

# A Review of Dublin Community Television

July 2023



Coimisiún  
na Meán

NEXUS

---

# A Review of Dublin Community Television

---

Final Report

July 1<sup>st</sup> 2023

Seán Ó Siochrú

Nexus Research Cooperative

---

## Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	A Brief History of DCTV.....	2
	A Community Mobilising	2
	Phase 1: 2008 - 2013 Building a Model of Community Television	4
	Phase 2: 2013 - 2022 Crisis and Recovery	7
	Phase 3: Renewal 2023 -	10
3.	Community Participation.....	12
	Participation in DCTV governance and structures	12
	Participation in media production and dissemination	12
4.	Viewership and Content Quality.....	14
	Viewer Access	14
	Content Relevance	16
	Content Quality	17
5.	Does DCTV generate benefits?.....	19
	The Social Benefit Framework	19
6.	Conclusions.....	23
	DCTV’s evolving model of Community Television	23
	Conclusions in Brief	25
	Annex 1: Research Survey Comments in Full.....	27
	Annex 2: Stories of DCTV Broadcasts.....	29
	Story 1: <i>A Finglas Story</i> (2023).....	29
	Story 2: <i>Ignite</i> . (2016).....	33
	Story 3: <i>Romancing Ireland</i> (2021).....	37
	Story 4: <i>Meetings with Ivor</i> (2017).....	40
	Story 5: <i>The Health Effect</i> (2016).....	42
	Story 6: <i>CityScapes</i> (2023).....	44
	Story 7: <i>Stay at Home</i> (2020).....	48

---

## **Acronyms**

BAI:	Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
CBSS:	Community Broadcasting Support Scheme (of the BAI)
CCMH:	Cork Community media Hub (or: the Hub)
CCTV	Cork Community Television
CESCA:	Cork Equality and Sustainable Community Alliance
CnaM:	Coimisiún na Meán
CTV:	Community television
DCTV:	Dublin Community Television
EPG:	Electronic programme guide
ETB:	Education and Training Board
LCYP:	Local Creative Youth Partnerships
SLD:	Sectoral Learning and Development (of the BAI)
VOD:	Video on Demand

---

## 1. Introduction

The report is part of a larger research process commissioned for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI).<sup>1</sup> The output includes three reports and a number of annexes. This report focuses specifically on Dublin Community Television (DCTV). A second report covers Cork Community Television (CCTV). The main report includes a general synthesis of these two, and examines the community television sector in Ireland as a whole, drawing overall conclusions and putting forward recommendations for the future.

The overall process was designed, with the agreement of the research Steering Group, as strategic in nature, exploring the past, current and future dynamics of the community television sector. Within this wider context, and pursuant to Section 72 (6) of the 2009 Broadcasting Act concerning community content provision contracts (known more generally as community television), the research addresses three specific questions: These are:

- a) To what extent are community television channels facilitating their target communities in actively participating in the compilation and transmission of programmes?*
- b) To what extent do the target groups view the broadcasting service transmitting these services?*
- c) What is the opinion of the target group on the quality of the programmes and does it specifically address their interests?*

This report continues in **Section 2** with a short history of DCTV.

This offers insight into the origins of CTV (community television), which is critical to understanding its dynamics, the forms it takes, the benefits generated, and the needs of the sector. When most people first encounter community television, they, understandably, perceive it as a sub-sector of media, with a focus on local or community level production. This fundamentally misunderstands the sector, and has led over the years to some mismatches between the regulation and support structures that have sought to govern and support community television.

In fact, the founders and activists for community television have always seen it first and foremost as contributing to community development and empowerment, to be achieved through the medium of television as its primary tool. Hence, community development principles are inscribed not just into the content produced, but into its open and democratic structures, and into its participative production processes. An exploration of the history of the individual channels and of the sector in Ireland, and indeed elsewhere, is thus an essential prerequisite to understanding the goals, dynamics and needs of the sector.

The subsequent sections examine in some detail the questions posed in the legislation: **Section 3** looks at community participation; **Section 4** explores issues of viewership, relevance and content quality. **Section 5** then examines the benefits generated by DCTV using a Community Media Social Benefit Framework. Conclusions are drawn in **Section 6**.

Annexes contains some data and detailed, along with a set of seven **CTV Stories** describing some of the productions broadcast on DCTV, offering practical insights into the unique characteristics that differentiate CTV from its mainstream counterparts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Now subsumed into Coimisiún na Meán

## 2. A Brief History of DCTV

### A Community Mobilising

The broad background to the emergence of community television in Ireland is covered in the main report. Briefly, it saw the coming together of community development groups and media activists, especially video, to lobby government to create a specific license for community television, with a ‘must carry’ obligation on cable operators as the main form of distribution. The effort succeeded, and the Broadcasting Act 2001 created the possibility of a “community content provision contract”.

In the late 1990s, once it was clear that a license could be granted, efforts began in earnest in Dublin to design and organise, with communities, the institutional structure for a community television station for the wider Dublin area, and to plan a timetable for securing a license and then launch. Much preparatory work had already been completed. Local organisations such as Ballymun Communications, Near Media Coop in Coolock (associated with Near FM), Coláiste Dhúlaigh and Ballyfermot Community School were already producing content; CMN was providing training to many communities in video use, and the magazine *Tracking* had created a forum for discussion and interaction. A specific opportunity arose in 2000 with the creation by Dublin City Council of the Dublin City Development Board (DCDB) with the goal of developing a plan for Dublin’s future. It launched a Community Forum for consultation, and in June 2001 this sponsored a Consultative Workshop on Community Media in Dublin, organised by CMN members. It was attended by over 60 community and voluntary organisations.

Following the success of this, DCDB funded a two part study to examine community television in more depth. The first part entitled: *Community Television: Lessons from international Experience* was published in January 2002, followed by a detailed plan of action entitled: *Building Community Through Television*, published in November 2002. DCDB formally welcomed and recognised the potential of community television in its strategy of July 2002, entitled *Dublin: A City of Possibilities 2002-2012*.

An interim DCTV Steering Committee was established in early 2003 to take the project forward, comprising a mix of community media groups and more general community-based development organisations. DCTV was registered as a Cooperative with the Register of Friendly Societies in May 2003, with membership open to all Dublin residents sharing its goals. It formally adopted the goals of enhancing: *Empowerment*, of both community of interest and geography, especially those facing disadvantage; *Participation*, in the channel and in local governance; and *Diversity*, celebrating and enriching the great diversity of cultures and community in Dublin, and contributing to diversity of media content.<sup>2</sup> CMN initially provided the secretariat, which was in turn supported by a FÁS scheme, and organisations continued on the ground with the formation of three Programme Sub-groups to identify and explore content in three segments:

- I. *Community programme segment*: to include e.g. community news and current affairs; live-phone-ins with self-operated studios; community arts and other community-produced programmes; selected important content on social, political and economic uses; and a community notice board.
- II. *An Education Segment*: to comprise e.g. adult education, and media and digital literacy content;

---

<sup>2</sup> Its Rules of Incorporation includes an extended paragraph on each.



III. *Local Governance Segment*: discussions were underway to broadcast Dublin City Council proceedings live, with the goal of enhancing transparency and participation.<sup>3</sup>

While these highly ambitious plans got underway (many of which, however, were never realised), a few hurdles had yet to be cleared before a license could be secured and DCTV could launch. In November 2002, DCTV responded to the BCI's call for expressions of interest in a community content license. The BCI had yet to publish its community television policy, which came in 2004, after significant consultation. A formal license application followed in April 2005 to broadcast throughout the greater Dublin area. This was approved and DCTV signed a Community Content Provision license in April 2006.

The 2001 Act also allows the BCI, under Section 40,<sup>4</sup> to assess the needs of a specific community in respect of broadcasting, notably in regard to the availability to the community of production facilities, training and resources. This was interpreted creatively by BCI, working closely with DCTV, and the work involved intensive consultant-led programme development workshops with different communities in Dublin. The report was completed for DCTV in March 2007.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, in October 2005, the BCI's Sound & Vision Scheme had also been launched, opening a potential line of funding for community produced programmes. DCTV began to identify suitable producers, production processes and subject matter.

DCTV's launch date had originally been set for January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. Yet an enormous amount remained to be done: negotiating with the then NTL (now Virgin Media) to carry the signal; sourcing and configuring equipment to schedule and play-out programmes; securing an office premises (in August 2006, initially in Temple Bar); recruiting a manager<sup>6</sup> and staff; and negotiating a loan from a socially oriented bank, Clann Credo. DCTV was also supporting community producers to apply to the Sound and Vision scheme.

DCTV's official launch took place on 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2008, and it began broadcasting on cable channel 802, a slot it has retained since. By then, Sound and Vision Rounds had granted a total of €630,000 for programmes to be broadcast on DCTV, of which €200,000 was for DCTV's own productions. Further content, national and international, was also identified and secured for broadcast.

Since launch, DCTV's evolution can be divided into two phases, the first from 2008 to 2013; the second from 2014 to 2022. A serious, near fatal, financial crisis marks the transition between them.

## **Phase 1: 2008 - 2013 Building a Model of Community Television**

### *Building a multi-purpose model*

From the start, DCTV was committed to 24 hours broadcasting. It succeeded in this and, although much of the output comprised repeats, it also managed to produce and source a constant stream of new material. It saw itself as much more than just a community television broadcaster. Based on the model in other countries and on its assessment of needs in Dublin, it also aimed to produce

---

<sup>3</sup> Dublin City Council since then developed its own Webcasting facility. See <https://dublincity.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> c

<sup>4</sup> Reproduced as Section 73 of the 2009 Act.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Gibbons, Ph.D. (March 2007) Section 40 Assessment: DCTV. A Report for the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and Dublin Community Television, March 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Ciaran Moore was employed in September 2006, initially to support the Section 40 study. He was then offered the position of Launch Coordinator, before becoming manager.

programmes in-house, both in studio and externally; and to provide training, studios and equipment to individuals and community organisations to produce their own programmes. Through opening its management and organisational structures to participation by all members (the sole criterion for which was residency in the greater Dublin area) it also promoted media literacy and opportunities at a deeper level.

DCTV's main source of staff funding during this first phase was from Sound and Vision productions,<sup>7</sup> supplemented with some training fees and commissioned work after 2010. The channel had intended at the outset to seek support under a community employment or social enterprise scheme, but the timing meant this was impossible: approving new schemes was abruptly suspended after the financial crash of 2008, and remained so almost throughout this phase.

However, the crash also saw, over the coming years, the availability of quite a few volunteers, with media and other skills, and these both supported DCTV and produced a large volume of innovative community content of their own. The crash also meant that resources could be negotiated at low cost. In 2008, the office moved to the Digital Hub, a state development company close to central Dublin, and a studio was opened there in 2009 occupying a corner of a 1,200m<sup>2</sup> warehouse also owned by the Digital Hub, both at a reasonable rent. Through creative use of materials, a variety of sets could be assembled and used for different programme. Cameras (fixed and portable) and a multi-camera switcher, microphones, mixers, lighting, personal computers, servers, software and transmission equipment were purchased using a €75,000 loan secured in October 2008 from Clann Credo, a not-for-profit social investment bank. This was to be repaid within two years. The equipment was not sophisticated by broadcaster standards, but falling costs and new technologies meant they were flexible and sufficient for most types of productions.

As noted elsewhere, a precondition for applications to the Sound and Vision scheme is that a licensed operator agreed to broadcast the output, and this delivered significant support to community television in successive rounds. Productions were by both DCTV and by independent community media producers, and in almost all cases community organisations were centrally involved. During these first few years, DCTV produced programme series in the Digital Hub Studio, such as *Looking Left*, a three-part review discussion about alternative magazines in Ireland in previous decades. A key project was entitled *Community in a Studio*, in which twelve community organisations each produced a studio magazine series, and the funding effectively allowed them to become anchor tenants for the studio in 2009. The *Storyteller* series, presenting traditions from five different cultures, evolved into a development project in its own right, with students of a local adult education college involved in set design, school liaison, promotion and distribution.

Other DCTV series were produced outside, in more conventional television formats such as the *A Taste of Home* series of five programmes in which immigrant families met with Irish families to prepare and cook a meal together, while giving background on the former. Many community organisations, encouraged and supported by DCTV, also won Sound and Vision funding, sometimes deploying a mixture of their own staff and DCTV personnel and using DCTV equipment. DCTV also agreed to broadcast productions from independent media producers, where their subject matter and approach were considered to meet the CTV ethos.

---

<sup>7</sup> Throughout, one staff person was formally employed on a FÁS scheme of another community organisation.



Since its launch, DCTV's own productions have been approved for just under €1.72 million in Sound and Vision grants, almost all during this first phase. By approving their transmission, DCTV has additionally enabled community producers to access €3.38 million in Sound and Vision grants.

By then, DCTV employed the manager and four staff engaged in production, training, scheduling and fund raising; supplemented occasionally by people on a JobBridge scheme. It also supported some student internships from educational institutions. There were also about 20 to 30 active part-time volunteers. Membership grew and the fee was set at €25, or €15 unwaged, for an individual, and €75 for an organisation. It grew to over 250 in a few years, though fee payment renewal was not, in practice, enforced except for voting rights at AGMs.

### *Changing Studios*

Training was a major focus of DCTV work, both as part of DCTV productions and separately. The large studio in the Digital Hub worked well as a formal training venue as well as for larger productions, yet it was physically inaccessible, required a team of six or more, and use of the technology required significant experience and training. By 2010, DCTV felt that the activities and facilities should be more attuned to the ethos of community television and accessible to a wider range of Dubliners, engaging in more ad hoc productions.<sup>8</sup> The office moved to the Guinness Enterprise Centre, and a *Shopfront Studio* was opened in Dublin's cultural quarter, Temple Bar, in January 2011, on short-term lease from Temple Bar Properties and with support from the Dublin City Community Forum. The studio was highly accessible, on a busy street, and was newly equipped with three remotely controlled cameras, an audio desk and a TV vision mixer, all relatively simple to deploy for programme-making by just one or two people. It had a space for interviews, and sufficient room for musicians and other performances. The 'as-live'<sup>9</sup> studio recording process could be viewed as it happened through a large shopfront window, creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere.

The *Shopfront Studio* was designed not just to enable the production of scale-scale programme, but to introduce new approaches to programme production, very much in tune with a community television ethos. A 'walk-in' training facility was available, offering one or two days training to DCTV members. The intention was to enable them to operate the studio, and thus to produce their own programmes, sometimes with music and other entertainment; more often as studio discussions on a variety of community related topics. For example, between February and April 2011, almost 150 people were trained, receiving anything from 3 to 12 hours of supervision. A small number were involved in Sound and Vision productions, and hence were funded, but the majority were members of a variety of non-profit groups or simply interested individuals. Nevertheless, DCTV does acknowledge that such limited training was, in many cases, not enough to enable studio operation unassisted: DCTV staff were often called upon to assist, sometimes quite intensively, at set-up and completion points but also during production.

### *Open Formats production*

*Open Formats* was the name given to probably the most significant innovation.<sup>10</sup> The *Open Formats* approach was developed during, and best exemplified by, a project entitled *We're At...* Round 10 of

---

<sup>8</sup> The development of more replicable and community friendly formats is documented in "Open Formats: The Case of DCTV" Ciaran Moore. in *TV Like Us*, (2011)

<sup>9</sup> It was not possible at that point to broadcast a live signal from the studio.

<sup>10</sup> See Annex 2 for additional details and formats on DCTV broadcasts.

Sound and Vision, in November 2010, secured €65,000 for a partnership between DCTV, Temple Bar Cultural Trust and Dublin City Council. It produced sixteen twenty-minute programmes, covering four cultural festivals organised by the partners during 2011. A combination of several elements made it unique.

- A large number of DCTV volunteers, new and existing, were trained with a separate production team for each festival.<sup>11</sup>
- It generated a set of digital resources, such as title sequence, theme music and other design work that could be easily shared and replicated, with minimal skills.
- A fifty page production manual was produced as a standard guide for volunteers wanting to use the studio to produce a similar programme.
- A common 'branding' was developed, packaging the entire process for replication beyond the initial set of programmes: The *We're At...* title could be followed by any event, the original name of *Festival TV* changed to introduce a wider flexibility.

A three person crew in DCTV supported all the activities, from liaising with the festivals, to providing the training, production, the production and equipment guides, local clips and digital resources.

The 16 programmes themselves were produced, each with five segments (three studio pieces and two pre-recorded videos) and each was also broken into smaller Web-sized chunks and uploaded to social media, receiving many thousands of visits. While the overall formats were the same, each also produced its own style, depending on the topic of the festival. All content, including the resources, were made available to reuse on Creative Commons licenses.

Most significantly, the resources continued to be used by numerous productions as standard guides and tools. In total, over 20 *We're At* branded events were covered, but the materials also offered guidance and support to most later productions in the *Shopfront Studio* for the following two years, until the studio was forced to close.

The *Open Formats* approach emerged from several years of trials and experiment in community television production, and was a conscious attempt at building an approach to community television that would not only expand DCTV activities, but might offer a model for elsewhere.

Throughout this Phase, DCTV was maintaining the programme scheduling system and play-out to the NTL system. Issues did arise, particularly around the level of the audio signal, which was difficult to synchronise with that of Virgin. The signal was also lost occasionally, but in general anyone tuning into NTL Channel 802 could view the DCTV channel. The DCTV Website was also built, including the required feedback mechanisms for complaints. Live-streaming of the broadcast programmes was developed, via a company called AerTV with a link to the stream on the DCTV Website, and a basic on-demand service was also available, with programmes stored on a professional VIMEO account.

Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that DCTV devoted huge effort to enabling physical access to the station, on training, and supporting productions, and were highly successful. At the same time, DCTV paid less attention to ensuring that audiences could access DCTV on different platforms, on promoting its programmes, and on implementing some quality guidance over the content.

---

<sup>11</sup> An initial call for volunteers attracted 85 applicants, of which 40 completed the two induction sessions.

## Phase 2: 2013 - 2022 Crisis and Recovery

### Crisis

By 2012, the financial sustainability of DCTV was becoming ever more strained, due to the absence of secure core funding from its activities and its heavy reliance on the Sound and Vision scheme.

In 2005, DCTV had developed a policy around Sound and Vision,<sup>12</sup> in which a main source of income was to be derived, directly and indirectly, from the Sound and Vision Scheme. DCTV was successful for several years in this, applying for its own productions, and providing production support at relatively modest cost – including renting equipment, the use of its studio, production staff and editing – to community producers who also had secured Sound and Vision grants. Table 1 shows the proportion of all income derived from Production Activity, the vast majority of which came from Sound and Vision. It also presents figures for income, expenditure and surplus/deficits.

**Table 1: DCTV Production fees, after costs, as percentage of total 2008-2021**

Income/ year	Production income	Other	Total	% total is production	Expenditure	Surplus/ deficit
<b>2008</b>	134,473	58,536	193,009	<b>70%</b>	166,349	31,160
<b>2009</b>	268,230	41,612	309,842	<b>87%</b>	314,916	-5,083
<b>2010</b>	135,601	66,256	201,857	<b>67%</b>	251,782	-49,962
<b>2011</b>	217,663	71,338	289,001	<b>75%</b>	255,275	33,726
<b>2012</b>	195,483	58,683	254,166	<b>77%</b>	265,178	-11,012
<b>2013</b>	191,152	36,316	227,468	<b>84%</b>	341,368	-113,900
<b>2014</b>	6,075	31,713	37,788	<b>16%</b>	14,322	23,466
<b>2015</b>	0	17,448	17,448	<b>0%</b>	3,955	13,493
<b>2016</b>	0	11,838	11,838	<b>0%</b>	-652	12,490
<b>2017</b>	0	9,729	9,729	<b>0%</b>	3,360	6,369
<b>2018</b>	0	18,769	18,769	<b>0%</b>	1,547	17,222
<b>2019</b>	0	14,729	14,729	<b>0%</b>	2,481	12,248
<b>2020</b>	0	13,035	13,035	<b>0%</b>	-10,170	23,205
<b>2021</b>	0	13,155	13,155	<b>0%</b>	2,129	11,026

Source: DCTV Annual Reports

The figures show that DCTV had an average annual income of almost €250,000 in the six years between 2008 and 2013. They also show the extent of DCTV's dependency on income from productions, a large majority of which was from the Sound and Vision scheme,<sup>13</sup> a scheme never designed for this purpose. As noted earlier, since its foundation, DCTV's own productions have won just under €1.72 million in Sound and Vision grants, all approved during this period; and it has also been the broadcaster for a further €3.38 million in grants for community and independent productions.

When, in 2014, this income dropped precipitously, following the failure to secure any funding from successive rounds in 2013. Productions usually took 12 months or more to complete, and payments were received in tranches, so DCTV was plunged into a financial crisis. With debts mounting during

<sup>12</sup> "A Programme Policy for DCTV: The Sound and Vision Fund." December 2005.

<sup>13</sup> The figures in Table 1 are fees exclusive of DCTV external expenditure. The Sound & Vision grants are inclusive of all costs, so the total grant amounts secured were significantly higher.

the year it was not possible to sustain operations. The office space was relinquished in September, and staff contracts were discontinued before the end of the year, with some continuing for a period on a voluntary basis.

DCTV members and supporters lobbied the BAI (a review of the Sound and Vision Scheme was ongoing) and government for emergency support, and achieved some publicity<sup>14</sup> and a motion of support from the Labour Party, but it failed to yield concrete results. The final round of Sound & Vision in December 2013 approved €148,000 for programmes to be produced in the following year, but by then the production capacities were dispersed. DCTV went into receivership and a creditors meeting was called in December 2013. Among over 30 creditors owed over €135,000 were Clann Credo, AIB Bank, and the Revenue Commissioners, as well as organisations including Leargas who had advanced €37,000 funding for two projects. In general, creditors were sympathetic and willing to reschedule.

What the figures do not reflect fully is that during 2013, DCTV had successfully secured over €100,000 in non-Sound and Vision sourced income, the highest amount yet, from Dublin City Council, European projects, and a number of commissioned productions. However, most of this was lost, or the work executed by redundant staff following the receivership. Thus DCTV was having some success in diversifying its income sources, but it came too late and, in the wider picture, the dependence on Sound & Vision was unsustainably high.

### *Recovery*

Despite the challenges, the DCTV membership and Committee decided not to liquidate and instead focused on paying off the debts. The above table shows how a steady surplus was generated each year over almost a decade to service and repay the debts. Individual projects, including those with Sound and Vision funding, avoided closure by being reallocated to former DCTV staff, some working pro bono, helping to repay much of the debt; and the studio and other equipment was sold, mainly to former staff and DCV volunteers to ensure it would stay in the community media sector. Volunteers were sought to take up some of the work, including assessing community producers' applications to Sound and Vision. A DCTV Support Group also raised almost €4,000 in donations from members and other supporters.

DCTV continued to generate modest amounts of income, including from the BAI's the Community Broadcasting Support Scheme (CBSS) routed through the CTA and directly, this could fund only small governance related and capacity related actions. It has relied exclusively on voluntary effort, mainly committee members and a few volunteers, and, for a period, some former staff. Its postal address moved to Near FM in Coolock. Applications for DCTV transmission continued, with a range of different productions seeking Sound and Vision support, some of them from independent video makers moving for the first time into community television. Requests to broadcast were, and continue to be, reviewed on an individual basis, selected in large part on their level of community relevance, though few could approach the intensity of participation achieved during the first phase.

In the meantime the core governance activities of being a license holder continued. BAI Compliance reports were compiled and delivered on a regular basis, and the annual audit completed. The DCTV Committee met regularly, electing new members at AGMs, and actively participated in CTA including organising several BAI-funded Community Television festivals. The membership was kept informed,

---

<sup>14</sup> 'This is television you won't see anywhere else'. Patrick Freyne, Irish Times. November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013

now on a subscription list of about 150, though opportunities to participate were limited and most have become inactive.

### *Scheduling and Broadcasting*

The greatest challenge in terms of time, cost, equipment and impact was technical: sustaining the scheduling of programmes and the signal play-out onto the NTL/Virgin cable system. The schedule was more limited, initially on a three day loop of the same programmes, then reduced to two days due to technical problems that could not easily be fixed. A new play-out system, called PlayBox, was purchased three years ago to access the Virgin cable system, with a grant from Dublin City Council. In 2019 DCTV disconnected, for technical reasons, remote access to the channel, but physical access to the Virgin property where the DCTV server was located was impossible during Covid, limiting transmission to a single continuous loop.

Throughout, relations with the relevant Virgin staff and management have remained positive. Virgin now views their work with DCTV as a part of their social responsibility activities, which has enabled them to offer some technical assistance.

The fact that the play-out to Virgin has been maintained at all, throughout, is thanks to committed and skilled volunteers devoting an average of at least 10 hours a week to feeding the schedule data and programme files into the system, maintaining the play-out and liaising with Virgin media. The current volunteer, also a community producer, has been doing this for four years. Operating the PlayBox system requires a high level of skill. Owing to time constraints, only a fraction of its full capabilities is being deployed: It could include, for instance, automated onscreen graphics and text for continuity between programmes. New programmes are also being uploaded onto Vimeo, to join a growing archive, using the volunteer's own professional account (DCTV discontinued its account); but, pending the production of an access and search software, the archive is not accessible publicly. However, well over 1,350 programmes are available across several sites.<sup>15</sup> The DCTV Website ([www.dctv.ie](http://www.dctv.ie)), which had achieved a level of live-streaming and on-demand, retained only basic functions for most of Phase 2.

Thus, overall, given the circumstances, DCTV focused (apart from repaying debts) almost exclusively on broadcasting material on cable and facilitating. It has also organised and hosted events, including the Community Television Festival funded by the BAI. Through the efforts of committee members and volunteers, the minimal level of activity required under its BAI contract was maintained, and 2021 saw a milestone with the final repayment of all DCTV debts.

### *DCTV Scope and Aspiration*

Compared to the first phase, not only the scope but also the aspirations of DCTV narrowed.

Having the community content license enables DCTV to support applications to the Sound and Vision Scheme from community producers. Losing the studio, equipment and training facilities to support such community producers has meant that some of the producers have more limited connections with their communities. The resulting programmes, such as *Meetings with Ivor*<sup>16</sup> and *The Silver*

---

<sup>15</sup> Most community producers, who broadcast on DCTV also have Websites: For instance, see: <http://neartv.ie/>, <https://ballymuncommunications.com/showreel/> and <https://caskproject.eu>

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.meetingswithivor.com/> for reviews and the trailer.

*Branch*,<sup>17</sup> are innovative, have a strong community dimension in the output, and almost certainly would never have been made had DCTV not agreed to broadcast them.<sup>18</sup> Their quality is high, and some have won national and international awards; reaching wider audience through festivals, community showings and rebroadcasting on other channels. These ‘independent’ community producers have been generous in supporting DCTV, running workshops pro-bono and even offering some resources during the course of the production. They have also drawn some new people in. But their encounter with DCTV is also instrumental – DCTV offers a means to apply for Sound & Vision funding. They have thus become less involved in DCTV as members to build community television in Dublin as compared to community producers.

Others, however, such as Near TV and Ballymun Communications, are closely involved in their community’s development; are engaging their communities at every level of production, and are coming up with innovative ways for the media products to generate social benefit beyond simply broadcasting on cable. These are regular and committed community media producers, facilitated in their access to Sound and Vision funding by DCTV, and in return offering practical support, volunteering as members and engaging directly in DCTV activities.

During this Phase, DCTV itself could not provide members with a space, physical, virtual or even conceptually, for community producers and members to build into something more, and to develop a network of ongoing community producers that can sustain each other and encourage new ones to get involved. The BAI’s Sectoral Development Scheme, however, did provide support for training and for running events, such as the Community Television Festivals, creating some opportunities for those involved to meet and for DCTV to maintain a minimal presence among its members. To build a sustainable momentum for community television within the community was, and remains, a core part of DCTV’s objectives and ethos. But to achieve this, DCTV has recently embarked on a new phase, and to develop its own resources.

### **Phase 3: Renewal 2023 -**

With its debts paid off, in 2022 DCTV began to consider a new phase and a renewal of its mandate. It has developed a clear view of what it seeks to achieve immediately, and is seeking solutions to a number of challenges it still faces.

Its priority goal is to establish itself as a catalyst for community television development among community development organisations building with, but also beyond, those already committed to media production. This means nurturing sustainable relationships with community organisations that can derive benefits from DCTV activities.

A new project, approved for €75,000 by the third Sound and Vision Social Benefit Round in 2023, takes the first steps in this. This pilot will see the employment of an Outreach and Training Coordinator, to work with a diverse set of eight partner community development organisations and NGOs.<sup>19</sup> DCTV will work with each of these DCTV members, the goal being:

---

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.silverbranch.ie/the-silver-branch/> for reviews and the trailer.

<sup>18</sup> *Meetings with Ivor* was later broadcast on RTÉ, though RTÉ had earlier declined, during the application for Sound and Vision, to commit to this.

<sup>19</sup> The eight are: African Centre, Ballymun Communications, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Dublin Council of Trades Unions, National Women’s Council of Ireland, Outhouse and RADE, Writing Home.



“...to strengthen ownership of DCTV by empowering partner groups to create their own content and to curate their own scheduled time, turning our partner group from content creators to broadcasters, and reinforcing our mission.” (from DCTV application)

Thus a more integral relationship is being developed between DCTV and its member organisations with a view to a sustained interaction into the future to generate content.

Using its own resources, DCTV has engaged a consultant, based in Bulgaria, to develop a new play-out system in 2023, re-establishing remote access and enabling scheduling to resume.

Also at the planning stage is a relaunch of the Website.<sup>20</sup> This will be part of a wider ‘rebranding’ of DCTV, being contracted to an independent consultancy *Language*,<sup>21</sup> specialising in working with social change organisations, and funded by the BAI’s Sectoral Learning and Development scheme.

DCTV still faces many challenges in reaching even this first goal. Its role as a catalyst for those already seeking to develop content and to become broadcasters is still a time consuming role – the pilot project will soon identify how far a single staff member can go. Also, relying on the commitment of volunteers to undertake the skilled work involved in scheduling and play-out systems is always fragile.

Furthermore, while broadcasting on Virgin Media is regarded as important, it is by no means sufficient to ensure that target groups and members are aware of, and can easily access, DCTV content. Reliable and searchable Web streaming and access to the full archives are regarded as a minimum for any broadcaster at this stage.<sup>22</sup>

Longer term goals depend on success in these first steps. A medium-term objective would be for DCTV to create a vibrant space, including resources and networking, for individuals and organisations to develop their media in line with their objectives, and for a variety of community media types, including digital, to experiment, interact and build together.

---

<sup>20</sup> DCTV Live streaming via YouTube is being tested here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNUVEn3bXW4>

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.language.ie/>

<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting the Ballymun Communications, a key supplier of programmes to DCTV, with the Irish Film Institute (IFI) is currently producing an archive of its programmes up to 2003, funded through the BAI, to be launched in mid 2023.

### **3. Community Participation**

The specific question posed by the legislation refers to the extent to which the local community or community of interest is “facilitated in the active participation by it in the compilation and transmission of the programme material and supplied pursuant to a community content provision contract.” The research Steering Group agreed that the issue of community participation should be interpreted in the widest manner possible.

The research findings are as follows.

#### **Participation in DCTV governance and structures**

The emergence of community television in Dublin was driven by community-based development-oriented individuals and organisations. At the centre was a group of volunteer activists who focused primarily on media as a means to achieve empowerment goals, in the context of both the production process and the output; and these were joined by a range of community based organisations engaging in a wider range of activities, who recognised media as a means to reinforce these activities. Together, and in collaboration with similar groups elsewhere in Ireland, they decided to seek legislation that would enable them to broadcast as a community channel. The process was long and at times arduous, and demanded a high degree of dedication from many individuals and community organisations including very significant volunteer time.

Thus, strong community participation was built into the dynamics of DCTV even before its foundation. While this did not ensure that the eventual institutional, production and dissemination structures would embody active participation, it did set it in a positive direction.

As a membership-based cooperative, the legal structures enabled wide participation from the community, which was defined in its founding statute to include everyone resident in the greater Dublin area. Between 2008 and 2013, DCTV grew to over 250 members, each paying a modest subscription fee.

In its Cooperative Society rules, membership of DCTV is open to all residents of wider Dublin who agree with its goals and ethos. The Committee is elected by the membership, one vote per member, with a degree of rotation every year, and annual accounts are published. As such, governance is in principle open equally to all members. As an organisation that actively seeks volunteers, almost all DCTV activities are open to direct participation by members.

With regard specifically to the compilation and transmission of content, even before launch, three Programme Sub-groups were created by the Board, open to all members, with the task of identifying programme content and producers in three segments, community, education and local governance. Other sub-groups were formed for defined purposes, including a Scheduling Sub-group, to build the individual schedules and prepare them for broadcast. However, especially during Phase 2, these tasks tended to return back to the Board and key volunteers.

#### **Participation in media production and dissemination**

Apart from participation in governance and management, the goal was to enable members to participate in content planning, production and dissemination. This was achieved, at different points, in a number of ways.

- 1 Offering Open Access: Members could directly request that DCTV transmit specific content over the NTL/Virgin cable, in an open access principle pursued by many community stations globally. The criteria for applicants were solely that the content should conform to the three DCTV principles of empowerment, participation, diversity.
- 2 Supporting Sound and Vision applications: With each Round of Sound and Vision, DCTV sought applications from its members to develop ideas for programmes, regardless of whether or not they had video production experience, and to submit them to DCTV for consideration to broadcast. Often, DCTV staff worked closely with potential applicants, to further elaborate their ideas.
- 3 Membership training: During phase 1 especially, DCTV engaged in extensive training, which was taken up by several hundred people. This included, for a brief period, short accredited courses; three to twelve hours training in the use of the *Shopfront Studio*; and training as an integral part of productions with community organisations.
- 4 Technical content production assistance: Members could also request that DCTV become partners in production, with DCTV providing some or all of the equipment and technical expertise, on Sound and Vision funded or other projects. This also generated a stream of income for DCTV.
- 5 Providing low-cost or free studio and equipment, often with support. *The Shopfront Studio* was made available to member groups at low cost (if they had received funding) or for free, to make their own programmes; and DCTV staff were also there to offer support.

The above activities were most extensively available during Phase 1, but support continued for Sound and Vision applicants throughout, and some training and technical assistance were delivered in the second phase to the extent possible.

## 4. Viewership and Content Quality

In the above sections, some indications are given in passing of the volume of output generated by DCTV itself, including members supported to produce their own programmes, and by community producers using DCTV as the main broadcaster. But what about accessing these programmes, their quality and relevance to the audience? An exploration of these issues is also a central part of this research.

### Viewer Access

For DCTV, and community television generally, success is not about *maximising* audience size. Nowhere in the goals of DCTV does it suggest that it seeks to maximise the number of viewers.

Rather, its goals are more broadly to generate social benefits, much of which springs from participation in a diverse range of activities pursued by the station as described in the previous section. Such participation is more likely to have an impact on DCTV's target groups in terms of social benefit, than viewing content on its own.

At the same time, attracting viewers is important since the content generated is also designed to encourage social change and empowerment, by producing practically useful content, disseminating information on issues that otherwise are not covered, and raising awareness on neglected issues.

DCTV is broadcast by Virgin Media on cable Channel 802. For commercial reasons, figures are unavailable in terms of households passed or subscriptions. Thus, there are immediate access issues for a significant proportion of Greater Dublin residents.

First, they must have access to the Virgin Media cable network; second, they must be subscribers; and third, they must seek out DCTV at Channel 802, a number well beyond the usual channels scrolled through. Furthermore, technical issues since 2019 have meant that for much of the period, only a very limited set of programmes was available and there were interruptions to the service. No viewership figures are available from Virgin Media, but they are likely to be very low, especially during Phase 2.

However, several other means are available to access and view the programmes broadcast on DCTV.

DCTV has supported online access, through its Website, both streaming and on-demand. No figures are available from Phase 1 regarding the extent of usage. Such online access has also been interrupted in recent years, and has also not been promoted, though a plan is now being developed to restore them.

However, some figures are available from commercial websites that have been used as another means to view content. The following three examples are among the most popular.

*DoleTV* was a DCTV series, produced by volunteers between 2011 and 2013, many in the *Shopfront Studio*. It comprised 64 segments varying from one to fifteen minutes in length, covering a range of satirical, humorous, cultural and serious topics, from short comedy sketches to music, to an interview with the then governor of Mountjoy Prison. The total number of views on You Tube since production to the time of writing comes to over 267,000.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> They can be seen here, as can the number of views: <https://www.youtube.com/@doletv802>

Figure 1: Rebecca Brady sings, as passers-by glance in



Figure 2: John Lonergan in the Shopfront Studio



*Ballymun Communications*, a founding DCTV member, produced a series called *Summer in The Mun*, with 44 segments ranging from just over one minute to over 20 minutes in length. These have recorded over 125,000 views on YouTube since they were launched.<sup>24</sup>

*Community of Independents* recorded and interviewed dozens of musicians and bands, in the DCTV studio and live, from 2011 to 2013, building up a series of 44 segments, from three minutes to almost an hour in length, including some of the earliest recordings of now well-known musicians. It has received almost 97,000 hits on YouTube.<sup>25</sup>

A former Chair of DCTV, based on a review of the figures, estimates that DCTV programmes have had over 2 million views on YouTube.

Apart from the online commercial platforms, many community television producers find other ways to reach their audiences. Some have their own websites, where the full programmes can be viewed; such as Ballymun Communications and Near TV. NVTV in Belfast also rebroadcasts some of them. There are also community screenings, as was the case with *The Health Effect*, produced by Near TV and Northside Partnership,<sup>26</sup> and most Ballymun Communication productions. Ballymun will also soon have a searchable archive of all its programmes to 2003, available through the BAI, many of which were broadcast first on DCTV.

These are especially valuable as they can gain direct access to the targeted communities and groups. The series *Romancing Ireland*, produced by the community producer eurAV (see CTV Story *Romancing Ireland*), make innovative use of social media both to promote participation in the programme and later viewing.

Several productions, usually by professional film makers, have also been entered for competitions reaching wider audiences and winning prizes.

Concerning the volume of programmes, or their total duration, produced by or for DCTV since its foundation, accurate figures are also unavailable.

Certainly, especially during Phase 1, many hundreds of hours were filmed by DCTV itself, including by the large number of volunteers who were trained in the Temple Bar studios. When the financial crisis hit the channel, DCTV's own programme archives were dispersed; but those currently available on YouTube (spread across many channels), and especially on VIMEO, offer some indication. While

<sup>24</sup> They can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/@SummerInTheMun>

<sup>25</sup> They can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/@INDEPENDENTS2011>

<sup>26</sup> See CTV Story 5 in the Annex.

the DCTV channel on YouTube contains 80 items (most series have their own channels) on Vimeo, a total of 1,286 items can be viewed, covering a vast range of topics and most produced by volunteers trained by DCTV. The last was uploaded about ten years ago. The archival value of these is enormous, documenting slices of Dublin life during a period when Ireland was recovering from the financial crash.

## Content Relevance

This research, following the 2009 Act, conducted a survey to examine the opinion of members regarding whether the content produced “specifically addresses the interests of their community”. The results of the survey of DCTV members are presented here. The survey, undertaken online using a targeted list of known and active members, yielded 24 responses. While this number is relatively low, DCTV (due to technical issues) has been broadcasting a limited set of programmes for some years, and viewership *per se* would have been low. In earlier years, there were far more viewers, and indeed far more viewers have accessed the programmes through online platforms such as YouTube. The results below thus represent only a small number of DCTV members over the years, or of those who have seen the programmes. Nevertheless, they offer valuable insights into the types of programmes considered relevant. The survey posed the question concerning the relevance of content as follows:

*“DCTV broadcasts programmes on a variety of themes, grouped below under a number of headings. To what extent is each of these relevant and interesting to your organisation and/or your community?”*

The table below ranks them in order of relevance.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 2: Relevance of DCTV Content Themes (N=24)**

Programme Theme	Relevance (max = 100%)
History and heritage	89%
Community development activities & projects	85%
Music, arts and culture	81%
Media literacy	80%
Migration and new communities	72%
Environment and climate change	65%
Older people	59%
Traveller community	59%
Children and young people	56%
Alternative global news	53%
Disability and able-bodied	53%
News from communities around the world	46%
Local sports	40%

It is difficult to discern clear patterns, but in general local news and content (except for sport) is valued over external and international news. However, it should be noted that they were asked about the relevance of *existing* themes broadcast now, or in the past by DCTV; as distinct from which themes, in general, members might find most relevant.

Respondents had an opportunity to comment on which additional themes should be covered. Full comments are reproduced in Annex 1, with an edited version below (emphasis added):

- There is a desperate need for, **ground-up, stories and analysis**, and new forms of connecting with local issues that are participative, sustained and meaningful.

<sup>27</sup> The four responses were: *Very relevant*; *Somewhat relevant*; *Slightly relevant*; *Not relevant*. A score of 100% would indicate that all respondents regarded the theme as *Very Relevant*; and a score of 0% would indicate that all respondents regarded it as *Not Relevant*.



- There is clearly a market for **well-produced social and political commentary** in Ireland; DCTV should look into how this content is made cheaply and how Youtuber-type set ups can lead to it producing **high octane current affair shows**;
- DCTV plays a strong role in **providing a platform for social inclusion** of potentially vulnerable or less represented groups, such as LGBT+ or minority faiths;
- Innovative programming which offers fresh insights into promoting and maintaining good **mental health** at community level is vital;
- **Emerging artists** in the fields of sculpture, painting and animation;
- **Radio on TV; Protests; Slow tv; Photography; Political proceedings (local democracy)**;
- **Biodiversity.**

There are too few comments to discern or establish clear patterns here, but three do reference the potential for covering local news and issues relating to local governance.

### Content Quality

Here the research, following the Broadcasting Act, is to survey members regarding “the quality of the programme material.”

The quality of media outputs is not a simple concept. In the case of community television, it is particularly complex, since there is a strong emphasis on the *production process* as well as on the output itself. Thus the quality of the process of production – to which those who simply view the output would have only limited access – is extremely important and must be assessed on criteria quite distinct from those used for output. Those who were targeted for the survey would have been involved in some way in the production of DCTV outputs, and hence could reasonably be expected to have informed opinions on most aspects of quality, including evidence from the output itself that the production process was participatory and empowering.

This complexity was reflected in the questions put to DCTV members, the responses to which are presented below. Members were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with a set of statements. The options given were: *Strongly agree; Agree somewhat; Neutral; Disagree somewhat; Strongly Disagree*. A score of 100% indicates that all strongly agreed with the statement; and a score of zero would mean that all strongly disagreed. The responses are presented in descending order.

**Table 3: DCTV Members' views on key features (N=24)**

Statement	Level of Agreement: max = 100%
“DCTV covers topics that other media somewhat neglect.”	85%
"Community participation at all stages is central to community television."	77%
“The process of making community TV programmes is as important as the final product.”	74%
"DCTV should also be about fun and experimentation."	74%
“Not all DCTV programmes are made by television professionals, and our appreciation of them is different.”	73%
"DCTV brings a unique approach to its programme making and its scheduling."	68%
“DCTV disseminates programmes that are of interest to me.”	55%
“DCTV programmes in general have good production values.”	49%
“The overall quality of DCTV broadcasting is high.”	40%

Members strongly believe that DCTV covers topics other neglect; and also that participation in the station is very important, and they extend this to the process of production, which should go beyond output to become a process of fun and experimentation for those involved.

Perhaps the most notable responses are to statements about whether production values are good, and broadcasting quality is high, with a relatively high level of disagreement among members. However, there is a much higher level of agreement that the appreciation of DCTV programmes is different, since they are not all made by professionals, would suggest that expectations, and perhaps perceived requirements, for production values and broadcasting quality are lower. The fact that DCTV's broadcast signal on cable has been erratic in recent years could also partly explain this result.

These issues are picked up in some members' responses to the question of how DCTV could improve its programmes and activities. Some are quite lengthy, and are reproduced in the Annex. They are summarised or paraphrased below.

Several cover the issue of quality and participation:

- While there must a minimal acceptable level of production values (which also costs money), to value this over content would a mistake in general - high quality values can even hide poor content; and in the case of community television, the quality of the production process is also vital.
- DCTV must validate both process and production qualities, they are not mutually exclusive. People's sense of what is good, well-made media, is hugely advanced these days, and they know the difference.
- While participation is a central concern, it is also wise to have some co-production opportunities with independent professionals, to broaden training opportunities, help to raise production values and tackle important social issues in a manner that mainstream TV might avoid.

Others cover concerns about content and reaching audiences:

- DCTV should 'de-platform': forego a broadcast led model in favour of no particular platform, but enhanced inputs, outputs and outcomes for communities involved. Make TV for any platform, in a non-linear world where cable or broadcast are irrelevant to many. Find funding, or operate without funding, for streams that can claim ownership of the ethos of community media in the online space; and counter the fact-denying media.
- There should be one community station for the whole of Ireland, that accepts members from all over.
- Uploading programmes to the channel should be easier.
- The capacity to deliver Video on Demand should be improved.

The diversity of these comments suggests an ongoing and healthy discussion within DCTV, and a desire to talk about the future; as well as the challenges involved in mapping the way forward.

On quality and production standards, it is also worth noting that several productions first broadcast on DCTV have been nominated and won awards. Some, such as *The Silver Branch* and *Meeting with Ivor* were produced by professional film makers, have been screened in film festivals and won awards.<sup>28</sup> For community producers there are fewer opportunities and awards given. But *The Storyteller*, a 10 part multi-cultural children's series produced in 2010 by DCTV with SPIRASI, won a media category award for the 2011 *Metro Éireann's Media & Multicultural Member Awards*.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> For instance, nominations and awards for The Silver Branch <https://www.silverbranch.ie/the-silver-branch/>

<sup>29</sup> See

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/multicultural-awards-take-place-in-dublin-following-three-year-break-1.630973>

## 5. Does DCTV generate benefits?

DCTV's goals are to contribute, as a membership-based organisation, to empowerment, participation and diversity. Creating and disseminating media are the means to achieve this. Like many CBOs, DCTV focuses a lot more energy on trying to achieve these goals than on gathering evidence that it is actually succeeding. Certainly having the skills and resources to do this is a second-level priority in these organisations, perhaps understandable. But generating such evidence is critical to securing support from others.

The above offers some evidence, though only loosely quantified, of some distinct types of benefits:

- It is reasonable to conclude that the training of DCTV members (some literally coming in off the street), including member organisations, in the basics of video/television production and editing contributes to vocational skills, enhances creativity and significantly enhanced media and digital literacy. Several hundred received such training and mentoring during Phase 1 of DCTV, and this continued at a lower level later. Though no breakdown is available, these included immigrant groups, people with disability and many groups facing disadvantage.
- DCTV itself produced a very large volume of video output, some of it highly inventive in what was a new genre of 'street' content in Ireland, though often with minimal production values and produced at very low cost; community producers, often facilitated by DCTV (including by enabling them to funds from Sound & Vision), produced yet more output. While the benefits generated by such content are nearly impossible to identify or to quantify, it is again reasonable to assume, based for instance on the number of views on YouTube and the interest shown at community level, that these have had a positive impact on their target communities, raising issues and building identity.
- DCTV also broadcast content with production values as high and higher than most mainstream productions, again enabling them to get funding, and covering issues that mainstream television declined to cover, and establishing links between mainstream and community television. These were produced at a higher, though relatively still modest, cost. Such programmes contribute to the diversity of content available.
- As a whole, the content produced by and for DCTV covered a very wide variety of themes, including many of them bearing on groups facing disadvantage. They thus contributed to media diversity, and drew attention to many neglected and/or minority themes and issues.

As noted, the above are, inevitably, difficult to quantify and partly anecdotal. Precisely because of the challenges involved in quantifying benefits, the BAI, in partnership with the community radio sector, developed a community media Social Benefit Framework and methodology.

### The Social Benefit Framework

The idea behind the Social Benefit Framework,<sup>30</sup> and the associated evaluation methodology, was to enable the generation of evidence of these benefits, and to enable them, to some degree, to be quantified or at least described. This research has deployed a part of that methodology: a set of 'CTV stories' are documented, each describing a specific CTV output written usually by the producers

---

<sup>30</sup> The Framework and further documentation can be downloaded here:  
<http://www.bai.ie/en/download/134920>

themselves, following an agreed format. The Framework defines the Social Benefit of community media as follows:

“Benefits to individuals or collective actors in the community that enhance their lives socially, culturally or economically, or in terms of development, empowerment and/or well-being, that otherwise would not have come about.”

Six types of social benefit that can be generated by community media are then specified, each with a set of indicators. Based on the evidence of this research, the most relevant for DCTV are presented in the table below. This assessment is necessarily tentative. The empirical evidence available has comprised the documented CTV Stories (See Annex 2), the interviews with DCTV members and community producers, and other data, documentation and publications.

Drawing on this evidence, each indicator of social benefits is scored on a scale of 0 to 5, where:

- **A score of 0** indicates there is *no evidence the DCTV generated benefits in this area*; to:
- **A score of 5** indicates there is reasonable evidence that *significant social benefit was generated for its target group in this area*.

While this is a crude measurement, based on largely qualitative experience, it nevertheless offers a reasonable summary pending further work on this in the future.

**It is important to note that this table is based mainly on the model developed and implemented during DCTV’s Phase 1.** This is important, since it was not possible, during Phase 2, when DCTV lacked a studio or physical space, to generate many of the benefits indicated below.

The DCTV Stories presented in Annex 2 also offer much concrete evidence of the types of benefits outlined below.

**Table 4: DCTV’s Social Benefits generated during Phase 1**

Social Benefits	Indicators of Social Benefits of each Type	Score 0-5	Comment
1. <u>Individuals</u> , especially minorities and those marginalised, are <u>growing in confidence and creativity</u> and/or <u>reinforcing a sense of belonging</u> , directly from engaging with the station.	Indicators relevant to DCTV are:		
	1.1. <b>placements</b> from a community organisation working with marginalised/disadvantaged people	1	DCTV had some placements from other community projects. DCTV excelled in this, mobilising dozens of volunteers especially in production.
	1.2. <b>station volunteers</b> making programmes and in administration and support	4	Most volunteers received training at low or no charge. The number of disadvantaged is unknown.
	1.3. <b>training</b> of marginalised/disadvantaged individuals; and taking in interns from external entities	4	Virgin/NTL viewer figures were probably low but online were higher.
2. <u>Individuals are enhancing their employment prospects</u> , through gaining skills and confidence, reinforcing	1.4. <b>isolated or marginalised individuals</b> viewing programmes addressing their interests	2	
	SB 2 is being achieved through...		
	2.1. <b>media training</b> that enhances vocational prospects.	2	A small number of individuals are known to have gained a media job. Reasonable to conclude that volunteers enhanced job prospects but no direct evidence.
	2.2. <b>volunteer</b> opportunities that enhance employment prospects through personal development and skills acquisition	1	
		5	

community identity	2.3. <b>staff</b> experience and training that enhance their vocational prospects.		All had some experience, but all greatly expanded that and maintain work in media/creative sector
<u>3. Community members are informed and aware</u> of what is happening around their community	SB3 achieved through the use by the members of information broadcast by the station, in the form of... 3.1. regular bulletins of <b>everyday information</b> traffic, weather etc. 3.2. specific <b>social bulletins</b> such as death notices, social events, etc. 3.3. <b>transactional information services</b> such as Job Search or Marketplace delivered free or at low-cost	0 0 0	DCTV never engaged in these, although it was part of the original plan to do so.
<u>4. Community members are responding more effectively to issues</u> —local to global—because they have access to diverse viewpoints and to more and better information	SB 4 is achieved through the station: 4.1. <b>producing/broadcasting content</b> and format that addresses local to global issues, with diverse views presented in a balanced and constructive format, in studio and outside broadcasting 4.2. <b>providing facilities and resources</b> for volunteers to do the same, covering issues of local interest and concern 4.3. <b>referencing local advocacy groups</b> when reporting on news items 4.4. <b>actively engaging in the community</b> through projects, advocacy and interactions on issues of local interest and concern	4 5 2 2	DCTV produced a large volume of programmes on a huge variety of social, economic and cultural issues. Quality and balance was uneven. It also broadcast relevant content from other countries. DCTV made studios, equipment, training and support available to volunteers; at the same time enhancing media literacy. Some DCTV programmes contributed to these; mostly it was through enabling community producers (SB 5 below)
<u>5. Collective actors (CBOs, NGOs etc.)</u> are facilitated, and reinforced in their capacity <u>to achieve their goals</u>	SB5 is achieved through the station... 5.1 providing <b>airtime</b> to local CBOs to discuss and present their work, issues and requests to the public 5.2 facilitating <b>CBOs to produce</b> dedicated regular slots or entire programmes, including training and facilities 5.3 <b>actively collaborating</b> , beyond broadcasting, with collective actors for advocacy and joint work on issues relating to social benefit.	1 4 1	DCTV itself hosted outputs In which CBOs presented issues, but mostly not live and with limited feedback DCTV enabled CBOs, through its studio, training and support for Sound & Vision applications, to produce programmes. DCTV did engage with CBOs in some joint advocacy but it was limited.
<u>6. The community sense of identity and cohesiveness is enhanced</u> through interaction and collective action.	SB6 is achieved through the station... 6.1. bringing <b>diverse community groups into interactive programmes</b> to discuss local issues, including dealing with conflicts and tensions 6.2. helping to <b>mobilise community members</b> on issues of concern locally, for joint action, advocacy, etc. in an inclusive manner	2 1	Some community producers, such as Near TV and Ballymun Communications, engage in dialogue type outputs, facilitated by DCTV. DCTV itself did not mobilise the community in this way. It assisted through supporting CBOs etc.

The above exercise does not pretend to arrive at firm quantitative conclusions and aggregating the scores would serve little purpose. Rather, it is illustrative, pointing to areas of strength of the particular model of community television developed by DCTV, mainly during Phase 1, and also envisaged in a future phase of growth. As noted, Annex 2 can be consulted for concrete examples of these benefits.



## 6. Conclusions

### **DCTV's evolving model of Community Television**

The model of community television that evolved from DCTV's launch in 2009 until 2013, phase 1, was, in terms of fulfilling its mandate and goals, highly successful in many respects. Through a process of trial and error, it developed multiple ways of engaging with its target community, the residents of wider Dublin.

Beginning with a large studio space requiring multiple skills and personnel to operate, it moved to a *Shopfront Studio* located in Dublin's central cultural quarter. This was relatively simple to use and, because of its location and on street access and visible studio, was a welcoming space, accessible to a large number of people including many passers-by. Dublin City Council recognised its value and offered it some support during these years.

DCTV encouraged and enabled extensive participation by the target community, at many levels, going far beyond what was indicated in the BAI license i.e. participation in the compilation and dissemination of content. For DCTV, participation is not just about fulfilling its mandate. Rather, a very significant proportion of the value generated by DCTV derives directly from a variety of opportunities available to members.

Participation in DCTV training, productions and events were of direct benefit to many people, at least several hundred. Skills developed included in media production and editing skills, which in some cases were put to later use in a vocational and employment context. For many, it also contributed to media literacy: it is widely acknowledged that engaging directly in media production and dissemination significantly enhances participants' understanding of the impact of media and how to engage critically with media content. For some, media production itself is also a personally empowering activity, a means of self-expression and confidence building.

DCTV was also producing a remarkable volume of programmes, of different styles, production qualities and content. The vast majority were produced by volunteers; but DCTV and its community-based producers also developed a large number of more professionally produced outputs usually, but not always, supported by the Sound and Vision scheme. A smaller number of programmes were produced by professional film makers who, while often approaching DCTV as a condition of accessing Sound and Vision funding, also offered their time and resources to DCTV and its members.

The key components of the model of production and training comprised the combination of: a small flexible production studio, visible and accessible to the public; equipped with user friendly media tools and tailored instructional materials; initial basic training at low or no cost; and some ongoing support for community productions. These were brought together with the Open Formats approach to programme making, and resulted in hundreds of Dublin people and groups producing huge volumes of video and television, in pursuit of their own interests and under the umbrella of the DCTV ethos.

An area of relative weakness was the dissemination of content and promotion of this content, including building a wide and varied viewership.

Part of the problem can be attributed to the constraints of the agreement between DCTV and NTL/Virgin. Despite some early efforts, a more prominent position on Virgin's EPG was never

secured. NTL, at the time of negotiations, understandably viewed DCTV as an untested concept – it had not by then built up a significant bank of content for launch, and it had no secure source of investment or income. Yet being so low on the EPG – Channel 802 – also made it difficult to attract and build up a viewership, that might then justify a more prominent position.

At the same time, for DCTV itself, extending the content to a wider audience was a lower priority, especially as staff came under pressure to support the production end. Even maintaining this minimal presence on Video Media required a considerable amount of work and equipment, much of it undertaken by volunteers or by staff as unpaid activities, in terms of developing the schedules, ensuring they were in the appropriate format, and delivering a reliable signal to play-out on the NTL/Virgin system. In more recent years, the technical challenges, as NTL was moving to new technologies – and with the intervention of COVID - also proved too much for DCTV to supply a regular quality signal.

DCTV had its own streaming service for a period, in a fortuitous arrangement with a private company, but on-demand access was left mainly to the community producers themselves to arrange and was never systematically available in a searchable form.

Overall, then, a significant weakness of DCTV was its inability to deliver to its members a reliable means to access the content.

Within a couple of years of its launch, DCTV had achieved some institutional sustainability. Management and governance processes were operating reasonably effectively. It was fulfilling its reporting requirements to the BAI, and completing administrative and audit requirements, and indeed continued to do so through Phase 2. Yet, in the absence of core funding, undertaking the administrative and institutional tasks is an ongoing challenge, involving significant voluntary effort and/or (in the past) a diversion of the energies of paid staff. The fact that DCTV has managed to pull through the crisis since 2013, and set itself back on its feet, ready for a new phase, indicates a very high level of commitment and competence among its core volunteers.

It was financial sustainability that was, and remains, the biggest challenge, and, as indicated above, it impacts on all other areas.

Between 2008 and 2013, DCTV generated an income of between €190,000 and €310,000 annually, over two thirds derived from the Sound and Vision scheme, directly or indirectly. The remaining income was made up from a combination of sources, including grants and projects from Dublin City Council, trades unions and the European Union; some training provided under contract to training/education bodies; and a small amount of contracted service provision. Lacking a source for core income, it combined volunteer activity with a diversion of staff to core activities. DCTV was surviving hand-to-mouth, uncertain of any future income streams. It was attempting to make long-term plans, and to diversify income, and was slowly succeeding. But the pursuit of these long-term plans, and sustaining a core of full-time staff, made it even more vulnerable, and the failure to win any grants for two successive Sound and Vision rounds was enough to almost close to down.

Phase 2 was a period of recovery as the debts were repaid; its own productions were cut back though it continued to facilitate community producers with the Sound and Vision scheme, enabling some new content to be developed, and to broadcast content provided. Many of the same Board

members remained active throughout and are now attempting to apply the lessons learned, in a new phase of growth. It was also a period of reflection, allowing new ideas to emerge.

Thus, in addition to having left its indebtedness behind in Phase 2, new thinking and resources are being brought into a renewal phase.

There is now agreement among members that a core goal for DCTV must be to provide a space, both virtual but also physical, in which community organisations and media activist can exchange ideas, develop proposals, experiment with new formats and technology, and build itself back as a network of people and groups. This requires, they believe, a re-imagination of the rationale of community television, taking into consideration the emergence of digital platforms and of media generally.

With funding from the new Social Benefit Sound and Vision Round, DCTV is rebuilding strong relationships with a number of key partner community organisations, across a range of groups, with the explicit intention of nurturing strong relationships, as active members, that will yield a significant volume of new content but also new engagement and sustained participation.

DCTV is thus strategically rebuilding, including how it is perceived among members and others. It has engaged a consultancy that works with social change organisations, with a brief that will sustain it into the future, both in terms of its core empowerment roles and its role as a media service provider in a changing world. As part of this the Website will be relaunched, and they are working on developing a video-on-demand and streaming service.

Yet it is still confronting the same challenges that were partly responsible for forcing it into receivership in 2013, and much of what it seeks to achieve is still beyond its available resources. For instance, they lack the funding to systematically organise and enable searchable access to their very extensive archive of programmes, which would at the same time facilitate a huge range of content for re-editing, incorporation and re-broadcasting. And realising the goal of providing and managing a space, a wider media hub, to enable the interaction and synergies between the many groups involved in community video, television and digital production in Dublin is still a long way off.

## **Conclusions in Brief**

The overall conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. DCTV grew from roots in the community voluntary sector in Dublin, led by those who believe that communication tools can be deployed to empower communities. From the beginning it saw itself as a component of the community development sector and media only in so far as that was its chosen tool. Its ethos, goals, processes and activities were, and remain, all about helping individuals and communities achieve their goals.
2. The model developed by DCTV, in particular *Shopfront Studio*, succeeded in engaging directly with large numbers from among its target groups and individuals. It energised and motivated a huge number of people, as volunteers and as activists, in its first six years, building media skills and creative capacities, including vocationally-relevant; helping to empower a diverse range of individuals and groups, including disadvantaged groups such as migrants, people with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. It produced a huge volume of programmes, some with the highest production qualities, others produced in studio with lower production qualities but generally adequate to the task; and many

more focusing strongly on the production process, and on building skills, and on reflecting back to its own target groups their interests and values.

4. Phase 2 offered members fewer activities to participate in, and hence was of lower interest among members. It has been sustained for the last decade by a small number of committee volunteers, who managed successfully to pay off the debts and regroup for the future.
5. DCTV developed good governance standards, in encouraging and enabling its members to participate at all levels. Its administrative capacities were adequate to requirements, reporting to the BAI and fulfilling the obligations of a registered cooperative.
6. Throughout, ensuring that the target audience can view the content, and encouraging the audience – the people of Dublin - to view it, has been a weakness. This was partly because of the narrow nature of the ‘must-carry’ obligation that can be imposed on the cable operator, Virgin Media. But it was also a consequence of the huge emphasis that DCTV placed on production and on supporting community groups and individuals to create their own content, perhaps to the detriment of other areas. The significant cost, time and expertise needed to support even basic broadcasting over cable became clear during the second phase of DCTV, when sources of income dried up.
7. The Social Benefit generated by DCTV, especially during its first phase, was significant for the target groups and members who engaged directly; the benefits are likely to have been strong and sustained. Some of the potential benefit for wider audiences in Dublin was forgone through the absence of a reliable means to reach them. DCTV enabled many groups to form and engage in collective activities, and to begin networking with each other. For community producers, such as Ballymun Communications, Near TV and others, the benefits of being able to access Sound & Vision, and being able to broadcast their programmes, was very significant, enabling them to multiply their own local development and empowerment work.
8. All of this was achieved on a relatively modest base of income which, however, became harder and harder to sustain.
9. DCTV is now embarking on a process of rebuilding, renewing and strengthening its relationships with its community of members, revamping its dissemination systems via broadcast and online, and in the future looking to provide a space for community media to flourish in a digital age.
10. The key challenge facing DCTV, since the very beginning, is the absence of a source of core support, that can cover basic staff requirements and basic costs associated with running a broadcasting and production channel as a registered cooperative and membership-based organisation. Were these in place, DCTV, building on its history, has shown that it can attract additional support, generate income and cover the costs of supporting a diverse range of community television content, engaging in outreach and providing training and skills development.

## Annex 1: Research Survey Comments in Full

The following comprise comments obtained from the survey.

“Please add additional areas or themes that you feel DCTV should focus on in their programming”:

“There is a desperate need for different, ground-up, stories and analysis, and new forms of connecting with these issues. RTÉ - whose job it might be - despite all their resources, seldom delve deeply into them and almost never engage with these groups in a participative, sustained and meaningful manner.”

“There is clearly a market for well-produced social and political commentary in Ireland, look at the success of things like the Tortoise Shack and the whole podcast revolution. DCTV should look into how this content is made cheaply and how Youtuber type set ups can lead to it doing high octane current affairs shows that pull in organic intellectuals and commentators from the broader milieu that can be identified online.”

“I believe that DCTV plays a strong role, also, in providing a platform for social inclusion of potentially vulnerable or less represented groups, such as LGBT+ or minority faiths.”

“I believe that because mental health is impacted negatively by new regulatory factors, exacerbated by technological 'advancement', innovative programming which offers fresh insights into promoting and maintaining good mental health at community level is vital.”

“Emerging artists in the fields of sculpture, painting and animation”

“Coding; Radio on the TV; Protests; Slow tv; Photography; Political proceedings (local democracy)”

“Biodiversity”

“Please comment on how DCTV could improve its programmes and activities to be more relevant to its target communities? What else could they be doing?”

Quality is always relative to what you are trying to achieve (as well as to the resources available). There is, of course, a minimal acceptable level of production values, but to value quality over content would be a mistake in general (indeed high quality values can sometimes hide poor content) and, in the case of community television, the quality of the production process is vital. Sometimes, when compared against mainstream media, the emphasis on the process, and what it brings to the people and communities involved, can look like poor production qualities, but a discerning audience will spot and appreciate what is going on - and then maybe get involved themselves.

Community participation is quite rightly a central concern for Community TV stations but it is also wise to create a small number of co-production opportunities with independent professionals to broaden training opportunities, help to raise production values and tackle important social issues in a manner that mainstream TV might avoid. Successful programmes (e.g. *Meetings with Ivor*), which are at first turned down by mainstream broadcasters but picked up by Community TV can subsequently end up on mainstream TV. With BAI Sound and Vision funding, Community TV can take intelligent risks, in the general community interest, which mainstream TV would typically avoid.

*Dole TV* programme was a high watermark. DCTV should ‘de-platform’, as long as funding and legislation support a move to de-platform. I have never seen DCTV on a TV screen. Ever. I live in cable land and am not a customer of a carrier. If carriage is not feasible on Saorview on weekends for Oireachtas TV then there is no hope for any other channels being FTA. Unless it is shop window channelisation from Sky, Challenge TV and Sky News promoting Sky bundles. De-platform. Make TV for any platform. Do not remain broadcast oriented in a non-linear world where the sticking to cable or broadcast is to the demise of the movement.

Recent DCU research quoted immigrant media groups seeking community TV productions on YouTube. Help funders see that broadcast is important to help prevent ‘silosation’ of audience down rabbit holes that lead to brainwashed news avoided fact-denying Trump supporters storm the Capitol. But if broadcast is not financially feasible in say the last 15 years then it will never be. Break the link. Get funded for streams or

operate below the funded level and gain ownership of the ethos of community media in the online space. Less the how to make and more the why we must make, this or that, under a community media content licence and AMARC charter guidelines.

Use of the term de-platform is not the dictionary use of the word. But is used to explain the jettisoning away from a broadcast led model in favour of no particular platform but enhanced inputs, outputs and outcomes for communities involved.

To quote the Third Cinema manifesto: "Pamphlet films, didactic films, report films, essay films, witness-bearing films - any militant form of expression is valid, and it would be absurd to lay down a set of aesthetic work norms. Be receptive to all that the people have to offer, and offer them the best; or, as Che put it, respect the people by giving them quality. This is a good thing to keep in mind in view of those tendencies which are always latent in the revolutionary artist to lower the level of investigation and the language of a theme, in a kind of neo-populism, down to levels which, while there may be those upon which the masses move, do not help them to get rid of the stumbling blocks left by imperialism."

DCTV is making a huge mistake if it is going to validate process over production qualities, they are not mutually exclusive. People's sense of what is well made and what is good media is hugely advanced these days, they know if something is off and if it is badly made - just because it was badly made with good intentions isn't enough. Also, people do not want to be associated with things that have low production standards, it can be embarrassing and make them feel unappreciated or reluctant.

There is a severe lack of leadership and professionalism from the DCTV board. It also seems very odd to have just two community tv stations in Ireland especially since Cork Community Television won't accept members from outside of Cork. There should be one station for the whole of Ireland. DCTV taking ten percent of funding from the BAI also makes it very difficult for the programme makers to deliver a professionally made show.

Make uploading programmes easier.

I feel that augmenting the TV broadcast offering with VOD is an important consideration - especially for younger audiences.



## Annex 2: Stories of DCTV Broadcasts

### Story 1: *A Finglas Story* (2023)

**Declan Cassidy, Programme Producer**

#### **Summary:**

*A Finglas Story*, in three 30 minute episodes funded by Sound and Vision, tracks the story of Finglas from a country village in the 1950s to the mature Dublin suburb of today, capturing the views of locals many of whom remember the huge culture shock of being moved out from the inner city. It deliberately invokes the modern day experience of migrants to Dublin as they try to find their feet in their new environment, as well as the need to nurture social cohesion. In three 30 minute episodes, it was produced in intense collaboration with the community, using large Facebook groups and other social media to identify ideas, gain feedback, enable activity and promote the outputs.

#### **Community issue addressed: Why make this programme?**

*A Finglas Story* is a timely contribution to this community, as rich oral history is on the brink of disappearing with the last of those who remember the pre-1950s village. Of special significance today is that the series highlights what was a successful model and process of social integration. The sudden expansion of the country village of Finglas was as much a culture shock for inner city Dubliners moving there as Ireland is likely to be now to newly arrived non-Irish nationals. Social cohesion is of paramount importance at this time when climate change, war and economic necessity sees Irish society faced with significant inward mobility; and internal challenges, fuelled by an environment of ‘fake news’ and disinformation, is leading to understandable disquiet in some sectors of the community.

This documentary is thus about the earlier generations of migrants into Finglas, from Dublin City Centre, how their concerns gradually gave way to collective community building, and what we can learn from this.

#### **Programme Content**

*A Finglas Story* is a documentary mini-series of three half-hour episodes. It covers the modern history of Finglas, from the 1940s when it was a country village of a few hundred people, to the modern, multicultural urban town that it is today. It documents the Dublin Corporation housing schemes of the 1950s and 1970s, a time that saw the farmlands disappear under estate upon estate of social housing that facilitated the relocation of inner-city Dubs from the tenements. Indeed, from that small village, it grew to its peak in 1979 with a population of 53,000. The series captures both the history and the oral heritage of the area.

Funded by Round 38 of the BAI’s Sound and Vision initiative, with a grant approaching €50,000 for the three episodes, under the genre of History/Heritage and Contemporary Society, it also had the financial support of Finglas Credit Union.

#### **How the community participates**

Getting the production of this project right, and making sure that the community was integrally involved, was particularly important to me, and not only because I was the producer. I was born and raised in Finglas. My father, James, was a well-known and well-respected artist and community

activist in the area and this sense of social responsibility was passed on to us children. *A Finglas Story*, therefore, uses our family, through our experiences and memories, as a central thread and introduction to the stories of the community at large.

### Using Facebook as tool to engage

The production, through close collaboration with the Finglas community, also establishes a participative model for community television production, engaging audiences in the process and using social media to draw the community into deeper participation in community television. At all stages of the process, the public – who, it was clear, would comprise the core viewing audience of the finished programme – were kept informed and engaged.

The entire project was planned and developed in close collaboration with the moderators and members of the 26,000-member strong Facebook Group *Finglas Memories*. I began the process by meeting with the Finglas Memories administrators. Having agreed upon the scope, I then reached out to the wider public through the Facebook Group, adding also the *Finglas Talks* Facebook group of a further 20,000 members; and a very active Finglas Heritage group of under 1,000 members. The anecdotes, memories and images that were submitted as a result of this outreach informed the application to the BAI.

Similarly, the Facebook groups were used to advertise the availability of community media production training during the course of project implementation. The training was overseen by EurAV European Audio Visual CLG, a non-profit social-development-through-media organisation of which I am a volunteer founding director. EurAV produced a short production course for eight trainees to complete online and for which they received a certificate.

EurAV's current sound recordist came through this process. He is legally blind and it is unlikely that he would have received the opportunity to work in this field outside of the community television framework that we have created.

### **Output Dissemination**

The project also innovated through developing integral links between the process of production and output dissemination.

### Dedicated social media platforms

An additional platform was developed to engage the local population throughout the process, by feedback of snippets of content as they were developed. This built on a previous BAI-funded community television project, *Romancing Ireland*, in which I had set up a dedicated website and Facebook page. By the end of the project, it had attracted almost 1,000 followers. Yet these followers were engaged only with this individual production. Learning from this, I decided to set up a personal profile, as a community television producer, on the main social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, so that followers would be 'collected' as a growing, engaged audience that new projects into the future could take advantage of.

With this in mind, I made use of the BAI's 'digital-first' concept (under which some content can be made available digitally prior to broadcasting) to share short clips of the interviews being recorded among the Facebook groups and across the social media platforms. These were humorous, poignant or generally interesting short clips that would not appear in the final programmes, but which served as 'teasers' to engage potential viewers. Each clip carried 'hashtags' to flag DCTV, the BAI and my

producer profile tag *DeclanCreative*. This proved highly successful. For example, one clip – a humorous anecdote about the damage caused to windows by the heavy traffic and overhead flight path in Finglas - was viewed by 8,488 people on Facebook (<https://fb.watch/j0oDLbNeOo/>), by 574 people on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CoR9HNbDDSp/>) and by 15,700 people on TikTok (<https://www.tiktok.com/@declancreative/video/7196648008895712517>). Precise viewer numbers are impossible to determine since the clips would have been downloaded and shared beyond the *DeclanCreative* profiles. However, the numbers of *A Finglas Story* clip viewed by March 2023 are 25,200 on Facebook, 9,250 on Instagram and 64,000 on TikTok – a total just short of 100,000 views. There are 1,300 users following *DeclanCreative* community media work on Facebook, just short of 800 on Instagram and 16,000 followers among the difficult-to-engage ‘Generation Z’ youth of TikTok.

Finglas Heritage Group invited me out to show them some clips and they, in turn, contributed images and interviews. Dublin City Council community section got in touch and offered to have a public screening in Finglas in conjunction with the local GAA Club for the Bealtaine festival in May 2023, a prospect that has allowed me to forge a strong network of community contacts to inform my future community TV production.

The three programmes will be broadcast on DCTV’s Virgin 802 Channel during 2023.

#### Promoting community television in the community

Essentially, the process has been a positive introduction of DCTV to a large Dublin community. *A Finglas Story*, then, demonstrates the unique and powerful role that community TV can play in reaching communities, involving them in the process and telling stories that are crucially important on a local level, but that would not get told in the macro-media world. As a former journalist, it’s my strong belief that our polarised society sees the media on one side or the other of the fence. Community TV, however, with its grassroots reach, represents the grass that grows beneath the fence, reaching both sides.

The dissemination and broadcasting of *A Finglas Story* is, to me, a collaborative endeavour – involving both broadcast on DCTV (and the other community TV stations across the island, such as Cork and Northern Visions) as well as dissemination online. The community TV channel audiences can be engaged and grown by the efforts of producers like myself, reinforcing the efforts of the communities themselves and of the channel. As a member of DCTV, I find the channel’s engagement to be very inclusive and transparent. There is a sense of common purpose, with the station supplying the broadcast platform and support while I, as a member, create content with the community, driven by the same ethos that underscores all of our activity. In this sense, dissemination and publicity is, I believe, increasingly valuable to the impact.

#### **Outcome for the community**

The above social media dissemination numbers are, taken together, impressive. Beneath these figures can be seen the unique value of community television, produced in such a collaborative ‘grassroots’ fashion. Each of the *A Finglas Story* posts has attracted comments, and replies to those comments, initiating a process of a community in conversation. I believe that, in an increasingly polarised society, this type of conversation can form the social adhesive that binds communities together and heals divisions when they emerge. The making of the programme, in this collaborative

and inclusive way, also allowed the community to get involved, to contribute content and to shape the telling of their story; i.e. to give the community a sense of ownership of it.

Sound and Vision-funded projects such as *A Finglas Story* offer me the scope and resources to work alongside DCTV in areas about which I'm passionate – climate action, social equity and media literacy. These same values are at the heart of DCTV and supported by Sound and Vision, so a synergy exists.

Each of my BAI funded for DCTV productions has addressed one of those three areas. *A Finglas Story*, for example, establishes a sense of pride of place for a community that historically has suffered bias at the hands of the media. It recalls a model of successful integration at a time when such a model is needed to serve a new influx of people into the community and it captures an important oral heritage that would otherwise be lost. The project has also strengthened cross community links and networks due to the collaboration that it required. This process, with its introduction of DCTV to a vast demographic across community, has also laid the foundation for engagement with community television. In 1988 I started a newspaper in Finglas to give our community our own voice that told our side of things in the face of a negative mainstream press. Community television, alongside digital versioning for online, is that voice today – for areas like Finglas and for other minority or disadvantaged communities of place or interest.

## Story 2: *Ignite*. (2016)

**Susan Jackson. Producer.**

### **Summary:**

The *Ignite* three-part documentary, funded by the BAI's Sound and Vision scheme in 2015, explored and documented the experiences of a group of artists with disabilities who were collaborating together on the wider nationally funded Ignite Initiative. The goal of *Ignite* was the creation of a high calibre, mainstream work, that blurred the lines in a positive sense between mainstream art and disability, marking a watershed moment in Ireland's cultural and social history.

### **Community Issues Addressed:**

In the *Ignite* documentary series we addressed the issues of the creativity of artists with disabilities, focusing on their abilities rather than disabilities. The context was the wider Ignite Initiative, Ireland's largest ever investment in Arts and Disability, and generated the country's most ambitious showcasing of talent and creativity from the aforementioned community.

We looked at the artists' backgrounds and experiences and, in the case of lead artists Jez Colbourne, Aideen Barry and Simon McKeown, what it meant to be an artist with a disability - but how, first and foremost, what it meant to be an artist. We explored arts and disability as it relates not just to the performers and artists but also audiences with disabilities and looked at the ways in which the respective venues accommodated this section of the community in a bid to truly be inclusive. The professional and academic opportunities afforded to artists with disabilities were also explored. By talking directly to the participants and not about them, we challenged public perceptions of people with disabilities in the arts, exploring the issue of human rights as it relates to people with disabilities. In episode two, attitudes towards disability and ambiguous Irish laws around sexuality and the right to marry were addressed, albeit subtly.

The wider Ignite Initiative comprised three collaborative commissions in Galway, Mayo and Cork, led by internationally recognised artists with disabilities. They worked with local disability groups, as well as other Irish artists and performers with disabilities. Each commission represented an investment of up to €60,000, and was funded by the Arts Council, Arts & Disability Ireland, Cork City Council, Galway City and County Councils, and Mayo County Council.

### **Programme Content/Genre:**

Produced across 2014 and 2015, it originated from *Citywide* (a volunteer DCTV programme which covered events in Dublin city) segments that covered arts and disability, including *Arts and Disability Ireland's* promotion of *Signs of a Diva* at Axis Ballymun. These led to the idea of doing a documentary series on the Ignite Initiative.

Each of *Ignite's* three episodes is 35 minutes in length. Each begins by interviewing one of the main Ignite partners (Arts and Disability Ireland in episode one, The Arts Council in episode two and the National Sculpture Factory in episode three). These present an overview of each commission and the overall Ignite project, providing a perfect jumping off point to explore the projects in depth. Each episode ends with the unveiling of the commissioned work at a designated local event.

*Episode One: Trickster (Galway)*. Incorporating sirens, a cherry picker, foghorns, cranes, a shipping container and all things industrial, it was an immersive, free form, promenade piece, which emphasised audience participation with an ensemble cast, perfectly exemplifying the talents of artists with disabilities. The project was a collaboration between Jez Colbourne, Mind the Gap and That's Life. This first episode went behind the scenes and looked at how the commission came into being, how it was put together and emphasised the abilities of the artists involved. Trickster represented the most ambitious piece of work housed in the Black Box Theatre, Galway and has also gone on to be performed in Bradford, England.

*Episode Two: Silent Moves (Ballina)*. Visual artist Aideen Barry collaborated with artists with disabilities from the Ridgpool Training Centre and Scannán Technologies in Ballina, to present a 28 minute rom-com film inspired by the classic black and white films of the silent era. Cutting edge stop-go animation techniques were employed, as the artists explored attitudes towards disability and ambiguous Irish laws around sexuality and the right to marry. The film won the people's vote for the 2015 spot in the Irish Times and Royal Irish Academy's "Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks" series. Episode 2 documented this project.

*Episode Three - Cork Ignite*: Cork's College of Commerce building was brought to life with 3D light projections and accompanying music especially written for the piece for Cork's 2015 Culture Night, based on the collaboratively developed storyline and light projection graphics. The project represented a collaboration between Simon Mckeown, the (Irish) National Sculpture Factory, Create and local disability groups Suisha Inclusive Arts, the Cope Foundation and SoundOut. It represented the most complex of the three projects in terms of logistics, project partners and scale. The last episode documented the incremental steps taken in creating such a visually technical piece and the local artist's participation in telling the history of Cork through 3D light projections.

### **Community Participation:**

The programme originated with the DCTV Citywide series, that enabled the development of a relationship with Arts and Disability Ireland (ADI). The Ignite Initiative was already in development, when I proposed the documentary. In this respect, planning the series was relatively straightforward as the winning commissions had been selected, and this simplified the funding application process.

The community targeted here included people with disabilities involved in the arts. The main challenge was working with vulnerable adults in terms of the consent forms and the concerns of some project partners who hadn't always necessarily had a very good experience of working with film crews in the past. They were concerned with how they and their members would be portrayed. To that end a series of meetings took place with ADI before the application process in which the approach and tone of the project was discussed and agreed upon with them and the other project partners (via ADI). This concern was raised several times before filming began and so, as the producer, I went to visit some of the groups in person. *Read Easy* consent forms were incorporated so as to ensure participants knew exactly what was happening and what was being asked of them. The crew themselves were briefed on best practice when working with vulnerable adults.

During production, the artists and respective groups featured prominently both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. We recruited a (paid) camera assistant from each of the commissions we were documenting. Galway saw us recruit from the That's Life organisation, Cork from the National Sculpture Factory and in Mayo from Scannán Technologies. The latter was our most

inclusive collaboration as this member was an artist with an intellectual disability. All were given basic training behind the camera with a view to imparting the skills needed to document their work in the future, as well as gain experience in working as part of a crew.

To ensure full consensus on the project that was produced, each group was sent a rough cut of the episode in which they participated and featured in.

### **Dissemination & Broadcasting:**

When the 'Silent Moves' commission won "Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks" award, a special (repeat) screening of the film was held in the Ballina Arts Centre. Our second episode, the one featuring the film, was also screened as part of this occasion, as part of the programme.

We were grateful that DCTV and the BAI permitted this advance screening since the full series had not yet been delivered (although a rough cut version had been submitted to both entities before this point). The series was also screened at the Community Television Festival held in Film Base in Temple Bar in October of 2017. July 2016 saw the broadcast of the series on DCTV, delayed due to broadcast issues within the station. To my knowledge, it has not been rebroadcast since.

A key challenge when working on community media projects, with far more modest resources as compared to mainstream media, is that the community producers – in this case myself – is obliged to undertake a huge range of tasks. By the time the project is completed, there is little energy or resource to mount a big publicity campaign. This was also my first Sound and Vision funded production and I perhaps didn't have as much experience or understanding of what was required after the final delivery of the project to the station and the BAI.

A trailer for the series is on the DCTV website <https://www.dctv.ie/portfolio/ignite/>

*Ignite* episodes can be viewed here: The password for all of the links is "Ignite"

Ep 1. *Trickster*: <https://vimeo.com/233304333>

Ep 2. *Silent Moves*: <https://vimeo.com/233303780>

Ep 3. *Cork Ignite*: <https://vimeo.com/233303119>

### **Outcome for the Community:**

Outcomes for the communities involved were considered under the Social Benefit Framework (see Main Report), with the specific benefits presented below.

**Social Benefit 1:** "Individuals, especially minorities and those marginalised, are growing in confidence and creativity and/or reinforcing a sense of belonging, directly from engaging with the Station"

This was fulfilled, perhaps in an arbitrary manner, by the very nature of documenting an initiative such as *Ignite*, featuring artists with disabilities and putting them front and centre. The feedback from the respective groups was that they felt very proud to have been placed at the forefront of the series, having their thoughts and voices documented and they felt empowered to go on to tell their own stories in their own words in future projects.

**Social Benefit 2:** "Individuals are enhancing their employment prospects, through gaining skills and confidence reinforcing community identity"



We trained a member from the That's Life organisation in Galway, the National Sculpture Factory in Cork and in Mayo from Scannán Technologies. These recruits, as well as acquiring invaluable camera skills that they could build upon after *Ignite*, to perhaps document their work in the future, were also paid for their work on the series.

**SB Indicator 5.1:** "Providing airtime to local CBOs to discuss and present their work, issues and requests to the public"

The work curated and produced by the above groups was given the opportunity to be presented on DCTV. The issues of being an artist with a disability, attitudes towards disability and ambiguous Irish laws around sexuality and the right to marry, were voiced by the very community they affected.

## Story 3: *Romancing Ireland* (2021)

Declan Cassidy, Programme Producer

### Summary:

*Romancing Ireland* produced six half hour programmes, five of which challenge a member of an immigrant group in Ireland to produce a traditional dish of theirs using ingredients grown here. It thus has a double function: to deliver an important message about sustainable food production, and to introduce to wider audiences in Ireland these immigrants groups in a positive context. The final episode summarised the lessons. Each of the communities was addressed during the production on their Facebook pages, in their own languages, ensuring that they were informed and could participate. Twelve trainees from the community were also engaged during production and as well as broadcasting on DCTV in early 2022, it has been extensively promoted and viewed on various social media including its Facebook page.

### Community issue addressed: *Why make this programme?*

The concept for *Romancing Ireland* came from a paper I had written for the Italian Department at Trinity College Dublin called “The Carbon in the Carbonara.” It looked at the growth in popularity among the native population of Italian food as a result of the increased number of Italians emigrating to Ireland and the consequent carbon cost of ingredient imports. Pizza in the USA is an example of how imported foods become ubiquitous; but imported dishes don’t necessarily require imported ingredients – an essential consideration against the backdrop of a climate crisis. The most recent census had shown a 22% rise in the number of immigrants, but numbers were continuing to grow for just five nations: Brazil, France, Italy, Romania and Spain. All of these, coincidentally, are romance language-speaking nations – hence the title. The growing number of ethnic shops, along with CSO stats, showed that imports had risen in parallel with immigrant growth.

*Romancing Ireland* sought to engage these five growing non-Irish national communities and work with a representative of each to demonstrate that the favourite dishes of their compatriots could be produced using only Irish produce. But the series had a two-fold purpose – to open a window, for the wider Irish public, on these new members of our social family, and to deliver an important climate action sustainable food system message with a light touch.

### Programme Content

*Romancing Ireland* comprises six half-hour episodes – five focussing on the expanding non-Irish national communities and one summarising the learning from the previous five episodes, with a call to climate action.

The first episode “The Brazilian,” saw Kika Chix, a dancer, survey the online Brazilian Facebook group to decide upon a representative dish. They chose ‘Carne de Sol’ and Kika set about visiting Irish producers to locate the ingredients – using parsnip to replace mandioca and strawberries in place of exotic fruits. The French protagonist, Tanguy Escaron, was given a lamb dish to cook by his French compatriots, experimenting with apple cider vinegar to achieve the effects of wine in the recipe. Arianna Siliprandi had just four ingredients in her ‘Parmigiana di Melanzane’ – but those ingredients had to be of optimum quality. Macroom Buffalo Mozzarella has, it transpires, beaten all Italian mozzarellas to the world gold medal and Cois na Tír cheese in Tipperary is a perfect replacement for Parmigiana Reggiano. The Romanian, Uta Silas, used spelt berries from County Louth to replace the

rice in her 'Sarmale,' and the Spanish participant, Marc Terra Vila, found a rare-breed Irish pork for his 'Cocido Madrileño' as well as an Irish Gaucho Chorizo sausage to replace the Spanish original.

The series was funded in Round 36 with an overall budget of €113,620. The BAI provided 90% and the requisite 10% came from Cristiana Cosmopolito, founder of a social economy post production house run by an Italian immigrant who supported the multicultural ethos of the series.

### *How the community participates*

Community participation is at the heart of community television at the best of times, but in the case of *Romancing Ireland*, there was a major emphasis on the non-Irish national communities involved. In developing the concept, I adopted a two-pronged approach. I contacted the embassies of each of the five countries and I joined the Facebook groups of their online communities here in Ireland. The embassies were, in all cases, very supportive in furnishing information. When it came to social media, in every case the Facebook groups were private, and posts were in the native languages, which makes them largely exclusive to the natives of each country and, by design or by happenstance, represents a barrier to other community members attempting to engage. Fortunately, to varying levels of proficiency, I speak the five languages, so was accepted as a member and was able to engage, first hand, with the communities. The entire process, therefore, was developed with and informed by the communities at the centre of the programme. Through this process the five volunteers came forward to represent their countries and, through this process, the five dishes that they were tasked to prepare were chosen. I also used social media to engage the wider Irish public with the programme. It was in this way that we found the producers who had ingredients to offer for our protagonists.

In addition, we engaged community trainees in the film process in keeping with my policy of capacity building for community media at every opportunity. I am a director of EurAV European Audio Visual CLG, a non-profit organisation that uses audio visual production and training in the areas of climate action, social equity and media literacy. We've developed community media production training that involved trainees shadowing us on shoots and then formalising their learning with online modules. We are currently hoping to develop this further with other EU like-minded partners under Erasmus Plus or some such funding support. During the filming of *Romancing Ireland*, twelve such trainees come through that process and received a certificate of completion.

### *Output Dissemination*

*Romancing Ireland* began its dissemination process before it was completed in small clips, shared on social media, to engage audiences ahead of its screening. I built a website <https://romancingireland.com> which promoted both the series and the sustainable food system suppliers featured in the series. I continue to maintain this site. The series was delivered to DCTV in January 2022. It has since screened, also, on NVTV in Northern Ireland three times. I also launched a *Romancing Ireland* Facebook page which attracted over 500 followers. The series proved so successful that I wrote a European project under Erasmus Plus Small-Scale Partnerships in conjunction with the National Ecology Centre of Ireland, Sonairte, and the Mediterranean Agronomics Institute of Chania, based on the *Romancing Ireland* model. It received funding from Leargas and is now underway as the CASK – Climate Aware Seasonal Kitchen project (<https://caskproject.eu>). This has gathered a large following and I have made *Romancing Ireland*

available on a dedicated player to further disseminate the series and its message ([https://caskproject.eu/?page\\_id=635](https://caskproject.eu/?page_id=635)).

### *Outcome for the community*

*Romancing Ireland* has benefitted the Irish community at large, in promoting sustainable food systems and, by inspiring the CASK project, its message continues to be amplified in a cascading effect. It has also benefitted both Irish society and the non-Irish national communities concerned in that it has opened a window on these newer members of the Irish family for the native population, while allowing the immigrant communities to showcase their cultures. This is particularly important as successful social integration becomes ever more crucial in the context of the war in Ukraine.

The *Romancing Ireland* Facebook page has been rebranded to CASK and the initial page following continues to grow as CASK takes off from where *Romancing Ireland* began.

In addition, I was able to form strong relationships with these communities. This led to a new BAI Sound and Vision proposal that was developed in direct collaboration with them and with the embassies. *Home Thoughts from Abroad* focuses on the eight largest non-Irish national communities in Ireland. It began as six but, with the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees, I expanded the programme at my own cost to include them, as Ukrainians are now second only to English and Polish in community size here.

## Story 4: *Meetings with Ivor* (2017)

Tomás Hardiman, Producer, Parzival Productions.

### Summary:

*Meetings with Ivor* was unusual for DCTV. It was produced and directed by highly experienced film-makers, and was experimental in form and content. Community participation was through interactions with DCTV members, during and outside the making of the film; and the wider benefits come from exploring and disseminating a community-focused approach to mental health.

### Community issue addressed: Why make this programme?

The initial idea of linking a programme on Professor Ivor Browne to a community television station came about because of Browne's role as a pioneer in bringing mental health care in Ireland out of the big institutions and into the community. Mental health is arguably the most important issue in any community and we felt it right to ground our film firmly in a community TV context from the outset.

Since community level action was so central to his ethos and practice the producing company (Parzival Productions) thought it might be appropriate and interesting to produce the film with the participation of DCTV and to broadcast the programme on a community television station. Dublin City had been the focus of a significant amount of Browne's community-based work, and Browne was unique in being both inside and outside the mainstream 'system', at the same time, and was very often a voice for the voiceless.

As an independent producer my relationship with DCTV came about through an initial meeting in 2015. I had teamed up with the director Alan Gilsean to make a film about psychiatrist Ivor Browne, which would be as radical as the man himself. The mainstream channels tend to be more prescriptive about the projects they would support, so we felt our aims with *Meetings with Ivor* might be more appropriate to a broadcast partner who could adopt a more experimental approach. Because DCTV was one of the eligible broadcasters in the BAI's Sound and Vision Scheme, I approached the channel to explore possible confluences between DCTV's aims and ours in relation to Browne's singular vision of promoting mental health in a community context.

I outlined our plans for the film informally to DCTV. They collectively decided that it might bring advantages to the community TV station, and we both became official members and went on to agree ways in which we could put together an application to the BAI with DCTV participation.

### How the community participates

It was agreed that the then chair of DCTV and a Board member, both volunteers, would act as Production Assistants during production. Another DCTV board member facilitated us at every turn. In addition, we had numerous interactions with DCTV members at every stage and level of the production.

Alan Gilsean and myself also agreed to make ourselves available to DCTV members for a series of workshops and for individual advice sessions as required. We took part in two formal DCTV workshops, one at The Teacher's Club, Parnell Square and one at Filmbase in Temple Bar.

The participation of DCTV was, of course, well flagged in the film credits, posters, DVDs and other promotional materials.

### **Programme Content**

The duration of the creative documentary was 70 minutes. The content focused on originality and breadth of engagement with all facets of Browne's life, his formative influences and his finely wrought insights about fostering mental health in individuals and society at large. Audiences saw him engage on screen with many well-known figures in Irish life in an honest and robust manner. He was honest and forthcoming about all his own life experiences.

The website for the film contains a trailer and many reviews and other outputs from the film. See [www.meetingswithivor.com](http://www.meetingswithivor.com)

Ninety percent (i.e. €82,000) of the proposed budget of €92,000 was awarded from BAI's Sound and Vision Scheme in December 2015.

### **Output Dissemination**

The film's premiere as part of the 2017 (arts and mental health) First Fortnight Festival at the IFI, which was attended by President Michael D Higgins, was notable in that it sold out not only once, but three times as the IFI were prompted to deal with queues around the corner from the cinema entrance! A record six-week run at the IFI and cinema runs at Eye Cinema in Galway and Triskel in Cork ensued.

These were followed by a city and country-wide series of community screenings in arts venues, which featured meditations and post-show Q&As with Ivor Browne and the filmmakers. The film was broadcast not only by DCTV but also by RTÉ One on two occasions. The film is still available to rent online and on DVD.

The trailer and reviews can be seen here: <https://www.meetingswithivor.com/> .

### **Outcome for the community**

I believe it is evident, from the huge numbers of people who engaged with the film and who further grew those numbers through word-of-mouth, that many benefits to the community flowed from the successful production by DCTV, Parzival Productions and the BAI of this ground-breaking filmic journey into a greater understanding of how much mental health matters in the community. The Irish psychotherapy practitioners' community in particular embraced the film as their own, often mounting screenings for their professional practice activities. It is fair to assume that the benefits they gained from the film extended to their clients.

From DCTV's point of view, it also showed how the station could leverage broad CTV awareness, in addition to the training opportunities which participation in *Meetings with Ivor* afforded.

## Story 5: *The Health Effect* (2016)

Ciarán Murray, Programme Producer, Near TV

### Summary:

*The Health Effect* is a collaboration between Northside Partnership and the community producer Near TV, and takes a participative approach to highlighting health risks in North Dublin, and what can be done about them. The focus is on two health programmes, PreParing for Life and Healthy Food made Easy, promoted by the partnership, and the impact that they are having. The programme was strongly promoted locally and, in addition to being broadcast by DCTV, has had a packed cinema launch in Coolock, and been viewed almost 20,000 times on YouTube. Some of the production staff were on a Community Employment project and have gone on to take up employment.

### Community issue(s) addressed: Why it was made

Research has drawn attention to significant health inequalities across North Dublin, and that this can have detrimental and lifelong effects on individuals, families and communities. Northside Partnership has been working on the issue in partnership with other agencies and academics. The programme, *The Health Effect*, explores the causes of such health inequalities and the effects that positive social programmes can have.

This documentary shows the different ways local people are working to develop the building blocks for general health and early intervention programmes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2GxXfwltbY&t=46s>

### The Content

*The Health Effect* documentary was 52 minutes (a television hour) in length and was produced in 2016 at a cost of €32,000. This compares very favourably with the budgets for hour long documentaries on terrestrial TV, which usually range from €80,000 to €120,000.

*The Health Effect* documentary used mixed formats of documentary-making such as observational, informative, and expository documenting, to explore the central idea of how the Northside Partnership used its social programmes to tackle health inequalities.

Using a fly-on-the-wall filming style we followed two main projects. These were the PreParing for Life programme and the Healthy Food Made Easy programme. We meet locals who are taking part in these programmes and, through the documentary, we see the positive effects these programmes are having on their lives. This is mixed with interviews with local GPs, and nutritional and educational experts, who examine the reasons for the health inequalities that exist in Dublin North Central and look at the emerging evidence of the positive effects these types of programmes are having on life expectancy.

### Community participation:

Near TV has a long relationship with the Northside Partnership, another not-for-profit NGO, both being dedicated to community development aims. We have had members on their board and vice versa. The Partnership was key from the outset, as their projects provide the basis of the content of the TV programme. They were very helpful with the application to the Sound and Vision scheme, giving lots of background information. We attended meetings and events related to the project, so that we would have a better understanding of it ourselves.



This is different from a mainstream approach because of its the grassroots theme and origins, emerging out of the community. We are using media to support this community initiative.

### **Dissemination & Broadcasting:**

As well as being shown on DCTV at regular intervals, this also had an exciting and packed-out cinema launch in Coolock, attended by the participants in the piece and their families, and many from the community and voluntary sector across the Northside of the city. We promoted this across a range of social media and as a piece on You-tube it has had nearly 20,000 views.

### **Outcome for the community**

As part of the production there was training and upskilling for the team involved. Some of these were on a Community Employment project, and have since gone on to employment.

As a piece about a community intervention, participants enjoyed being part of the production and felt valued. It was the first time 'on TV' for most of the people on camera.

We understand that it has been used and promoted by the groups who took part and experts who took part in order to spread the word and to help people understand the issue. We have also heard anecdotally that it has been used in 3rd level education settings.

This project has strong elements informing the community of what is happening in their area, and has clearly elements which help create social cohesion, through telling the successful story of a local initiative.

It is also about a community acting to make things better in their own area.

## Story 6: *CityScapes* (2023)

**Susan Jackson, Producer.**

### **Summary:**

*Cityscapes* is, broadly-defined, an ambitious media literacy project that enables CBO members of Dublin City Council's Public Participation Network and affiliates to gain skills in media making and dissemination; that results in 12 one hour magazine shows, that explore key issues; and a set of training resources that can be redeployed elsewhere. The project empowers this group with skills and confidence, promotes their messages, enhances employment or vocational prospects.

### **Community Issues Addressed:**

The Public Participation Network (PPN) is the collective voice of community/voluntary, environmental and social inclusion organisations at county council level around the country. We worked with member groups of the Dublin City PPN and affiliates, teaching mobile video production skills to participants to equip them to explore issues that were important to them. In this sense we addressed the issues of media literacy skills acquisition as it relates to citizen journalism, content creation and production.

Issues addressed were diverse, running the gamut from the history of the Iveagh Trust (past and present living conditions in Dublin) to slow fashion, and health initiatives within the Traveller community. Because filming took place during Covid-19, the impact the pandemic had on the different groups and how they emerged from the crisis was a bi-product of the show. What was presented on screen was a sense of hope, renewal and, in essence, a living document on the vibrant communities in Dublin as they adjusted to a new normal. In many instances we recorded the first time groups had opened back up their doors to the general public.

*CityScapes* is a pilot scheme, the aim being to roll the project out to PPNs on a larger scale further down the line, allowing groups to make and tell their own communities' stories from the ground up.

### **Programme Content/Genre:**

*CityScapes* is a media literacy project and was approached as a two-phase production cycle. The first phase consisted of a training course to equip participants with basic mobile video camera, lighting, sound, presenting, editing, webcasting and streaming skills. The implementation of the training programme itself was recorded and condensed into twelve, technology in action- (How to Demo) segments. These were incorporated into what constituted the second phase of production, an educational magazine show.

This approach to the training course means that segments will also operate as stand-alone pieces that will be accessible online via the PPN, the PPN Arts and Culture Linkage Groups, the PPN Secretariat, *CityScapes*, the participating groups and Dublin Community Television websites, after the initial broadcast of the series. In this way they will serve as an enduring and ongoing reference for mobile and/or TV /webcasting production skills, for future community groups and productions.

Building on the skills, participants went on to then produce twelve, one hour, educational, engaging and entertaining magazine shows exploring the three pillars under which the PPN operates: Community & Voluntary; Social Inclusion; and Environmental issues. Each pillar was covered by four episodes.

The show combined outside/on location broadcasts with in-studio interviews. Cutaways were employed to add to the visual experience of the viewer. We also built upon the 'How To' technology segments and branched out into demos in other disciplines such as (sustainable) arts and crafts, slow fashion and organic culinary skills.

*CityScapes* was granted funding from Sound & Vision of €75,000 in March 2019, and the first tranche was drawn down in February 2020.

The training course began in September 2021 and we went in and out of production (filming) from that October, responding to lockdowns. A high number of our participants were in the vulnerable category in relation to Covid-19. The final shoot we did was in March 2023.

### **Community Participation:**

The training phase emphasised peer/cooperative learning among the core participants. This promoted integration between the different groups/ organisations and pillars taking part, and enabled participants to bring skills back to their groups, in turn imparting their knowledge to a wider network. Initially, this was a bit challenging as we had to conduct classes online, but eventually (when public health guidelines dictated it was safe ) we had a hybrid of online and in-person classes where people exchanged tips and posed questions.

Participating groups were involved in every step of the production process, from deciding what issues/topics would be covered (within constraints set by Sound and Vision ) to working as part of a crew. Each crew/group member was offered various roles in the production process, for example (mobile phone) camera operator, presenter and floor manager for studio interviews. Participants/ community groups who had attended training are paid for their work on the magazine show productions. Almost all participants gained a working knowledge of television show production.

During the filming of the magazine show the emphasis was on groups from the three PPN pillars collaborating together in the making of the individual segments. Bringing together groups, who at first sight may have little in common, was an exercise in celebrating the diversity of Irish culture and heritage. We really wanted groups to make and tell their own stories, and in this sense *CityScapes* set itself apart from mainstream media. Working within the same pillar (Community/ Voluntary), we most notably had the Fatima Groups United cohort working in collaboration with St Patrick's Cathedral and the Iveagh Trust in a co-production capacity.

Groups that preferred to be featured on the show, but not to receive training, provided input into the productions of others. By adopting this approach we sought to build cohesion and collaboration between the different PPN pillars; being as inclusive as possible also generated more material for the show, and allowed participants the opportunity to gain experience as part of a working crew. It was hoped that groups being featured would also see the potential benefit to their own members and/or organisations in the future. This approach also helped spread the word about the initiative.

We provided work experience for the DCTV membership, specifically with a production assistant, who built on experience from having participated in earlier DCTV productions such as *Citywide*.

### **Dissemination & Broadcasting:**

With final delivery of the project slated for the end of April it is envisaged that DCTV will broadcast the programme throughout the summer of 2023. After this, they will be made available online

through DCTV, the PPN, their affiliates, and the designated working groups online platforms. It is also envisaged that there will be screenings of the episodes at the PPN offices in Wood Quay.

We are also developing a *CityScapes* website (<http://cityscapes.ie>) – it is still a work in progress, not yet public - where episodes will be made available after the initial broadcast. The PPN and participating/featured groups will also promote the DCTV broadcast and I have contacted the Journal.ie and The Irish Examiner about the launch.

### **Outcome for the Community:**

The outcomes refer to the Social Benefit (SB) Framework. (See Main Report)

SB Indicator 1.3: “Training of marginalised/ disadvantages individuals; and taking in interns from external entities.”

The training component significantly contributes to this. For example, AkiDwa members (a national network of migrant women living in Ireland) trained by the project were able to showcase their cultures and express their experiences as a member of a marginalised group. To know that their experiences were going to be told on screen and by them, where maybe they hadn't been allowed to speak their opinions before, was very powerful. They now also regularly make short videos to share amongst themselves featuring arts and crafts from their respective countries.

SB Indicator 1.4 “Isolated or marginalised individuals viewing programmes that address their interests.”

Although all the groups are keen to have their interests addressed, individuals in groups such as AkiDwa, RADE (Recovery through Arts, Drama & Education) and Pavee Point are especially keen to see themselves on screen and in turn members of their communities are keen to see them address their communities' interests.

SB Indicator 2.2:

“Volunteer opportunities that enhance employment prospects through personal development and skills acquisition.”

*CityScapes* incorporates a media training course and we provided work experience to DCTV member(s), thus enhancing vocational and employment prospects through skills acquisition. A case in point was one of our participants from Fatima Groups United has used the skills she acquired through the project and has had a photography exhibition on Achill Island. She also uses her skills to promote her health and well-being business by producing promotional videos.

SB Indicator 5.1 and 5.2:

“Providing airtime to local CBOs to discuss and present their work, issues and requests to the public;”

“Facilitating CBOs to produce dedicated regular slots or entire programmes, including training and facilities.”

By its very nature *CityScapes* contributes to the above social benefits, by delving into the work groups, such as the Saol Project (a community project focused on improving the lives of women affected by addiction and poverty) and VOICE (Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment, an NGO expert in Ireland on waste reduction.) We also gave regular slots to The Rediscovery Centre, the National Centre for the Circular Economy in Ireland.

The following demonstrates the diversity of the groups involved in this production, featured on screen and/or behind the (phone) camera.

Episodes 1-4 explored Voluntary/Community pillars/groups themes: East Wall History Group; Fatima Groups United; St. Patrick's Cathedral; The Iveagh Trust; Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality; TOG; St. Andrews Resource Centre; Saol; Five Lamps Arts Festival; Dublin Smartphone Film Festival.

Episodes 5-8 explored the Social Inclusion pillars/groups themes: Uisce; RADE; Gateway Mental Health Project; AkiDwa; Meath Travellers Workshops; Disability Power Ireland; Dundrum Arch Club; Intercultural Language Service; Pavee Point; Sightless Cinema; Connections Arts Centre.

Episodes 9-12 explored the Environmental pillars/groups themes: Howth Tidy Towns; The Rediscovery Centre; Mud Island Community Garden; Dublin Community Environmental Network; Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment; An Taisce; Dublin Vegfest.

## Story 7: *Stay at Home* (2020)

Ciarán Murray, Near TV

### Summary:

The *Stay at Home* video was produced, with no funding, not just for broadcast on DCTV, but for wider and rapid social media dissemination. It was part of the “Lost in a Word” series during COVID. Just one minute in length, it was delivering a key message about COVID at a time of much uncertainty and some misinformation. It was one in a series of one-minute clips created by Near TV community employment staff entirely working from home, giving staff an opportunity to work and learn from home. It also brought a positive message to the community.

### Community issue(s) addressed:

The Covid 19 pandemic had a massive effect on the world at large. Communities were hit hard and fast with constantly evolving information, often making it difficult for people to keep up with current recommended medical advice. The recommendation for isolation to avoid the virus being spread was met with varying degrees of fear and enthusiasm throughout communities at large. It was in this environment that the public awareness Video *Stay at Home* was made.

In the initial stages of working from home and self-isolation, Near TV faced the same dilemmas as many media organisations. How do you create community related content without being able to go out into the community itself? As we all learnt to communicate over video apps such as Zoom we began brainstorming ideas about what we could do to help the community at large. It was in this context that one of our Community Employment Staff, Joe McGlue, came up with the idea of doing a public awareness video that highlighted why it was important to stay at home for not only yourself, but the community at large.

### Programme Content/genre:

The *Stay at Home* video was made in April 2020, in the very early stages of the pandemic. It was produced with no real budget. A small amount of full time staff time went into the support and these were supported by the CDET and INTREO.

It was decided that a short video, of about just one minute in duration, would work best as it could also function on social media and we would have more chance of spreading the video's message.

The video is made up of close up shots set to a soundtrack of Saturday Night Fever and has a comedic air to it with an underlying serious message. We see a man pick up a tin of paint which has a label of ‘Paint The Town Red’. We see the man leave his house and head out into the community in search of a good night out. However in the text it is explained that though it’s obviously hard to stay at home all the time, it’s not just yourself you’re putting at risk of infection if you do go out. As this is explained, in reverse we see the man heading back home.

There was lots of training and learning in the process of making this piece, and this was all done remotely. There was filming, editing, scripting, copyright, and there was peer review, bringing in elements of community participation in the production, and as a learning exercise it was a very positive experience.

### **Community participation: How were they involved.**

As this video was produced during the pandemic the idea of interacting with community groups outside of Near TV wasn't possible. However, as the majority of the staff working for Near TV were on a CE employment scheme, this project was very important for them.

The one minute video inspired the idea of creating other one minute videos based around random topics, not necessarily Covid related, that might be a comfort to the community at large. The series was called 'Lost in a Word' and each week one of the Near TV staff would create a one minute video on a topic they chose.

Along with the social benefit to the wider community, this series served the important function of giving the staff at Near TV something positive and creative to concentrate on. At a time when self-isolation and general anxieties about the pandemic were leading to negative mental health outcomes for people in general, having a positive and creative project to focus on was definitely a benefit for all involved.

### **Dissemination & Broadcasting:**

The initial *Stay at Home* video was on DCTV and distributed via our website and social media. It had nearly 6,000 views on YouTube. See <http://neartv.ie/stay-at-home-video-covid-19-coronavirus/> The 'Lost in a Word' series that it inspired had a further 2000 views. <http://neartv.ie/page/1/?s=lost+in+a+word> and a sample <http://neartv.ie/lost-in-a-word-hope/> .

### **Outcome for the community:**

The *Stay at Home* video had a positive impact on the team involved in the production, and the broader 130 people involved in Near Media Co-op, showing that we were doing something positive. The fact that it inspired others and had a follow-on series, 'Lost in a Word,' was very encouraging. This in turn inspired other pieces during lockdown: <http://neartv.ie/lockdown-stories/>.

The community benefitted by seeing and enjoying this positive locally produced message, through helping promote the idea of community awareness of the pandemic and how personal actions could contain the spread of the virus.

The amount of engagement with this video and the fact that it was watched, shared and liked so many times, demonstrates how making such videos can be a positive way of spreading important information, especially at times when the media in general is flooded with varying information.

The 'Lost in a Word' series that it inspired had the dual effect of spreading positive, non-Covid related, stories in the community and had another extremely important role in helping with the mental health of the Community Employment staff who made them, by giving them a project to focus on creatively at a time when a lot of people's focus was primarily on the pandemic.

Joe McGlue, the main person behind this piece, has since gone on to full time employment with Virgin Media.