
The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Helping make Northern Ireland a better place to live and work
Welcome to the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland’s Vital Signs 2016. Vital Signs reflects factual data and the voices of the community at local levels across Northern Ireland; sharing lived experiences about what makes the area vibrant, but also the challenges our communities are facing.

Vital Signs is a global project, run by community foundations, who want to listen to, understand and appreciate the communities in which they work. It takes the temperature of how our communities are feeling, across 10 key quality of life areas and asks people across NI what is working and where we could prioritise our actions - be these personal, professional or philanthropic. Our Vital Signs programme has several elements to it. We looked at statistical data, reports and consultations from government sources, statutory agencies and third sector organisations, across our core ten themes. Between May and August 2016 a survey was circulated throughout the community sector. We received 366 responses, with people prioritising and grading the ten themes for their area. 20 focus groups were held facilitating approximately 200 people. Through our research, we spoke to just under 600 people in total. All of these yielded some fascinating insights into community priorities and through this report we present a snapshot of the feedback we received in these vital conversations.

Vital Signs can also act as a unique guide for those who are charitably-minded and want to come together to act on priorities at community level. We have found that people are willing and eager to engage on issues that affect their lives most; as long as they can see how it might be of benefit to them, their families and their community. There is much to celebrate about life in Northern Ireland. But we have also heard of some particular challenges that people are facing within their area. We have been told some of the practical steps that civic society could take, potentially with support from philanthropic activities, to help make our communities more vibrant.

Of course, Vital Signs isn’t the final word on the quality of life in Northern Ireland, but we hope that it allows the start of a wider conversation.
There is much to celebrate about life in Northern Ireland. But we have also heard of some particular challenges that people are facing within their area. We’ve produced a report card to show how we think Northern Ireland is doing in relation to 10 key themes. The grades indicate how people overall rated this theme.

We asked people to grade each theme based on how they think it is doing. Each theme was given a grade based on what most people (60%+) told us.

A: Everything is great. Let’s keep things that way!
B: Things are going well, but we can make them better.
C: The situation is okay, but could be improved.
D: Things aren’t going very well. We should take action as soon as possible.
E: Things are going very badly. We must act now!

Northern Ireland is home to 1.8 million people. Between 2012 & 2016 the Community Foundation awarded £21 million in grants.

Top priorities by council area:
1. Causeway Coast and Glens
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills
   3. Economy and Work
   4. Civic Engagement

2. Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills
   3. Economy and Work

3. Belfast
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Economy and Work

4. Derry and Strabane
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills
   3. Economy and Work

5. Down
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Economy and Work

6. Fermanagh and Omagh
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Economy and Work

7. Lisburn and Castlereagh
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills

8. Mid and East Antrim
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills
   3. Economy and Work

9. Mid Ulster
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Economy and Work

10. Newry, Mourne and Down
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Education and Skills

11. North Down and Ards
   1. Health and Wellbeing
   2. Economy and Work

We have been asking you to tell us your priorities for community foundation grantmaking. Here are the results:

- Health and Wellbeing: 29.83%
- Education and Skills: 19.72%
- Economy and Work: 12.94%
- Poverty: 11.32%
- Housing and Homelessness: 7.22%
- Civic Engagement: 9.49%
- Community Safety: 6.38%
- Arts and Culture: 5.81%
- Environment: 5.63%

Northern Ireland is home to 1.8 million people.
The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland makes grants right across the region. Certain funds may focus on a particular geographical area and we are aware that many of our current and prospective donors like to give to causes near to where they live. They may also wish to give to a specific issue, theme or beneficiary group, such as mental health, education or young people. This explains why some areas (both themes and geographies) have higher spending on certain issues than others.
Northern Ireland has 13,000 millionaires and 376,000 people living in poverty. Inequality has emerged as a key issue for the country. Northern Ireland is a vibrant place to live, yet also has a raft of social and economic problems.

The percentage of those living poverty is similar to that of GB, and is a little higher than before the recession. However, Northern Ireland has not experienced the same employment performance as the rest of GB. Average weekly pay is lower in NI than a decade ago (after inflation) however, the composition of those in poverty in Northern Ireland has changed over the last five years. There are more working-age adults, particularly young people, more private renters and fewer pensioners in poverty.

Community philanthropy plays a vital role in preserving and nurturing such assets. However, its key job is to ensure that such assets remain accessible and relevant to all the country’s residents. Arts and culture is an important aspect of life, and is not necessarily a priority when there are other more prevalent issues.

Access: For communities or individuals living on low or restricted incomes, there can be an issue of access as many arts activities come at a cost, particularly for families. Access can also come in the form of a physical barrier, particularly for those living in rural areas, as arts activities are often concentrated in urban settings. The issue and cost of transport also comes into play for those living in rural settings.

Home heating oil, the most expensive fuel, is also the most prevalent form of central heating in NI, used by 68% of households as the sole means of central heating, compared with 4% in England and Wales.

Poverty]

**VITAL ISSUES**

- Foodbank use: This is an all-time high in Northern Ireland. The use of food banks is rising faster in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK.
- Defining poverty: There are many definitions of poverty. The stark reality is that poverty is about not being able to heat your home, pay the rent, or buy food and other essentials. Poverty stops people from being fully involved in their local communities.
- Cost of heating fuel: Heating a home is more expensive in Northern Ireland. People spend a significantly larger proportion of their income on fuel than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.
- Inequality: There is an established and recognised link between inequality and health/social problems. Tackling inequality is the most important step in achieving social justice and a more prosperous Northern Ireland.

**VITAL STATISTICS**

- Over 100,000 children live in poverty in Northern Ireland (23% of our children)
- 376,000 individuals living in poverty – 2% increase since 12/13
- 1/3 of adults with no qualifications were in poverty, compared with 7% of those with a degree.
- 23% Who is more likely to be in poverty? Single working age adults, disabled, pensioners, families with children
- 3.6 Times higher income from distribution had weekly income of 3.6 times higher than bottom 20%.

**VITAL STATISTCS**

- 376,000 individuals living in poverty – 2% increase since 12/13
- 1/3 of adults with no qualifications were in poverty, compared with 7% of those with a degree.
- 23% Who is more likely to be in poverty? Single working age adults, disabled, pensioners, families with children
- 3.6 Times higher income from distribution had weekly income of 3.6 times higher than bottom 20%.

**VITAL GIVING / EAST BELFAST INDEPENDENT ADVICE CENTRE**

East Belfast Independent Advice Centre (EBIAC) was set up by the local community in 2000 to meet the need for advice services in East Belfast. They provide free, independent and confidential advice in relation to Social Security, Debt, Housing and Employment. The organization received funding in early 2016 from the Community Foundation’s Social Justice Fund.

The project involved EBIAC developing a pilot Young People’s Advice Service in East Belfast aimed primarily at 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training. The 4 month pilot employed an adviser to work for 16 hours per week to run a benefit uptake advice service and research in partnership with NICVA and Participation and Practice of Rights Project. The project led to young people being able to access benefits and entitlements that they perhaps hadn’t previously realized they were entitled to. The project had a particular focus and impact on young people from deprived urban areas.
Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement is the process through which individuals and their representatives engage with social and political institutions on issues of public concern to achieve collective goals. This is not just voting in local and national elections; it also includes volunteering, lobbying and trade union membership amongst other things.

Northern Ireland boasts a vibrant community and voluntary sector, which plays a crucial role in supporting communities at a local level. Such groups provide opportunities for local people to work together to enhance community life, tackle social problems and ensure that local people have a say in the decisions that affect them. However, dependency on funding means that some groups may be hit hard by future public expenditure cuts. Some have struggled to adapt and a growing number have closed. Small community groups have been affected as they are under resourced and staff are overworked - facing increased competition for small grant funding from each other and from larger organisations, who are anxious to cover shortfalls in their budgets.

Some residents felt a strong sense of being part of and belonging to their local community. While other residents highlighted issues of isolation, lack of community cohesion or ‘spirit’ and a sense of disengagement from society and decision making. Some of these feelings may be attributed to northern Ireland’s impact of conflict and legacy and ongoing sectarian division.

VITAL ISSUES

- Lower voter turnout and scepticism/disengagement from elected reps: In much of Northern Ireland, there are residents who take little interest or feel they have no power over the decisions that affect them. NI has the lowest voter turnout for general elections in the UK and Assembly elections are experiencing a constant decline. This is due, in part, to a lack of confidence in political leadership and the political process to deliver change.
- Social Isolation: This is a particular problem in rural areas and for members of vulnerable groups.
- Lack of facilities: There is a concern that there are not enough facilities for young people and that community health facilities (particularly mental health) are scarce. We have found that communities are unable and/or unwilling to share space both on a single identity and cross-community basis. We are further exploring these barriers and how to overcome them.
- Loss of community cohesion or ‘community spirit’: There is a perception in some communities that this loss of community cohesion or community spirit is in part due to immigration.
- Little to no self help: Communities struggle to identify the issues of concern in their area. This prohibits them from being able to adequately articulate and address such needs.
- Short term core and programme funding: The Community and Voluntary sector (CVS) is unable to strategically plan or develop long term approaches to issues due to the short term nature of much funding.

VITAL STATISTICS

- Assembly election turnout declined from 70% in 1998 to 54.9% in 2016
- 31% of adults believe NI Assembly has ‘achieved nothing at all’
- 6127 organisations in NI – concentrated in urban areas: Belfast
- 27% Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon
- 11% Derry/Strabane
- 9% VCSE groups for every 10,000 people
- 33.3% in May 2016 elections lower in Eastern NI: North Down lowest at 49.0%, compared with Fermanagh and Omagh at 64.6%
- 64.6% of VCSE organisations provide support exclusively to communities living in NI
- 40% of young people rarely or never socialise with different ethnicities.
- 25% of adults prefer to socialise with people of their own ethnicity
- 44% of people said nothing would encourage them to volunteer
- 3% of adults feel they have little to no influence on local decision making
- 81% of adults have volunteered in past year
- Voter turnout in 2016 Assembly election lower in Eastern NI: North Down lowest at 49.0%, compared with Fermanagh and Omagh at 64.6%
When it comes to education, no one will be surprised by these vital statistics or issues. This theme by far sparked the least discussion, in terms of ‘better-off children and young people’ continue to achieve academic success, those ‘less well-off’ are not achieving the grades necessary to enter the labour market.

This affects their future life chances and is reflected in the poor literacy and numeracy levels amongst our student and adult population. The link between poverty and educational attainment has been established and bold steps need to be taken by policy makers if the link is to be broken. Some of those consulted highlighted that ending academic selection, as it operates here, could be taken by policy makers if the link is necessary to enter the labour market.

Northern Ireland has an amazing range of natural assets, like rivers, coastlines and green spaces. However despite this, our research indicated that communities do not seem to naturally engage with environmental issues. This theme was by far the least discussed in terms of issues, beyond the obvious waste collection and public transport concerns.

The most commented on issues at our consultation were the persistence of food waste management problems and the lack of availability/access of public transport (in both rural and urban areas); this issue was supported by the fact that 80% of total miles travelled were by car. It is therefore clear that we need to engage local people in addressing environmental issues and as such supporting local projects which do this remains a priority for us.

Waste collection: Communities are concerned about the infrequency of waste collection, however we need to engage communities to find ways to increase recycling and reduce residual waste.

Food waste: Encouraging community interest in growing food is a good way to engage the community in environmental issues and prevent further waste of food.

Lack of insight about environmental issues: Many in communities do not appear to be concerned about issues like climate change - are we doing enough to prepare for the effects of this, particularly in deprived and vulnerable communities?
Many people struggle to look after their health with problems such as poor diet, alcohol misuse and lack of physical activity often leading to obesity, with wider potential for an obesity epidemic.

Mental health problems are much more widespread than in the rest of the UK and affect one in five people in Northern Ireland. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and suicide rates among young men are particularly concerning. The Community and Voluntary sector needs to help the statutory authorities by supporting people and ensure better mental health. This was the case in both rural areas and major cities.

Life Expectancy by Area:

- **Buddy Bear Trust** is an established, independent Conductive Education school for children with motor disorders including Cerebral Palsy. The school is holistic and aims to draw out potential communication and other skills in order to advance education and life opportunities for its pupils.

VITAL ISSUES

- **GP waiting times:** Many individuals were concerned and frustrated by the length of waiting times in GP surgeries. Most people said they have to wait at least two or three weeks for an appointment.
- **Mental health:** There is much concern about the lack and/or quality of emergency services for those suffering from mental health issues, particularly in cases of suicide. There was also a desire to see more community based health facilities and better services and information for children’s mental health.
- **Cost and knowledge of and access to healthy eating:** There is a distinct lack of information for children’s mental health.
- **Drug and alcohol abuse:** There was a deep concern about the growing use of drugs and alcohol, particularly amongst young people. Communities are afraid to speak out against drug dealing but are aware of the harsh realities for their children.
- **Troubles related PTSD:** PTSD and other disorders associated with trauma represent a significant public health cost here, with economic implications right across society that stretch far into the future.
- **Social isolation:** Some recognised that many people are experiencing social isolation. The benefits of befriending services and personal social contact were recognised as ways to maintain and ensure better mental health. This was the case in both rural areas and major cities.

VITAL STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>People with mental health problems receive no treatment at all - still a hidden problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>NHS healthcare budget is spent on mental health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>NI has the world’s highest rate of PTSD - 8.8% of population met the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at some point in their lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Troubles related Violence has been the direct cause of mental health problems for 18,000 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>Double the number of deaths by suicide since late 1990s; however, male suicide rate decreased by 10.2% between 2013 to 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>1 in 5 people in NI reported having mental health problems, with NI having 20-25% higher prevalence rate of mental health problems than rest of UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74%</td>
<td>Suicide rates per 100,000 adults - 12% Men, 15% Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VITAL GIVING // BUDDY BEAR TRUST

Buddy Bear Trust is an established, independent Conductive Education school for children with motor disorders including Cerebral Palsy. The school is holistic and aims to draw out potential communication and other skills in order to advance education and life opportunities for its pupils.

The funding received from the 25th Anniversary of the Telecommunity Fund in 2015 allowed the group to purchase an interactive screen to be used to work with the children in developing communication and interactive skills. The screen complemented existing specialist equipment including a Sound Light Wall and a Sensory Room. The children who use this service have gained significantly in terms of developing both their physical and communication skills and continue to achieve more than originally hoped.
In comparison to the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland enjoys affordable housing, and this is an advantage in terms of the area’s attractiveness to inward investors. However for many people, particularly those on low wages or benefits, it can be a struggle to meet housing costs, including fuel bills.

Despite this, Housing and Homelessness are two of the most challenging, urgent and important issues facing Northern Ireland today. A particular concern for communities is the rising number of rough sleepers, particularly in urban areas such as Belfast. Although the government built 542 social homes last year, homelessness rates in Northern Ireland remain the highest in the UK. The Community and Voluntary sector plays a key role, particularly in preventative work for those at risk of homelessness.

Since the Good Friday Agreement and reform of policing in Northern Ireland, public perceptions of crime have largely been inconsistent with actual crime statistics. Despite lower prevalence of crime in NI, there are higher levels of worry about crime than in England and Wales.

A natural peace dividend has been the normalization of society with localized policing in Northern Ireland, Agreement and reform of statutory organisations.

Crime Rates By Policeing District 2004/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Crime Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antrim and Newtownabbey</td>
<td>6890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ards and North Down</td>
<td>6334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh City, Banbridge</td>
<td>10103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>35456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causeway Coast and Glens</td>
<td>6617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derry City and Strabane</td>
<td>9510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fermangh and Omagh</td>
<td>5054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisburn and Castlereagh</td>
<td>5469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid and East Antrim</td>
<td>5793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Ulster</td>
<td>5144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newry and Mourne</td>
<td>8899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105072</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VITAL ISSUES

• Antisocial Behaviour: This is of particular concern for communities living in urban areas. This was less of a concern for those living in rural areas. Much of the fear of crime in local areas is due to groups of people and anti-social behaviour.

• Drug abuse and drug dealing: Some communities are still plagued by the existence of drug dealers. Communities are afraid to speak out but are concerned that the lives of some young people are being destroyed by drugs.

• Poor to no response times from police: in some areas there was a recognition that relationships with the police are not positive. There was a concern that at times the police can be slow to respond, if at all: “I felt safer in my community pre ceasefire, at least my community was not out of control”. This was particularly the case in rural and/or traditionally Catholic communities.

• Poor street lighting: A lack of street lighting feeds further into communities’ fear of crime. Generally people are afraid to go out at night in areas that are not well lit.

• Domestic violence: Victims of domestic violence do not feel that they have the ability to either speak out or walk away. Family and children pressures feed into this issue further. Communities, and in particular women, need a safe space to talk through such issues and seek the required support.

Despite this, Housing and Homelessness are two of the most challenging, urgent and important issues facing Northern Ireland today. A particular concern for communities is the rising number of rough sleepers, particularly in urban areas such as Belfast. Although the government built 542 social homes last year, homelessness rates in Northern Ireland remain the highest in the UK. The Community and Voluntary sector plays a key role, particularly in preventative work for those at risk of homelessness.

Housing and Homelessness

Since the Good Friday Agreement and reform of policing in Northern Ireland, public perceptions of crime have largely been inconsistent with actual crime statistics. Despite lower prevalence of crime in NI, there are higher levels of worry about crime than in England and Wales.

A natural peace dividend has been the normalization of society with localized policing in Northern Ireland, Agreement and reform of statutory organisations.
Northern Ireland traditionally has a rich industrial heritage, and building on this the Northern Ireland economy performs well in the current economic climate. The unemployment rate is above the UK average but below that in the Republic of Ireland.

Outside of London, NI is the leading UK region for attracting inward investment, with Belfast as a top destination for financial services technologies investments. However, public sector decline is holding back overall progress. For many there are a lack of employment opportunities and job insecurity remains a major concern for people throughout Northern Ireland.

VITAL ISSUES

- Inequality: Individuals do not feel that the benefits of the recovery are being equally distributed throughout NI. In particular, those living in the North West are concerned that economic growth and job creation is concentrated in Belfast and the East. Rural areas face difficulties with shop and other supporting infrastructure closures, the increasing need to travel significant distances for work and reliance on seasonal employment.
- Inadequate investment: Poor planning and investment is believed to reduce the accessibility and appeal of areas in the North and West, thus adding to the unequal distribution of growth. The potential of these areas could be unlocked through improvements to transport, ICT and other infrastructures. This would increase the awareness and attractiveness of the North and West for investment in manufacturing and services.
- Lack of incentives for business start up: Despite some incentives from Stormont and local councils, small businesses and entrepreneurs still face a large number of barriers in the early stages of their development.
- Terms and quality of employment: The reduction in quality public sector employment and expansion of zero-hour contracts, part-time and temporary employment are repeatedly described as concerns for people seeking work. The reduced security of such employment discourages people from applying for jobs.
- Emigration: Young people are leaving rural areas and moving to urban areas or abroad to find work.
- Training schemes are inadequate: Young people feel that government schemes, targeting those ‘not in education, employment or training’, are not fit for purpose or relevant.
- Vulnerable groups: Overall work can be hard to find, and some individuals, particularly those with physical or learning disabilities, face additional barriers. Support interventions such as those offered by voluntary or community based organisations can help to overcome such barriers.

Economy and Work

The young grant-makers of Banbridge YouthBank are the central beneficiaries and the key actors responsible for running the Teenage Market. They have enhanced skills and knowledge through project management of the Teenage Market, which will continue over the next eighteen months. Other positives include increased footfall, investment and publicity in the town.

VITAL GIVING // YOUTHBANK INTERNATIONAL

Youthbank International, a youth led grant making organisation, received funding through the Community Foundation’s Micro Grant Programme in the summer of 2016. The funding was a contribution towards the development and running of the first Teenage Market in Northern Ireland.

The project attracted young people, in the greater Banbridge area, as traders and performers as well as local established traders.

The project attracted young people, in the greater Banbridge area, as traders and performers as well as local established traders.
METHODOLOGY

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland have compiled this research using publicly available data, statistics and research and original research and case studies from their own grant making. A compendium of the data and sources used will be fully available on our website or by request. All information is considered accurate as of August 2016.

The information included here should be considered a snapshot and only analyses a limited amount of the available data. If you have any queries or believe any information provided in this report to be incorrect, please contact us and we will do our best to undertake corrections.

Any quotes or opinions from individuals have been obtained via an open community consultation conducted by the Community Foundation. The identity of any individual(s) quoted within this report has been anonymised to protect their privacy.

For further information on the sources used, original research or analysis or to request a hard copy of the report, please contact:

Sara Houston, Policy Officer: shouston@communityfoundationni.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lead author and researcher: Sara Houston

Contributing authors and researchers: Paul Adair, Lauren Harper, Uel McCreary, Peter McCully, Lisa McGeady, Fiona McKelvey, Martin Mooney, Janice Smith, Elizabeth Super.

With thanks to: CFNI Vital Signs Steering group: Fred Bass, Paul Braithwaite, Laura Darragh, Michael Hughes, Victoria McMurray and Dawn Purvis, UK Vital Signs Steering Group, CFNI Senior Management Team: Orla Black, Andrew McCracken, Fiona O’Toole and Dawn Shackles.

For any media queries, please contact:

Laura Darragh, Communications Officer: ldarragh@communityfoundationni.org