

Trinity Arts Centre

Trinity Arts Centre is a restored community arts and cultural space in the heart of Castlerea. Housed in a repurposed 200-year-old historic building, it has become a flexible, multi-use centre for creativity, community activity and local service delivery. Today it hosts everything from yoga and Zumba to HSE outreach, to arts projects and intercultural events. In the words of the Chair of the Board Breege Callaghan, it is a space that has *“lent itself to everything.”*

The origins of the project go back more than twenty years, when the building was still a ruin. Breege, then studying community development part-time, identified it as a community project and began building a group around a shared vision. As she explains, the group put real work into team-building and feasibility planning at the outset, knowing that the success of the project depended as much on the strength of the people behind it as on the building itself. That volunteer effort carried the project through years of work, funding applications and financial pressure.

CASE STUDY



Trinity Arts Centre is a restored community arts and cultural space in the heart of Castlerea.

Photo courtesy of Trinity Arts Centre, Castlerea

The financial challenge was constant. Trinity Arts Centre had to assemble support from a range of agencies over time, while also finding ways to cover match funding and manage debt. The group established a patronage scheme early on and secured charitable status so that supporters could donate in a structured way.

CASE STUDY

That brought in an initial pot of local support, but the project still needed something bigger if it was to fully succeed. That turning point came through the Finneran family, originally from Castlerea, whose support proved transformational. Breege had identified them as a possible connection because of their roots in the town and wrote a careful letter that was not simply asking for money, but setting out a positive vision of what was being built and why it mattered. The response was extraordinary. Support came first through the International Fund for Ireland and then through the wider family itself. As Breege put it, *“The substantial contribution from the family ensured both the completion of the project and its future.”*

The Finneran family were not responding to a generic appeal, they were responding to memory, place and the sense that something meaningful was happening in Castlerea. Breege describes how they had *“the most fabulous memories of growing up in Castlerea”* and how that connection made them want to help. She also recalls asking one of the brothers why the family had been so generous. The answer was telling: from the outside, they could see the value of what was being created. They could see a town with energy, activity and ambition, and they wanted to be part of that story. For Breege, that is the real lesson of diaspora engagement. It is not about “begging bowls”, but about showing people something positive and real that they can believe in and reconnect with.

That same understanding shapes her wider work in Castlerea, including through the Sunday Evening Roundup, which began during Covid as a local information effort and unexpectedly became a way of keeping diaspora connected too. People now tune in from New York, California, Australia, Europe and beyond, just to hear what is happening in the town. As Breege says, *“We’re only on there talking like you’d be talking in the pub or in the shop,”* but that ordinary, positive local voice is exactly what people want. It keeps connection alive.

The story of Trinity Arts Centre shows that diaspora relationships can be hugely important, but they work best when they grow out of strong local effort and a visible commitment to place. Diaspora support did not replace that work; it recognised and strengthened it. And crucially, that contribution was valued and made visible, with plaques in the building acknowledging the family and others who supported the project. As Breege says,

“That’s all they wanted... and that makes all the difference. Makes them part of it.”

