

Mount Street Club Trust



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Overview of Mount Street Club Trust

The Mount Street Club Trust is a charitable trust originally founded in 1934 as the Mount Street Club. The Trust's current funding and development initiative, Hope & Ambition, is focused on addressing social inequality and exclusion in Ireland and is founded on the principles of trust-based philanthropy. Rather than adhering to traditional models of grant giving, which can perpetuate power imbalances and restrict grantees' autonomy, the Trust promotes flexibility, collaboration and mutual trust between funders and recipients. Its core philosophy prioritises building long-term, authentic relationships that enable grantees to respond effectively to community challenges.

Overview of Grant Initiative

Born out of discussions in 2018 between the Trust and the five original participant organisations, Hope & Ambition launched in 2019 as a three-year program providing grants and development support to a diverse set of organisations working with marginalised communities in the Greater Dublin Area.

The first phase of Hope & Ambition ran for three years, from 2019 to 2022, and following a funded interim co-design phase, the second phase has now begun, this time providing a four-year commitment to supporting the participant organisations through to the end of 2027. Unlike traditional grant models, Hope & Ambition provides flexible, long-term funding that allows grantees to decide how best to use the resources based on their understanding of the challenges they face.

A unique aspect of this initiative are the CEOs Club and Practitioners Club, forums in which the participant organisations can exchange ideas, share challenges, critically reflect and seek inspiration. This peer-learning and collaboration model encourages innovation and collective problem-solving, significantly enhancing the program's impact.

The Trust seeks to maintain open and transparent communication, ensuring that funders and grantees can engage in

meaningful dialogue and decision-making. The initiative's reporting process also reflects this—rather than focusing on numbers and formalised metrics, the emphasis is on narrative reflection and shared learning.

Impact Highlights: Phase One

Hope & Ambition Phase One had several significant impacts on the grantees and their communities.

Collaboration: The CEOs Club and Practitioners Club fostered close collaboration between the organisations, enabling shared learning and problem-solving. For example, the Irish Refugee Council partnered with the Intercultural Language Service to extend their services to refugees more effectively. Similarly, Rua Red collaborated with Glencree to support refugees through creative arts initiatives, which proved effective in addressing trauma among refugee populations.

Organisational Growth: By focusing on capacity building, the initiative helped grantees develop more robust internal structures. This non-financial support included opportunities for critical reflection, leadership development, mentorship, and skill-building, which enhanced the long-term sustainability of these organisations.

Sustainability: The provision of three-year funding was critical for enabling organisations to plan effectively. As Nick Henderson, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, noted, "Three years was a significant investment and that in itself involved an element of trust." This long-term commitment allowed organisations to deepen their work and broaden their impact.

Impact on Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of Hope & Ambition were often vulnerable or marginalised individuals, including asylum seekers and refugees, Travellers and young people with intellectual disabilities. Through the partnerships and collaborations fostered under the initiative, these individuals experienced more comprehensive and effective support services. The collaboration between the Irish Refugee

Council and Rua Red, for instance, led to enhanced youth services that supported integration and socialisation for young refugees. Creative arts programs were instrumental in helping participants work through trauma and foster a sense of community.

For the organisations involved, the program created a unique space for solidarity, shared learning and a new lens on systemic exclusion. As Maoliosa Boyle, Executive Director of Rua Red, explained, "We learned through phase one, that there are inherent contradictions in the meeting of a settled organisational culture and Traveller culture. We were largely unaware of the complexity of many of the barriers and yet, through our systems and structures, acted as keepers of these barriers too."

The collaborative efforts also extended to non-financial areas. As Peter Sheekey, CEO of Intercultural Language Service, described it: "Being a CEO can be lonely. The CEOs club is a fantastic initiative which enables meeting other CEOs and provides us an opportunity to collaborate and share concerns, issues, and learnings." This shared learning environment empowered grantees to enhance their service delivery and meet the needs of their beneficiaries more effectively.

Learning and Reflections from Funders

The Mount Street Club Trust's experience with Hope & Ambition Phase One offered valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of trust-based philanthropy. One of the most prominent lessons was the importance of building authentic relationships between funders and grantees. Dr Liz Hayes, who was instrumental in co-designing the initiative, remarked, "The criteria and rationale that brought the funders and grantees of the project together was a sense of wanting to do something that was looking at patterns of exclusion in the experience of different people's lives."

Moreover, the initiative underscored the value of flexible funding and open communication. The long-term commitment to unrestricted funding, coupled with the initiative's collaborative ethos, was critical in fostering an environment where grantees felt empowered to lead. As Margaret Barry, Chairperson of the Trust, emphasised, "The motivation behind Hope & Ambition is the possibility to do better and the need to rethink the idea of grant giving – both as a gift and as a constraint."

However, there were also challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the ability of organisations to engage in face-to-face work, requiring creative solutions and online adaptations. Additionally, the winding down of one grantee organisation, Blossom Ireland, due to financial constraints, highlighted the ongoing issue of long-term sustainability.

Despite these challenges, Phase One was a success in advancing trust-based philanthropy and its potential for transforming philanthropic practices. The Trustees were in no doubt that Hope & Ambition had even more to offer the participant organisations and the wider philanthropic community. Phase Two, which began in January 2024, will support four of the original organisations plus two additional organisations for the next four years. One of the Trustees' key aspirations for this new phase is that insights that arise through Hope & Ambition will be captured and shared more widely, hopefully influencing the wider adoption of a trust-based philanthropic practice in Ireland.