

# COSTA Annual Report



## 2014 / 2015

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#### COSTA is funded by

Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs via DAERA's Rural Community Development Support Service / Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation Programme  
Public Health Agency and Mid Ulster District Council

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## Chairperson's Address



**I wish you all a very warm welcome to COSTA's 2016 AGM!**

However, on a very sombre note I want to begin by paying tribute to the late Mr Eamon McClean who passed away very suddenly on 13th June. Eamon was our Company Secretary since October 2014 and Manager of Speedwell Trust based locally in Parkanaur. COSTA deeply regrets Eamon's very untimely passing and we extend our deepest sympathy to Eamon's family and friends. Eamon gave an absolutely sterling contribution to COSTA over the past 2 years and he will be truly missed.



I would like to also take this opportunity to give a note of thanks to all my fellow Board members: Richard Knox, Heather McLaughlin, Anthony McGonnell, Mary O'Neill, Raymond Harrison, John Burrell, Liz Salter, Wilfred Mitchell, and also Estelle Patterson who retired from the Board in September. The Board has certainly arisen to meet the many very difficult challenges faced this year, including having to implement cuts and take extremely tough decisions in light of much reduced resources - I take my hat off to you all.

Despite the deep cuts over the past year, our Annual Report showcases not only the sheer volume of work which is ever increasing, but also the diversity of what we do, and for whom. This has been an especially difficult year for the community sector and COSTA alike, of that there is definitely no doubt. Despite this COSTA continues to have devoted staff, Development Manager - Loraine Griffin, but unfortunately, our Finance Officer - Lisa Wright has now left the Network after 15 years of dedicated service due to severe funding cuts. We will also very unfortunately be saying goodbye to all our remaining MARA staff: MARA Project Officer - Clare Davidson and MARA Enablers – Gillian Steenson and Karen Duggan when the MARA Project finally closes down in September. These ladies have worked so tirelessly in their roles to deliver COSTA's services to local rural and isolated communities. On behalf of the Board I would like to say a very heart-felt thank you to you all for your contributions to COSTA over many years and I wish you all the very best for the future!

COSTA would like to acknowledge and thank the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DEARA) as they are now known, for their contribution as our major funder and for their leadership role in developing the Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Inclusion Programme (TRPSI). Thanks must also go to the Public Health Agency for funding the Dungannon & Armagh MARA Project in partnership with TADA Rural Support Network. The Maximising Access to services, grants and benefits in Rural Areas project has been shown to significantly improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural areas throughout Dungannon & Armagh, where the hidden nature of poverty and isolation can make it difficult to connect with the most vulnerable members of our community. It has to be noted that COSTA appreciates the ongoing and invaluable support provided by Mid Ulster District Council, and especially, the four Councilors who sit as Advisors on our Board: Frances Burton, Sharon McAleer, Dominic Molloy and Robert Mulligan. I would like to pass on COSTA's thanks to these Councilors and to MUDC Community Development Manager, Philip Clarke who has been with COSTA from the very start.

Central to all this, COSTA continues to deliver and sustain the Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) throughout the Dungannon and South Tyrone area; sub-contracted under CWSAN as part of the 9 providers of the Rural CDSS. Our now very well established partnership with CWSAN, covering Cookstown and Magherafelt, continues to prosper and we look forward to ongoing strong partnership.

As I now finally 'bow out' of COSTA after 16 years and also retire from many years of voluntary community service, I see COSTA continuing very positively into the future despite the current very difficult times for the sector. I hope COSTA will be here for many more years to come and I wish you, and your communities all the very best for the future.

**Helen O'Donnell  
COSTA Chairperson**



## Network Development Manager's Report

Welcome everyone! We celebrate our 16<sup>th</sup> year in a more muted tone perhaps than usual. This year has been by far one of the hardest ever for the Network and indeed the wider voluntary community sector to date with austerity cuts taking effect, sweeping changes and extreme uncertainty ahead.

However 2016 sees very successful completion of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the current DAERA-funded Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) across Mid Ulster in partnership with CWSAN. Despite swinging cuts this year, the Network has delivered over 28 Workshops to 460 participants and over 310 supports to the local community. We have actively engaged with over 150 local groups and communities face-to-face and our key outputs can be viewed on pages 7 - 15 of this Report.

We have already seen the successful delivery of Phases 1 and 2 of the DARD Rural Micro Capital Grants Scheme since May of last year. More recently under Phase 2, in total 42 grants were awarded across the Mid Ulster area with around 20 of those from the COSTA area. We are awaiting confirmation of the future of the scheme as it has been hugely successful to date, and we hope that there will be future programmes perhaps from September 2016.

As ever, I extend my sincere thanks – but unfortunately this year also a very fond farewell - to several COSTA staff: my RCDSS colleague of 15 years Lisa Wright, and our MARA staff: Clare Davidson, Gillian Steenson and Karen Duggan for such an excellent achievement in delivering the MARA Project in conjunction with TADA. Thank you all sincerely for all your hard work, I hope you have enjoyed your time at COSTA, and I wish you all the very best for the future. I must also thank Elaine Murphy and Keelin McGartland for standing in, helping out, and for doing such a fantastic job this year.

Thank you sincerely to all the COSTA Board for their unwavering dedication and hard work on many sub-groups throughout the year particularly from Richard Knox, Heather McLaughlin, Anthony McGonnell, Raymond Harrison, John Burrell and Wilfred Mitchell. The Board has had to make many very tough decisions in light of very significant funding cuts, all credit to the Board, they have shown great courage, tenacity and leadership in ensuring COSTA's survival. I do believe the truly difficult work is now behind us and we can look forward to a more positive future. At this point, I really want to take this opportunity to mention 3 Board members who have served on COSTA's Board for the last 15+ years and have given so many years of dedicated service – firstly our Chairperson of the last 2 years Helen O'Donnell who has a very light and pragmatic approach to everything, also our previous Chairperson Liz Salter (3 years), and our Chairperson prior to that, Mary O'Neill (7 years). These 3 ladies have given an amazing contribution to not only COSTA, but the wider voluntary community sector, for many years and wearing many different hats. We are so grateful for their dedication, and it has been an absolute honour for me as Manager to have worked with them over so many years.

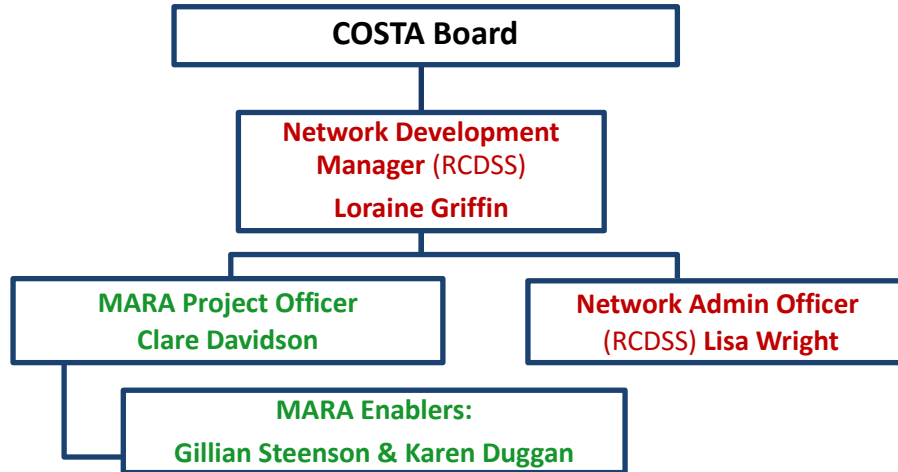
I pay tribute to our late Board member Eamon McClean from Speedwell Trust whose untimely passing at quite a young age has come as a real shock to us all. We appreciated all of Eamon's wisdom and experience as a board member. We will truly miss Eamon and we extend our deepest sympathy to his family.

Thank you also to Mid Ulster District Council for their continued support of COSTA, and in particular, Philip Clarke who has served a Statutory Representative from almost day one, and Faye and Ted Sharkey who maintain the US Grants site so well. Councillors Frances Burton, Robert Mulligan and our 2 new Councillors Sharon McAleer and Dominic Molloy are always on hand to provide valuable support, guidance and wisdom.

Despite all the current uncertainty, COSTA will still be here for another year but what lies beyond that still remains to be seen as we enter discussions with the new DAERA Department and our new Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA, "*Michelle number 3*". Whatever the future holds, I certainly aim to ensure that a local office and local service remains **here as YOUR Local Support Network** for the Dungannon and South Tyrone area : )

Loraine Griffin - Network Development Manager

## COSTA Staff



## COSTA Board of Directors

Helen O'Donnell	<b>Chairperson</b>	Richard Knox
Elizabeth Salter	<b>Vice Chairperson</b>	Raymond Harrison
Eamon McClean	<b>Secretary &amp; Company Secretary</b>	<b>(deceased 13/06/2016)</b>
John Burrell	<b>Treasurer</b>	Anthony McGonnell
Mary O'Neill MBE		Heather Nixon-McLaughlin
Wilfred Mitchell OBE		Estelle Patterson <i>(Resigned 07/09/2015)</i>

## Associate Board Members

Cllr Robert Mulligan	Cllr Frances Burton	Cllr Sharon McAleer
Cllr Dominic Molloy	Cllr Joe O'Neill	

## Statutory Representative

Philip Clarke

## Bankers

**Ulster Bank Ltd**  
Main Street  
Clogher  
Co Tyrone

## Accountants

**Mac Neary Rasdale & Co**  
Registered Accountants & Auditors  
Darling Street  
Enniskillen



# The Local Rural Support Networks

- Supporting rural living across Northern Ireland -

## A Unique Rural Infrastructure

COSTA is one of 9 independent Local Rural Support Networks networked together under a unique rural focus. This strong and unique rural infrastructure covers all of rural Northern Ireland.

The Local Networks draw members who are largely rural and cover a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations in their area of remit including: community groups, social economy, play groups, farmers, women, youth, disability and older people etc.

The LRSNs have been officially recognised as an example of good practice and an essential conduit between rural communities and statutory bodies – providing communities with access to the decision making process, and decision makers with a means of tapping into the expert local knowledge on the ground.

We are membership based and our Management Boards are elected each year at AGM from our member groups. Our primary aim is to support local groups and organisations to achieve what they want for their community. **We help groups to help themselves by working *with* groups and *not for* groups.** Visit: [www.localruralsupportnetworks.org](http://www.localruralsupportnetworks.org) for further information.

## COSTA Social Media & Website



Follow us on our Facebook Pages and newly Re-vamped and Enhanced Website:  
Check out our website for the latest NEWS on all forthcoming Projects, Events, Training and Workshops.

**COSTA Website: [www.costaruralsupportnetwork.org](http://www.costaruralsupportnetwork.org)**



**COSTA: <https://www.facebook.com/costa.network>**



**COSTA Community Organisations of South Tyrone Areas**

**<https://www.facebook.com/pages/COSTA-Community-Organisations-of-South-Tyrone-Areas/595993680543963>**





## Mid Ulster District Community Plan

From 1 April 2015, the new Mid Ulster District Council assumed responsibilities for the services provided by the Legacy Councils of Cookstown District, Magherafelt District and Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough.

Our new Council is now responsible for some additional functions which have transferred from central government, including Planning, off-street parking, urban regeneration, and increased powers in local tourism and economic development. Perhaps most significantly of all, the new Councils have responsibility for creating a Community Plan for their area. COSTA has been very actively involved in the Mid Ulster Community Plan as a key Community Sector Network Representative over the past year and beyond. We continue to attend and actively feed-in to the consultation workshops to ensure rural and community needs can be adequately addressed by statutory agencies working together throughout the region.

## Good Community Relations

Good relations across all parts of our community are an essential ingredient of building a prosperous, peaceful and safe society which is enriched by diversity and is welcoming to all. Specifically, tackling the twin blights of sectarianism and racism, in addition to other forms of intolerance, is essential in shaping a shared and cohesive community that can move forward and collectively face the challenges of an ever-changing world. COSTA continues to provide support to local communities via Training and practical actions to support Equality, Human Rights and Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism. Contact COSTA for more information: 028 855 56880 or [info.costa@btconnect.com](mailto:info.costa@btconnect.com).



**MID ULSTER**  
Rural Development  
Partnership

## Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership

**The new Local Action Group for Mid Ulster has now been formed. *Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership* will take forward the delivery of Priority 6 funding under the new 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme in partnership with Mid Ulster District Council.**

**A number of COSTA Board and Staff are Members of the new Local Action Group for the District.** With two thirds of our residents living in rural areas, Mid Ulster has a focus on supporting its rural communities and rural enterprise. A local Rural Development Strategy for Mid Ulster has been developed by the Partnership to address local need and develop the rural economy. This new Programme is funded under the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 via the Department of Environment, Agriculture & Rural Affairs. COSTA will keep you fully up-to-date with rural development issues and funding opportunities as they arise.

**For further information on LEADER Rural Development funding and the application process, contact the Rural Development Team at Mid Ulster District Council on 028 8676 4714 or email [eamon.gallogly@midulstercouncil.org](mailto:eamon.gallogly@midulstercouncil.org)**

# Rural Community Development Support Service – RCDSS



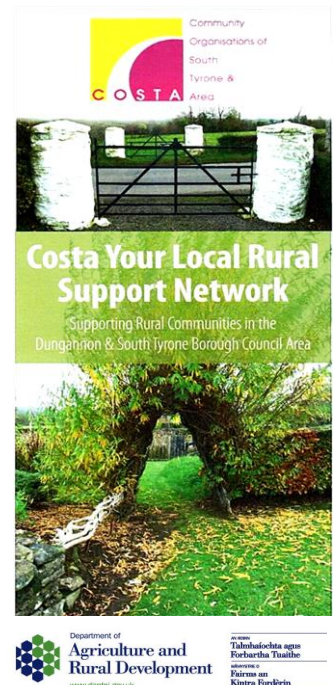
Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas (COSTA) in conjunction with Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN) continue to work in close partnership. With 4 years now already completed, we strive towards the start of our 5th year, in April 2016, of delivering the 'Rural Community Development Support Service' for the Mid Ulster area covering the Dungannon and South Tyrone area (COSTA) and the Cookstown & Magherafelt areas (CWSAN).

The key elements of this current contract with the Department of Agriculture, environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) supported through their **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2012 -2016**, are:

- 1. Supporting Access to the NI Rural Development Programme;**
- 2. Assisting Development of the Rural Economy;**
- 3. Supporting Access to the DARD Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation Programme;**
- 4. Developing Capacity & Leadership.**

The RCDSS provides on-going practical Community Development support services - responsive local group's needs:

- **Events / Workshops / Visits / Meetings.**
- **Newsletters / E-Bulletins / Public Relations.**
- **Facebook Page / Website.**
- **Use of 'Grant-Tracker' / funding searches etc.**
- **Assistance with funding applications.**
- **Networking & Sharing expertise.**
- **Capacity Building, Training.**
- **Good Practice Checklists & Action Plans.**
- **Governance & Board / Management Committee Skills.**
- **Office Services – access to photocopying, fax and email.**
- **Resources, Library, Equipment loan.**
- **Wide range of Management & Leadership Support Services.**
- **Community Audit (support), SWOTs, Profiles, Statistics.**
- **Policies, Procedures, Good Practice Guides.**
- **Action Plans, Needs Assessments, Skills Reviews.**



**The Rural Community Development Support Service is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) under the Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme.**

# COSTA Rural Support Network - Snapshot of the Year

## The COSTA Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) delivered across the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster District

1. **Local Groups: Increased Awareness of local groups / Improved Capacity / Enhanced Sustainability:**
  - **RCDSS 309 groups / supports.**
  - **28 Workshops / 460 attendees.**
  - **7 Newsletters, 1 Mail-out, 910 Email-outs, 18 Press Releases, 30 Website updates, 141 Face Book updates.**
  - Supporting NIRDP 2014-2020: 2 Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership LAG Meetings / Attendances / Events: 1/2/16, 3/3/16.
  - 1 LAG EOI, 1 LAG Co-operation Project (linkage) 5/2/16.
  - 5 Meetings / contacts with LAG Manager / RDC re LAG Establishment.
  - 23 Villages / Groups Supported.
  - **2 'NIRDP 2014-2020' Information Sessions:** 24 attendees: Clonmore Community Centre, 22 attendees, 26/8/15, and at USG, 2 attendees 8/9/16.
  - Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI): 114 Promotions / Signpostings / Referrals: ARTS: 17, MARA: 51, RYE: 20, Rural Support: 12, SUSE+ / DEL / Skills: 14.
  - **5 TRPSI, Energy Efficiency & MARA Events:** (35 attendees) 10/9/15, 23/9/15, 30/9/15, COSTA RCDSS 'Rural Networking & MARA Celebration Event' at The Torrent Complex, Donaghmore, 20+ attendees, 12/11/15. 'Are U Part of the Local Action?' Caledon Courthouse, 20+ attendees, 4/11/15.
  - Energy Efficiency: **1 COSTA & NEA 'Energy Efficiency in the Home' Information Event:** at Killymaddy Centre, 12 attendees, 15/3/16.
  - Capacity Building Workshops: **1 COSTA 'Funding & Sustainability' Workshop / Mid Ulster Seniors Network:** 15+ attendees at Ballysaggart Business Complex, 15/2/16. **1 COSTA & Age NI / MUSN 'First Steps to Funding' Workshop:** 10 attendees, 8/6/16.
  - **1 'Mid Ulster Funding Fair' (CWSAN & COSTA):** 70 attendees, 21/4/16.
  - 8 Good Practice Checklists and 2 Action Plans.
  - Rural Voice / Consultations / Survey Feedback: 20.
  - Regional Links & Engagements: 25 (NIVCA, RCD, RNNI, RCN, SENI etc).
  - Charity Registration Support Service: 10 Charity Registrations / Supports.
  - **4 'Charity Registration' & 'Charity Annual Returns' Information Workshops:** 7 groups / 8 attendees, 27/7/15, 16/11/15, 11/5/16.
  - **5 COSTA 'Open Door Support Days':** 24 Groups / attendees / supports, 28/7/15, 18/8/15, 22/9/15, 16/2/16, 27/4/16.



- Community Evaluation NI (CENI) engagements for Rural CD: 4 meetings, 3 engagements, 1 RCDSS Phase 2 Evaluation process.
  - Social Economy Awareness: 2 Newsletters, 56 Email-outs, COSTA Profile on SENI Website.
  - Social Economy Supports: 15 new and existing groups / individuals / ideas supported.
  - Social Economy Engagements: **1 'Funding Readiness' Workshop**: Cluster Workshop for Roughan & Clogher Valley areas in Roughan Hall, 60+ attendees, 23/2/16.
  - Procurement Capacity: **1 'Grants Vs Tenders' Info Workshop**: 14 attendees / 3 groups, 18/9/15. COSTA capability significantly increased via COSTA 'Strategy for Sustainability' Action Plan.
  - Village SOS Linkages: 32 Email-outs, 2 referrals, 1 Mentor: COSTA NDM.
  - **DARD Rural Micro Capital Grants Scheme: 2 Phases jointly managed with CWSAN to date.**
  - **2 DARD 'Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme' Workshops**: 28 + 29 (57) attendees at Crieve Centre, 13/1/16 & 14/1/16.
2. **Local Individuals: Improved Capacity of individuals, Farmers and Farm Families:**
- Farm Families Health Checks Programme engagements: 24 articles / email-outs, 2 Signposts.
  - Positive Regional Engagements: 37 engagements / actions.
  - Volunteer Involvement: **1 'COSTA 2015 AGM'**: President Grant's Homestead, 40 attendees, 3/6/15 (**4 New Board Members**).
  - MARA Programme: 33 Referrals: 3 Events, 8 LOF Meeting attendances.
  - **MARA Project (Southern Zone 8 - Armagh & Dungannon): 1 Programme (Extended).**
3. **Relationships: Bonding (Improve relations within community) / Bridging (Improve relations with 'other' communities) / Linking (Improve relations with Decision Makers / Statutory Agencies)**
- Capacity Building Relationships: 14+ Partnerships.
  - **1 'Human Rights & Magna Carta' Workshop**: Beechview Beacon Centre, 14 participants, 7/7/15.
  - Influencing & Engaging Statutory Bodies regarding Community Development: 24+ attendances.
  - Voluntary Community Sector Delivery Mechanisms for Community Development: 36 Meetings / engagements. **Major Restructuring Programme for COSTA Jan – June 2016.**
  - Alleviating Poverty & Social Isolation: 37 Partnerships / 52 attendances.
  - Good Relations & creating space for dialogue: **1 'COSTA Summer Coffee Morning'**: 'Rural Vision Wall' to capture Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Inclusion issues in the local community and helping to improve inter-community / cross-community relationships addressing misconceptions, building trust, creating space for dialogue and discussion via Networking: 25 attendees 1/7/15.
  - Community Planning / Structures: 9 Meetings / Events / 10 Actions.
  - Promotion of Libraries NI: 1 Referral, 2 Newsletters, 10 Email-outs.



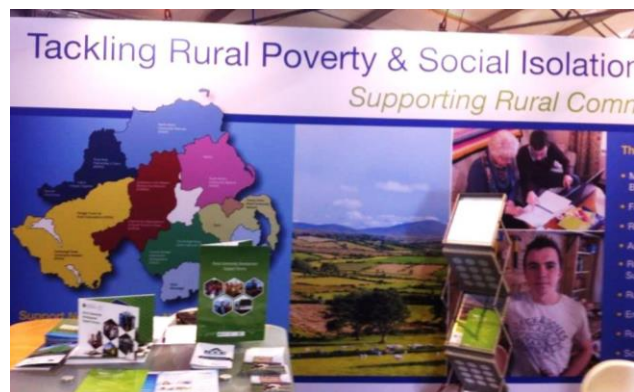
## COSTA Project Partnerships & Representation 2015 / 2016

- Mid Ulster Rural Partnership / Local Action Group (Member).
- Mid Ulster District Community Plan.
- Social Economy Partnership (SEP) Stakeholders Forum.
- Community Development & Professional Standards Training Steering Group (SHSCT)
- ISO 9001:2015 Steering Group. Community Sector Training - Management Group.
- Agewell Partnership.
- Urban & Rural Community Networks Forum.
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Locality Group.
- Mid Ulster Seniors Network (MUSN).
- COSTA & CWSAN Modernisation & Strategy Sub-Group.
- MARA Lead Organisations Forum.
- RCDSS / Local Rural Support Networks Forum.

### The 2016 Balmoral Show

In May 2016, COSTA and the Local Rural Support Networks showcased the DAERA TRPSI Programme (Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Inclusion) at the Balmoral Show.

Heather McLaughlin – COSTA Board Member and Loraine Griffin – COSTA Network Development Manager both represented COSTA and provided information on all TRPSI Programmes and associated Projects.



### COSTA 'Open Door Days'

Throughout the year over 24 groups have accessed 5 Open Door Days held once nearly every two months by COSTA. The Open Door Days provide COSTA members and local groups with access to free and confidential support, advice and information on topics such as:

- *Charity Commission NI Registration & Annual Returns Process;*
- *Funding application forms assistance;*
- *'Grant Tracker' Searches;*
- *Assistance with funding applications;*
- *Governance Support and Information;*
- *Constitutions;*
- *Good Practice Checklists & Action Plans*

### COSTA 'Charity Registration' & 'Charity Annual Returns Information' Workshops

Throughout the year COSTA, as a recognised support organisation, has engaged with 50 groups to comply with the new Charity Commission NI legislation via 4 Workshops and 5 'Open Doors Support Days' held at President Grant's Homestead to provide direct information and support to those 'called forward' to register as Charities. To date over 75 groups have been assisted to complete or submit their Charity Registrations. In line with upcoming demand, COSTA has now developed a new **Charity Annual Returns Workshop** and support service to give local groups the essential guidance and information on how to successfully complete their Annual Returns to the NI Charity Commission.

## Mid Ulster Funding Fair

CWSAN and COSTA jointly hosted a Funding Fair for the Mid Ulster District area on Thursday 12 March 2016, 4:00pm – 6:45pm in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown.

At least 70 groups and community representatives from all walks of life attended. Attendees had the opportunity to talk to and spend some quality time with a range of funders to discuss potential opportunities, plans and ideas for the future.



## DARD Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme (DRMCG)

The Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme is a grant programme funded by DAERA through which rural community groups can apply for funding up to £1,500. It was piloted in May 2015 (Phase 1) and Phase 2 was launched in October 2015. CWSAN and COSTA jointly manage the DRMC Grant Scheme throughout the Mid Ulster District Council area along with the other 9 Network regionally. There has been a huge uptake in the scheme from all manner of local groups wishing to carry out small capital projects. The Programme provides grants funded at up to 85% of the total cost of the project, up to a maximum grant limit of £1,500, and are designed to address local issues of:

- Access Poverty
- Financial Poverty
- Social Isolation

Projects can fall under one or more 3 Key areas:

- Modernisation (of premises / assets)
- Information Communication Technology
- Health & Wellbeing

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (now DAERA), Michelle O'Neill MLA has spoken in the NI Assembly on several occasions about how pleased the Department is with the positive difference these small grants have made to groups, not only in capital value, but in confidence building as many have used the experience of applying through the RMCGS as a stepping stone to apply for further funding from other sources.

DARD Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme (DRMCG)					
Phase 1	Number of Applications	Total Grant Requested	Number of Beneficiaries	Number of Eligible Applications	Grant Value of Eligible Applications
MUDC Area	87	112,558	37,739	75	97,047.32
<b>NI Region</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>561,878</b>	<b>180,898</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>289,711.20</b>

**To date under Phase 2: In the MUDC area 43 eligible projects have been funded to the tune of £49,500.**

We are hopeful the scheme will be launched again in September 2016. If you intend to apply in September there are a few essential criteria you can prepare for prior to the call opening so you will be ready to submit your application. If you would like further guidance please contact COSTA Tel: 028 855 56880 or Email: [info.costa@btconnect.com](mailto:info.costa@btconnect.com)

## CENI Evaluation of the RCDSS Programme

COSTA and the Local Rural Support Networks have been a highly valued part of the voluntary and community development networking infrastructure for around 20 years now. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and successive Ministers, have all recognised the crucial role that the Networks have played in supporting our local rural communities across the region. In late 2015, the Department commissioned CENI (Community Evaluation NI) to carry out a further Evaluation of the Rural Community Development Support Service Programme.

The Report highly commends both the vast range of, and the sheer amounts of work carried out by the Networks in each of their respective areas. The report is available to view - if you are interested in receiving a copy contact COSTA. COSTA has also carried out its own regular surveys and gathered feedback to ensure we continue to meet the needs of our local groups and communities - it is clear that the RCDSS is very much valued.

*"Keep up the good work"*  
*"I think they are doing a wonderful job"*  
*"COSTA is a very important community support network"*



## ISO 9001:2015



Since May 2009 COSTA and the Rural Support Networks have all successfully, and very proudly, held the internationally recognised ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management Standard for excellence. In our quest to ensure that we are continuously evolving, adapting and improving all that we do, we are now well on our way to attaining the newly updated standard ISO 9001:2015. The new standard is more applicable and better suited to the Networks and the types of work and services that we deliver. The new standard also carries a much stronger emphasis on the management of risk and organisational sustainability which is particularly relevant at present.

## COSTA Strategy for Sustainability



In September 2015, based on a very sound evidence base, COSTA produced a 'Strategy for Sustainability Action Plan' with 3 key areas of focus: (1) LRSN Infrastructure, (2) Positive & Innovative Culture, and (3) Social Economy.

Since then, the Networks have been rocked by serious funding cuts of over 33% in the last year alone, and in order to meet these challenges, COSTA has implemented a Restructuring Programme. Over the past 5 years in particular, COSTA has very successfully built up a firm foundation and a reserve base – using the 'Prudence Principle' – to ensure we can weather the tough times.



In addition, during the last 5 years over £15,000 of development investment has been levered-in through in-kind contributions to train staff, update skills, promote innovation, and increase organisational capability and sustainability to meet the demands faced by the wider voluntary community sector today. Despite a future that appears to remain new and quite uncertain, we remain very positive and pro-active.

## MARA Project - Maximising Access in Rural Areas



In March 2012, DARD and PHA introduced the MARA Project to all rural areas of Northern Ireland. Since this time **COSTA has delivered MARA home visits to nearly 2,000 households in the rural areas of Dungannon and Armagh** in partnership with TADA Network - co-ordinated by Project Officer Clare Davidson.

The overall aim of the project has been to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural deprived areas by making them aware of, or helping them access local services, grants or benefits, thus supporting those rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Both of COSTA's Enablers – Gillian Steenson and Karen Dougan - visited clients' homes to conduct a needs assessment. MARA used a "personal touch" to encourage people to avail of a range of services, benefits and grants which they would not otherwise have known about or been able to apply for (e.g. Benefit Entitlement Checks (BECs), NI Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), Home Safety, Local Services, Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP), Boiler Replacement Grants (NIHE), Occupational Therapy Assessments, Social Services, and Translink Smartpass). Clients are also provided with follow-up support regarding their referrals.

### What MARA has Achieved Regionally:

**In total, 12,085 homes were visited by enablers across all rural areas of Northern Ireland between May 2012 and December 2014 and there have been additional homes visited since the evaluation has been carried out. In those households, 13,784 individuals were assessed for need. The overall profile for clients included in MARA was as follows: 40% of clients were male and 60% female. The gender breakdown was roughly equivalent across zones. Clients were aged 64 years on average (ranging from 18 to 102 years). Over half (55%) of all clients were 65 years or more. Over half of all clients (57.9%) were retired, less than one fifth (19%) were in employment (full or part time or self-employed) and the majority, 81.7% lived in households that did not contain children under 18 years.**

Regional Targets were set for the number of referrals for services, grants and benefits. All regional targets were exceeded except for transport as follows:

- 53% of households referred to Home Improvement Schemes (target 20%).
- 51% of clients were referred for Home Safety Checks (no target set).
- 53% of clients were referred for a Benefits Entitlement Check (35% target).
- 28% were referred for local services (including social / physical activity, education / training activities) (target 20%).
- 18% referred for Universal Services (Social Services and OT) (target 15%).
- 21% were referred for Transport service which included Rural Community Transport or Translink Smartpass (target 25%).
- 90% of all clients were referred for at least one service.
- 69% of clients were referred to more than one service (up to 9 services).
- Over half (55.4%) of all clients achieved a positive outcome from a MARA referral.



**MARA has achieved all its targets and yielded success, particularly for older rural people - for every £1 invested MARA yielded £6 for clients. Forecasting over 5 years this increases to a value to clients of £15.52 for every £1 invested. MARA's holistic multiagency offering helps deliver government in a 'joined up' way and its local community approach helps identify and access those most in need.**

### **Successful Outcomes**

From the proportion of clients who had successful claims:

- 30% of those referred to home improvement schemes were successful (16% of all households) and had measures carried out to improve the energy efficiency of their home.
- The majority (14%) had a successful Warm Homes or Levy claim and 3% were awarded a Boiler Replacement Grant.
- 77% of those referred to Home Safety were provided with equipment and / or advice from the Home Safety Advisor which equated to 40% of all clients;
- 7% of those referred for BECs were awarded a Benefit which equated to 4% of all clients; the average weekly Benefit amount for successful claimants was £63.74.4
- 39% of those referred to a universal service had a successful outcome which equated to 7% of all clients: 6% all clients had a successful outcome from an Occupational Therapy Assessment and 1% had a successful outcome from a Social Services Assessment);
- 42% of those referred for a Transport referral were successfully registered with a transport provider which equated to 9% of all clients (6% of all clients were registered with RCTP and 3% with Translink). The number of community transport trips taken by MARA clients was 3,966 (reported April 2015).
- 20% of those referred were sent information about a service they were interested in their local area which equated to 6% of all clients.

<b>Referral Type</b>	<b>MARA</b>	<b>MARA Extended</b>	<b>MARA 16/17</b>	<b>Total</b>
Benefit Entitlement Check	828	148	16	<b>992</b>
Boiler Replacement Scheme	293	49	-	<b>342</b>
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	420	33	-	<b>453</b>
Home Safety Check	859	211	34	<b>1,104</b>
Local Services	257	24	5	<b>286</b>
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	153	15	2	<b>170</b>
Occupational Therapy Assessment	227	39	9	<b>275</b>
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	197	27	1	<b>225</b>
Smartpass	35	3		<b>38</b>
Social Services	68	9	1	<b>78</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,337</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>3,963</b>

**Since the Evaluation the project has continued successfully and COSTA has met all targets from March - June 2016 (completed 90 household visits within this final timeframe).**

**The MARA Project has undoubtedly proved to be a fantastic service for local rural communities and it is *very unfortunate that it is now closed.***

**Clare Davidson  
MARA Project Officer**

COSTA delivers the  
**Rural Community Development  
Support Service (RCDSS)**

**In the former Dungannon & South Tyrone area of  
Mid Ulster District Council**

(sub-contracted under CWSAN as part of the  
9 providers of the Rural CDSS) - funded by the

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