

Summer 2025

# BCPP NEWS

Building the  
Community-  
Pharmacy  
Partnership

This newsletter is brought to you by  
Community Development & Health Network (CDHN)



## 30 Years of Community Action on Health Inequalities

On 12th November 2024 over 100 guests from across sectors gathered to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Community Development and Health Network (CDHN). The event honoured three decades of community action to address health inequalities and poverty, and looked ahead to a future of social change and health equity.



**FUNDING FOR PROJECTS  
WHICH TACKLE THE ROOT  
CAUSES OF POOR HEALTH**

**FUNDING ROUND NOW OPEN**

The celebration featured a keynote address from one of CDHN's founder members and Director, Ruth Sutherland. She reflected on CDHN's beginnings during the Troubles, when in 1994, the focus of health promotion was on lifestyle education, largely overlooking the context of poverty and conflict and the need for action on the social determinants of health. She also spoke about CDHN's foundations and its commitment to the vital role of community development in shaping a fairer, more equitable and healthier society.

Ruth said "CDHN evolved by listening to community needs and building trusted relationships between people, communities, health and social care and government agencies. Continued collaboration to address the systemic issues of poverty and health inequality is essential to bring about change for many communities today"

The event also featured testimonies from CDHN members who shared how the organisation's values and support have helped drive their work in communities across Northern Ireland. Jennifer Todd from Antrim Community Support Hub reflected on how CDHN's BCPP expanded her community's knowledge and understanding of community development. Grainne Graham and Fionntan Gregory of Crisis Café spoke passionately about their BCPP work with young people experiencing mental health issues.

"The 30th anniversary celebration is a timely reminder of CDHN's relevance today as a catalyst for positive change combating social injustice and the persistent health inequalities to improve health outcomes at grassroots and regional levels"  
**(Joanne Vance, CDHN Director)**

# Mary O'Hagan's Long Service Contribution

We were thrilled to celebrate and express our heartfelt gratitude to Mary O'Hagan for her unwavering dedication to CDHN and its members. Since beginning her journey with us in 1997, Mary has been an invaluable and supportive member of our team for an incredible 27 years.

Mary embodies the core values of CDHN in everything she does, championing social justice and equality with passion. Her practical support and kind, encouraging words have made a lasting impact on both staff and members alike.

Below are some wonderful quotes from our funders and supporters in recognition of Mary's contributions.

"Mary is an inspiration to colleagues, pharmacists, and community groups, fostering a culture of inclusivity, empathy and positivity and striving to improve health and well-being for some of the most deprived, disadvantaged, and isolated within our society. A true beacon of goodness and care, Mary has devoted her time selflessly to building relationships and in doing so has created solid foundations for the BCPP programme that seeks to empower communities and reduce health inequalities using a community development approach." **Prof Cathy Harrison, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, DoH**



"Countless community pharmacists have directly and indirectly benefitted from Mary's calm, reassuring and effective personality....the 1000+ projects are testament to that, but what will have mattered most to Mary is the difference she has made, and the support she has given to so many community groups, to local people and to individuals who either needed or benefitted from her quiet involvement and her ability to connect people in such an empowering way that makes a difference to individuals. An unsung hero, if ever there was one!"

**Gerard Greene, Community Pharmacy NI**

"I first met Mary in the early years of BCPP and I immediately recognised her commitment to enable communities and pharmacies to work together to solve sometimes very challenging problems. She is a very kind and compassionate lady who is committed to improving the lives of people who are often the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and isolated in our society. She is exceptionally resilient and does not let adversity dampen her resolve."

**Joe Brogan, Former Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG**



**GRACE**  
Women's Development Limited



# Grace Women's Development and McKeever's Chemist, Belfast

*The Strength of Shared Stories*

**Grace Women's Development is a Company Limited by Guarantee and recognised as a registered charity. They are a community resource for women and their families, that advances education and training through the delivery of programmes based on community need.**

They successfully gathered a local group of women to address their health concerns. These women built trust among themselves and with the local pharmacist to openly talk about personal issues. The topics were selected by the participants and deliberated on a weekly basis. Each session was a blend of empathy, shared experiences and mutual support, creating a safe space for everyone involved. The discussions ranged from common health ailments and preventative measures to mental health and wellness.

One of the most significant outcomes was the empowerment of these women through knowledge and collective wisdom. They learned not only from the pharmacist's expertise but also from each other's life stories and coping strategies. This sense of community fostered resilience and encouraged proactive approaches to health.

*Amy Kerr, the pharmacist from McKeever Pharmacy, took great pride in her involvement in the project. Her extensive knowledge allowed her to address all of the participants' enquiries with confidence, while also providing guidance on medication-related concerns and clarifying any questions about prescriptions. Her role in the sessions was pivotal in rebuilding trust, helping the women feel more comfortable approaching their pharmacist with future health-related inquiries.*

Bernadette Montgomery, representing the Community Partner Cancer Lifeline, participated in the last session. She recounted her personal experience with cancer and discussed the support services her organisation provides not only for cancer patients but also for their family members. This session not only offered insight into cancer care but also highlighted the importance of support networks for people navigating serious health challenges.

One of the key factors that contributed to the success of the programme was the familiarity of the setting and the small group size. The intimate environment helped alleviate any anxieties that some participants may have had, creating a more comfortable atmosphere for everyone involved. We aimed to keep each session as casual as we could, allowing participants to enjoy tea and coffee while engaging in discussions. As the weeks progressed, the sessions evolved into a blend of insightful conversations and collaborative activities. This practice not only strengthened the group's bond but also provided valuable feedback that informed Grace's Women's future planning.







Parenting Focus is the leading charity for parenting support in Northern Ireland, with over 45 years of experience providing a wide range of family support services aimed at improving the lives of children, young people, and their parents.

Their core objective is to enhance skills, understanding, and opportunities for parents, while promoting the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of both parents and their children. At Parenting Focus, they prioritise prevention and early intervention, working collaboratively with parents to address challenges and improve outcomes. By fostering resilience and confidence, they enable families to build stronger relationships and create nurturing environments that help children and young people thrive.

## Parenting Focus and Murphy's Chemist PARENTING FOCUS

### *Change the conversation about Men*

The men's led project along with the work of the local pharmacy partner enabled men to explore perceived obstacles in terms of their health whilst improving their wellbeing and sense of belonging to their local communities. It made a real difference in helping them identify other community provisions for men and connecting with others.

The men's café has managed to open the conversation for men and allow people to talk about things, to listen and connect as human beings and to work through emotions and health related difficulties and move on.

The work with the pharmacist and project worker continues to be a respectful, slow and a trustful process that provides a place for learning and connections to each other, the men as well as other services and providers. Since attending the men's café, many of the men have changed the outlook on their lives in a different and positive way. They looked different in terms of posture and energy, and they have made profound changes in their lives in terms of being men, strengthening their roles as fathers, friends, and active members of the community.

The project achieved its aims of providing participants with the opportunities to explore obstacles in terms of their mental and physical health.

04| [cdhn.org](https://cdhn.org)

It also succeeded in connecting them to additional support networks that helped them develop a fuller sense of community belonging, where friendships through conversation and peer support have continued to help them cope with the challenges that impact on them as individuals.

*These were rare moments where I pushed myself outside of my comfort zone and took part in something that was just for me, leaving me feeling energised afterwards and grateful to have been a part of some really special moments”.*

**Participant/** Parenting Focus



The men's café sessions supported talking and listening and provided opportunities to listen to the pharmacist about engaging in healthier lifestyle choices and activities. This in turn led to the development of a running & walking group, gardening and the development of a local men's support group to help other men cope and improve their well-being.

The project successfully engaged with and invited along other community speakers to talk with the participants reinforcing social connections and allowing men to explore mental health topics in a safe, supportive and stigma-free environment. At the human library event run by the Holywell Trust, (North West Community Network) men were introduced for the very first time to personal stories which also helped broaden their understanding of other people's own life experiences and its impact.

*It was great to work with men. Women can't get enough out of you in terms of information, but men are underrepresented in conversations about health. When I finished training, I thought I'd be doing bloods all day. It was only when I started doing this work that I realised why it's called a Community Pharmacy. Nobody trains you in how to chat to people about their health concerns but my involvement in the project demonstrates that this is the way to do it. (Ben Harkin/ Community Pharmacist)*



**CDHN is deeply saddened to learn that Parenting Focus is closing after 46 years of dedicated service. Their work has made a lasting impact on countless families and communities, and it's clear that their legacy will continue to resonate long after operations cease. Their closure is yet another reminder of the challenges posed by short-term and insecure funding in our sector.**

The presence of a pharmacist in the project has also been instrumental. Traditionally, men tend to be underrepresented in healthcare conversations. The involvement of the pharmacist with the project/ men has also been instrumental and gave him a whole new way of seeing how to engage in community pharmacy work.

The opportunity through the BCPP level 2 funding has given faith in the participants leading the way, to build self-confidence, share experiences and continue learning from each other. Even with the ending of funding, participants continue to engage with Parenting Focus and the Pharmacist, showing that the connections and support systems established through the Men's Café are lasting.

By spreading awareness through social media and engaging with local GP surgeries and hubs, the project is helping to shift the narrative around men's health. As more healthcare providers recognise the importance of these safe spaces, it is hoped that similar initiatives will continue to grow, providing men with more opportunities to engage, talk, and thrive. Through continued collaboration and a focus on fostering deeper connections, the future looks bright for men's health and community well-being.

The Community Pharmacy Project was a new experience for the men's project. The participant-led approach enabled the men to explore and develop new ways of working with a community pharmacist. It produced numerous benefits - many of them unanticipated - for both the pharmacist, the participants and more widely for men in the local area.

The outcomes for individual men were an increase in their focus on their mental and physical health and the actions they took to improve it. The outcome for men in the community was the development of new supportive spaces where they can connect with each other and talk and learn about their health. The support of the pharmacist enabled greater understanding of health and health improvement and a significant increase in men's confidence in using local health facilities.

The Pharmacy project also led to clear increases in men's health seeking behaviours and their knowledge of their own personal health, and it provided an important learning opportunity for the pharmacist to hone his skills in engaging with men about their health both individually and as a group.

The wide range of positive outcomes is a testimony to the design and impact of the Community Pharmacy Project Model.

**Alison Wightman** / External Evaluator

# The Well and McKeagney's Chemist

## Healing Through Laughter



The Well was established in May 2021 as a response to the mental health struggles of those in the Mourne and surrounding area. The well is an inclusive space available to the community to support those in crisis, break the cycle of intergenerational trauma that exists due to historical loss by suicide and to ensure the breaking down of social isolation, loneliness and suicidal behaviours.

They provide a holistic approach through a multi-disciplinary team consisting of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Trauma/Child Therapy, and a psychiatric nurse to name a few, and assist them in connecting back into their community.

The aim of the BCPP project was to reduce isolation, lift mood, and strengthen connections between individuals, community support services, and local pharmacy partners. We are proud to say that this project fully achieved those goals—and in doing so, delivered meaningful, lasting change to everyone involved.

When the project began, many participants were struggling. Low mood and feelings of isolation were common, and several individuals had little awareness of the support available in their local area. Over the course of the project, however, those initial challenges were met with compassion, community, and creativity.

Participants quickly bonded with one another, forming genuine connections as they engaged in group-led discussions on topics that mattered to them. These conversations created safe spaces for people to be heard and supported, and to realise they were not alone in their experiences. Many participants reported a sense of relief in meeting like-minded peers who shared similar day-to-day concerns.



A standout moment from the project was the progress made by one particular participant, who experienced a significant improvement in their overall wellbeing. They reported better day-to-day mood and improved sleep—tangible, life-enhancing outcomes that reflect the depth of impact this project can have.

The community support provided by The Well was particularly valued, helping participants learn about local resources they hadn't previously known were available. This awareness played a critical role in helping individuals feel more supported and empowered.

*I'd forgotten what it felt like to laugh. That session broke something open for me.*

**Participant/ The Well**



The project also delivered benefits beyond the participant group. For the pharmacy partner, BCPP created an opportunity to step outside of the traditional dispensary role and engage directly with patients. These in-depth conversations allowed the pharmacist to gain valuable insights into the personal factors affecting how individuals manage their health and medication. This human connection allowed for more compassionate, informed care.

From a community partner perspective, our ongoing collaboration with the pharmacy team has been immensely beneficial. The strengthened relationship means we can now more easily streamline support for individuals—connecting them to resources without adding to the pressure on already stretched health services. Together, we're helping people access timely, appropriate help through alternative, community-based pathways.

What truly brought the project to life, however, were the innovative and engaging sessions we incorporated. Two experiences stood out in particular:

**Laughing Yoga**, led by an exceptional facilitator, added a joyful, unexpected dimension to the programme. For many participants, it was the first time they had laughed in years. The sessions created a shared sense of fun and freedom, breaking down social barriers and building trust within the group. One participant reflected on how they'd forgotten what it felt like to laugh freely—and how good it felt to rediscover that part of themselves.

**Sarah Hypnotherapy** introduced participants to the science and benefits of hypnotherapy, offering new perspectives on managing mental health. Through her sessions, participants gained insight into how the brain works, and how hypnotherapy could be used as a tool for healing. This educational approach was both empowering and inspiring, opening the door to alternative methods of self-care.



The approach used to delivering the programme was shaped by a deep understanding of participant needs, and focused on six core elements to ensure everyone felt welcome, engaged, and supported:

1. Relaxed Venue Atmosphere
2. Conversation Starters
3. Individual Support
4. Interactive Activities
5. Creative Expression
6. Feedback and Reflection



**Creating Change.  
Empowering Communities.  
Keeping It Real.  
For You.**



# Causeway Rural & Urban Network (CRUN) and Henderson's Pharmacy

*Confidence, Connection, Change: A Community Story*

**CRUN has been in existence for 25 years. Currently CRUN supports over 200 community groups. In 2019 CRUN joined the Healthy Living Centre Alliance a network of 31 community organisations who value community development and assets-based approach to wellbeing and health. Through such programmes as HELP Social Prescribing, they empower people to take more control over their personal health, promoting an ethos of peer-led self-management for people with long-term conditions.**

At CRUN, we believe that the heart of a resilient community lies in connection—people supporting one another, sharing experiences, and feeling empowered to access local support. Our recent BCPP project with a group of 11 individuals from our target area is a shining example of how grassroots engagement can strengthen community ties and individual wellbeing.

This project focused on building resilience through informal, peer-led sessions where participants felt comfortable sharing their stories, challenges, and triumphs. From the outset, it was clear that simply bringing people together to talk was powerful.

The relaxed format encouraged genuine conversations, helping participants feel seen, heard, and supported. These discussions soon sparked a wider desire—not just to improve their own lives—but to help others in their community do the same.

Each session offered practical techniques and accessible information, which were warmly received. Participants reported being able to make small, meaningful changes in their daily routines, improving their mental and physical wellbeing. The content was designed to be manageable and realistic, making it easier for individuals to apply what they learned in everyday life.

A standout feature of the programme was the wealth of knowledge-sharing that took place. Participants regularly exchanged tips, resources, and signposted each other to additional local support services. This organic exchange of information created a sense of empowerment and mutual care that extended well beyond the walls of the session room.

One of the most notable impacts was the strengthening of relationships between CRUN, local pharmacies, and participants. Through the sessions, a better understanding of the pharmacist's role emerged. Many who were initially unsure or hesitant now feel confident approaching their local pharmacist, recognising them as a valuable and





approachable source of support. This increased trust highlights the potential of strong community-pharmacy partnerships to bolster wider health interventions. The value of this project went far beyond individual benefits. A lasting bond formed within the group, with many members continuing to stay in touch and engage in other community-based initiatives together. These new friendships became a support network in their own right, encouraging ongoing participation and a sense of shared purpose.

Collaboration with external organisations added an exciting and enriching layer to the experience. Two sessions were delivered in partnership with the National Trust, whose ideas for connecting with nature and heritage inspired participants to organise group outings—something many hadn’t considered before. These outings are now being planned, helping to further strengthen the social ties that were formed.

Our work with the Causeway Volunteer Centre was equally impactful. Some participants had previous volunteering experience and, supported by the group and CRUN, are now exploring opportunities to return to volunteering. This renewed sense of purpose is another encouraging outcome of the group’s collective journey.

We also introduced fun and inclusive activities to help break the ice and build group rapport. Quizzes were used early in the programme to encourage participation and conversation. In the final session, we brought the quizzes back—this time as a lively recap of everything the group had learned. It was a joyful and competitive moment that celebrated how far everyone had come, reinforcing both their individual knowledge and their shared experience.

*These community partnerships are an invaluable way to ensure that the role of community pharmacies are reinforced as an integrated health care pathway, sitting alongside other statutory, community and voluntary supports.*

**Evan Reid** /Community Pharmacist

*This project is a perfect fit for CRUN in delivering community centred wellbeing initiatives that are both accessible and educational to meet the current needs of our local communities.*

**Lorna O’Neill** / Causeway Rural & Urban Network (CRUN)

This initiative was more than a series of sessions—it was a catalyst for connection, confidence, and community spirit. Participants didn’t just attend; they engaged, contributed, and grew. The supportive atmosphere allowed them to explore new roles, reconnect with old passions, and build meaningful relationships.

The success of this project affirms CRUN’s belief in the power of local partnership and community-based approaches to health and wellbeing. By bringing together individuals, organisations, and services in a meaningful way, we’re not only addressing immediate needs—we’re laying the foundation for long-term resilience and community cohesion.



# BCPP IMPACT REPORT LAUNCH

## 2024

Since 2001, the BCPP programme has supported over 1080 communities. On June 6th, Community Development and Health Network (CDHN) celebrated the launch of the Building the Community-Pharmacy Partnership (BCPP) Impact Report in Long Gallery, Stormont. Health Minister, Mike Nesbitt, Chair of the Health Committee, Liz Kimmins, and Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, Professor Cathy Harrison spoke at the event.



Powerful contributions were made by people who participated in the programme. Lorna O'Neill from Causeway, Rural and Urban Network (CRUN), their community pharmacist Evan Reid and participant Frances Dougherty shared their lived experience of BCPP which really brought the programme to life and illustrated the valuable work of CRUN in supporting the health of local people. Sheila Smyth from The Right Key together with pharmacist Cathy Smyth and participant Jordyn Kerr shared personal stories about the impact of the BCPP programme in their work using music to support people recovering from mental health issues and addiction. Dymrna Ferran from The Bridge NI recited her wonderful poem, 'Bones'.



Scan QR code to read a copy  
of the report



This impact report shows that Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership is much more than an individual health improvement programme, it is a tried and tested cross-sectoral partnership supporting collaborative working to tackle health inequalities locally and regionally. It clearly demonstrates how policy to reduce health inequalities that takes action on the social determinants of health can be addressed using a community development approach and targeted to those most in need, to create long-term positive social change, healthier and stronger communities and improve the lives, health and well-being of people in our society.

*BCPP supports the co-production vision identified in "Health and Wellbeing 2016: Delivering Together" by helping to foster a community development approach that can assist communities to take responsibility for their health and wellbeing, focusing on using a social model of health to address local need. I welcome the development and publication of this report, which provides tangible evidence of the real impact of the BCPP programme on people's health and wellbeing.*

**Health Minister/ Mike Nesbitt**



The programme successfully reached people and communities who often experience financial stress and health inequalities. Two fifths of the projects were delivered in the top 20% most deprived areas in NI and over two-thirds in the top 40% most deprived areas. Additionally, two-fifths of participants reported having health problems or disabilities that limited their day-to-day activity.

BCPP's aim is to reduce health inequalities by focusing on the social determinants of health, in particular social support, community connections and access to healthcare through community pharmacy.

Since 2001, the BCPP programme has invested over £8 million and supported over 1100 partnerships between community pharmacies and community organisations. The BCPP model has evolved over the last 23 years, building on what works as evidenced through programme evaluations and using the learning from community development, social determinants of health and health inequalities evidence base.

-  135 supported to apply (Level 1&2)
-  117 applications received (Level 1&2)
-  28 new groups applied (Level 1&2)
-  71 projects funded (Levels 1&2)
-  19 new groups engaged (not funded before)
-  8 Level 1 projects progressed to Level 2



*The report is a two-year overview of 51 local BCPP projects between 2021-2023. It demonstrates how government policy can embed community development methods into preventative healthcare interventions, leading to improvements in health and social wellbeing within the communities they serve. CDHN is pleased to be partners in this impactful and innovative initiative.*

**CDHN Director/** Joanne Vance



*Since the first pilot project in 2001, BCPP has established over 1000 strong partnerships between local communities and their community pharmacies across Northern Ireland to address locally defined needs. These partnerships have helped local people to make connections, listen to and understand each other better and work together to address the social determinants of health and health inequalities..*

**Chief Pharmaceutical Officer/** Prof Cathy Harrison







#cdhn30 #communitydevelopment

#socialdeterminants #endhealthinequalities



Community  
Development  
& Health Network

Application forms and guidance notes are available from [cdhn.org/bcpp](https://cdhn.org/bcpp) along with the closing dates for the next round of funding.

If you have an idea for a project, please contact a member of the BCPP team who will be happy to guide and support you.

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