



BANN MAINE WEST
COMMUNITY CLUSTER

Building Bridges Together



● **Year 2 Impact Report • April 2025 - March 2026**

BANN MAINE WEST

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BANN MAINE WEST

Introduction

This report presents the findings from Year 2 of Bann Maine West's Connecting Communities programme, covering the period from 16 April 2025 to 15 April 2026.

This project relates to a five-year programme, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, supporting older people across Portglenone, Cullybackey, The Grange, Hillstown, Cloney and Tullygarley.

Building on the foundations established during Year 1, Bann Maine West continued to deliver a varied programme of social, educational and community-based activities. Larger shared events were complemented by smaller activities delivered within familiar local settings, helping to make participation more accessible across the six communities.

Project Purpose

This programme primarily supports older people living in rural areas, particularly those who live alone, have limited access to transport or services, or may be at risk of loneliness and social isolation.

The programme is delivered through Bann Maine West's network of six community partners and links participants with local health, advice, digital support and community organisations. These relationships also support referrals into the programme, provide access to relevant guest speakers and create additional opportunities for participants, including practical support such as charity hampers. This helps people access activities in familiar local settings while connecting them with wider information, services and support.



Hugh Kerry

"It gives you something to look forward to and it gives you educational opportunities, because we always have to keep learning."

Anticipated Programme Outcomes

- **Reduce loneliness and help people build meaningful social connections**
- **Support improved health, wellbeing and confidence**
- **Create opportunities for learning, creativity and personal development**
- **Improve access to local information, advice and support services**
- **Strengthen community participation, local groups and relationships across the six communities**

Activities Delivered in Year 2

Year 2 combined larger shared activities with smaller community-based programmes delivered in familiar and accessible local settings.



LUNCH & LEARN

10 monthly sessions combining a shared meal, guest speaker and social time together.



MEN'S BREAKFAST

10 monthly gatherings providing an informal and welcoming space for older men to meet, share experiences and access useful information.



TRIPS AND OUTINGS

4 shared cultural, heritage and seasonal visits for Lunch & Learn and Men's Breakfast participants.



DROP-IN MORNINGS

7 Hub-based sessions connecting participants directly with health, advice, community policing and support organisations.



THE COMMUNITY HUB

An ongoing welcoming space for activities, information, practical support, volunteering, shopping and informal social contact.



LOCAL LUNCH & LEARNS AND WORKSHOPS

28 smaller sessions delivered in local community venues and tailored to the interests and needs of each area.



CARD MAKING

48 weekly two-hour sessions supporting creativity, confidence and the production of items for the Community Hub shop.



TECH TUESDAYS

Weekly structured and drop-in support with online applications and digital support requirements, i.e. smartphones and online banking.



KNIT 'N NATTER

48 two hour sessions, delivered weekly, offering regular social contact, peer support, developing creative skills and the production of items for the Community Hub shop.

Year 2 in Numbers



1,401

participants attended across 59 organised events, workshops and community sessions



30

volunteers supporting activities, events and the Community Hub.



6

rural communities supported through the programme.



12

community Representatives involved in programme planning. Two representatives from each area attended monthly meetings to identify needs, review delivery and shape future activities.



2

part-time staff posts supporting programme delivery.



20

average visitors to the Community Hub, open 5 days per week.



£14,000+

Community Hub shop sales between April 2025 and March 2026, contributing to the overall sustainability of Bann Maine West.



6

Communities supported.

• Portglenone

• Hillstown

• Cullybackey

• The Grange

• Cloney

• Tullygarley

IN FOCUS

MEN'S BREAKFAST

I don't get out much, so I love coming to this event to talk to others and see how they are getting on.

MERVYN, AGE 68

The Men's Breakfast provided an informal and welcoming opportunity for older men from rural communities to meet, enjoy a cooked breakfast and hear from an invited guest speaker.

Ten monthly sessions were held at the Wild Duck in Portglenone during Year 2, on the third week of the month from 10.30am - 12.30pm. Participants paid £3 to attend, helping to keep the activity affordable for those living on pensions or fixed incomes.

Participants were connected with information and support from Age NI, Mid and East Antrim Agewell Partnership and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. The relaxed format helped reach retired men, widowers, carers and those living alone or adjusting to changes in health.

Regular attendance strengthened participants' connection with the Community Hub, with some calling in more often between sessions. Friendships developed through the programme encouraged peer support, with participants checking in on one another, sharing information, offering encouragement and helping others feel more connected to community.

Year 2 at a Glance

1 familiar and accessible venue at the Wild Duck.

10 monthly Sessions

A shared breakfast, guest speaker and time for conversation.

Topics shaped by participant interests and local needs.



Guest speakers provided information and discussion on subjects relevant to the group, including:

Farming and rural life

Home security

Local history and heritage

Historic film and television footage

Wildlife and the natural environment

Practical community information

Storytelling and reminiscence

Participants also valued the organised trips and outings, which provided opportunities to visit new places and spend more time together outside the monthly sessions.

The Year 2 report identifies the Men's Breakfast as an unexpectedly popular part of the programme and highlights the continuing need for male-focused social support in rural communities.

Connection, Routine and Belonging

Interviews with participants showed that the Men's Breakfast delivers benefits well beyond the breakfast and guest talk. The men interviewed for this feature ranged from 68 to 86 years of age and had joined the group through friends, relatives and word of mouth. The most consistent benefit was having a regular date

in the calendar and a reason to leave the house. Participants described reconnecting with people they had not seen for many years, developing new friendships and maintaining social contact following retirement, bereavement or changes in their health. Affordability was important. While the £3 charge kept the breakfast accessible for most participants, some men were not in a position to pay. In these cases, attendance was provided free of charge to ensure that cost did not prevent anyone from taking part.

Denver, Age 71

Denver began attending in May 2023, several months after losing his wife. He had retired five years previously and became involved after being encouraged by a friend.

The Men's Breakfast gives Denver a regular opportunity to meet people from the local community and provides something positive to anticipate each month. He also values the group outings and believes that participation has supported his emotional wellbeing following bereavement.

"It gives me an interest and something to look forward to. I always put it in my Calendar"



Leslie, Age 74

Leslie joined approximately six months ago after being introduced by his brother-in-law. Since attending, he has reconnected with people he went to school with but had not seen for many years.

Although Leslie remains busy helping to care for his four grandchildren, the Breakfast provides a separate opportunity to meet people of a similar age and renew older community connections.

"I have met people I was at school with and had not seen for years. I am so grateful for this opportunity to get out and it's enabled me to attend other programmes"

Mervyn, Age 68

Mervyn lives between Cullybackey and Ahoghill and retired approximately two and a half years ago. He also attends the developing Men's Shed in Cullybackey, where he has an interest in woodworking and practical skills.

He values the range of talks, the trips and the opportunity to meet people he would otherwise rarely

see. As someone living on a fixed income, he also highlighted the importance of the affordable attendance fee.

"I wouldn't see some of these people if the Breakfast didn't exist. I don't get out much, so I love coming to this event to talk to others and see how they are getting on"

Three Brothers, One Shared Routine

Tom, George and Joe, aged 82, 84 and 86 respectively, attend the Men's Breakfast together and provide their own informal transport and support network.

The brothers value the conversation, guest speakers and opportunity to meet other local men. George can no longer drive and, because of deteriorating eyesight, is also unable to attend some of the activities he previously enjoyed. Travelling with his brothers allows him to remain socially involved.

"I can't get to church now, so this is a huge lifeline for me to get out with other people."
George.



IN FOCUS

LUNCH & LEARN

I feel more connected to the community as a result of attending.

Rhoda, Lunch & Learn Participant

Lunch & Learn brought older people together for an informative guest speaker, lunch and time to connect with others. Ten sessions were delivered during Year 2, with approximately 50 participants attending each event. Demand regularly exceeded available places, resulting in waiting lists and demonstrating the continued popularity of the programme.

Sessions took place at the Wild Duck in Portglenone on the last Thursday of each month, from 12noon to 2pm. Participants attended from across the six Bann Maine West communities, with two transport services supporting those who did not drive or had limited mobility.

The popularity of Lunch & Learn also generated interest in other Connecting Communities activities and highlighted demand for smaller Lunch & Learn sessions within individual communities. These local sessions provided additional opportunities to participate closer to home, while the wider programme continued to support new friendships, learning and social connection.



Learning Through Shared Experience

Guest speakers and activities were selected in response to participant interests and local needs.

Guest speaker topics included::

Health, wellbeing and healthy eating

Pharmacy and practical health information

Local history and heritage

Gardening and cookery

Genealogy

Personal safety and scam awareness

Music, storytelling and reminiscence

Information from statutory and community organisations

Participants consistently valued the opportunity to learn about subjects they may not otherwise encounter. The sessions also provided a practical route into other local services, groups and activities.

Beyond The Monthly Session

Lunch & Learn provided a gateway into wider community participation. Information shared at sessions introduced participants to walking groups, senior citizens' activities, the Men's Breakfast, local groups, trips and other Bann Maine West programmes. Participant feedback showed that people used the programme to build new friendships and become more connected locally.

Some participants also progressed into additional activities, including walking groups and the Men's Breakfast. This demonstrated that Lunch & Learn offered more than a monthly event, helping participants build confidence, widen social networks and access further opportunities across the Mid & East Antrim area.

Accessing The Programme

Transport was one of the most important factors affecting participation.

The provision of minibus transport enabled participants from communities such as Cullybackey to attend sessions in Portglenone.

For others, informal lifts from friends and fellow participants provided an additional layer of community support.

The affordable meal, accessible venue and regular monthly format also helped ensure that people living on pensions or fixed incomes could continue to participate.



Voices Around the Table

Dessie

Dessie has attended programmes at Bann Maine West for 6 years. He lost his wife several years ago and also provides care for his son. Living 7 miles from Portglenone, the programme provides one of his few regular opportunities to socialise outside the home.

He values meeting people, getting out with others and having a dependable activity to attend.

“There is nothing else like it. It changed the whole scene for me and I enjoy meeting other people.”

Jean

Jean began attending approximately two years ago and no longer drives. She now receives a lift from another participant, allowing her to continue attending despite limited mobility.

She values the talks, organised outings and regular social contact and believes that participation has positively affected her mental wellbeing.

“It has made a huge difference to me. It gives me something to look forward to every month.”

Diane and Chris

Diane and Chris moved back to Northern Ireland after living in England for more than 20 years. They settled in a rural location outside the town and initially knew very few people.

Lunch & Learn helped them establish new friendships and learn about other opportunities across the Bannside area. They particularly valued the local history, healthy-eating, music and storytelling sessions, together with the organised outings.

“When we moved back, we did not know anyone. The programme helped us meet people and find out what else was happening locally.”

Attracta and Maureen

Attracta and Maureen live approximately five miles from the venue and have participated in the programme for several years. They value the meal, guest speakers and regular opportunity to meet others.



Their experience also highlights the level of demand. Sessions are frequently full, with participants waiting for cancellations to secure a place.

“We would be lost without the group. It gives us something to look forward to every month and positively impacts our health and wellbeing.”

Rhoda Mark

Rhoda lives in Cullybackey and can only drive occasionally because of her health. She would not drive to Portglenone independently, making the minibus essential to her participation.

Having moved from County Down, Rhoda developed a new friendship network through the programme and became more aware of other local groups and activities.

“It gets me out of the house. I have a completely new set of friends and feel more connected with the community as a result of attending”

Lunch & Learn - Year 2 Differences Linked To Programme Outcomes

National Lottery funding reduced the cost of taking part and enabled Bann Maine West to provide a consistent monthly programme of lunches, guest speakers, transport and social activity.

For participants living on pensions or fixed incomes, the subsidised cost made regular attendance affordable. The provision of transport and organised lifts also enabled people who no longer drove, had limited mobility or lived outside Portglenone to attend.

Funding supported a varied programme of talks on health, wellbeing, local history, gardening, cookery, personal safety and community services. Participants reported gaining useful information, discovering other local activities and becoming more aware of the support available to them.

The practical support provided through the funding resulted in:

- **More older people being able to access the programme**
- **Reduced financial and transport barriers**
- **Regular opportunities to leave the house and meet others**
- **New friendships and stronger community connections**
- **Improved emotional wellbeing and reduced isolation**
- **Greater awareness of local services, groups and activities**
- **A dependable monthly activity that participants could look forward to**

Participant feedback showed that the combination of affordable access, transport, learning and social contact was central to the impact of Lunch & Learn.

IN FOCUS

CARD MAKING GROUP

“The group has also helped me build friendships and become involved in much more within the community

Judy, Card Making Group

The Card Making Group provided a free, weekly opportunity for participants to develop creative skills, meet others and contribute to the wider work of the Community Hub by supplying regular handmade cards to the Hub.

During Year 2, 48 two-hour sessions were delivered, with an average of six participants attending each week. The small-group format created a relaxed environment where members could work at their own pace, learn from one another and gradually build confidence.

Participants produced a wide range of handcrafted cards, including personalised and bespoke orders. These were sold through the Community Hub shop, giving members a visible sense of achievement and demonstrating that their skills were valued by the wider community.

The programme also provided new cutting equipment, helping the group improve the quality and range of its work. As participants became more experienced, they began supporting and training new members, sharing their skills with other community groups and delivering talks and small workshops for others. This progression demonstrates the confidence participants have built and their willingness to pass on their skills to others.



Year 2 Snapshot

48 weekly sessions

2 hours per session

6 participants attending on average

Free to attend

Handcrafted and bespoke cards produced for sale through the Community Hub



Participant Stories...More Than A Creative Activity

Participant interviews showed that the impact of the Card Making Group extended beyond learning a craft. For some, it provided a regular opportunity to leave the house. For others, it supported mental wellbeing, created new friendships or provided a route into other community activities and services.

Alison

Alison lives with a progressive condition that affects her mobility and limits her opportunities to get out and take part in community life. She had also experienced depression and described the Card-Making Group as an important source of routine, friendship and emotional support.

The accessible venue, made it possible for Alison to attend regularly. She found staff welcoming and valued having people who had time to listen and talk. Through the group, she developed new creative skills and formed friendships with people of different ages, with

several of these relationships continuing outside the weekly sessions.

Peer learning was central to the group, with participants sharing techniques, teaching others and helping newer members develop their skills and confidence. Alison was also connected to wider activities and local support services.

“The project has been a lifesaver. I have made so many friends, learned new skills and really look forward to coming each week.”

Catherine

Catherine first joined the Card-Making Group after coming along to a Friday morning session. She found the atmosphere relaxed and welcoming and quickly became part of the group.

Before attending, Catherine had limited experience of card making. Through the weekly sessions, she learned new techniques from other participants and developed skills she had not previously possessed. The informal, peer-led approach meant that members could learn at their own pace, share ideas and support one another.

The group also widened Catherine's social network. She met new people, developed friendships and gained a regular activity to look forward to. She now contributes cards for sale through the Community Hub shop, giving her a sense of achievement and allowing her creativity to support the wider community programme.

"Everyone is very friendly. I have learned skills I did not have before, made new friends and now help provide cards for the shop."

Judy, Sharing Skills and Giving Something Back

Judy had been crafting for approximately 13 years before becoming involved with the Card-Making Group. After moving from England, she had a limited local support network and initially connected with another participant through Facebook.

Her existing experience allowed her to take an active role within the group. Rather than only

developing her own work, Judy began helping other participants learn new techniques and build their confidence. She described this as an opportunity to give something back to the community.

Participation also opened the door to wider social and community involvement. Through connections made at the Hub, Judy joined two walking groups, took part in trips and attended cultural activities, including an event focused on Polish culture.

The provision of new cutting equipment further supported the group's development and enabled members to expand the range and quality of cards produced.

"I have been crafting for years, so it is rewarding to help other people learn. The group has also helped me build friendships and become involved in much more within the community."

Change During Year 2

A before-and-after survey was used to assess changes in participants' experiences, confidence and involvement across eight areas linked to the Connecting Communities programme. This included:

Social connections and relationships

Emotional wellbeing and confidence

Involvement in community life

Independence in daily life

Confidence using digital technology

Learning and personal development

Awareness of local information and support

Sense of purpose and ability to contribute

Results from 60 participants showed positive change across every area measured. The average score increased from 6.16 out of 10 before participation to 8.10 after participation, representing an overall improvement of 31.4%.

OVERALL Impact

60 

participants included

6.16/10

average score before participation



8.10/10

average score after participation



+1.94

average increase



31.4%

overall improvement



8 of 8

outcome areas improved



1. EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND CONFIDENCE

Before: 6.20

After: 8.29

Increase: +2.09

This was the strongest area of improvement. Participants reported increased confidence, improved emotional wellbeing and greater motivation to take part in activities and meet others.

2. PRACTICAL DAILY INDEPENDENCE

Before: 6.29

After: 8.32

Increase: +2.03

This area achieved the highest final score. Improvements reflected greater confidence in managing daily life, accessing practical support and remaining active and involved.

3. SOCIAL CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Before: 6.32

After: 8.31

Increase: +1.99

Participants reported stronger friendships, more regular social contact and a greater sense of connection to people within their local communities.

4. SENSE OF PURPOSE AND CONTRIBUTION

Before: 6.19

After: 8.14

Increase: +1.96

Participation created opportunities for people to contribute through volunteering, helping others, sharing skills and becoming more involved in community activities.

POSITIVE CHANGE
Across Each Outcome

**5. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
AND ENGAGEMENT**

Before: 6.16

After: 8.08

Increase: +1.92

Participants became more involved in local groups, events, trips and activities and reported greater confidence in taking part in community life

**6. DIGITAL CONFIDENCE
AND SKILLS**

Before: 5.95

After: 7.85

Increase: +1.90

Participants increased their confidence using digital technology through Tech Tuesdays and practical one-to-one support, including help with smartphones, online applications and accessing everyday digital services.

**7. LEARNING, SKILLS AND
PERSONAL GROWTH**

Before: 6.01

After: 7.88

Increase: +1.87

The programme provided opportunities to learn through guest speakers, workshops, creative activities and shared peer experience.

**8. ACCESS TO SUPPORT AND
LOCAL INFORMATION**

Before: 6.17

After: 7.90

Increase: +1.73

Participants became more aware of local services, community organisations, advice providers and practical sources of support.

What the Findings Show

Between June 2025 and March 2026, average participant scores increased across all eight outcome areas. The strongest improvements were recorded in emotional wellbeing and confidence, practical independence, social connections and sense of purpose.

These findings reflect the wider interview evidence, which highlighted reduced loneliness, new friendships, greater confidence, improved awareness of support and increased involvement in community life.

Methodological Note

The comparison is based on survey information from 60 participants collected between June 2025 and March 2026. Some later returns were provided as overall averages rather than separate scores for each outcome area, so the detailed eight-area figures include a calculated allocation.

CASE Studies



SAMANTHA

Community Development Officer,
Cullybackey Community Partnership

Samantha joined Cullybackey Community Partnership as Community Development Officer in September 2024. As the organisation's only member of staff, she works alongside a 13-member voluntary board to develop activities and support for adults and older people in Cullybackey.

Cullybackey Community Partnership is one of the six local organisations connected through Bann Maine West. Samantha's involvement in the Connecting Communities project is therefore

centred on partnership working, local outreach and ensuring that residents can move between activities delivered in Cullybackey and the wider programme.

Activities and Contribution

The relationship between Cullybackey Community Partnership and Bann Maine West operates in both directions. Where Bann Maine West identifies someone from Cullybackey who is isolated or requires additional local support, that person can be signposted to Samantha and introduced to nearby coffee mornings, workshops and community activities.

In return, Samantha can connect local residents with the wider Connecting Communities programme, including Lunch & Learn, trips and activities where transport support may be available. Shared volunteers and regular communication between the organisations also help ensure that participants receive consistent information and are not limited to opportunities delivered by one group.

This approach is particularly important for people who may not use social media or who have become less confident about leaving home. Samantha highlighted the continued importance of telephone calls, leaflets and personal invitations in reaching older residents. "We work very closely with Bann Maine West and strive to help one another. If someone from Cullybackey needs local support, they can be signposted to me; if our members want to access the wider programme, we can connect them with those opportunities."

Personal & Community Change

The partnership has widened the range of opportunities available to residents in Cullybackey. People can begin with a small activity close to home and, as their confidence grows, progress into wider events, trips and learning opportunities.

Samantha has seen people return to community activity after receiving a personal telephone call and has met residents who had

lived in Cullybackey for many years without previously knowing what support was available. Connecting Communities has strengthened the route between these individuals, local provision and the other partner groups across the Bann Maine West area.

Outcomes due to Community Fund Investment

Stronger signposting between local and area-wide activities

Increased access to support for isolated residents

Greater participation beyond Cullybackey

Improved cooperation between community organisations

More personalised outreach to people without digital access

Stronger relationships across the six participating communities

Project Volunteer Case study



GEORGINA, AGE 81

Participant and Volunteer,
Bann Maine West

Georgina has lived in Cullybackey for approximately 60 years and has volunteered in the village for more than three decades. A retired nurse, she has always enjoyed remaining active, meeting people and contributing to community life.

She was already spending time in the Community Hub and helping informally when she was asked to become a volunteer. Her involvement now combines participation in the programme with a flexible volunteering role supporting the Hub, community shop, activities and organised trips.

Activities and Contribution

Georgina helps in the Bann Maine West Community Hub shop. She welcomes visitors, wraps purchases and provides cover when staff are attending meetings or delivering activities elsewhere. She also assists with groups and accompanies older participants on trips, including visits to the Belfast Mela and Bushmills.

Her knowledge of Cullybackey and her confidence speaking to people make her particularly effective at welcoming new visitors. She speaks to people using the Hub and adjoining coffee shop, explains the activities available and encourages those who may be isolated to become involved.

Georgina described approaching an older man who regularly sat alone in the coffee shop. She encouraged him to try an activity, while project staff helped arrange transport. After attending, he began returning to ask what other events were available.

Personal and Community Change

The Connecting Communities project has given Georgina a regular and meaningful role in which she can use the interpersonal skills developed during her nursing career. It keeps her active, provides a continued sense of purpose and allows her to remain closely connected to village life.

The investment in the Hub, accessible activities and organised trips has created opportunities for Georgina both to participate herself and to support others. She has also been encouraged to revisit former interests, including crochet, after seeing the creative groups operating through the Hub.

Whenever somebody says, 'Thank you, for your help,' that makes my day.

Georgina sees the effect of the programme on other participants at first hand. People remain after activities to continue talking, notice when regular attendees are absent and provide informal support when someone is unwell or experiencing difficulties.

Outcomes due to Community Fund Investment

A continued sense of purpose through volunteering

Improved personal wellbeing and regular social contact

Opportunities to use existing skills and experience

Increased awareness of activities among isolated residents

A welcoming first point of contact for new participants

Practical support for older people during activities and trips

Stronger friendships and informal community support



PETER, AGE 81

Participant, Connecting Communities

Peter lives in Cullybackey and experiences a number of health and mobility difficulties, including heart problems, arthritis and back pain. He stopped driving at the age of 80 because of the cost, which reduced his independence and made it more difficult to maintain regular social contact.

Before becoming involved in Connecting Communities, Peter experienced significant loneliness. He described having limited reasons to leave home and few opportunities

to meet people regularly, particularly following the disruption and isolation of the pandemic period.

He joined the programme approximately two years ago and gradually began participating in a wider range of activities.

Activities and Participation

Peter has attended Lunch & Learn, the Men's Breakfast, coffee mornings, trips and local Men's Shed activities. These programmes gave him regular dates in his calendar, opportunities to meet others and a route back into community life.

Through the programme, Peter formed new friendships and developed an informal support network. One friend now collects him on wet mornings, helping him attend when travelling independently would be difficult.

The programme also connected Peter with practical information and services. A

falls-prevention talk was particularly relevant after he experienced a fall. He accessed handyman support to install curtain rails because his arthritis prevented him from lifting his arms, and assistance was arranged when he experienced difficulties with his computer.

Personal Change

For Peter, the greatest change has been the reduction in loneliness. Regular participation has given him routine, companionship and confidence to become involved in activities outside his home.

The practical support he accessed has also helped him remain more independent. Rather than facing health, mobility and digital difficulties alone, he now knows where to seek assistance and has people around him who notice when he is absent or needs support.

Affordability remains important because Peter lives on a fixed income. The low-cost programme has allowed him to participate regularly without creating additional financial pressure.

"It changed my life completely. It was a lifesaver for me. Loneliness is a terrible thing, and I no longer feel loneliness."

Outcome Summary

Significantly reduced loneliness and isolation

New friendships and dependable informal support

A regular routine and greater community involvement

Improved access to practical and preventative services

Increased confidence in seeking help

Greater independence despite health and mobility barriers

Improved emotional wellbeing and sense of belonging



TERESA

Secretary, Cloney Rural Development

Teresa has served as Secretary of Cloney Rural Development for approximately ten years. The organisation is managed by a small committee of five volunteers and operates with an annual income of less than £10,000.

The group works from premises at St Mary's in Ahoghill, where it holds a 25-year lease. Teresa's role includes preparing funding applications, organising activities, communicating with residents and helping

ensure that people from Cloney can participate in the wider Connecting Communities programme.

Participation and Contribution

Through Bann Maine West, Cloney residents can access Lunch & Learn sessions, transport, workshops, trips and activities that the local group would not have the resources to deliver independently.

Teresa promotes the programme locally, gathers expressions of interest and coordinates attendance. Demand is consistently high. Cloney is normally allocated eight places at Lunch & Learn, but approximately 15 people may put their names forward. Where demand exceeds the available places, the group must operate a fair selection process.

This level of demand reflects the importance of the programme to local residents. Teresa explained that many participants live alone and

value the opportunity to leave the house, enjoy a hot meal and spend time with others.

Transport is particularly important. A bus collects participants in Ahoghill before travelling through The Grange to the Wild Duck in Portglenone. Without this provision, some residents would be unable to attend because they no longer drive or do not have access to suitable public transport.

Cloney Rural Development also delivered smaller local Lunch & Learn activities, including gardening and floral-art sessions attended by more than 20 people. These events provided opportunities for residents to participate in familiar surroundings while remaining connected to the wider Bann Maine West network.

Personal and Community Change

Teresa has seen the programme reduce isolation by giving older residents a regular

activity to anticipate. The combination of transport, affordable participation, shared meals and local communication has enabled people who might otherwise remain at home to become more socially involved.

The partnership has also strengthened Cloney Rural Development. Working with Bann Maine West allows the group to offer a broader range of opportunities, share transport and resources, access speakers and maintain relationships with the other community organisations.

Teresa also highlighted the pressure placed on a small volunteer base. The same committee members often carry responsibility for organising activities, communicating with participants and managing local delivery. Continued collaboration across the six communities therefore remains important in sustaining the programme and widening participation.

“Most of the people attending live alone. The transport is a massive help and gives them something to look forward to.”

Key Outcomes as a Result of our Involvement in This Programme

Improved access for residents who do not drive

Reduced isolation among older people living alone

Regular opportunities for social contact and a shared meal

Strong demand for accessible local and regional activities

Greater cooperation between Cloney and the other partner groups

A wider range of opportunities than the local group could provide alone

Stronger community relationships and local participation

Increased recognition of the contribution and pressures experienced by volunteers

LEARNING

From Year 2

Key Learning

Year 2 confirmed that demand for the programme is now greater than the capacity of several existing activities. Lunch & Learn and the Men's Breakfast were regularly oversubscribed, placing pressure on available places, transport arrangements, staff and volunteers.

The six community groups remain central to identifying participants and promoting activities, but their ability to respond to demand varies. Additional volunteers and stronger local delivery capacity are needed so that more activities can take place within individual communities rather than relying mainly on the larger central programmes.

The Community Hub also experienced increased use, with approximately 20 visitors each day. While this demonstrates its value as a trusted local space, it has increased the Project Officer's workload through registrations, enquiries, signposting, shop activity, participant contact and day-to-day support.

The change in Project Officer during Year 2 also highlighted the importance of clear records, documented procedures and effective handover arrangements to maintain continuity in participant relationships, activity planning and monitoring.

Priorities for Year 3

Strengthen and upskill the existing volunteer network, ensuring volunteers have the confidence, skills and support needed to contribute effectively across activities and within the Community Hub.

Review volunteer capacity and commitment across the programme, identifying current roles, levels of involvement and any gaps where additional support or recruitment may be required.

Increase opportunities for smaller, locally delivered Lunch & Learn sessions, workshops and other social activities that bring people together within their own communities, with Bann Maine West continuing to support coordination, speakers, promotion and administration.

Use waiting lists and participant feedback to guide local delivery, identifying where smaller Lunch & Learn sessions or workshops could increase access and grow within their community.

Develop a shared pool of guest speakers, facilitators and activity ideas that can be used across the six communities, reducing duplication and the planning burden on individual groups.

Review the Project Officer workload and day-to-day Hub requirements, identifying routine tasks that could appropriately be supported by trained volunteers while maintaining continuity of participant support.

Use the Year 3 mid-term review to plan Years 4 and 5, supported by simple monitoring of attendance, waiting lists, volunteer involvement and participant feedback to identify what should continue, where provision should develop and what additional capacity will be required.

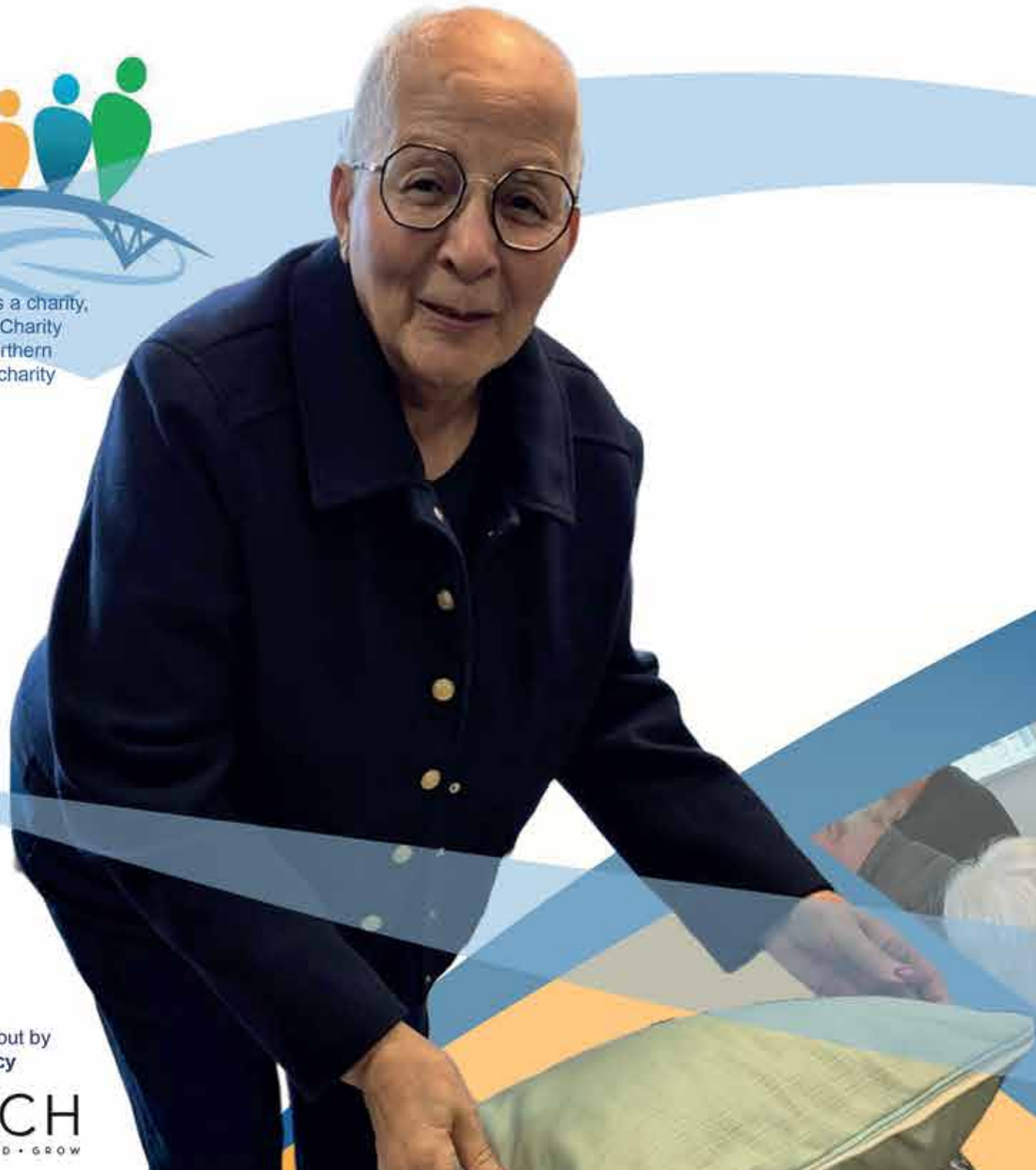
CONCLUSION

Year 2 demonstrates clear progress in reducing isolation, strengthening social connections and improving confidence, wellbeing and access to support. Strong demand also highlights the need to manage capacity carefully. Year 3 should build on what is working, strengthen volunteer skills, increase local delivery where practical and ensure the programme is well positioned for continued development and growth through Years 4 and 5.





Bann Main West is a charity,
registered with the Charity
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number 100828.



Evaluation carried out by
PITCH Consultancy

