

# COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK



## PLACING PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF CHANGE

Community Action Network (CAN) was founded in 1987 to respond to the pressing issues of high unemployment, poor housing, endemic poverty, and the early days of the heroin epidemic in Dublin city. CAN's early work was to consult with communities about their needs. Community activists – often local volunteers working to support the people of stricken neighborhoods - were desperately in need of training in how to build community organizations. CAN showed them how to tackle these overwhelming challenges at the grassroots level. ❤️

HERE, PETER DORMAN, A STAFF MEMBER AT CAN, TELLS THE STORY OF THE ORGANIZATION AND THE DIFFERENCE THE IRELAND FUNDS IS MAKING FOR COMMUNITIES ON THE MARGINS.

CAN is a social justice organization. Our motto is Placing People at the Heart of Change. The people are groups in society that live with inequality. The change is in the systems to perpetuate the inequalities.

CAN's early work in the 1980s focused on developing innovative training programs to help local people be a voice for their communities. We also worked directly with fledgling organizations to become stronger and more effective in supporting local youth, tackling the drug problems and addressing unemployment and housing issues.

CAN's work has grown to become national. We developed accredited learning programs in community and leadership development, human rights-based responses to issues of inequality, dialogue-based methods for resolving core problems in communities and new and better tools for supporting organizations tackling inequality.

## INNOVATIVE FUNDING FOR ★ INNOVATIVE IDEAS ★

A lot of our work is in social housing communities, particularly in Dublin's city center. One of the most intractable issues for these communities is persistent anti-social behavior (ASB), much of it by children and young people. Children growing up in communities marked by poverty, poor housing conditions, unemployment and drug and alcohol addiction can grow up with significant stress and trauma. Often, anti-social behavior can develop into criminality.

CAN has responded with a range of initiatives to tackle this problem. One of our first innovations was to establish the Dublin 8/12 Restorative Practice Partnership. Restorative Practice is a proven method of addressing the harm caused by offensive behavior. It focuses on improving and mending relationships through dialogue, teaching children to deal with their emotions, to learn to empathize and to appreciate fairness. It has been shown to be much more effective than traditional disciplinary methods such as exclusion from school.

### THE IRELAND FUNDS SUPPORT FOR CAN INNOVATION

The Ireland Funds' grant in 2017 enabled CAN to organize Restorative Practice Training for almost 20 teachers, youth workers, community workers, Gardaí, volunteers and others working in settings marked by ASB. We also established a coalition of these professionals to work towards making Dublin district 8 and district 12 restorative communities. Since then over 60 individuals have taken training.

We have also focused on one local area, Inchicore South, where schools and youth projects will be part of programs to become "Whole Organization" restorative communities. This will mean that staff, boards of management, children and parents will all be part of these three-year programs. As these organizations are all close together in the heart of South Inchicore, their participation in these programs will impact significantly on the whole community. In all, some 300 children and young people will participate.

**All this started with The Ireland Funds' support and allowed us in turn to access funding worth three times the original grant.**

Following this success, CAN applied for The Ireland Funds Flagship Award for a wider response to anti-social behavior, focusing on the more challenging impact of drug trade related ASB in neighborhoods. Though shortlisted, we were unsuccessful in getting a Flagship Award.

Yet preparing for the application with advice from The Ireland Funds' staff, enabled us to think about what innovations could make a real difference to communities living with drug trade-related anti-social behavior. The application to The Ireland Funds Flagship Award led to a strategic plan. We began to develop additional programs, but we lacked the capacity to fully drive the plan.

However a couple of years later, The Ireland Funds introduced us to its donor Ray Wilson, a native of Rialto in south inner-city Dublin, now living in Australia. Ray met us in his native Rialto, and we took him on a whistle-stop tour of some of the projects we were struggling to launch. He visited a series of our projects:

- **Targeted Response with Youth (TRY)**— an outreach program working with 18 young men involved in drug dealing and moving them into recovery, education and employment.

- **Welcome on the Mat** — a project in our public housing neighborhoods working to positively integrate the growing numbers of migrants settling amongst existing white Irish neighborhoods.

He also met with the activists and community workers ensuring the public build projects in the area, such as the new children's hospital, included social clauses to benefit the community.

Ray said of that experience, ***"During my visits to the above CAN projects, I was so impressed by the caliber of the individuals leading change in their communities and by the results they are achieving in addressing social inequality and the lack of access to opportunities. As a 'Liberties boy' myself, it is a privilege to be in a position along with The Ireland Funds to support these wonderful people and these game-changing projects at CAN."***

Ray made a significant Donor Advised Gift in partnership with The Ireland Funds Australia. That donation enabled CAN to accelerate our work on these projects and others.





- 1 Beneficiaries of the community benefit program
- 2 Work with community activists in December of 1989
- 3 Participants in the online intercultural program
- 4 Restorative Practice training graduates





# WHAT THE IRELAND FUNDS SUPPORT HAS HELPED US ACHIEVE

➡ **Today the TRY program is working with 25 young men, a women's group connected with the men and younger children in danger of being drawn into drug dealing.** The program is now mainstream funded (though funding is uncertain for 2021) and is being invited to work in two neighborhood communities with street dealers there. It has also played a major role in keeping these vulnerable young people and their families safe during COVID-19.

➡ **The use of social clauses in the children's hospital project has led to 2,515 weeks of direct new entrant labor being delivered including the creation of 10 apprenticeships and an additional 3,611.5 weeks of labor** by workers living in the surrounding communities – all for people who would not have had this opportunity otherwise. CAN has chaired the community benefit employment and training subgroup in the hospital that guided this work. One man now working on the construction of the hospital shared, "I'm a local guy and I'm part of the new initiative in community benefits and I was proud to get the job here. It's great to be working here because it's a legacy – Though I'm a small cog in the wheel it's a big legacy for my kids...and my grandkids."

➡ **The city council regeneration builds have benefited over 20 local people** including some participants in the TRY program. CAN was also able to source funding to research the experience of social clauses in Ireland which was launched by the Minister in Government with responsibility for procurement in October 2020.

➡ **The Welcome on the Mat project has also grown with 16 participants** and CAN is developing a cultural integration quality mark for five of the largest voluntary social housing bodies in Ireland. One neighborhood participant said, "the program challenged me about where racism is coming from. I learnt so much about myself and it opened my mind."

➡ **Finally, we developed Building Community Resilience, which brings together all our strategies** for tackling anti-social behavior in one program involving communities, senior police, healthcare agencies, youth organizations and local authorities to deliver safety in the south inner city Dublin area using mostly CAN initiatives. We have managed to secure funding from the local authority to lead this program over the coming 18 months.

💚 **We see ourselves as social innovators and are always looking for investment in innovation to tackle inequalities. We have other ideas about how to deepen the intercultural work, to expand the specialized youthwork around Ireland, and to promote social clauses more widely. The relationship with The Ireland Funds has been crucial for CAN in our innovation work. We had ideas, but limited capacity to develop them until the core funding injections from The Ireland Funds which came at crucial times.**