

## **Welcome to the Collaboration for Change AGM Nov 2023.**

The CfC Declaration for the Common Good is a vision statement for the society already being created by so many people committing voluntarily to work towards progressive environmental, economic, social and political change. CfC members are individually involved in different areas of this change. Collectively we have also set ourselves the task of providing support which enables people to continue doing their own work while strengthening that work by making connections with others.

### **Collectively**

In March this year we organised a System Change event as part of the Imagine Festival of Politics and Ideas in Belfast. This built on the work of Ground-up Community Wealth building and The Alternative Economists. Over 70 people attended on a Friday afternoon for a participative speed-dating workshop where they learned about the inspiring local initiatives run by passionate people - East Belfast Living Wage Campaign, Northern Mutual Bank, Zero Waste North West, The Larder, Carrick Greengrocers and Repair Café Belfast. The opening speech was given by Matthew Browne leader of Preston Council which has been leading the way in modelling Community Wealth Building.

In June we worked with Zero Waste North West, The Environmental Gathering and Artitude Climate Action Network to host the Nurturing the Groundswell workshop at the Climate Action Festival in Derry. Kevin Flanagan facilitated activists working in all areas of change to reflect on the approach they are taking, consider how they could work with activists who have different perspectives and share their visions for the future.

Nurturing the Groundswell is part of the work Kevin has been doing for CfC on building relationships to strengthen connections between the groups represented on the CfC online map.

### **Living Wage**

Mary has been doing the groundwork on building a network of Living Wage employers in NI. The Living Wage Campaign for east Belfast which began in August 2022 and was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland aims to break the cycle of poverty by reducing levels of low pay and in-work poverty. When the project began there were just 55 employers signed up as Living Wage employers in NI, there are now 86 with the aim of 100 by the end of this year. This has resulted in 931 employees getting a pay rise which for a full-time worker amounts to £3081 per year. With recent research showing that those paid below the real living wage are struggling to buy food, pay housing costs and heat their homes, the real living wage is more important than ever. Belfast City Council became the first council in NI to sign up as a Living Wage

employer and three other councils are actively looking at signing up. Another large public sector anchor in the higher education sector recently signed up but has yet to formally announce this. The Linen Quarter BID signed up and is offering to pay the first year's fees for any of their 340 members who will sign up. Both the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, the membership organisation for the Community and Voluntary Sector signed up as did The Community Foundation for NI, the largest independent grant making trust. Longer term the goal is to follow in the footsteps of Scotland and Wales and set up Living Wage NI, a local organisation that will promote the living wage and accredit organisations.

### **Positive Money**

Several core members of CfC have been involved for years with the international monetary reform movement, raising awareness about the damage arising from debt-based money creation and campaigning for the change to a transparent system which benefits everyone. Positive Money held open in-person meetings in Belfast several times this year and continue to share information online.

### **DARE**

Tony continues to overcome economic illiteracy at public and academic levels teaching through Maynooth's Communiversity programme. This year he also gave an introduction to the South Belfast Quaker Meeting and recently started a series of Demystifying and Reimagining Economics sessions in South Down linking with Rostrevor Action Respecting the Environment and Dolmens Climate Action Network. Tony is writing a draft paper on how the poverty caused by neoliberalism (the economics of cruelty) is a form of violence and will be making a presentation to Church and Peace in the hope of widening the meaning of 'peace'.

### **Northern Mutual**

Bridget is continuing her work on the Northern Mutual Bank campaign. This fits with CfC's Declaration for the Common Good in that a mutual bank can play a role in transforming our economy from one that is extractive and profit-driven into one that promotes sustainability and economic justice. The Northern Mutual Bank have secured funding for a great new website.

### **ZNetwork**

Bridget also became a staff member at ZNetwork an independent online media platform dedicated to promoting alternative news and marginalised voices and advancing vision and strategy for a better world.

### **Participatory Budgeting**

Noeleen is a core member of Participatory Budgeting Works which aims to promote the use of PB as a participative decision making process bringing

local communities together to deliberate on how a budget should be spent to best effect in their own area. Noeleen has been particularly engaged with the Glens Healthy Places Programme led by the Northern Community Network. PB is one of the practical outworkings of the CfC Declaration for the Common Good. It gives the opportunity to experience *'ways of being and doing that embody compassion, cooperation, community and creativity'* and to build the capacity to *'use our voices and actions to shape a truly deliberative democracy'*.

Pascal attended Grand Choice - Lisburn and Castlereagh Council's PB where local residents and groups in the Castlereagh South area were able to apply for up to £1000. Over 700 people took part.

### **Carryduff Repair Café**

Pascal was involved in starting Carryduff Repair Café which has held 6-8 cafés so far. Repair Cafés are free meeting places where local fixers repair furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, toys, textiles and other items sitting together with the item owner so they provide an opportunity for conversation and learning. Repair cafes also work with Tool Libraries and are often part of the *'right to repair'* movement with the aim of a reduction in waste and a more sustainable economy.

Pascal says: *'I have never witnessed such a surge in people wanting to be part of this very practical project. That is both as volunteer fixers and people wanting items repaired.'*

### **CRAIC (Cultivate, respect, Appreciate, Inclusion across Cultures)**

The diversity of people in our society has been increasing. Pascal has been working with CRAIC as they look at their future strategy. They want to widen cultural understanding through the thoughtful collaboration of diverse experiences.

### **Patricia**

Patricia describes herself as being under the radar, nudging and poking for change rather than voicing it, being a signpost rather than an activist. Patricia is a self-employed therapist/facilitator. Her affiliations are more international than local and her interests holistic - health for earth and inhabitants. Patricia is a member of the Lucas Trust (providing meditation activities), Alliance for Natural Health, Gatekeepers Trust, Findhorn Foundation, Derry Well Woman, Rights of Nature, Rose Fellowship and the Meitheal Trust which has stewardship of land at Inch Island Donegal.

### **Neil**

Neil says; *'A Saturday CfC seminar in Derry some five years ago rekindled old passions and launched new ones and encouraged me to return to activism. The ongoing attendance at CfC events and meetings have greatly*

*motivated and supported me in these activities and continue to do so. In particular through CfC I am passionate to assist in the understanding and fostering of systems and practices of economic justice and the ecological benefits that will arise from new economic forms in our communities.'* The highlights from Neil's activism in 2023 are the Participation in Peace summit and residential citizen assemblies with Holywell Trust; research and planning for a forestry and rewilding project associated with Inch Fort in Donegal; continuing research on political models for the island of Ireland originally outlined in the document The Proposal. Neil participated in the Ullans Academy reconciliation meetings in East Belfast.

### **Stevie**

Stevie has been busy writing papers on the law of supply and demand, the absurdity of austerity, the conundrum of debt. He has been supporting the Barbadian campaign for reparations from the Drax estate in Dorset and writing on education projects in Nicaragua, Welcome Refugees campaigns, incidences of corruption/malpractice in UK corporations, Bank of England citizens' panels, AI and the future of work. He is following the Good Law Project, Open Democracy, Tax Justice UK & Feasta campaigns as well as projects on limits of individual choice in historical contexts.

### **Zero Waste North West**

Most of Marian's activism has been through the environmental group Zero Waste North West. After three years she recently stepped down as chairperson remaining on the committee. Her big interest is looking for ways to create flexible governing infrastructures that allow chaotic ungovernable activist energy to thrive. She sees administration as 'housework', boring but essential, usually done by women and invisible until it isn't done and everything falls apart. Marian is committing the next year to focusing on how Zero Waste North West operates rather than on what it is doing. Looking after each other has always been at the heart of ZWNW and she would like to nurture this, possibly as a model for other activist groups. Marian will continue to look for and support connections between ZWNW, CfC and other progressive groups.

### **What next for CfC?**

The CfC team organises workshops online and in-person, shares learning, engages in discussions - sometimes heated. We know the solutions to all our human created problems already exist and we really want to support the people doing the work by enabling connections and providing supportive scaffolding. We will keep holding this space.

November 2023

Marian, Patricia, Mary, Noeleen, Bridget, Pascal, Tony, Neil, Kevin, Stevie