

Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair

Based in An Chrannóg in Gaoth Dobhair, in the Donegal Gaeltacht, **Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair** has been part of community life since 1989. It is one of a network of Gaeltacht community development cooperatives (coistí forbartha) with core funding from Údarás na Gaeltachta to preserve and promote the Irish language and local culture through the provision of community services. Its work spans youth and family supports, services for older people, and a wide programme of cultural activity. These include a large traditional music school for children and young people and major festivals and events such as Scoil Gheimhridh Ghaoth Dobhair (Winter School), the St Patrick's Day parade, poetry competitions, and summer camps. It also runs or supports social enterprises and community projects, including a local crafts coffee/gift shop and a gardening project with allotments and a polytunnel.

CASE STUDY



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Photo courtesy of Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobh

It is a practical organisation, shaped by the needs of the area and closely connected to everyday life in the community. Part of that story is a long history of emigration. Families from the area have settled across Scotland, England, the United States and further afield, and those connections continue to shape how people relate to the place. This is reflected in the dedication of a room in their centre, An Chrannóg to genealogy and local history, where people can explore townland-based archives, photos and stories.

Manager Caitriona Nic Gairbhígh says; “We call it the *seomra staire*, the history room, and it’s filled with folders, there’s one for each townland in the area, and it’s filled with pictures of family, pictures that people donated or stories that people donated... A lot of them [diaspora] pop up and say, I’m an O’Donnell, and my great grandmother was born here. And they’ll refer them on to us here, because we’ll have some information for them.”

The fact that An Chrannóg used to be the local Technical School provides a further source of connection: “The building we’re in actually used to be a technical school, so we get ex-students. That’s another one that has surprised me, the amount of people that just wander in and they say my dad or my granddad learned his carpentry here before he moved to Boston, or whatever it is.”

Alongside this, events and cultural activity provide natural points of return. Scoil Gheimhridh Ghaoth Dobhair, the winter school for traditional music, song and dance, has been running since the mid-1990s and has long attracted people back to the area. These kinds of moments create opportunities for reconnection, even if they are not always part of a wider or structured approach. The organisation remains busy, with strong participation across its activities, but the pattern of engagement has shifted. There is less regular travel from overseas than in the past, and many visitors engage with one aspect of the work without seeing the wider picture. Caitriona says that they would love to engage more with their diaspora and have involvement across the breadth of their activity but she is not sure how to achieve this, “I mean, we have good raw material for engagement with the diaspora. It’s just that we’re lacking the knowledge of how do we connect? ... If they engage with us in the way that they do, they’re only familiar with us through that element of our work.”

For Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair, the next step is not to create diaspora engagement from scratch, but to build on what is already happening, making it easier for people to find the organisation, understand the full breadth of its work, and stay connected and supportive over time. At its core, this is an organisation sustaining language, culture and community in Ghaoth Dobhair.

The potential is to extend that work further, turning existing connections into stronger, more lasting relationships.

