

St Stephen's Green Trust



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Overview of the Organisation

The St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) is an independent social justice grant maker working across the island of Ireland. It has a 30-year history of grant making to support community-based activism and work to promote equality and positive social change in critical areas of social justice.

Supporting Intercommunity Practice and Activism

From 2017 to 2019, SSGT ran a pilot programme called Supporting Intercommunity Practice and Activism (SIPA) in Northern Ireland distributing grants of over £230,000 to community groups. In 2019, a call for applications led to a three-year programme designed for groups working collaboratively on an inclusive and intercommunity basis. The aim was to address common issues, identify barriers to inclusive work, and foster relationship-building within and between communities. This initiative was part of a wider peace-building programme funded by family foundations advised by Porticus. It involved three programme partners: Community Foundation NI, the Social Change Initiative, and SSGT and had a total value of £3.5m. SSGT's programme was extended as a result of the pandemic and grants of over £667,000 were made to twelve community-based organisations working on grassroots peacebuilding issues between 2019 and 2023.

Impact Highlights

The SIPA programme sought to support the growth and development of intercommunity relations, activities, and dialogue across communities, and to champion participation and confidence-building opportunities, especially for women and women's groups. After three years, there is evidence that the grantees made significant contributions to the programme's overall outcomes.

These included:

- Building activist confidence, knowledge, capacity, skills, and social inclusion.
- Promoting active peacebuilding efforts, often in difficult circumstances.
- Establishing connections between community groups, statutory bodies, and elected representatives.
- Contributing to greater understanding and reconciliation within communities.
- Creating improved channels for dialogue and amplifying marginalised voices.

The programme's grantees have demonstrated meaningful change in their communities. The outcomes achieved include:

- **North West Migrants Forum:** This organisation focuses on the rights of minority ethnic groups in Ireland, using the grant to challenge the discriminatory policies embedded in the Common Travel Area agreement and that impact non-Irish and non-British citizens. The campaign raises awareness about these hidden inequalities and advocates for more inclusive policies that promote integration.
- **Éalú:** Originally a support programme for ex-prisoners, Éalú has grown into a cross-community initiative. With grant funding, they've empowered community members, especially women, through training and confidence-building, fostering reconciliation and active community participation.
- **Turas na nDaoine's Erne East Women's Group:** Operating in a rural area, this group used the grant to reduce social isolation among women by offering education, social engagement, and volunteer opportunities, empowering them to gain confidence, skills, and economic independence.

- **Carson Project:** Initially focused on ex-combatants, the Project now addresses broader community needs, especially the participation of women. The grant allows them to adapt programmes to changing community needs, supporting mental health, confidence-building and fostering inter-community dialogue and inclusivity.

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The best thing to come out of the grant for us has been the possibility of bringing in facilitators and experts for training. We now have two counsellors, nearly full time, providing counselling of all sorts right from kids up to domestic and sexual abuse victims, and all the other needs that can arise within any community.”

Frankie Quinn, Éalú

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Sometimes, issues that impact on our minority ethnic community are not prioritised... this grant has done that; it has prioritised a hidden issue that has been going on for quite a long time and helped us to bring it to the surface.”

Lilian Seenoi Barr, North West Migrants Forum

Learnings and Reflections from St Stephen Green's Trust

The St Stephen's Green Trust highlighted key learning and reflections from the SIPA programme:

- The importance of a relational approach and flexibility in funding, which was particularly valuable for grassroots groups operating in difficult contexts.
- The significance of supporting groups to build collaborative and supportive
- Funding organisations should prioritise flexibility and a relational approach to grantmaking, as these elements are highly valued by grassroots groups.
- Supporting collaborative efforts and addressing common issues across communities leads to meaningful outcomes. However, funders must also be prepared for the complexities of intercommunity dynamics and the need for adaptability in shifting political and social contexts.

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Grantee organisations have established connections with other community groups, statutory bodies, and elected representatives, which has actively contributed to greater understanding and reconciliation. Communities are directly benefiting from improved channels for dialogue, having previously marginalised voices heard and resources created.”

St Stephen's Green Trust Funder on Key Learnings