



## Supporting Communities Turns 40!

This year marks Supporting Communities' 40th Anniversary since its first incarnation as a single project in Ballymena in 1979. Forty years is a major milestone for anybody, and we couldn't be prouder of the way Supporting Communities has grown over the years.

To celebrate, we'll be taking a look back this year at the people and places that helped get us where we are today. We hope everyone will get involved!

To take part in a bit of nostalgia, you can post throwback photos, documents, memories – whatever you can find - on social media using **#SC40**.

We might even come up with a prize for the oldest bit of evidence of being involved with our work – who remembers the Doury Road Project in 1979?

If you're interested in getting a bit more involved, we will be looking for people to write blog posts and/or be interviewed about their experiences with Supporting Communities during the past 40 years.

Get in touch and tell us your stories. Email [healy@supportingcommunities.org](mailto:healy@supportingcommunities.org) or message us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.



**Staff from NITAP and members of CAG at the launch of the Consultation Standards.**

*1996 - Back when Supporting Communities was NITAP and the CHF was the CAG!*



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## Downpatrick Group Changes Lives through Art and Counselling

Life Change Changes Lives (LCCL) is a group going from strength to strength. Originally set up in 2015, they provide counselling, therapy, training and activities to help people in their community overcome mental health issues and addictions. Using activities like Art as Therapy and work experience, they help people to tackle mental ill health, social isolation, lack of opportunity, offending, addiction, suicide and self-harm, and assist people to become more life and work ready.

Supporting Communities got involved in July 2017 when they were referred to us through the Housing Executive's Downpatrick District. Our Community Development Officer, Orla McCann, has been working with the group to explore funding opportunities to help them become more sustainable in addition to providing advice on committee roles and potential future projects.



*Ailish Teague, LCCL, and Orla McCann, Supporting Communities, pose with some hand painted furniture for sale in the LCCL shop.*

One of their most successful ventures, the Pop-Up Art Project, has been running for three years and attracts 20-25 people daily to participate in Art as Therapy where they upcycle and redesign furniture that would otherwise end up in a landfill.



*Ailish and Manus Teague, LCCL founders, in the Pop-Up Art workshop on Market Street, Downpatrick.*

The project acts as a medium for people to open up and discuss their feelings, which can be developed further through one-to-one counselling if they choose.

This is a real passion project for Manus and Ailish Teague, who have both given up their previous lines of work to concentrate on this project (more than) full time. The people who benefit from this project are all meaningfully involved in leading its delivery. All participants, whether they are coordinators, volunteers or members are equal actors in the project, not passive

***"We need to stop the stigma, stop the shame. If you had a sore tooth, you wouldn't hesitate to go to the dentist.***

***That's the way it should be for mental health. This is a mental health project.***

***People are now walking in here proud to be a part of it."***

***- Ailish Teague, LCCL***



Check out the shop!

recipients, ensuring they have an active stake in the project.

The group is now into its second year of funding from the Big Lottery which covers part of their administration costs and part of their counselling costs. They have also

recently moved to a town centre location on Market Street, Downpatrick. The front part of the new premises displays the upcycled furniture completed by service users which is also on sale to the public and there is studio space at the back where the art work is completed.

“Orla has been great coming down to us. The regular meetings with her really help”, says Ailish. “I need a deadline to work to and Orla gives me leads to try for new funding streams which are well suited for our project.”

Looking to the future, the group are exploring additional ways of employing service users to

learn new skills and build up their self-confidence. They hope to expand into online marketing and sales of the upcycled furniture to grow the existing social enterprise side of the venture.

“This is a very exciting project with a lot of potential”, said Orla McCann, Community Development Officer. “There is a lot of very valuable work going on here with some of the most vulnerable people in our society. We are continuing to help them secure funding and our Social Value Officer, Anita Doonan, is helping them to understand impact and social value so they can effectively demonstrate the very real worth of the work they do.”

You can check them out online at [www.lifechangechangeslives.com](http://www.lifechangechangeslives.com) and follow them on Facebook [@lcclproject](https://www.facebook.com/lcclproject) for a look at some of the incredible art for sale.



Shopfront at  
41 Market Street

# SOCIAL VALUE

## MEASURE YOUR IMPACT



"For every £1 invested, our work returns £9.55 of social value!"



Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a method of measuring the economic, environmental and social value your organisation has generated in a tangible way. It shows how valuable your work is, not just to the people it directly benefits, but to society as a whole.

### Why measure social value?

- Understand where you are having the most impact
- Identify what works and what doesn't
- Decide where best to allocate resources
- Demonstrate your value to others
- Attract further funding

### Impact Awareness Training

Free impact awareness training is available to Housing Community Network members.

Contact Aidan Kearney, Senior Training Officer for details on 028 8676 7040 or [aidan@supportingcommunities.org](mailto:aidan@supportingcommunities.org)



# Lessons from Sweden

by Colm McDaid

I was excited and grateful to win the coveted CO3 Leading People award last year in May. I was even more thrilled when I discovered that the prize came with a trip to Stockholm!



CO3's Nora Smith and Truls from Ideell Arena, her Swedish equivalent, created a perfectly tailored programme to reflect the interest areas of all the award winners on the trip, from health to education to housing/

community development to social enterprise. There was something for all of us to learn in a packed programme of site visits.

First we went to KFUM Central, an organisation similar to the YMCA. We learned that this was one of the oldest 'Swedish Civil Society' membership organisations. Their business model and structure has enabled KFUM Central to become one of the most sustainable third sector organisations in Stockholm. They own subsidiaries from health & fitness clubs to the very hotel where we were staying. We had a very open and honest Q&A session which set the tone for the rest of our trip where our Swedish hosts graciously shared their knowledge and experience, good and bad.



At the University of Stockholm, we gained a historical and theoretical context about what was fast becoming our new favourite phrase - 'Swedish Civil Society'. I was curious

about what this really meant, and this session explained where it fitted in with the business and public sectors in Sweden.

I also met with the recently retired and current Secretary Generals of the International Union of Tenants (IUT), a worldwide tenant membership organisation. Meeting with Annika and Magnus

allowed me to ask more questions about the whole concept of 'Swedish Civil Society'. I was especially interested to hear about the role played by the Swedish Tenants' Union. They are a longstanding and highly regarded membership organisation of almost half a million who play a hugely influential role in both lobbying central government to set standards for the Swedish private rented sector and also in negotiating and setting rents at a municipal (local council) level right across Sweden. It was then I began to appreciate the scale and influence that 'Civil Society' really has in Sweden.



Public housing in Stockholm

I was also fascinated to learn how the Swedish government is using creative research techniques involving community engagement and conversations at a grassroots level to help identify societal priorities. For me, it showed where we could easily replicate a similar approach in Northern Ireland and reinforced for me the benefits of trips like this in opening our minds to do things differently and achieve better results.

During our last session at Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University, I finally got the best answer to my question about what it meant to be a member of one of the 220,000 Swedish organisations. To be a member of 'Swedish Civil Society' was not only what was expected of you as a Swedish citizen, I was told, but it also meant you were a better Swede! In that one sentence I understood that civil society was an integral part of Swedish culture and in the DNA of every citizen.

This made me think of my experience at home. We have an equally vibrant and diverse range of organisations right across our region. We may not use the same terms, but what we have here is as important and dynamic as any other country.

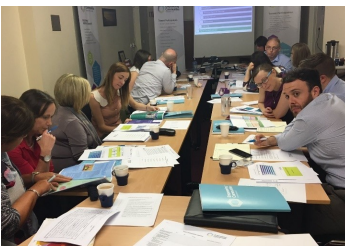
We may not shout it from the rooftops, but the impact and difference our third sector makes is immense so perhaps we should!

# Empowering Communities

In 2018, Empowering Communities firmly cemented itself as the lead organisation in promoting effective and meaningful tenant engagement. Our colleagues within the Housing Association sector have engaged us to assist them to deliver their Tenant Participation obligations in line with the Department of Communities requirements.

Each Housing Association is naturally different, and we pride ourselves in delivering a “bespoke” service tailored to individual requirements. This is just a flavour of what we have been working on this past year.

## Training



We have trained staff, tenants and board members of Housing Associations in a range of subjects such as ‘Tenant Participation & Community Development’, ‘Good

Governance’, ‘Service Improvement Training’ and Digital Inclusion.

We have also provided a number of one off sessions such as ‘Community Champions’, ‘Effective Meetings’, ‘Team Building’, and ‘Getting your Message Across’.

## Mystery Shopping

This tool allows members to assess their service at a given point in time; an ideal opportunity to get a picture of how tenants view them and to improve services. Empowering Communities provides an overview of the findings and recommended improvements to staff members.

## Tenant Participation Strategy

We have assisted Housing Associations to produce, review and update their Tenant

Participation Strategies ensuring they are aligned with DfC requirements. We developed the Tenant Participation Guidance notes in 2017 and will be updating them over the next 6 months, a role that will involve the recently established Housing Policy Panel.

*“I find the TPPN invaluable. It is enjoyable and interesting to hear what other Associations are doing in tenant engagement. It’s a great network to share ideas, particularly when the role of a TPO can be an isolated one.”*

*- Claire Darby, Choice HA*

## Tenant Participation Practitioners Network

Creating this support network for Housing Association staff has been a huge success thus far. The network acts as a platform for workers to come

together and share good practice and their experiences with tenant participation.

## Tenants’ Committee in Supported Housing Scheme

Another highlight for us has been working with a group of tenants living in a scheme for frail elderly and people with mild to moderate dementia. The



*Cedar Court launches tenant’s group*

work was commissioned by South Eastern Trust (Joint Management Provider) and has been earmarked as a model of good practice.

## Looking Forward

Looking ahead, we have many exciting projects lined up including working with new Housing Associations and with housing bodies in the Republic of Ireland. We will also be developing an accreditation framework for Tenant Participation in Northern Ireland.

To keep up with all our future news and events, sign up to our mailing list at [www.empoweringcommunities.ltd](http://www.empoweringcommunities.ltd).



# 40 Years

## Supporting™ Communities

Empowering Society

### The Doury Road Pilot

A tenants' action group addresses decline in an estate in Ballymena and impresses upon the Housing Executive the need for community development in successful housing.



1979

### Priority Estates Project

Following on from the successful pilot, the Priority Estates Project is established by the NI Voluntary Trust in conjunction with the Housing Executive in April, 1983.



1983

1984



### Tenant Participation Advisory Service, a NICVA Project

TPAS is established to support some 60 tenants groups, providing training, policy, and information. They worked with the NIHE to contribute to reports on Joint Management Agreements and the resourcing of Tenants Associations.

1986



### Tenant Liaison Officers Project

Community groups and Tenants' Associations are invited to apply for grants to employ a Tenant Liaison Officer through funding from NI Voluntary Trust and NIHE. Six Community Associations/Tenants Groups were selected and employed for two years.

1988



### Estate Action Project (NI) Ltd.

EAP is established to facilitate greater involvement of tenants in housing and to provide support services to enable them to do so. Over 40 estates all over Northern Ireland are involved in developing strategies and other initiatives.

1991



### The NI Tenants Action Project

EAP and TPAS merge "to promote the participation of communities, particularly in estates and neighbourhoods, in the management of their homes and of the adjoining physical and social environment."

### Community Association Handbook Launched

The first of its kind in Northern Ireland, the Handbook contained information needed to establish and maintain a Community/Tenants Association and details of the structure and processes of Housing Executive.



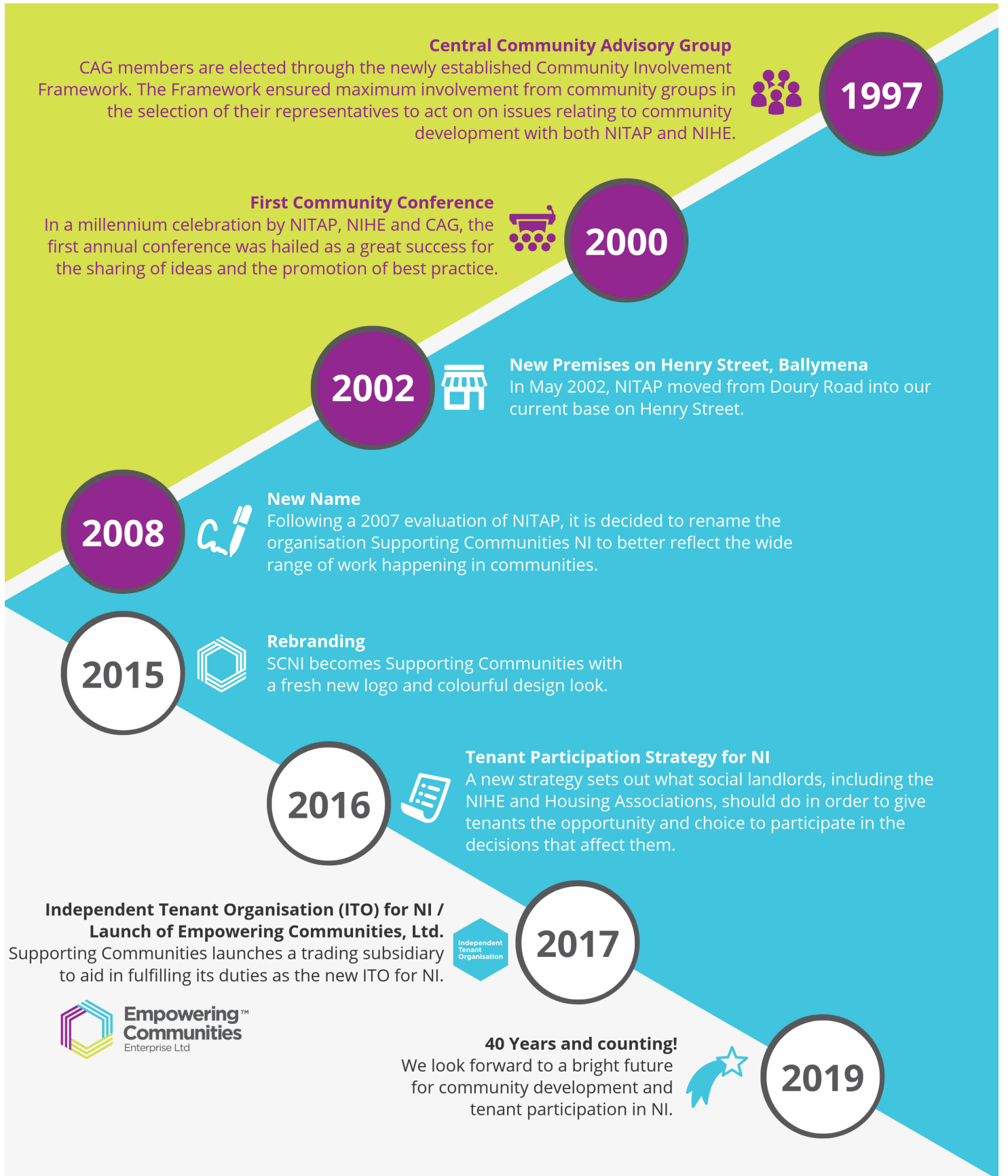
1994

### Tenant Consultation in Planned Schemes

A Working Group made up of representatives from NIHE, NITAP & CAG designed a programme that for the first time ensured a meaningful role in the way that tenants are consulted.



1997



## Looking Back to Look Forward

As our timeline (on the two previous pages) shows, the history of Supporting Communities is really the story of tenant participation in Northern Ireland.

As we look back at our evolution over the past 40 years growing from a single pilot project in the Doury Road Estate, Ballymena to an independent, province wide charity serving over 500 groups (as well as other voluntary and statutory organisations), the thread of empowering grassroots participation and tenant involvement runs throughout.



*A meeting with the CAG in the late 90s.*

As a critical friend and partner to the Housing Executive, we have stood up for the 'tenant's voice' and have embedded a culture of meaningful consultation and two-way communication. We have also ensured that there is unbiased, objective support for that process in the form of development officers, training, advice and funding assistance. Our timeline shows just a few of the milestones marking our organisation's growth along the way but does not show the constant expansion of the support services and high-quality staff growing along with it making it all possible.

The formation of the Central Community Advisory Group in 1997, which has since become the Housing Community Network, was a foundational piece of work which has led the way in facilitating effective tenant participation. The HCN now has a recognised and meaningful role in the monitoring and decision making process of the Housing Executive and

influences decisions affecting tenants and communities. The Central Housing Forum, made up from representatives of all the HCN areas, scrutinises Housing Executive policies and procedures to act as quality assurance to the Housing Executive Board with whom they meet on a regular basis.

The Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland, launched in 2016, sets out what the standards should be for all social housing landlords and when Supporting Communities was appointed by the Department for Communities as the Independent Tenant Organisation for NI the following year, our long unofficial role was formally recognised.

What's next for tenant participation and community development in Northern Ireland? The notion that the fundamental relationship between a social landlord and their tenant is not just that of provider and consumer, but one of partners in building communities is what drives us forward to innovate and build on what has come before.

As we look to our cousins in TPAS England, Scotland and Cymru, as well as further afield to organisations in Europe and elsewhere, we realise Northern Ireland has long been a leader in this kind of work. We will continue to share our own best practice, learn from others' ideas and take what works best back home to our groups and structures here.

Our recently established trading arm, Empowering Communities, is expanding our reach and trying new models of participation with Housing Associations throughout Ireland, North and South. Our work in developing an accreditation framework for Tenant Participation in Northern Ireland will drive us forward in exciting new ways, building on the 40 years of progress and innovation that has paved the way thus far.



## “Get Connected” in Strand Road

Supporting Communities is very pleased to be continuing our collaboration with BT and Choice Housing Association to provide digital skills training to tenants who might otherwise not have the confidence or ability to get online themselves.

In 2017, we worked with a group of people living in homeless hostels in East Belfast. This past summer, we got a group from Leonard Cheshire Taylor House involved, and now for a third phase, we have moved North West to Choice’s new 126 Strand Road scheme in Derry/Londonderry.



*Stephanie McKillop, Digital Inclusion Officer, with some of the Choice Residents.*

This new 7 week digital skills course builds digital confidence and develops the skills residents need to engage in a technology led world as well as providing tablet computers to all those who take part. Being online has given participants the independence to organise their own lives, stay safe online, save money, take up a new hobby and connect with family and friends.



We also brought in some guests to help reinforce the benefits of going digital. Natassia from Libraries NI’s Digital Citizen Initiative delivered a popular session on

eBooks and eMagazines to the group. The participants were delighted with this and noted that it would be very useful, especially over the coming winter months.

“Downloading an audio book free of charge and from my own flat is amazing, I wish I had known

about this years ago. I’m also looking forward to getting new Christmas Recipes from cooking books online”, said Caron-Michelle, Choice Housing Tenant.

The course also considers safety concerns and raises awareness of the potential dangers involved in being online. Stephanie Roberts from Ulster Bank delivered a very useful session on Cyber Security to ensure that the participants can avoid internet scams and hacks.

“This session has really opened my eyes to the dangers online, I had

never taken much notice of it until this awareness session”, remarked Caroline, a Choice tenant and project participant.

Much like the previous groups involved in the Get Connected Project, this group has benefited not just from learning new skills, but also from forming new friendships. The social element of coming each week to learn together has been a boost to the neighbours who are all settling into the newly refurbished scheme.



We look forward to returning in 2019 to see how they are getting on with their new skills and digital confidence, connected now to both the online world and their real world neighbours.

# Supporting High-Rise Residents to Have Their Say!

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, it is unsurprising that the past year has seen a tremendous focus on high-rise fire safety. At a national level, an Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, led by Dame Judith Hackitt was published in May 2018 while Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry ended in December 2018. Locally, an Independent Reference Group was set up to review fire safety in Housing Executive tower blocks, with the Group releasing its findings last January.

works to support residents (regardless of tenure) to get involved at a level and in a way that is right for them.



Sarah Harkness-Robinson, Project Coordinator commented, "Over the past 40 years, Supporting Communities have advocated for tenant participation and stressed the importance of the tenant voice. Although it's always important to have residents round the table, it's perhaps more important than ever that tower block residents are encouraged and supported to be there."

First, we distributed a survey to all tower block residents so we could learn more about high-rise life and find out about the issues which affect residents.



Meet and greet session with Housing Executive staff.

Secondly, we completed a series of resident engagement and 'get involved' sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to continue to raise awareness of the project, to listen to residents, to learn more about the high-rise life, and to share ways in which residents can get involved and how Supporting Communities can help.

In the final ongoing phase, we are supporting the development of new and existing community representation across the 33 tower blocks. This is not a one-size fits all approach. We are listening and working with residents in each block to consider the next steps which are right for them.



An information session in Divis Tower

A fundamental thread throughout these studies has been the importance of ensuring effective communication and meaningful tenant participation with highrise residents.

Given this, Supporting Communities was keen to have been engaged by the Housing Executive to deliver a 12month project starting in Spring 2018, to encourage residents of the Housing Executive's 33 high-rises to have their say.

The overarching aim of the Tower Block Project is to improve communication between the Housing Executive and tower block residents. To do this, the Project aims to support the development of new community representation in tower blocks where none currently exists while also supporting and developing established community representation. Most importantly, the Project

## Tower Block Project in numbers:

**1839**  
Surveys distributed over 33 Tower Blocks



**13**  
"Get Involved" Information Sessions delivered



**99**  
Residents attended an Information Session



**34**  
Resident engagement sessions delivered



**139**  
Residents spoke to us during engagement sessions

## Communities Training for the Future

Our training team have been busy in recent months working closely with, and providing training to many community groups, their committees, volunteers and staff members alike. This article gives a brief idea of the courses, activities and benefits of participating in our structured (accredited and non-accredited) training programmes.

The roll-out of our 'Good Governance' training sessions coupled with 'Measuring Impact' sessions, have been a priority and the feedback from participants has been very positive. These sessions are designed to help committee members effectively run their meetings and group activities and to raise awareness of how to measure the impact they are making in their communities.

Meanwhile, groups in Craigavon, Lisburn and Castlereagh have been availing of our accredited Community Capacity Building Levels 1 and 2 courses, which are delivered by our Training Officers Karla and Stephen. These courses are run over 10-12 weeks and participants receive accredited certification from OCN (Open College Network) upon completion. Topics covered in these courses include; Effective Meetings, Communication, and Community Development to name but a few.



*Newtownards OCN Level 1 in Capacity Building*

Another popular accredited course is our Social Enterprise programme. Stephen Marks, Training and Social Enterprise Officer, delivers sessions at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and has even had a few graduates recently progress to university to complete an Advanced Diploma in Social Enterprise.

These courses fundamentally build an understanding for participants around Social Enterprise and, as the weeks and levels progress, allow the participants to plan, design and set up a Social Enterprise in their community. Courses are currently being completed by groups in Belfast, Lisburn and Derry/Londonderry.



*Monkstown Community Association D4C group*

This month has also seen the conclusion of the D4C (Digital 4 Communities) project with positive and successful outcomes for all groups involved. Senior Training Office Aidan Kearney has been co-ordinating the D4C project in conjunction with NI Housing Executive and community groups in Belfast, Omagh, Newtownards, Newtownabbey and Monkstown. The project provided tablets and basic digital training for community groups with an emphasis on the rollout of Universal Credit and assisting the participants to access their portals, as well as other digital services which are primarily delivered online.

We are not resting on our laurels, though. Supporting Communities is constantly striving to improve our services. The training team are currently developing some exciting new courses as well as regularly updating existing content to ensure all our materials are relevant and useful.

Keep an eye out on our website for details of new courses coming up!

# The 2018 Annual Community Conference in Pictures

