presentation from the NIFHA conference, [my slides are here!](#)

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Colm McDaid'.