

REV. BILL SHAW




The 174 Trust Celebrates the Opening of North Belfast's First Purpose-Built Arts Centre

# THE DUNCAIRN CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND ARTS: SHARED SPACE FOR ALL



THE FORMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HAS BEEN ENTIRELY REPURPOSED INTO AN AWARD-WINNING CULTURAL VENUE WITH INTIMATE CONCERT AND GALLERY SPACE.



With the opening of the Duncairn Centre for Culture & Arts, the 174 Trust is about to embark upon a new and exciting period of service for the North Belfast Community. Since its foundation in 1983, the Trust has sought to “work with local people, helping them to identify and meet local needs” by providing an inclusive, non-threatening and safe environment for individuals and groups to access programmes and to be involved in a wide range of life-enriching activities where all people are valued equally. The Ireland Funds have been longtime partners with 174 Trust in supporting their efforts towards peace and reconciliation in their often deeply-divided community of North Belfast. Here, Rev. Bill Shaw of the 174 Trust tells of the new life that the Centre is bringing to the area.

**AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS OF PLANNING,** consultation, sweat and tears, Belfast’s newest arts venue (and perhaps the coolest music club this side of anywhere!) is up and running in a former Presbyterian Church.

The Duncairn Centre for Culture & Arts, described by the Arts Council CEO as a ‘WOW!’ building, officially opened to the community on May 1. The new facility is part of an already busy complex that caters for several hundred people of all ages every week with a diverse range of activities and programmes.

Situated as we are in the most divided and volatile part of the city, this launch was an important restatement of our commitment to North Belfast. Especially significant, coming as it does, during our 30th Anniversary celebrations.

Support from The Ireland Funds has been crucial during this period in helping us maintain a presence—a ‘shared space’—open to everyone regardless of religious affiliation, race or ethnicity. The 174 Trust realises that it is not possible for a society to be healthy in terms of its ability to be reconciled within itself and to foster a sense of ‘shared society’ if its cultural sector is unable to make its proper contribution to the civic debate. Cultural discourse has a key part to play in peace building and we are now better equipped than ever to play a strategic role in this respect.

Already the 170-seat theatre space has hosted a series of major conferences including ‘Victims’, Community Relations Council, Policing Board and The Arts Council as well as several music and drama events. The new venue is also proving itself to be a popular destination for music fans who have been entertained by a diverse range of internationally-renowned musicians and performers.

The daily foot traffic, whether visiting the exhibition space or enjoying a cappuccino in the Refresh Café, is drawn from near and far. It is already becoming an established meeting spot for local people, Protestant and Catholic alike. This fall, in response to the unprecedented interest generated during and after the opening Spring Festival, the 174 Trust hopes to unveil an exciting £120,000 arts programme.

**In a neighbourhood where everything is either ‘them’ or ‘us’— Protestant or Catholic—the 174 Trust has succeeded in creating a unique and stunning cultural space—one in which everyone can share and celebrate—and at the same time make a massive contribution towards building a lasting peace and a truly reconciled community.**

— Rev. Bill Shaw of the 174 Trust