

Glór na Móna

Tuarisc Coimrithe an Stiúirthóra /Directors Summary Report, December 2024

Executive Director, Dr Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh

January-March

As the year began, we could enjoy the good news that our £500,000 of capital funding secured through the Belfast City Council's Neighbourhood Regeneration Scheme had finally passed through full council. With a similar capital funding commitment having been secured, in principal, from the Irish language investment fund (Ciste), we entered 2024 in confidence that our capital project would be proceeding and gathering further momentum. Our adult language classes and youth provision restarted with enthusiasm and we threw our energy behind Scoil Ghéimhridh Uí Chadhain which had developed significantly from our pilot programme in December 2022. This years' winter school was based in An Chultúrlann at the end of January and had an extended programme 3 days with hundreds in attendance exploring issues around Irish Unity and solidarity with Palestine.

The school, aimed to ensure deeper participation of working class communities in the ongoing discussion around Irish unity and social justice. We were overwhelmed and thrilled at the resounding success of our second winter school and the levels of participation and engagement around the key issues facing our society was heartening and inspiring in equal measure.

Fís an Phobail's Meitheal Meantóireachta programme commenced again and this time recruitment successfully extended beyond West Belfast and we had young activists from across the north and as far away as Clare Island in Cork taking part. We also further developed our partnership with Queens University through Dr Síobhra Aiken who provided research support their Research Excellence Framework for community impact.

Having developed the 'Ag Tógáil Clainne le Gaeilge' steering group of language activists and organisations involved in Irish medium family immersion and early years' programme support, Fís an Phobail also received welcome support from the Department Communities for research on intergenerational family language transmission work. This included the steering group taking part in a successful study visit to Wales in March to meet with those Welsh medium language activists and practitioners pioneering this work in Wales.

April- June

Having extended our Winter school and began planning for our May Festival, Féile na gCloigíní Gorma, we decided to cut back on our Seachtain na Gaeilge /Féile an Earraigh programme. We did continue with the 'Curious Minds will find a way' critical discussion series in partnership with the New Script for Mental Health we also organised our first annual Matt Lundy memorial lecture with Dr Lauren Ní Néill who delivered a fantastic presentation on Irish placenames. Fóram na nGael also came together to organise the Matt Lundy spring dianchúrsa in Coláiste Feirste which was almost 200 learners in attendance in what was a fitting memory to Matt's enduring legacy.

In April, we learned the sad news of the passing of the great Seán Mag Goill, the renowned activist architect who we named our building after in 2016. We posted a written eulogy of Seán and his legacy on our website and did some video media with Meon Eile. In May, we hosted a delegation of grassroots mental health practitioners from Pennsylvania in the US, he agreed to come over and visit our May festival, Féile na gCloigíní Gorma. One of their cohort, a psychotherapist named Connor Moriarty, ended up narrating our Féile wrap up video at the end of the festival. We also had contact from and another delegation from indigenous, riverine and agrarian traditional communities of Brazil's Amazon rainforest who agreed to visit us during their stay in London and facilitate a roundtable discussion on the battle against illegal mining. The Féile itself was a massive success and was aided by lovely weather than brought over 3500 people to a packed 8 day extravaganza of events which mixed serious discussion that explores the key issues of the day and fun-filled outdoor program of activities and events for the community to enjoy: with SEN family days, a community walk and run on the mountain, The Hills Are Alive outdoor activities with the Rewilding the Black Mountain project, a workshop with internationally recognised psychologist Dr Lucy Johnston, community lunch by the asylum seeker and refugee campaign Kind Economy, interview with Dublin GAA legend Jim Gavin, sunrise swims, sports tournaments, the Scríbhneoirí an tSléibhe poetry night, a Stonelifting workshop with David Keohan and much more all.

Deriving from the workshop we hosted with the delegation from the Amazon rainforest during the Féile, they extended a formal invite to Glór na Móna to visit their communities in a solidarity visit to Brazil in February 2025. Led by our Community Projects Officer, Eoghan Ó Garmáile, a group of 5 young activists who showed a keen interest in taking part in the trip, launched a new network, Meitheal Uí Chadhain under the watchwords; solidarity, education, and internationalism with the aim 'of learning from radical communities around the world as well as support them through acts of solidarity not only while we are in

those countries but also from here at home.’ Meitheal Uí Chadhain began a fundraising and awareness raising campaign for the trip to Amazon which has been ongoing since June.

In June, we began formed a sub-committee work on our 20th anniversary dinner which was booked as the finale event of Féile na Carraige 2024 in Belfast city hall and involved attracting over 30 organisations to buy tables in order to fill the 300 capacity venue. It was agreed that the event would double as a commemorative celebration and a fundraiser for Croí na Carraige. On June 21st, after a few months of preparatory work which typically took longer than we expected, we officially launched, Anam- Caifé na Carraige with a soft launch for partner organisations and colleagues. The launch, which was attended by our funders in the Housing Executive’s social enterprise scheme, got excellent media coverage and positive feedback from the local community. It was agreed that the Caifé would open on Fridays and Saturdays and developing organically over the months that followed.

July-August

Our youth summer programmes again went from strength to strength with Sólás na nÓg holding two weeks of bespoke summer programme for our young people with SEN and these catering from an age range of 7-18 years of age. Dr Órla Nig Oirc was also recruited again to conduct a follow on research report from her 2023 report. This report was focussed on measuring impact on a smaller cohort of young people and assessing the organic relationship with our schools and the impact of the provision on the holistic development of the young people.

This was mirrored by our Cumann Óige Uachtar Chluanaí summer programme, which was oversubscribed for its summer output. Having achieved record numbers, the youth team conducted their own evaluation of the programme which suggest that the team will need to attract additional funding resources to extend the summer programme and cater of the increased demand.

In terms of family transmission and language acquisition in the home, Fís an Phobail’s programme of work which was being led by Sorchá Nic Cathmhaoil , who was now full-time in the role, continued to grow and develop. The ‘Scéim Samhraidh na dTeaghlach’ was spread over the summer with weekly events rather than the intensive one-week programme for those families in West Belfast who are raising children in Irish.

The Fís an Phobail research report ‘Saol Trí Ghaeilge’ was launched in Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich where researcher Dr Órla Nig Oirc presented her findings. Foras na Gaeilge, Deputy CEO, Pól Deeds also spoke at the event, along with one of the parent cohort Connlaith Ní Raifeartaigh. A corresponding launch was also organised for later in the year in An Carn in Maghera and Foras na Gaeilge

expressed an interest in exploring a pilot ‘family immersion’ funding initiative between each area.

September-October

Our second Aspire Programme apprentice, Tarlach Bairclagh, whose post is funded through the Rank foundation, started in September. As long-standing part-time youth worker with Cumann Óige Uachtar Chluanaí, Tarlach availed of all the Fóram na nÓg accredited youth training and began working closely with Emma one day a week as well as supporting Eoghan’s participatory democracy work at Laochra Loch Lao’s schools work. Fís an Phobail’s language proficiency programme ‘An cúrsa cruinnis’ also kicked off again in September and was immediately oversubscribed with over 25 registered.

Belfast City Council also agreed to move ahead and procure for a design team to work up the Croí an Carraige proposal to stage 4 development. A number of meetings ensued and a new and updated design was developed. We also began a range of meetings seeking advice about fundraising in America for the building. Anam also received 4 stars in the Belfast City Council scores on the door inspection which gave the team great confidence.

Our 2024 Féile na Carraige programme had a special buzz in 2024 as we put the finishing touches to our celebratory dinner in Belfast city hall. We organised a range of excellent other events also which included; an interview with Irish wild rainforest guru, Eoghan Daltún; Fís an phobail organised a workshop with Aoife De Bhál in Gáirdín an Phobail; Fóram na nÓg hosted a youth policy consultation with the Department of Education; Anam held a live broadcast with Raidió na Gaeltachta and we held a landmark Harry Holland discussion with Clare Daly and Bernadette McAliskey in St Marys University college with over 300 in attendance.

Our Community Projects officer and Bayview Media’s Martin Keenan worked and produced a fantastic 15-minute short film to mark the 20th anniversary of Glór na Móna which was shown on the night of the dinner where over 320 people in attendance where presentations were also heard from 3 generations of Glór na Móna activists. We had support from local community development organisations, GAA clubs, our two universities, Trade Union, human rights NGOs and local businesses.

Anam continued to flourish and develop in November with our new Business Development officer, Caoimhe Ní Choinn organising and hosting a range of events of international solidarity events such as 'Coffee for Palestine', Belfast Dabke Traditional Palestinian dancing, and the Céad Míle Fáilte programme to inspire the use of the Irish language amongst new communities. Caoimhe also took part in a community inquiry in Glasgow at the beginning of November where she spoke about Glór na Móna and our burgeoning partnership with Gáirdín an Phobail. Anam has become a vibrant and lively community safe space in the Upper Springfield which is developing the philosophy of self-help within the community while placing an emphasis on sustainability and self-sufficiency through the use of local produce whenever possible. It is providing training and employment opportunities for young Irish speakers and one of these young people Úna Nic Gabhann, who attends the Sólás na nÓg youth project for those with additional learning needs was recently awarded the Glór na nGael young entrepreneur of the year for 2024

As part of Fleadh Feirste, we also launched our 20th anniversary book which included 23 personal memoirs from Glór na Móna activists, founders, colleagues and comrades over the past 20 years.

At the beginning of December, Fóram na nÓg hosted Minister Paul Givan, for a follow up visit to Glór na Móna to meet with young people from Coiste na nGael óg and some of our youth staff at Cumann Óige Uachtar Chluanaí. The visit received very comprehensive media coverage and the sector's collective position on the need for strategic and sustainable long-term funding for Irish medium youth work made very clearly and articulately.

In addition, we were delighted to hear that our large grant application we submitted in August to National Lottery Heritage Fund was successful. The aim is to create a profound and lasting impact by establishing the Croí na Carraige multi-purpose community building as a central hub for heritage interpretation within the West Belfast area that curates and showcases the remarkable history of the Upper Springfield area.

The funding will use to create a permanent interpretive heritage display curating the history of the area in our new proposed capital build and associated staff costs and activity/programme plan. At this stage, we have only received word of phase 1 Development funding to work up the project in order to apply for the larger delivery phase at a later date. We have two years to use this development phase effectively to ensure we receive the remainder of the funding. This good news gave further impetus and status to our efforts to raise the necessary funds to develop Croí na Carraige. Working in partnership with supportive alliances in Irish America and Conradh na Gaeilge's Douglas Hyde Foundation, we have provisionally planned a fundraising event for Croí na Carraige in New York City in June 2025.

Overview of 2024

On the whole, we are again delighted and inspired in equal measure by another amazing year progress, growth and renewal. The phenomenal growth of the many projects that have formed part of our long-term strategic vision for youth and community development and language revitalisation more generally have also brought the welcome addition of new staff and resources that have strengthened our overall operational output. It is testament to the commitment, diligence and ingenuity of our staff members that we have been able to manage this in very constrained office space. Despite it's the additional workload involved, the development of Anam- Caifé na Carraige, as envisaged as one of our 2023 Strategic milestones, has acted as a brilliant addition to our network of projects through providing an excellent and welcome hub for community organising, solidarity events, meetings with funders and visitors. Although the workload has been intense and overwhelming at times, we have stuck to an integrity based growth process throughout and this made all the difference in fostering a collective sense of ownership amongst the team. This was undoubtedly strengthened by the Strategic planning process that we conducted and completed in early 2023 which augmented our own processes of bi-monthly developmental planning sessions with full-time staff.

We also drew great value and inspiration from the process of developing the 20th anniversary short film and book. This gave us an opportunity to reflect positively on the core ethos, philosophy and ideological underpinning of Glór na Móna over the past two generations. We have a detailed calendar of work and a diverse yet inspiring programme for the year ahead. We look forward to the exciting challenges of the year ahead and would like to thank the board, and the wider community for their ongoing support, inspiration and patience.