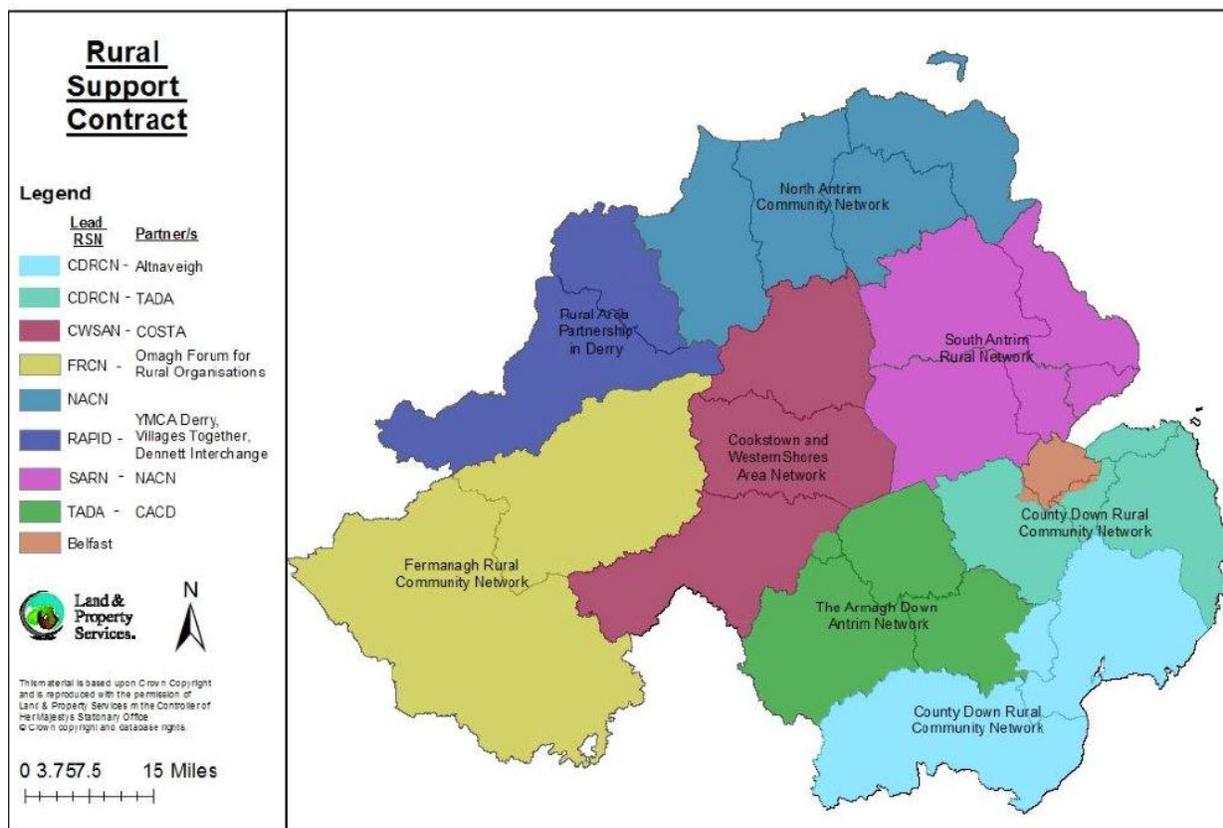


**Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) Contract Holders Presentation to ARD
Committee**

The eight RCDSS Contract holders provide community development support to rural communities throughout Northern Ireland. The RCDSS Contract holders do this by determining and responding to the key issues impacting on the lives of rural people and rolling out programmes to address identified needs. By the nature of the organisations involved, the RCDSS Contract holders are also committed to tackling the impact of poverty and economic improvement in rural areas. This is achieved through commitment to other measures such as rural development support for community and voluntary applications, suicide prevention and addressing health and wellbeing, ethnic minority support, support to the rural economy and farm families.

The RCDSS contracts are funded by the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme. Those who were successful in the bid for the tender are as follows

RCDSS Contract Holder	Partner(s)
Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN)	Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas (COSTA)
County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN)	Altnaveigh House (Unionist Partner)
County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN)	The Armagh, Down and Antrim Network (TADA)
Fermanagh Rural Community Network (FRCN)	Omagh Forum for Rural Associations (OFRA)
North Antrim Community Network (NACN)	
Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)	YMCA, Dennett interchange and Villages Together (Unionist Partner)
South Antrim Community Network (SACN)	North Antrim Community Network (SACN)
The Armagh, Down and Antrim Network (TADA)	County Armagh Community Development (Unionist Partner)



The current service requirements are to:

1. Supporting Access to the N.I. Rural Development Programme
2. Assisting Development of the Rural Economy
3. Supporting Access to the TRPSI (Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation) Programme
4. Developing Capacity and Leadership
5. Community Development Service for the Unionist Population (Selected Border Areas)

The Contract Holders provide assistance to Community Groups and Voluntary Organisations through providing

1. Regular updates on funding opportunities (e.g. RDP Funding through LAG's)
2. Provision of and access to training
3. Specialist advice to assist Social Economy organisations
4. Assistance with identifying potential funders and completing funding applications
5. Support and advice re: governance, policies and procedures and financial systems
6. Networking opportunities, newsletters, e-zines and social media communication
7. Representation and support to statutory, governmental bodies, community and other external organisations (e.g. PHA, PCSP, Community Transport, LAGS)
8. Dedicated and qualified staff members providing support and working on your behalf

ATTENDANCE: PRESENTATION WILL BE DELIVERED BY:

Mary T Conway

Mary T Conway is Network Manager with Omagh Forum for Rural Associations for the past eleven years and in that role has helped numerous rural community groups and represented the rural voice in our area. I have lived on the family farm all my life and have been involved in rural community development on a voluntary basis for 30 years initially with the local youth club, the community group and later with the playgroup and after schools club so I am very aware of the needs of rural groups. I am currently Treasurer of Creggan Community Association for the last seven years and am Vice Chair of the Parent Support group in the local Primary School. I was recently appointed chair of Easilink Community Transport following two years as Vice Chair. I also sit on the board of Omagh Independent Advice Services and FOCUS our urban counterparts. In Omagh Forum I work with and have helped groups to develop and manage projects ranging from capital builds to securing funding for classes; helping groups: apply to and drawdown funds for current RDP; with corporate governance, more recently with Charity Commission requirements; networking opportunities, provision of training; working in partnership; financial management and much more. Prior to this I was involved in securing finance for a major tourism and community project when I worked with Owenkillew Community Development Association, managing the capital build process and developing many projects after completion. I am married with three children at various stages of education: Primary, Post Primary and University, I recently graduated with a Foundation Degree in Counselling myself and am a practicing counsellor in the voluntary sector.

Brendan McCann

Brendan McCann works for Tada Rural Support Network - this work allows me to travel to and meet rural people. I hear and understand their concerns many of which I have been able to give attention to.

I live and work in the rural community. Therefore I have firsthand knowledge of how disadvantaged the rural community have become compared to their urban neighbours. For the last four years I have been giving assistance to rural dwellers by offering advice on how to make applications to the RDP. This has given me knowledge in both dealing with the applicant and the funder. I was a member of Saint Vincent De Paul for over 10 years. So I have seen poverty at first hand, it has no boundaries either urban or rural.

I have a third level qualification in Youth & Community Work from NUI Maynooth.

Working in the area of good relations is one of the areas that I concentrate.

I live in the heart of the apple country. Battlehill.

I have run my own business for over twenty years.

Recently I retired as supervisor of the local Credit Union.

Lorraine Griffin

Lorraine Griffin is Network Development Manager of COSTA Rural Support Network (Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd).

I have been working for COSTA for 15 years since it was first set up and established in 2000.

I have over 17 years experience of community development and related work, both in a professional capacity and on a voluntary basis right across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Previous experience includes: (Sperrin Lakeland) Western HSS Trust (WHST), Omagh Enterprise Company, Omagh Women's Area Network, Omagh & District Junior Chamber and Omagh Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Educated to Masters level, key qualifications include: Leadership, Management, Community Development, Media Studies, Psychology and Training.

COSTA was the 11th out of 12 Rural Support Networks to be originally set up to support rural communities throughout Northern Ireland. COSTA covers the Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council area and works in partnership with CWSAN across the Mid Ulster Council area.

The Network has built up a steady membership of 100 rural community groups and individuals from all backgrounds and we regularly keep a further 500+ groups informed of development opportunities via our monthly Newsletter "COSTA News."

**Submission to the
Committee for Agriculture and Rural
Development**

For The

**Review of the Targeting Rural Poverty &
Social Isolation Programme (TRP&SI)**

By

**The Local Rural Support Networks and
Contractors for the Rural Community
Development Support Service (RCDSS)**

**(As presented to The Agriculture & Rural Development
Committee in February 2014 and subsequently updated
December 2014)**

RCDSS Submission to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

This paper is further developed from a previous presentation to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on 4th February 2014 which was attended by Wendy Kerr, Nicholas McCrickard, Christopher Spence and Conor Corr as representatives of four of the contract holders representing the **Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS)** contract. The contracts were issued via tender from DARD from April 2012 for three years until March 2015 under the boundaries of the new Local Government Reform.

Present today are: Mary T Conway, Loraine Griffin and Brendan McCann

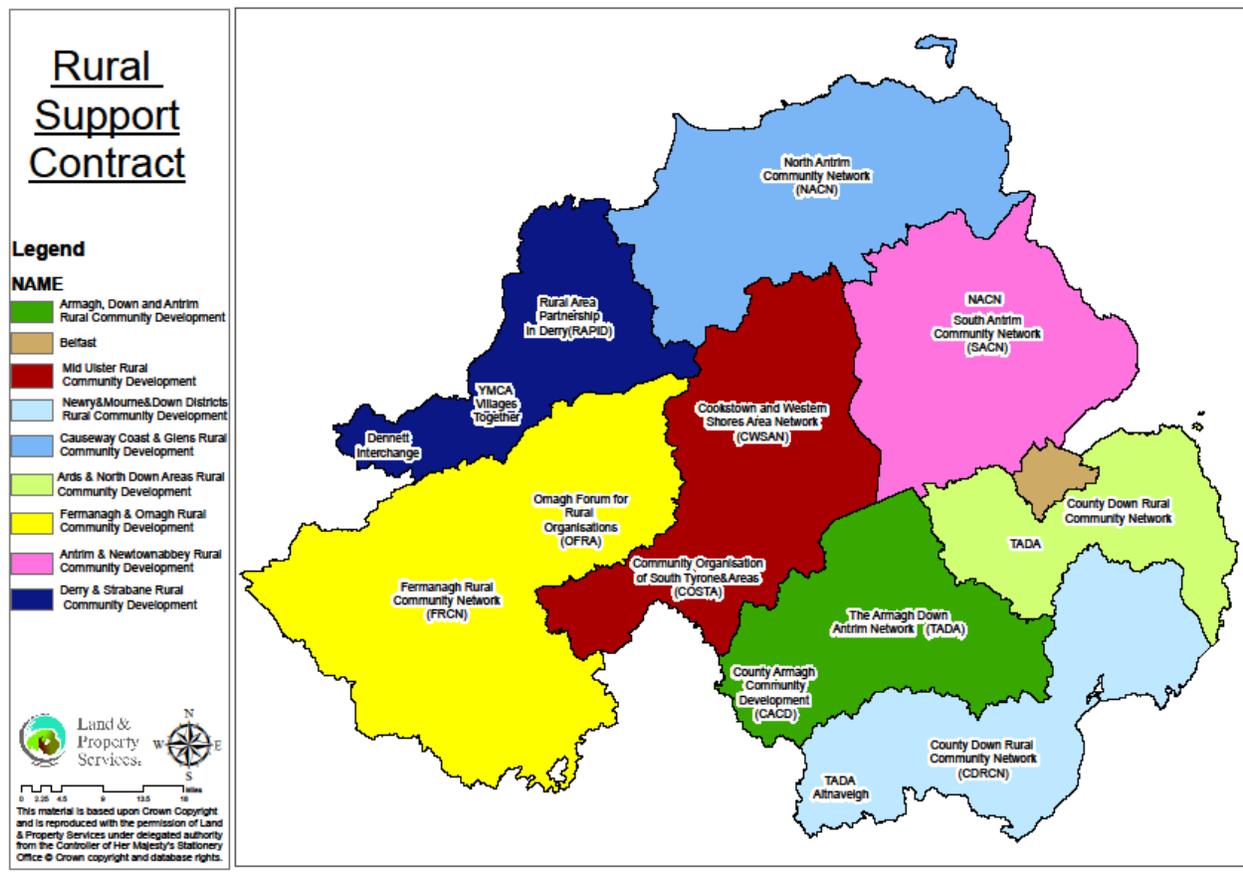
Since the presentation in February 2014 the organisations delivering the RCDSS contract have helped to roll out a number of programmes for the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development, most notably, the Animation process for the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Begins: The organisations awarded this tender have been in place for a substantial number of years and provide a strong and unique rural infrastructure which covers all of rural Northern Ireland. With similar aims we network together and deliver rural community development support and advice funded mainly by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation fund. Many contract holders draw membership from a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations in their area of remit, including generic community groups, social economy, play groups, farmers, women, youth, disability, ethnic minority and older peoples groups.

We are present here today because we want to highlight the practical support, advice and actions we have been delivering within our rural communities.

Many Networks are membership based and Management Boards are elected annually with the primary aim of representing and supporting local groups and organisations to achieve more for the community through a bottom up community development approach. The RCDSS Contract holders seek to assist sustainable

communities through their locally based staff providing local support and advice. The Networks are widely recognised as providing an essential conduit between rural communities and statutory bodies, providing communities with access to decision makers and a channel into expert local knowledge on the ground. The model the networks provide across rural Northern Ireland is viewed as an excellent model of good practice enabling local communities to seek solutions to local issues by effective networking.



HOW AND WHY WE DO IT

The Community Development (C.D.) approach:

- C.D. is a recognised vehicle that can underpin actions to alleviate poverty and exclusion;
- Effective and efficient tool to addressing economic and social deprivation;
- In rural NI, community development supported by a rural CD infrastructure, has been vital to the success of many government policy instruments e.g. successive EU Rural Development Programmes.

Consultation & Research undertaken by Rural Development Council & Research carried out by Rural Development Council & Rural Community Network:

- Evidenced a continued need for on-going support to rural communities;
- Echoed the fresh challenges that economic downturn, social / policy environments present to rural communities;
- The issues faced by rural communities: lack of employment opportunities, transport constraints, access to services;
- The Unique needs of *rural* require a specialised approach to Community Development.

Support *on the ground* is required:

- Providing *direct, hands-on support* to local communities, groups and individuals;
- Delivery of this support is best undertaken by organisations that have the trust and confidence of the rural community;
- People on the ground are best placed to identify their own needs
- Opportunities to harness the skills and abilities of local communities.

There is a need for:

- Rural Proofing;
- Recognising rural challenges;
- Close working between Councils and local C.D. practitioners particularly in relation to delivery of the NIRDP 2007 – 2013 and 2014 - 2020;
- Support farmers / farm families / individual private applicants to the NIRDP;
- Support Capacity Building particularly in areas of weak infrastructure.
- Momentum offered by such a unique infrastructure of Networks.

Strategic Context

DARD's key goal in its Strategic Plan 2012-2020 is to improve the lives of farmers and other rural dwellers targeting resources where they are most needed.

DARD recognises the need to support CD in rural areas and has supported CD through the Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI):

Access Poverty - Focus on access to statutory services such as advice on welfare benefits, health and social care, advice and support, education and training and public transport

Financial Poverty - Focus on measures that ensure vulnerable rural dwellers can maximise their income; addressing fuel poverty, maximising benefit uptakes in rural areas, and addressing the additional costs people face by living in rural areas.

Social Isolation - Focus on measures that identify and address different types of isolation experienced by different vulnerable groups through CD approaches to address local needs, or supporting organisations that work in rural areas supporting those suffering from different types of stress or mental health issues. This priority also focuses on researching the needs and challenges of "hard to reach" vulnerable groups in rural areas.

DARD's aims for the Rural Community Development Support Service:

1. Ensure *regional coverage & local* delivery of RCDSS across NI;
2. Support individuals and communities in rural areas in improving their economic & social sustainability;
3. Support the increased participation in community development by the Unionist Population living in border areas
4. Support rural communities, Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders in the face of restructuring of Local Government and the reorganisation of public policy and service delivery.

RCDSS Service Requirements 1 April 2013 – 31 December 2014:

1. Support Access and Implementation of the NIRDP
2. Assist Development of the Rural Economy
3. Support Access to the TRPSI Programme
4. Develop Capacity & Leadership
5. *Community Development Service for the Unionist Population*

What We Do

We are a unique rural community development infrastructure covering the region. The RCDSS work to a strong Community Development ethos and principles of empowerment. The contract holders work *with* groups rather than *for* them to ensure a legacy of empowerment long after a support intervention is made.

We are guided by:

- our focus on the unique grass-roots Membership base
- Identification of Real Needs and local Provision of programmes
- Partnership, Representation and Maximising Participation (*e.g. 520 plus responses to recent DARD Budget Consultation*)
- Sustainable Development
- Quality assurance and service provision (ISO 9001:2008).

Leverage

The funding provided from the RCDSS contract totals £890,480. This contributes efficiently to roll out DARD programmes and other joint initiatives across departments that are of benefit to all rural communities. All contract and partner organisations carry additional resources for front line community services and projects leveraged into local areas. This carries a leverage ratio of over 1:5 so collectively **we easily lever in an additional £5 million annually.**

Specific Examples include:

- Work with a local Council in one contract area to secure over £400,000 in loans to groups to allow draw-down of NIRD funding for 12 projects that would not otherwise have been able to proceed.
- Distribution of £60,000 annually in small grants in one area.
- 300 groups in receipt of micro-grants in one contract area over 8 years.
- Working with wind farm companies to manage their community award programmes to a value of £82,000 since 2012 in one council area
- Linking with Council on Dog Control.

IMPACT AND PROGRESS TO 31ST DECEMBER 2014

Supporting Access to the NIRD

- **Number of villages supported/examples of improvements/support**

Over 120 villages supported across Northern Ireland showcasing improvements such as

- New signage
- Painting buildings
- Collective community art projects
- Fencing and lighting improvements
- New walk-ways, flowerbeds and seating

- **Direct engagement with LAGs; individuals; farmers and farm families**

We have assisted farmers and farm family members to access:

- farm safety workshops
- 'fast track into I.T' which is helping to deal with bureaucracy of running a farm business
- farm diversification
- make applications to the Farm Modernisation Programme

RDP LAG work - We have brought forward a programme of activities through direct engagement with rural communities and Local Action Groups which support the LAGs in achieving the objectives for their area, helps identify community needs and support LAGs in addressing these needs. In our current tender, we have enabled community and voluntary groups to draw-down support from the Rural Development Programme with interventions such as promoting and circulating RDP information, helping groups new to the RDP to apply, helping unsuccessful groups to reapply, facilitating good practice visits, holding funding workshops, delivering training, ensuring community participation in village renewal action plans and supporting groups to implement actions identified in village renewal action plans. We are also supporting groups with governance and procurement assistance. A significant number of Network Board Members and staff sit as social partners on the Local Action Groups ensuring the funding is targeted at community need and they also meet regularly with other agencies to ensure local programs are complimentary and benefits are maximized.

- **Support Co-operation Projects**

Networks provide help and assistance with applications, procurement and further assistance in identifying potential future funders to sustain growth of such projects.

Example – The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland applied to GROW South Antrim under Measure 3.6, Conservation and Upgrading of Rural Heritage, due to the success of their application, they were awarded a letter of offer for £798,209 to assist with the creation of the unique heritage visitor attraction in the rural location of Whitehead. The project which is due for completion by the end of 2014 opportunely falls in line with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of RPSI. The project has already taken steps to transform RPSI Whitehead from an industrial workshop and storage facility into a national railway museum and major tourist attraction. The funding will provide enhanced visitor facilities including a small exhibits museum, a workshop viewing gallery, a historic carriage exhibition building, interactive displays, an extension to the workshops and a locomotive turntable.

Assisting Development of the Rural Economy

- **Increase awareness and support/assist/signpost groups/individuals to Social Economy Sector**

Raise awareness via media publications of current social economy projects
Assist groups in co-operative initiatives.

- **Increase awareness/access of public procurement**

Offer access to training such as Central Procurement Directorate information session.

- **Providing advice and information to rural dwellers on potential sources of social enterprise funding, for example, Charity Bank, Ulster Community Investment Trust and Ulster Bank**

Support and liaise with rural dwellers in accessibility and appropriateness of funds.

Supporting Access to the TRPSI Programme

The RCDSS has assisted access for an estimated 50,000 people to:

- *Farm Families Health Checks Programme* –
5,765 health checks have taken place in 266 rural locations
- *Rural Challenge Fund* –
5,606 beneficiaries from projects funded via the current Rural Challenge Small Grants Programme
- *BOOST* –
1,131 unemployed young people supported by the BOOST youth employability programme
- *RYE* –
509 young people engaged in a Rural Youth Entrepreneurship programme;
- *Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS)* -
660,477 passenger trips have been funded through the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme since it commenced in December 2009.
- **MARA** –
12,243+ households with over 30,000 referrals made to date and 1,409 homes have received energy efficiency enhancements.

Developing Capacity and Leadership

There are 16 locally staffed offices and resource centres maintained as a direct result of the RCDSS Contract. This maintains 28 direct jobs and 54 indirect jobs which are funded through other means but compliment the work of the RCDSS Contract.

- **Create sustainable communities**
868 Member Groups registered with approximately over 10,000 volunteers and around 102 of those are Volunteer Board Members representing local rural communities
 - Assisting groups called forward by Charity Commission NI to register as charities and preparing others for the registration process
- **Identify and develop measures to alleviate poverty, social isolation and inequality in rural areas**
Developing Group Capacity and Projects:

- Over 4,000 requests for support including development assistance funding information & project grant application assistance in just one year.
- Over 150 Networking / Good Practice Visits / Information / Consultation events hosted and organised.
- Over 200 information bulletins.

- **Working with government departments, councils and the wider voluntary and community sector to support rural communities in the development of community planning structures under the Review of Public Administration.**

RCDSS representation on over 90 strategic/theme based partnerships including health and wellbeing initiatives.

- **Positive engagement with regional generic and thematic, for example, women and faith based voluntary & community sector support organisations.**

PR improvements including reaching a younger target audience through initiatives such as facebook and other social media outlets

- **Contribution to provision of a 'Rural Voice', for example, articulating rural concerns, evidence gathering on rural issues, facilitating consultation exercises, positive engagement with regional generic and thematic voluntary & community sector support organisations.**

Over £20,000 worth of training and advice workshops provided to community and voluntary groups such as PR and Media Training, Governance, Community Venue Sustainability, Collaboration, Risk Management, Financial Management, Capital Build, Legal Status, Procurement workshops, Funding clinics.

Community Development Service for the Unionist Population

As part of the Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) tender, in four of the new council areas of Fermanagh & Omagh; Londonderry & Strabane; Armagh & Banbridge & Craigavon; and Newry & Mourne & Down, we have secured a tender to deliver a Community Development Service for the Unionist population living in rural border areas which is consistent with 'Renewing

Communities – the government’s response to the report of the taskforce on protestant working class communities’.

This includes Assisting individuals and communities, including farmers and farm families, to access information and advice on the economic assistance available to rural areas; and provide support in working towards the economic and social sustainability of rural communities.

There is also a focus on Improving inter-community and cross-community relationships by, for example, addressing misconceptions, building trust, creating space for dialogue and discussion.

The main core of the work carried out is actively engaging with hard to reach individuals and groups by providing networking opportunities for them, for example, best practice visits, creating a safe space for difficult conversations, providing opportunities for them to engage with leaders of institutions, councils etc. In a practical sense, this service helps individuals on the ground, with practical training and capacity building, allowing for improvement in the general capacity of local people within the rural area.

Practical examples of this in the Fermanagh and Omagh council area was the establishment of a steering group that now sits quarterly and involves both Fermanagh District Council & Omagh District Council, Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Orange Order, Victims and Survivor groups, and other local agencies. This is bringing together unionist community representatives within the new council area and building relationships within the unionist community and wider society.

We support groups applying for funding; improvements to places of worship; Hall sustainability; farmers & farm families with availing of funding, training and support opportunities such as IT training and farm safety awareness;. All of this is undertaken through the structures of Fermanagh Rural Community Network and Omagh Forum for Rural Associations.

All of these actions directly make a difference to quality of life of individuals and local communities.

Key Message/Conclusion

Vibrant rural communities are an essential component of Northern Ireland's future. The RCDSS contracts are about valuing people as the most important asset of what we have as *rural*. We provide a very important localised co-ordinated service to rural people which assists the Executive to roll out programmes which supports sustainable rural communities. The RCDSS Contract Holders bring value for money, independence, many are membership driven and we all build cross-community linkages and provide localised co-ordination and co-operation - all of which is underpinned by Quality Assurance standards. We appreciate the investment in this sector for community development support in rural areas which has come from the TRPSI fund which has enabled the RCDSS contract holders to promote the Rural Development Programme and a wide range of other government initiatives. This has levered in a huge amount of external investment which local councils and Government have been very grateful for and which they alone would not have been able to access.

We would ask the committee to recognise the contribution that TRPSI is making and in particular the impact of the Rural Community Development Support Service (RCDSS) in assuring Rural Proofing.

We would ask that the committee recognises the level of interest within the rural community and impact of the RCDSS bottom-up approach.

We would ask that you recognise the need to secure a sufficient budget to ensure that such community intervention programmes aimed at local needs and the vast experience and trust built up over the past decade between DARD and the rural community is maintained.

9th January 2015