

April 2024 – March 2025

ANNUAL REPORT



County Down
Rural Community
Network



The people at the heart of our work

406

members of voluntary organisations directly supported

12

Voluntary directors

2

Operating across 2 council areas – Ards and North Down and Newry, Mourne & Down

17

Members of staff



How we make a difference



27

Training courses
532 Participants



12

e-zine newsletters to 406 groups



60

Events
5500 Attendees

£400K

Micro Grants to 300 small rural groups



120

agencies working in partnership



260

Social media posts



£900K

of grant aid secured for 55 voluntary organisations



The funders and organisations that make it possible

DAERA, PHA, CFNI- ARN Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund, Dormant Assets N.I., Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, Ards and North Borough Council, Peaceplus and the Healthy living Centre Alliance

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TOTAL FUNDS

£1,026,480

Total Investment

£1,024,487

Total Expenditure



County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN)

Celebrating 30 Years of Rural Community Support and Leadership



County Down
Rural Community
Network

2025 marks a significant milestone for County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) as we celebrate 30 years of service to rural communities. Formed in 1995 by five local community groups, our organisation has grown into a trusted and influential voice for rural life — now representing and supporting over 400 voluntary and community organisations across County Down and South Armagh.

Over three decades, CDRCN has helped rural communities to thrive through practical support, advocacy, and partnerships that empower local people to improve health, wellbeing, and opportunity.

This report reflects our achievements during the financial year April 2024 – March 2025, marking a year of continued impact, renewal, and resilience.

From the original five founding groups to today's 406 members, our journey reflects the strength of collective effort and the enduring value of community spirit in rural County Down.

Achievements and Performance 2024–2025

1. Rural Community Development Support (DAERA)

Our Rural Development Team continued to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service funded by DAERA, working across rural North Down, the Ards Peninsula, South and East Down, and South Armagh. Over 300 micro grants were managed, totalling more than £400,000 in support for small organisations. CDRCN also contributed to strategic discussions at Stormont to ensure rural needs are represented.

2. Health and Community Development Programme (PHA)

Funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA), our Health Team continued to support hundreds of small community groups promoting physical activity, mental wellbeing, and social connection. With funding secured until March 2027, this programme remains central to our mission — empowering people to take control of their own health outcomes and reducing rural isolation.

3. Neighbourhood Renewal (Downpatrick)

Now entering its twentieth and likely final phase, this 20 year initiative continues to build resilience in Downpatrick. £20,000 annually in training, events, and direct community investment has strengthened local capacity, including support for Downpatrick Community Allotments, enhancing food security and wellbeing.

4. Social Supermarket Programme

In partnership with Clanrye Group and Community Advice, we provide

a wrap-around support service to families in crisis. This model offers food access, financial advice, and wellbeing support, helping residents move from crisis towards stability and self-reliance.

5. Asylum Seekers Fund

With support from DfC and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, CDRCN managed the Asylum Seekers Fund, welcoming new residents and ensuring access to essentials.

6. Hardship and Cost-of-Living Support

Through NMDDC, DfC, and Ards and North Down Council, we distributed over £100,000 to families in financial hardship. This immediate relief has been critical in supporting households affected by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

7. PeacePlus and Major Projects

A defining highlight of this year was the successful €15 million PeacePlus award from SEUPB in partnership with the GAA County Board for the Ballykinlar Centre of Participation, Wellbeing and Shared Learning. CDRCN will lead community engagement and outreach, ensuring the facility serves as a shared space that connects people across traditions and backgrounds throughout County Down.

8. National Lottery Community Fund

Our Health Team secured a new £500,000 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to support very small community groups across Ards and Down over the next three years — ensuring that even the smallest voices have access to support and growth.

9. Research and Community Insight

Our 2024 Member Survey received 160 responses, with an overwhelming majority expressing satisfaction with CDRCN's support. The survey also revealed the top two challenges facing rural communities: mental health and poverty — priorities which will shape our work in the coming years.

In 2024–2025, our work directly benefited thousands of residents and hundreds of organisations, ensuring that the impact of charitable investment reached those most in need.

We also thank the 120 partner agencies and hundreds of community volunteers who make our success possible every day.

Financial Review

CDRCN's income for the year remained stable across multi-annual funding streams. Funds were applied wholly to charitable purposes, and reserves were maintained at responsible levels to safeguard future operations and respond to funding fluctuations.



Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council

Ards and
North Down
Borough Council



Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk



Public Health
Agency



Peace
Northern Ireland - Ireland
European Regional Development Fund



The
Community
Foundation
Northern Ireland