

# 'THE FIELD' - "ENOUGH ROOM FOR LOVE"

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that a man found and hid again. In his excitement he went and sold everything he had and bought that field." – Matt. 13:44

**FIELD WORK** - Revealing the gifts of people who have learning disabilities and others in the margins of society and enabling them to contribute in the creation of safe, shared spaces and communities in Northern Ireland.

## 'GROWING TOGETHER'

### WHAT IS SO...

- People who have learning disabilities are among the 'invisible' and the 'disenfranchised' in our society.
- They are often only recognized and identified in relation to their deficit or the service they require. They are rarely seen as friends, contributing citizens or simply fellow human beings.
- Formalized care is increasingly becoming disassociated from loving human relationships. It is seen as a commodity that can be bought and sold in units like electricity or other energy. In market terms care is considered to be measurable and auditable.
- There is a need and a request for more opportunities for people with and without disabilities to create friendships and to contribute in a way that gives meaning and dignity to their lives and makes a real difference to the lives of others.
- In the 'shared future' political/social agenda in Northern Ireland there is a leadership and grassroots movement towards the creation of safe, shared communities without sectarian boundaries. This movement embraces many people, organizations, and communities who are already 'growing together'.
- Today, even in the welfare state, productivity, expertise, financial value and consumer capacity are often a measure of human value. Many people, irrespective of their abilities in other domains, experience themselves as invalid, marginalized and lonely.
- In Belfast, particularly as a response to the depressed economy, there is a longing and a movement to bring agriculture ("*tend, guard, cultivate, till a field*") to urban culture and a growing interest in growing healthy food together.

### WHAT DO WE SAY: '**PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE ARE THE LUCKIEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD**'!!!

People are precious beyond measure and human value and market value are different. **People who have** learning disabilities have **an extraordinary ability to reveal love**. In this way they are truly **P.E.A.R.L.s!** They touch and disarm hearts and invite people into simple human relationships that transcend all boundaries. Their presence transforms and softens space such that it is more welcoming for everyone who comes. They are the cornerstones of real, human communities where everyone can belong just as they are.

In relationship and in co-operation with other organizations, communities and ordinary people living extraordinary lives throughout Belfast **WE WILL BRING LOVE BACK TO THE HEART OF CARE AND COMMUNITY**. We will grow food, friendship and community together in an organic way. In our cultivating together we will create opportunities for the gifts of people who have learning disabilities and others hidden in the margins of society to become visible and valuable.

Rooted in the gifts of our shared and vulnerable humanity we will be a Community – joyful, soft and slow at the heart of Belfast. We will grow and serve food and grow in relationship to one another working in the field, eating at the table and storytelling around the fire. Everyone, irrespective of color, creed or capacity will be welcome, will have a place, know that they are valuable, delight in their lives and make a real difference to the lives of others.

## OUTCOMES BY NOVEMBER 2009

- We will have acquired an acre of land at the heart of Belfast to create a community garden.
- We will have hosted 'A Harvest Festival', a relationship-building event in Corrymeela (November 2<sup>nd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup>) for 50 to 100 people.
- We will have had a 'Field Trip' together to create relationships and hear the stories of the Camphill Community in Mourne Grange and the Benedictine Monks in Rostrevor.
- We will have formalized the 'The Half Door Café' franchise with the 174 Trust within the Duncairn Ave, Church Arts and Cultural Centre Restoration plan.
- We will have created openings for table and fireside friendships.
- We will have 4 new committed friendships with people with learning disabilities.
- We will have established The Buddleia Players and the Knotty Knitters - Saturday Drama, Arts and Crafts activities for people who have learning disabilities and friends.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE:

- We have established a relationship with the 174 Trust in North Belfast
- We have engaged with and enrolled other organizations and individuals in the Growing Together movement.
- There have been initial conversations on both garden and café
- We have reserved the space for the 'Harvest Festival' and have begun conversations to design the event.
- We have arranged a conversation with a friend of Seamus Heaney to enroll him as patron of 'The Field'
- We went on a Friendship Walk from South to North Belfast on Good Friday to share 'a wee cup of tea' and create new friendships.
- We have received a £5,000 grant for 'growing together' and other 'fieldwork'
- We have opened a conversation that may offer us the financial resources we will need to create new spaces and opportunities.
- We have established one new friendship with a person who has a learning disability and have a request from 2 other people whose needs will draw us together, show us the way and lead us out!!
- The date of the 'Field Trip' has been confirmed (September 12) and is already in people's diaries and in their longing!