



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag  
an Aontas Eorpach

Co-funded by the  
European Union



pobal

government supporting communities



SICAP

Social Inclusion &  
Community Activation  
Programme

## SICAP 2024 Case Study



SICAP

Social Inclusion &  
Community Activation  
Programme

### Comhar na nOileán CTR – Goal 1 Project

Target Group – Island Residents



West Cork Islands (18-7)

*“The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 – 2027.”*



Comhar na nOileán CTR aims to support, provide, and deliver supports to sustainable permanent communities on the inhabited offshore islands primarily and any other adjacent peripheral area whose development is intrinsically linked to that of the islands.

Comhar na nOileán's mission is to support balanced sustainable development, address decline in island populations and communities, promote equal and equitable access and opportunity to education, training, employment services through the delivery of programmes and initiatives using area-based local development strategies and a bottom-up community-driven development approach.

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the work that goes on in bringing events like the Fastnet Film festival to the islands and how it benefits our SICAP Target Group of Island Residents. The FastNet Film Festival takes place every year in the south-west fishing village of Schull. The festival screens short films from all over the world and invites industry professionals to share their knowledge with visiting filmmakers. As part of our continuing aim in supporting rural regeneration, Comhar na nOileán are fully supportive of the FastNet Film Festivals plans to further develop and expand the festival. The festival provides a welcome social and economic boost to the local area, and there are plans to create an all-year-round facility for local filmmakers. Comhar na nOileán have also been incredibly supportive of the FastNet Film Festival's decision to add an Irish Language category to the festival which is held in Schull but brought to into Oileán Chléire for a day. As the festival is a fully international event, we believe that this a fantastic opportunity to promote the local area, the language and culture of Oileán Chléire to a worldwide audience.



## Background

Beginning in 2008 this year marked the sixteenth year of the Annual FastNet Film Festival. The festival began when a group of people living in the local area got together and identified that there was an opening for a unique festival in the area. The organisers felt that Schull was an ideal spot for a film festival as there were a lot of people with a background in film residing in the local area. The idea was to start off with a short film-festival and see what would happen. From the beginning the organisers had a main rule which they state will never be changed. The rule is that there is no dress code and no red carpets which lends its itself to the non-formal image of the festival. This encourages an up close and personal format to the festival where people mingle and socialise. From the beginning the festival was met with enthusiasm and spread throughout the town and over the years has got bigger and bigger. In its current format there are two key elements that make up the festival. Firstly, there is a competition section and secondly a more traditional festival element. The festival is committed to giving young filmmakers an opportunity to highlight their work and emphasises staunch support for community input into the festival. This year saw over eight thousand people attend the main festival. The festival itself included over five hundred entries from over forty countries with prize money totalling €24,000.



## **Community Benefits**

Bringing the FastNet Film Festival from Schull to the islands is an initiative that aims to extend the season and promote economic activity on the West Cork Islands. The festival operates as a community festival which is run by the community and for the community.

From small beginnings in 2008 the festival has grown steadily over the years to become a truly international event and has attracted top industry figures such as director Jim Sheridan as well as actors Saoirse Ronin, Jeremy Irons and Paul Mescal. The informal nature of the festival allows local filmmakers to interact and gain valuable insights into the industry from some of its biggest names.

The festival itself is also economically beneficial to local businesses, and a welcome extension to the season. Events such as these help to promote islands in a positive way and provide, a welcome boost to the local economy.

Local participation is essential in organising events like this and many hours of work were put in by local volunteers. As well as this, Comhar na nOileán worked with a local social enterprise, CCTEO, to prepare for the festival. The manager of Comharchumann Chléire Teoranta stated that hosting the festival is advantageous to them as a development agency on several grounds. Firstly, there is an economic benefit to local businesses because of increased trade at a time (May) when it is quiet. There is also a cultural benefit as the Irish Language is the central aspect of the day. Finally, there is a social benefit as the events are open to the community and easily accessed.

All food outlets are kept informed of the numbers of people who might be travelling to ensure that they have enough resources to provide food for visitors. Other local businesses such as the distillery provide gin tasting samples along the walking routes. As the festival occurs early in the tourist season staff shortages can be an issue as summer staff are not yet on the island, and the work of local volunteers is essential.

## Irish Language Section



As a result of another area of our work on the mainland in 2019 Comhar na nOileán staff were approached by the Director of the Fastnet Film Festival about developing an Irish language section of the festival and bringing it to Oileán Chléire, with the aim of having the first run of the festival in 2020.

To bring the festival to the island we needed to ensure the support of the local community. To achieve this, Comhar na nOileán linked in with CCTEO, the local development company on the island, local businesses, and the ferry company. Unfortunately, COVID struck, and the first festival was cancelled. We planned to begin again in 2021 but the covid lockdown forced the festival online. This version of the festival included the first Irish language section. At that time just like many other events that were cancelled there had been a lot of work done in getting this festival off the ground and all of that had to be shelved to comply with health and safety regulations. Despite this, there were still several entries, and a local panel of judges had chosen their top four short films.

In 2022 we planned to hold the event again, but Comhar na nOileán and the festival organisers were unsure if COVID would prevent it from happening in person again but began organising for it regardless.

The event did eventually go ahead but was scaled back in terms of venues. The event was held in the community hall with local businesses providing food and refreshment. Transport was arranged to get

people to the venues, and we were expecting 150 people to attend with 2 ferry runs organised to run from Schull. However, the weather was unbelievably bad on the day, which discouraged many from travelling. The crossing from Schull can be challenging even on the finest of days as the boat travels across the tide, so even for the hardiest of travellers it can be difficult.

As the first ferry load left the pier in Schull many attendees were beginning to feel unwell and were busy texting friends and colleagues not to travel. Once they arrived on the island there was clothes found for some people that had been very sick, along with plenty of tea and support for people who were feeling unwell. As a result of that journey the subsequent boats were cancelled. Despite this, attendees were well looked after and received the unique Island céad mile fáilte. Once all attendees had settled and were at the venue the festival was a tremendous success despite the initial start. Everybody left having had a wonderful experience as the skies began to finally clear.

In 2023 we were able to go back to our initial plan of holding a main event/ feature with questions and answers in the college for the first half of the day. A variety of local businesses were used to show the Irish language short films with every business on the island turned into a mini cinema. This not only highlighted the local businesses but provided visitors with beautiful views of the island's unique scenery. Food was served in the local cafes and pubs, and the local gin was sold through the distillery.

This year saw 150 people travel to the island for the festival which was an increase from the previous year's attendance of 120. Preparation for the festival typically begins months in advance and requires a lot of effort from local volunteers. Setting up the venues takes at least three days as scaffolding must be brought in to blacken out the skylights. In addition to this, drivers must be found to bring people to some of the more difficult to reach locations. Getting the judging panel together also requires a significant amount of work as we try to change it every year to give more people a chance to participate. Posters and signs are also put up around the island to enable people to find their way around, and we have also printed maps that show people the walking trail to the venues

As highlighted above, bringing the Fastnet Film Festival to Oileán Chléire requires a lot of effort and behind the scenes work from community organisations such as Comharchumann Chléire Teoranta and from individuals such as the local language planning officer Ruairi Ó Donnobháin.

Ruairi Ó Donnobháin first became involved with the Fastnet Film Festival over three years ago as an independent artist and more recently in his capacity as the language planning officer on Oileán Chléire. His current role sees him liaising with festival organisers and our local SICAP officer to put together the selection jury for the Irish language short films and organising the island venues where the films are shown. Mr. Ó Donnobháin stated that the festival brings an internationally recognised event of the

'highest artistic merit' to the island and fits well into the local calendar as the island has a rich cultural tradition both in historic terms and the Irish language.

## **Conclusion**

Improving the lives of island residents, both economically and socially, is a core aim of Comhar na nOileán. Bringing an international film festival such as Fastnet to Oileán Chléire for the day not only gives an economic boost to the island but brings people together and promotes the island to a worldwide audience.

Comhar na nOileán's main Target Group are island residents and the festival is a huge draw for the island and is seen by many locals as the first event in a wider summer schedule. Several local businesses get involved by providing food and refreshment on the day and partner with the festival to organise screenings of the films. The success of the Irish language section enables local residents and local community groups to highlight the best of the island to a worldwide audience. The festival also provides a natural link to the mainland town of Schull which hosts the main festival. This has led many film creators to use the natural beauty of Oileán Chléire in several highly praised productions. The festival's growth has also led to an interest in the film industry and the establishment of a local film club in parallel to the main film festival and is supported by the local Irish Language Plan.

Through our work with SICAP Comhar na nOileán are committed to bettering the lives of island residents on the West Cork Islands. By working with local community organisations to help bring events such as Fastnet to Oileán Chléire, Comhar na nOileán aims to improve the lives of island residents and promote the West Cork Islands in a positive manner.

