
CONWAY MILL TRUST

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Conway Mill Trust Awards Scholarships

Conway Mill Trust is pleased to announce five winners for the Mary Mannion Merit Scholarship. The application period ended on October 31, 2009, with Belfast's Conway Education Centre selecting the winners based on firsthand knowledge of the candidates, information on their application forms, and previous class attendance.

The following students have been awarded a scholarship for the school year 2009-2010:

Brendan Hanvey, for GCSE Mathematics. Brendan is a young caregiver for a parent and a part-time employee. He aspires to enter the university in the field of nursing.



Brendan Hanvey

Margaret Brady, for GCSE History. Ms. Brady, a senior citizen, travels from Crumlin each week for her history class.

Niall Montgomery, for GCSE English. Niall is a home schooled young person who is taking his first steps informal education, and is doing well.

Deborah O'Sullivan, for GCSE English. Deborah is a young person with part-time employment who desires to become an accountant.

Ann Marie Tully, for GCSE English. Ann Marie is a single parent whose goal is to improve her skills in order to pursue better employment opportunities.

The GCSE program at Conway Education Centre is comparable to the GED course of study in the United States. It aims to help students complete the course requirements for a secondary diploma in preparation for entrance into a university or technical institute, or into the world of employment, with the belief that further education will heighten their opportunities for economic success.

There were thirteen applications with five scholarships being awarded. Your generous contributions have made this possible. It is hoped that more financial support from generous donors will enable a greater number of scholarships to be dispensed next school year

Altram and Naiscoil na Rinne Receive CMT Grants

Danny Cassidy, manager of Altram and Naiscoil na Rinne, received Conway Mill Trust grants of £150 each from CMT Secretary Sandy Haas and Treasurer Ed McManus on February 1.

As Danny explained, the early years Irish medium schools teach more than the Irish language. The naiscoils are equivalent to the early learning, preschools and kindergartens in the U.S., with the naiscoils also teaching the Irish language along with core curricula for preschool age children.

Danny expressed appreciation of the funds because the early years Irish language medium schools are fighting to survive as a result of global recession and significant funding cuts.

Drumcree Community Centre:

“Drumcree has always been a part of my life”

Two grants totaling £400 were distributed to Drumcree Community Trust just as it began a new initiative for 2010: to contact some 200 former users of the community centre and try to bring them back to the centre as volunteers. The centre relies heavily on volunteers to run its operations.

Drumcree Community Trust continues to focus on community development, community education, work with children and young people and a community health initiative. The Trust manages its own Community Centre, operates a community “Health House,” and is directly involved in local community economic development through its ownership of the Mayfair Business Centre.

A visit to the Community Centre left Conway Mill Trust Secretary Sandy Haas saying, “It was obvious to Ed [CMT Treasurer Ed McManus] and me how used the Centre is.”

The Centre is used frequently by members of the community it serves in part because for many it has always been a part of their life. Young people reported on the meaning of the Centre to them as they saw it through one of its most recent projects.

The “T-Project,” which stands for Transition Project, is an outgrowth of the Centre’s long-standing Cabin Club. The T-Project consists of 12, 13 and 14 year-olds who meet weekly to help make the transition from primary to secondary school. They focus on personal development, discuss risky behaviors and developing leadership skills.

When asked why they became involved with Drumcree Community Centre, Sherene Reynolds, Play Development Worker, said she came to the centre in November, 2008. She works with children 2 through 12 years old as a youth support worker. She came to Drumcree because, “I wanted more experience working with children after university.”

Joanne Breen, Creative Arts Worker, has been at Drumcree about 7 or 8 years. Prior to Drumcree, she worked with preschool children. The position interested her because it allowed her to be creative, tell stories and merely play.

Ryan Campbell, a teen, started volunteering in September 2007. He reported that his reason for volunteering was, “I wanted to improve my confidence and I want to help other children to become more confident.”

Collette Mercer has volunteered at Drumcree for 15 years, working with 5 to 7 year olds and 8 to 13 year olds. “My children got so much out of being a part of Drumcree that I wanted to give back to the Centre and the community.”

Clearly, the Centre has tremendous community support. Despite this overwhelming support, it is not without its challenges. One of the biggest challenges is raising funds to maintain their building and cover the cost of insurance. Neither of these expenses is covered by government funding. Insurance can be a major impediment to operations. Drumcree Community Trust leaders said, “We can have all the staff, club programs and clients in the world, but if we have no money to pay for insurance we can’t open the doors.”

Conway Mill Complex Update: “On Schedule”

“On schedule” is the latest report from the Conway Mill Refurbishment Project about the massive reconstruction work being done on Conway Mill.

Even better news is that if all things remain the same, there is the possibility that some things that had been “de-scoped” (removed) from earlier in the renovation, for example a freight elevator, might be added back into the refurbishment project.

Refurbishment of Building B is expected to be completed by September of this year. No public grand opening/dedication is planned prior to late spring or early summer of next year. Susan Glass, Project Manager, reports that the Conway Mill Preservation Trust must raise additional funding of about £170,000 in conjunction with the refurbishment.

Dove House Celebrates 25 Years of Putting Community First

Described by one writer as “arguably the catalyst that changed the face of the Bogside and Brandywell,” Derry’s Dove House is celebrating its 25th anniversary, not only surviving but flourishing with offspring organizations that have evolved from its most humble beginnings.

Organizations throughout Derry that owe their beginnings to Dove House include Conradh na Gaelige, The Nerve Centre, The Gasyard Development Trust, Gasyard Wall Feile and The Bogside & Brandywell Initiative.

Among the founders of Dove House were Mary Nelis, Frankie McMenamin, Gerry Toner, Paula Martin, Carmel Enright, Paul Barwise and Jemma Martin. They established Dove House through the bold move by a number of the founders when they “squatted” in what had previously been a residential home for the elderly in the heart of the Bogside. The squatters took over the building and started to fix it up. Following some heated exchanges with the Housing Executive, the squatters won the right to rent the building for the modest weekly sum of a shilling a week.

Education was at the heart of the earliest activities undertaken at Dove House. Literacy classes as well as ongoing Irish language discussions filled the air. The bedrock philosophy of the founders was individual and community self-sufficiency. They employed a community development model that ensured that self-sufficiency would become a core ingredient throughout its existence and would become part of the life blood of the organizations that it helped to bring to life.

Dove House’s struggle to survive would be challenged in its early years by charges of sectarianism, charges that were vehemently fought against by its founders. Mary Nelis told a reporter, “I was determined to make it neutral – Dove House was about the needs of the community. It was not about the needs of any political party.”



Mary Nelis

Current projects that are making a difference for the community include the Neighborhood Assist Program, which informs residents about their entitlement rights; the Divert Project, which provides drug and alcohol education and prevention; and the Learner Access Engagement Project, which promotes learning by reducing barriers that might be encountered for individuals returning to education or training.

In keeping with its history of putting the health of the community first, a new project called PATHS (Positive Alternatives to Hatred and Sectarianism) was launched last July. It is designed to tackle racism and sectarianism by instilling mutual respect in its participants. Included in the program’s activities are outdoor survival activities, drama groups, discussion and debates, art workshops and overnight expeditions. Additionally, three part-time project workers mentor children to learn about different cultures and different identities.

Dove House continues to build pride in the community through animating public open spaces, promoting civic pride and ownership among its residents. From the initial actions of its founders in reclaiming a home for the elderly to its wide array of current programs, Dove House and its supporters have maintained their focus on putting the community first and keeping its needs at the center of all of its work.

Springhill Programs Receive Support from CMT Grant

A £150 grant was given to Springhill Community House as part of the recent grant awards authorized by the Conway Mill Trust Board. The Educational Project at Springhill aims at personal empowerment and development of positive self-image, freeing people from the prevailing culture of prescriptions dependency.

Springhill's Information Technology facility is a community resource that offers individuals training on email, online research and development of business websites, skills that students can take back to their respective communities and teach others.

Noelle Ryan reported on Springhill's heavy involvement in complementary health techniques and therapies, including reflexology, aromatherapy, homeopathy, massage, acupuncture and more. Springhill and Noelle were instrumental in setting up and running both the Belfast Health Initiative and the Belfast School of Homeopathy, the first of its kind in Belfast.

Springhill's "It's My Life" program continues to support and empower young people to create positive life changes, enhance their skills and potential and to improve their self-esteem.

Springhill also offers two more self-improvement programs: "A Journey Through Self" and "Workability." A Journey Through Self addresses the emotional and social experiences of people; the Workability program is a professional life coaching and personal empowerment program, tailored to the needs of people who have been unemployed for a long period of time or are being trained to enter the workforce.

Springhill Community House also addresses drug and alcohol dependency, which is on the rise as a result of the economic recession. Non-traditional therapies are utilized, offering promising results to address chemical dependency as well as to ward off the possibility of relapse in addiction.

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If you would like your donation to go to a particular organization, write the name in the memo of your check and 100% of your donation will be forwarded to that organization.

Conway Education Centre Grants Awarded

May Face Budget Cuts and Funding Diversion

Grants of £150 each were distributed by Conway Mill Trust Board Members Ed McManus and Sandy Haas, to four organizations affiliated with the Conway Education Centre: the After School Program, the Day School Program, Woodworking Shop and Health Matters Program.

The grants were gratefully received by Conway Education Centre Manager Pauline Kersten, in particular due to the impact of budget cuts for next year. Pauline explained that funding is being diverted from the community development sector to economic development initiatives, which would have a negative impact on programs affiliated with the Conway Education Centre.

Additionally, the government is reportedly pressing for more accredited courses. This could affect the Day School program, whose funding currently covers a student to the age of 16. Pauline reported that she is trying to get this age extended to 17 and also to try to get funding for people with mild learning disabilities.

Strains on finances for programs affiliated with the Conway Education Centre can come gradually, drip by drip. For example, clients for the therapies provided by Health Matters pay what they can, but many times they don't have the £5 for the therapy. They are never turned away, but the shortfall can reach about £2000 per year, when combined with shortfalls experienced in similar fashion by Springhill Community House.