



# Conway Mill Trust

Formerly "Doors of Hope"

P.O. Box 101529  
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

December 2013

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## Conway Mill Trustees Award Grants

Conway Mill Trust board members Ed McManus and Sandy Haas mixed volunteer work and pleasure in August when they traveled to Derry to take in all the festivities of the UK's 2013 City of Culture and Ireland's Fleadh Cheoil, the largest and most prestigious traditional Irish music competition and festival, held for the first time in its history in Northern Ireland.



CMT Trustee Ed McManus and Brenda Kelly, CEC Finance Administrator

Enroute to Derry on August 9, Ed and Sandy spent their first day in Northern Ireland in Belfast where they presented grants to four community groups.

Their first stop was Conway Education Centre (CEC) to present Brenda Kelly, Financial Administrator CEC, the Mary Mannion Merit Grant of \$2,142. Manager Pauline Kersten was not available that day. These funds help young people and adults unable to afford the full tuition of GCSE courses meet the cost of the courses in order to earn their certificates.

Their second stop was the Irish Republican History Museum. They presented a \$1,100 grant to Johnny Haddock, one of the creators of the museum. Johnny asked us to convey his deep gratitude to the faithful supporters of Conway Mill Trust.

Next, they visited Tar Anall to deliver a \$756 grant for Tar Anall's Still Imprisoned Project. Still Imprisoned Project is a program directed at former prisoners and their families struggling with alcoholism, drug dependency, depression, anxiety and financial problems. The program provides 24 hour personal support. It is an all-volunteer group. Every dollar is spent on those needing the project's services. PJ Jones, one of the volunteers of the Still Imprisoned Project was not available

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# Emergency Funding Request

*Conway Education Centre 'Family Learning Project' needs your help!*

*As our readers know, it is always a challenge for the CEC to secure funding for its vital programs. Pauline Kersten and her staff, along with our generous donors, have always found a way to maintain operations with an ever-shrinking budget. However, funding for the centre's Family Learning Project is being completely eliminated at the end of this year.*

*We received this urgent request from Pauline:*

Dear Friends,

Conway Education Centre recently celebrated its 30 year anniversary, with many current and former students and supporters joining in the celebrations.



**CEC Students with Dr. Mary McIvor**

Last September we organised a Celebration of Achievement event whereby our adult students were presented with their certificates by the Director of Further Education, Dr. Mary McIvor from the NI Department of Employment and Learning. There are now over 550 adult learners enrolled, the majority in accredited classes. This is a new record for CEC and we are delighted.

Our Day School for young people has just been shortlisted for a prestigious crowd funding event at Belfast City Hall and we have high hopes that they will do well.

But at the start of this week we received devastating news about the funding for our Family Learning project. Its funding will cease after Christmas.

So we have an emergency request to you, our American supporters and friends:

Could you help us?

CEC Family learning project is an early intervention project aimed at increasing aspirations and educational attainment of children and increasing parental engagement with education. The project provides 20 children (7 to 12 years of age) and their parents/carers with: homework support & family learning activities (4 sessions per week) and monthly drop-in session for parents, in a safe and encouraging environment.

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## Drumcree Community Centre Expansion

As we reported previously, a major refurbishment project on the Drumcree Community Centre is in the planning stages. We received the following update on the project from Breandan MacCionnaith:

*As mentioned previously Annual Report, a funding application was submitted to the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership with a view to undertaking a major refurbishment and partial extension of Drumcree Community Centre at a cost of over £300,000.*

*That application was finally approved by the Department of Social Development within the past few months and we recently conducted a tendering process to appoint a qualified architect/consultant. As a result of that process, we formally appointed a local firm of architects at end of last month (October).*

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### Grants Delivered, from page 1

that day, so Ed and Sandy stopped back again on Monday, August 19 to officially present the grant.

Their last stop before departing for Derry was a visit to Fr. Des Wilson at Springhill Community House to present Fr. Des with a \$1,251 grant. Fr. Des and Noelle Ryan were deeply appreciative of the grant. Fr. Des is doing well, but he is trying to slow down. Ciaran Cahill has been assuming more and more of the day-to-day workload of Community House.

It is worth repeating that every grant made by Conway Mill Trust donors is received with thanks and gratitude. Your generosity is making a real difference in the lives of the people helped by these programs.

Please note that Conway Mill Trust board members personally assume 100% of the expense for their trips to Ireland to deliver grants. You can be assured that every dollar you donate will be used to benefit the groups we support.

## **CEC, from page 2**

We have just been informed that funding for this project has been cut. This means that the project will have to close after Christmas if we don't find alternative funding. This would be a major setback for the children and families in our area as there is no other provision or help available.

At Conway Education Centre we are working very hard to secure alternative long term funding. Although we are confident, realistically, it will take us around 6 months to get this in place. We call on your generosity and support to please help us bridge this period and help us raise the £9600 necessary.

CEC's Family learning project is unique in the area and provides valuable educational support and encouragement and, for some children, an important respite from family difficulties. It enables parents/carers to connect with their children and education in a supported and fun way.

### **Reasons for the Project:**

The disadvantage experienced by children in West Belfast include poverty, low self-esteem, low educational expectations/aspirations, low educational attainment and achievement, child neglect, high fat diet, anti-social activities and small housing with large families.

Homework support sessions address the need for quiet space to do homework, guidance and support for tasks, improving confidence, school attendance, academic achievement and aspirations.

Engaging parents in their children's education through the family learning activities will contribute to higher parental expectations about their children's educational level, and greater level/frequency of interest and direct involvement in children's learning, which are associated strongly with better educational outcomes for their children.

### **The Difference made by the family learning project:**

Through receiving encouragement and support for homework activities and completing homework, children are better able to participate in school and increase their feeling of achievement.

Through positive participation of parents/carers in fun/educational activities, a culture of learning is encouraged and children are less likely to skip school or be kept at home. Increasing parents' involvement in joint learning activities improves relationship and communication between parent and child. Increasing awareness of the curriculum amongst parents (what is being taught in child's class) improves parental understanding of importance of homework and increases their encouragement and support for homework tasks and good school attendance.

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Through family learning activities, parents increase their understanding re value of learning and the opportunities it offers their children (and themselves). This leads to better support for children, which in turn leads to a higher level of educational attainment.



Fun based activities such as creating a family cookbook (use of weighing, measuring, reading, writing and information on healthy eating), doing science experiments like making a volcano, or learning about vegetables and healthy eating by planting seeds and harvesting beetroot, beans and carrots, increases enjoyment in learning and improved parent/carer-child relationships. It also further develops communication skills, problem solving skills, numeracy and literacy skills.

To make a long story short, the project has demonstrated over the years that it increases, in a very real and measurable way, a child's chances of better academic achievement, a better chance to do well in school, and a better chance to be successful in life.

Please help us to continue this valuable work.

With warm regards,  
Pauline Kersten  
Manager, Conway Education Centre

## **Want to Make A Difference?**

Your donations can be the deciding factor in whether or not programs like the Family Learning Project can survive.

Please partner with Conway Mill Trust and send a tax-deductible contribution today to Conway Mill Trust Inc., PO Box 101529, Pittsburgh, PA 15237-8529.

If you wish to direct your donation to a particular group, write the name of the group in the memo of your check or money order and they will receive 100% of that donation. Or go to [www.conwaymilltrust.org](http://www.conwaymilltrust.org) and click the DONATE button to donate securely online through PayPal using your checking account or credit card.

*That firm is now tasked with bringing forward detailed and comprehensive plans to refurbish, reconfigure and partially expand the Community Centre. This will also include securing the various statutory consents including planning permission, building control approvals, etc.*

*We envisage that actual physical works to the Community Centre will commence towards the middle of next year. Among the main elements of the project will be:*

- *Extension the existing large room to effectively double it in size*
- *Construction of new storage areas and a boiler house*
- *Relocation of the current kitchen area to create a larger kitchen with serving hatches and installing new kitchen work areas, etc*
- *Creation and fitting out a completely new reception area*
- *Removal of internal walls between existing small offices to create two new larger offices*
- *Replacement of existing small windows with larger windows throughout*
- *Upgrade where necessary all existing heating systems, insulation, electrical systems, internal and external lighting, etc*

*The extent and nature of those works will inevitably entail the closure of the Community Centre for several months. We are currently investigating a number of options, including relocation to another site during the construction period, in order to ensure that the Trust continues to deliver our full range of programmes and activities to the local community.*

*The Directors are working towards a target of fully completing this entire project in time for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Drumcree Community Trust in 2015.*

*Through this programme of refurbishment, internal re-configuration and partial expansion, the Directors intend to develop the existing Community Centre into a high-quality, modern facility capable of meeting the needs of many existing and future residents in Northwest Portadown for at least another 25 years.*

The Drumcree Community Centre currently provides a wide range of valuable services to members of the community. Breandan is confident that the refurbishment/expansion will greatly increase their capacity to deliver these services to those in need.

If you would like to support the center, please write “Drumcree” in the memo of your check or money order.

## Changing Lives at the Conway Education Centre

As part of the recent 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Conway Mill gathered testimonials from both current and former students of the Conway Education Centre and published them in the program. We thought that our donors would like to hear directly from the people that benefit from your generosity. We will print some of the testimonials over the next few editions of our newsletter.

### **“Happy in My Work and Life” – Louise**

I am writing to tell you about the positive impact Conway Mill Education Centre had on my life. I had a daughter when I was 15 and went to SAMS project (School Age Mums) for the year of my pregnancy, which was 4<sup>th</sup> year. When the year came to an end I realized that there was no follow on course and I still had a full year of 5<sup>th</sup> year to attend. I was too embarrassed to return to my mainstream school, and I didn't want to come out of school completely, as I now had a dependant. I decided Conway Mill would suit me more.

In Conway I got my English and Maths GCSE plus ECDL in computers among other AQA exams. This gave me the confidence to return to mainstream school in Corpus Christi College for 6<sup>th</sup> year, where I did well in getting GNVQ in Leisure & Tourism. These qualifications were enough for me to follow on to BMC.

I am now a full qualified dental Nurse and very happy in my work and life. But there is no doubt in my mind that I couldn't have got to this stable lifestyle without the help and support from Conway Mill Education Centre at a tough time in my life. It was a great stepping stone.

### **MARY MANNION MERIT GRANT FUND DRIVE**

Your outstanding generosity has allowed the Mary Mannion Grant to continue changing lives. Unlike the United States GED program where those who do not graduate from high school can take a single test to obtain their diploma, people in the U.K. must complete a series of courses at their own expense to obtain their degree. The Conway Mill Education Centre offers the GCSE classes, but cannot afford to underwrite the tuition costs for those who cannot afford it. The Mary Mannion Merit Grant was created to assist students to cover the cost of courses and complete their education.

If you would like to donate to this fund, write “Mary Mannion” in the memo of your check or money order and 100% of your donation will go toward helping a deserving student.





# An Irish Christmas Blessing

The light of the Christmas star to you  
The warmth of home and hearth to you  
The cheer and good will of friends to you  
The hope of a childlike heart to you  
The joy of a thousand angels to you  
The love of the Son and God's peace to you.

Conway Mill Trust wishes you and your  
family a Blessed Christmas and a  
Happy New Year

