

'THE FIELD'

Planting the seeds of community and creating a new and shared future together.

L'ARCHE BELFAST



WHO WE ARE ...

We are a community, a group of people of different ages, creeds, capacities, social and ethnic backgrounds, connected to one another through our belief that everyone irrespective of their circumstances, can make a difference and has the capacity to change the world.



Together we are working to build a world that recognizes the unique value of every person and our need for one another and the lifestyle and activities of the community are focused on bringing the gifts of fragile humanity, often hidden in the margins of life, into the centre.

At the heart of the community there are people who have 'learning disabilities' often referred to as '*Core Members*'. Because of their simple and authentic way of being in the world and their dependence on others in the ordinary activities of daily life they have much to teach us about welcome, hospitality, our shared humanity and our need for one another. They invite us into relationships that are about interdependence and that transform our hearts. In this way the community is a 'school for the heart' and through mutually transformative relationships we are moved into new and more meaningful ways of belonging in the world - as family, friends, neighbours and citizens.

"L'Arche is about changing the world one heart at a time." Jean Vanier, Founder of L'Arche

*The possibility that brought us
together ...*

“a world ... where people,
whatever their race,
religion, culture, abilities
or disabilities can find a
place and reveal their
gifts”



- Jean Vanier, Founder of L'Arche -

When a dream takes hold of you ... follow it.

*“Creating Soft Spaces in busy places and
a world that we can call home”.*

We believe that together we can be ‘a soft space’ in our fast paced world - a natural space where things grow organically, where time moves more slowly, and where people are welcome to come just as they are – free to be weak and free to be strong, to laugh or to cry, to succeed or to fail - free to be fully present, fully human and fully alive.



Cultivating Community

To realize the dream of being 'a soft space' at the heart of Belfast we need 'a place'. In this place we will create an environment where we can offer hospitality to all who come and invite people into simple relationships that will transform their lives.

It will be a place where people can come to discover their gifts, reconnect with their creativity and engage with one another using their hands, hearts and minds to create something together that they could not create alone.

We will cultivate community in our garden, kitchen, gathering spaces, craft studios, and around our tables as we share food, fun, faith and friendship with one another. In this place we will honour the gifts of simple presence and friendship and strangers will simply be friends yet to be discovered. Everyone's contribution will be valued and we will welcome and celebrate our humanity in the activities and events that we offer.

We have witnessed people who have learning disabilities offering their gifts of universal welcome and hospitality and inviting people into simple relationships that transform their lives.

Now we want to create opportunities for them to take up their place in the world, to offer their gifts, realize their potential and be enabled to make an active contribution to society.



The Proposal

We will acquire 'a space' where we can:

- welcome everyone who comes
- connect with one another
- become friends
- create community and
- make a difference through the work of our hands, hearts and minds



In this 'Space'

- People who have 'learning disabilities' will be able to offer their gifts by welcoming and caring for whoever comes and by creating relationships that reveal to people that they are needed and important, not for what they can do, but simply for who they are.
- We will grow flowers, fruit and vegetables organically, bake bread slowly, eat together joyfully and share our food graciously.
- We will have a kitchen with a big round table where we will offer simple hospitality. In the old Irish tradition there will always be tea in the pot and someone to pass the time of day with!
- Our way of life will be founded on 'gifts and diversity' rather than 'deficit or disability' and we will work and be together in a way that challenges the roles, labels and identities that segregate and de-humanize people in any way.
- With the help of others we will build some community homes, a gathering space, creativity spaces and a small guesthouse so that we can offer hospitality, friendship and an experience of belonging and community to people who have disabilities, their carers and others.
- We will sing, laugh, play, cry, pray, struggle, work and share our very human lives together.

- We will offer people opportunities to volunteer and offer their gifts, skills, and time in a way that fulfils their longing for community and makes a difference.
- We will offer other organizations (statutory, voluntary and community groups) the possibility of using our gathering space to hold their meetings, training sessions, workshops and conferences and we will host and serve them so that they feel at home and connected to one another and go back into their own work feeling renewed, energized and re-committed.
- We will have fun together engaging in activities based on traditional crafts, music, arts, home making, baking, cooking and gardening that create opportunities for people to experience their creativity, connect with one another, serve others and have an experience of community.
- We will host days of re-creation, reflection and for groups and individuals so that they can connect to their own deepest dreams through their hands and hearts and be inspired to realize those dreams.
- We will make a space for silence and for prayer and we will be 'an oasis' for those who need it.

This is the space that we call “The Field” - Our Field of Dreams in which the hope and the possibility that we hold for ourselves and for Belfast and beyond can become visible. (*When the people were exiled from their sense of home and in despair – Yahweh asked the prophet Jeremiah to buy a field. It seemed to be a foolish request. That field, however, became a sign of hope for an exiled people and held alive the possibility that they would one day return to a place that they would call home – Jeremiah Chapters 29 -32*)

‘The Field’ is not only a space that we long for, it is a way of being in the world here and now – a sign that it is possible, in our disconnected world, to come together in very simple ways and to re-claim the connections and the relationships that transform our hearts and keep us human.

We will invite others to help us realize our dream to be a community bigger than we could ever imagine. We will be the possibility of a ‘Community of Communities’ in Belfast that will one day be a ‘World Wide Web’ of human relationships and ‘The Field’ will then be just a name for the world in which we live.

A Field of Dreams

Hope and a Future ...

“I know the plans I have in mind for you” - it is Yahweh who speaks. “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all of your heart you will find me there already waiting for you”. It is Yahweh who speaks. “I will bring you back from the land to which you have been exiled.”