

## Annual Report 2011



*(...) using their money from the Lotto, walk the arts into thorns and into places unknown and unnoticed. When in doubt, Minister, and without money, be brave and build a castle.*

- Extract from Seanad Debate on Arts and Culture (21/9/2011) in which Blue Drum actively participated

*Taking up permanent residence outside the comfort zone*

- Extract from Brid Connolly's presentation to the Aontas Community Education Conference in which Blue Drum exhibited its work

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Blue Drum  
December 2011

## Eleven Highlights

The thrust of our work in 2011 was to increase the visibility of the creative work undertaken by Family Resource Centres. Key achievements in 2011 can be summarised as follows:

- We Are Family: a creative showcase of Family Resource Centres took place in Thomond Park, Limerick in association with the Mid-western Regional Forum
- Increased communication with all FRCs
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of *Artizen* produced between September and December underpinned by a public action related to Community Arts Action and available to view on <http://vimeo.com/32471522>
- Take Back the Power programme takes place in Glencree
- Celebrated 10 years of Blue Drum with a day of arts events
- Show-and-tell Gatherings for FRCs in Oughterard and Cork City
- New PACT Conversations in Thomond Park, Glencree and Dublin
- Presentation and networking at the Support Agencies Conference
- Website and Facebook page revitalised and e-Notes distributed, created podcasts
- Initiated Artist / Community Worker Swap
  - St. Louis – Ireland: Con Christeson’s workshops in Oughterard and Ballinarobe FRCs
  - Ireland – St. Louis: Blue Drum’s Eleanor Phillips and Ballyboden FRC’s Jean Bates spent 3 weeks working on *The Office of Enquiry*
- Volunteers now contributing centrally to Blue Drum

## Five Challenges

The climate for working in the community and voluntary sector this year was particularly uncertain; nonetheless, we addressed

- policy in relation to community arts and its value when it comes to making equality real in Ireland,
- staff turnover in FRCs and the ongoing need to develop working relationships,

- communication barriers within FRCs because of the absence of a recognisable *talk with us* brand for all FRCs (e.g. bbcfrc@eircom)
- the resources tsunami threatening a decade of work and
- the level of uncertainty about the future of the Family Support Agency.



**We Are Family:** We did it together! Blue Drum with Limerick and Clare Family Resource Centres celebrated art and creativity in local communities on 19th April in Thomond Park. What a day! There was a wealth of creative work on display by Hospital FRC, Southill FRC, St. Munchin's

FRC, Killaloe/Ballina FRC, Kilrush FRC, Shannon FRC and Croom FRC. Over 350 people attended and participated in the various elements of the programme: workshops, talks, performances, exhibitions and marketplace. Blue Drum staff / volunteers included: Mary, Mick, Gillian, Eleanor, Rina, Carol and Neil. Margot was project leader. *We Are Family* was acknowledged by Pat Bennett and Bill O'Dea of the Family Support Agency as a huge success and a unique opportunity for synergy and collective action across FRCs in those regions. Niall Crowley also noted it was refreshing to see an arts organization working to question how arts funding priorities get set. 'We Are Family' also received wider media coverage: a radio interview with Clare FM and coverage in the Limerick

Leader, Limerick Post and Clare Champion. They were delighted that the event was taking place and are very willing to support any future events. Kathleen Kelly from Kilrush FRC won the 1st Big Blue Art Trolley for her FRC which we recycled after a donation from Gate Gourmet at Dublin Airport. We're asking for more! You can view images of the day which speak volumes: [click here to see more photos](#).



## Artizen 2011 and the Community Arts Petition



The theme for Artizen 2011: Community Arts was who decides, during Ireland's extreme situation, what's in the interest of families and

communities in poverty? This is a follow-up theme from the first edition, and we developed an audio programme to give it a context. You can listen to the programme by clicking [here](#).

We chose this theme because of the lack of channels for arts resources into Family Resource Centres. In addition we decided to connect the capacity and skills exchange process initiated in June 2011, which we called Initiators, to the main public event of Artizen 2012. Taking place on October 17, 2011, UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the event engaged with non-art actions that sought to re-set Ireland like SpunOut (Ruairí McKiernan), Claiming Our Future (Niall Crowley) and Afri (Joe Murray). You can listen to a short report about the event in a Near FM [podcast](#). We can develop new competencies which can restore public value and trust in arts and culture if we address the poverty of cultural engagement of families and communities in poverty. They have a right to the protection and promotion of their cultural expression.

## A Decade of Community Arts Practice



**INVITATION**  
Your Community Your Art!  
Join Blue Drum for a day of arts on  
Dec 8th 2011 in Priorswood - for everyone

**10:00am - 11:00am Storytelling**  
The Outreach Centre, Clonsilla Drive, Priorswood, D17  
for pre-school children, their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

**12:00pm - 2:00pm The Family Support Agency**  
The Assembly Hall, St. Francis Senior School, Clonsilla Drive, Priorswood, D17  
Community musician Nico Brown and Martin Brunson make music with children and their families. No previous musical experience needed. All ages welcome.  
Lunch box will be provided for everyone

**3:00pm - 4:00pm The Northside's Museum - an afternoon of recalling History**  
Located beside the post office in the Northside Shopping Centre  
Eleanor and Neil invite you to contribute your memories, photographs, memorabilia and experiences of living in the true Northside. All are welcome.

**7:30pm - 9:00pm Panel Debate**  
The Outreach Centre, Clonsilla Drive, Priorswood, D17  
Writer Peter Sheridan, Senator Marie Louise O'Donnell, Noreen Byrne, Community Activist and Mick Daly, Community Artist.

After an action packed day join us for tea and cake to mark Blue Drum's  
10th anniversary of working with communities to support their creative expression....

Dedicated to  
the memory  
of Eddie Browne

It is ten years since the Combat Poverty Agency and others established a community arts organisation to work with families and communities. We worked through various attempts to orient the work: from developmental community arts to arts based community development to community arts pure and simple.



To mark the work and contributions of many people, we invited various representatives to lead a day of celebration on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Blue Drum is funded by the Family Support Agency, and this year the organisation received just over €80,000 to deliver our programme of arts

and cultural work. This programme is delivered to 107 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in Ireland and to our wider links in the arts and community sector. Family Resource Centres work where all the indicators of extreme marginalisation converge: poverty, broken relationships,

alcoholism, suicide, abuse and violence. Over the last ten years we have creatively programmed:

- Hundreds of artist workshop and project days for Family Resource Centres,
- Responded to thousands of requests for information about making local art happen,
- Trained a generation of community workers in community art methodologies,
- Showcased the work of Family Resource Centres developing special capacities in work with Travellers, children and women,
- Initiated a volunteer programme as a core part of the work of the organisation for the next decade and
- Nurtured innovative arts and health programmes in the area of smoking, suicide prevention, healthy communities, etc.

For the next ten years we see our role as an advocate of art work in and with communities. Together with others we want to develop capacities to protect and promote local expressive life and local art practices. A core part of our work will be to convince others of the public value of this work.

### **Take Back the Power – Glencree, June 2011**

What does an inclusive society look like? What are the opportunities for cultural empowerment in this time of change? How can community arts contribute? In a watershed year where the country appears to be at a



junction and where the future of our families and communities are being discussed, we wanted to work with others to plan our contributions. Our history is rich with self-organising communities, from the GAA to farmer's co-ops to the fight for independence. At the heart of all these movements was the desire for cultural expression. 'Take Back the Power' is about developing ideas and methodologies which will

enable our communities to revive an era of community action, art, responsibility and commitment. Seventeen of us went for the Initiators Weekend, and it was WOW. In the words of one artist/activist: 'I also feel very lucky to have been in Glencree - it was a good challenge to step up

to the mark!' Activists from Family Resource Centres as well as artists from Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Clare and the USA came along.

## Northsiders' Museum - Mapping Community Memories

Eleanor and Neil have continued workshops with groups to map memories and collective histories of localities. Workshops were delivered in Limerick and Dublin. The focus on mapping community memories is linked to work about regeneration. Loosely called Project Bud, our idea is to research, initiate and develop participatory methods in the regeneration of a locality. Regeneration here is understood to include the social, cultural and built environments, in other words a holistic approach to regeneration which forefronts the voices, opinions and artistic expression of those who live within a locality, particularly those who are routinely considered marginalised.

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Bluedrum invites you to contribute your memories, photographs, memorabilia and experiences on Friday 9th September, 2011 11am to 5pm.

**The Northsider's Museum**  
Northside Shopping Centre

**Celebrating Living in the true Northside**

Followed by a Guided Walk on Sunday 11th at 3pm

For further Details tel: 086 026 1638  
Email: [bluedrum@ireland.com](mailto:bluedrum@ireland.com)



The intention of this area of work is:

- To research, initiate and develop participatory practices,
- To uncover new narratives about places and publics,
- To disseminate the experiences and methods learned to FRCs
- To develop workshops with interested FRCs

**Show & Tell events were organised by** Eleanor in Galway, Glenree and Cork. The idea of Show and Tell was to engage with local skills and



capacities as a way of probing local knowledge. People shared ideas and practices about what they considered to be your best community arts work(s). The purpose of the event was to create greater exchange between FRCs and artists, to meet and discuss projects and goals and to find commonalities and a shared platform to make the work visible in the wider community.

## Conversations & Petition



We are actively working with the European Anti Poverty Network strengthen the role that art and culture plays in democratic renewal. We produced a [podcast](#) to set out our position and to prompt on-going conversations that began in Dublin (Fatima Mansions 2010) and continued in 2011 e.g. Limerick (Thomond Park), Initiators Weekend (Glencree) and EU Parliament Office in Dublin. We simply want to find ways to work with people from different pursuits to propose that the island of Ireland needs to be re-set. We have yet to bridge the distance between aspiration and action.

### **Aontas (The Voice of Community Education) Conference**

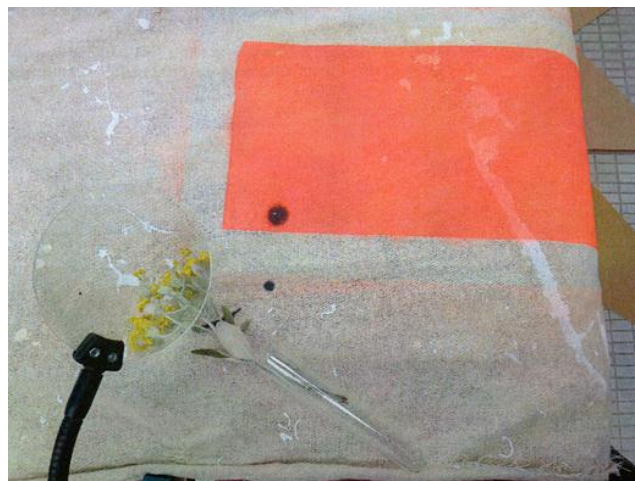
Along with other peer organisations we exhibited and showcased our work at this important national conference for community educators. Our message was simple: creative education and community arts needs to be part of the strategy to address youth unemployment and literacy. There was a lot of interest in our stand with all sorts of questions from community education organisations, VECs, etc. One of the main aims of the conference was to develop a position paper representing the perspective of the community education sector to shape Solas in relation to how community/social education would be delivered.

## St Louis Artists Residency in Ireland



Artist Con Christeson was resident in Clann and Tacu Family Resource Centres in June and facilitated workshops with children, an all-day workshop with women, people with a disability. The gathering of shared 'pass-around' drawings that, combined with written and spoken words, were the catalyst of more storytelling and sharing. She has extensively documented her residency workshops with people with a disability in the [Cranmore Centre, Ballinrobe, Co Mayo](#) and children at [Tacu, Ballinrobe](#) as well as her work with [children](#) and [women](#) in Clann FRC, Oughterard, Co Galway. Con also spent some time with the Ballyboden FRC in Dublin. Jean Bates and Imelda Clarke took part in the Take Back the Power Weekend. Jean and Imelda Clarke shared a history and tour of their facility and were interested to explore and discuss how they could work with young men and women using the arts and the possibility of using an artistic process to design and build a playground on a nearby vacant lot.

Robert Longyear and Alicia LaChance from St. Louis, Missouri came to explore the Northside's history with a view to collect as much archival materials as possible in order to showcase the history or creativity of this community. What manifested was a series of installations in the Northside Shopping Centre, Coolock. These installations humbly explored ideas of ascension, measuring where we stand and where we are headed based on the hopes and aims of the people of Dublin.



, suspended moment in which we could all pull on that Donegal Tweed

nd if we could all be a Joyce

nd if we could all be a trader

, clash of the ash, and savor it the first time cause I envy ya!

# A Dubliner Affect

As artists, we act as another layer on top of the dynamics we encounter daily. The line of questioning that we develop manifests itself as concentric circles of developing theories, studio work, and newfound avenues of understanding. Our time in Ireland demanded that we act as quick absorbers of landscape in order to formulate a visual response to our international exchange.

French sociologist Michel Maffesoli was perhaps the first to use the term neotribalism in a scholarly context. He predicted that as the culture and institutions of modernism declined, societies would embrace nostalgia and look to the organizational principles of the distant past for guidance, and that therefore the post-modern era would be the era of neotribalism. The underpinnings of our work were anchored in this notion.

The landscape we navigated in Dublin proved to be intrinsically fractured by financial and political unrest - its center had weakened. This was most dramatically demonstrated by a working class that was not only in decline, but undergoing a transformation into a way of life built from the bottom up - one that was tempered with reflection and inventiveness, curiosity and risk.

Our installation presented a congruence between our cultural curiosities, our experiences, and our making. It was meant to communicate the surmounting of challenging themes including static, immobility, and generational inheritance through quiet moments of ascension. The visual language we employed throughout the installation was mindfully built from the patina of a city, the sincerity of its people, and the importance they placed on the conservation of their histories, traditions, and cultural identities.

## Irish Community & Art goes to St. Louis

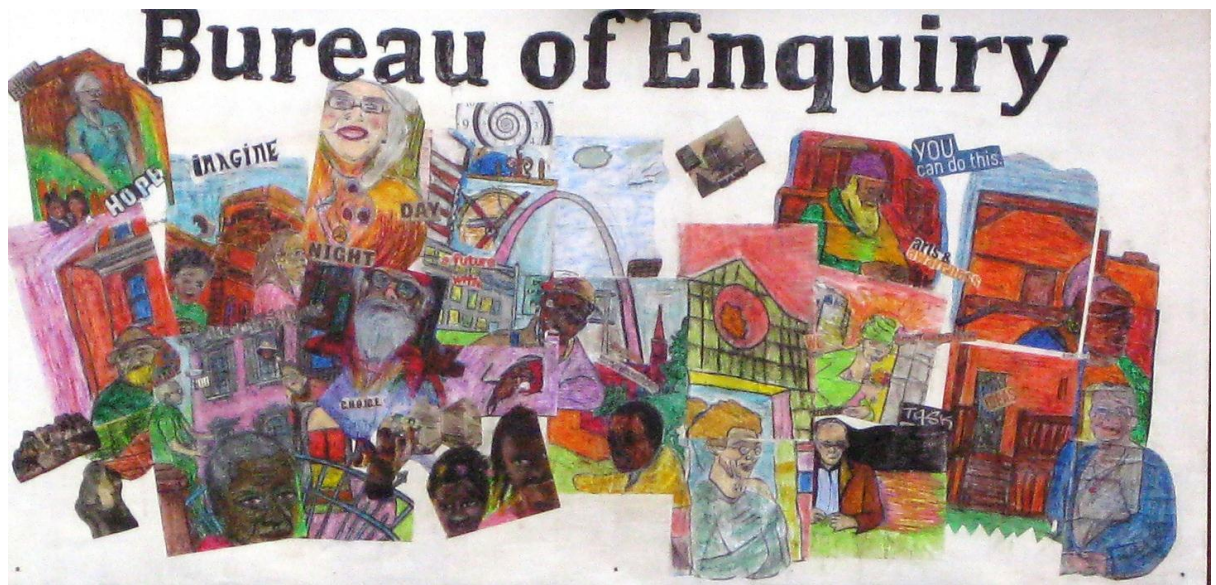


The *return serve* in St. Louis, Missouri, USA took place when artist Eleanor Phillips and community worker Jean Bates from Ballyboden FRC went to St. Louis in October.

St. Louis is known as the Gateway City as it lies just below the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi rivers and was once a great inland port, transporting cotton, hemp and tobacco, products whose profits were almost wholly dependent on the work of slaves. It was also a noted brewing town and Budweiser is still manufactured there. St. Louis is famous for its beautiful red brick

houses. The red brick was manufactured locally from the clay of the

Mississippi during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is so sought after that "brick rustling" or stealing the red bricks from empty houses is a huge problem.



Whilst there Jean and Eleanor took part in a neighbourhood fund raising "fish fry", an African American Church Service, attended an Interchange Community arts training morning in the Regional Arts Commission, met with/had coffee with/talked with and walked with community activists, homeless men, students, health workers, workers, soldiers, waitresses, individual artists, in short anyone who wanted to talk. They were surprised to find racism a constant present, which they described as a subtly oppressing experience, and a terrible barrier to community welfare. For everyone, black, white, Hispanic, the biggest problem is the lack of stable work in the city. The majority of those they spoke to held down two to three part time jobs at any one time. Some had spouses who worked in other cities, and occasionally other countries (often in the Army) all of which meant that having enough time to spend with their families, never mind their neighbours was challenging. On the whole they found St. Louisans were open and friendly; and felt very privileged to meet some genuinely warm and generous people

Jean and Eleanor had access to a room which opened onto a shopping street. They called it the "Bureau of Enquiry" and created a space where people could meet and discuss issues such as racism, community welfare and themes such as ownership and power. These issues were extrapolated from the many conversations they had with the inhabitants of St. Louis. They facilitated formal discussion groups and an informal drop-in space where people could pose questions, write or speak their stories, have something to eat, a place to share their concerns and creativity.

The final week was one of intense activity where all the photographs, research, questions and stories were looked at. Images were selected to

create drawings which were then broken up, redistributed amongst participants for colour work and then reassembled to make a series of images and create signage for the front of the building. On the final night the community erected the sign and a key ceremony was held where Jean and Eleanor handed their keys over to the community of participants, symbolically inviting them to share in the continuation, management and responsibility of the project. In her feed back from the residency Jean Bates said:

“Having been part of the engaged process I can see the value of this model for creating spaces for communities to see their own worth and to be empowered in the process to believe that they can effect the changes that are needed to further future community development. The creative process is both enjoyable yet profound in the depths that it lets people experience themselves and their own creativity.

### **Outcomes 2011**

In conclusion, we now summarise the outcomes of 2011 under four headings :

- opportunities for growth in family and community
- process of innovation and transformation
- advocacy/political
- links to the tradition/history

<b>Opportunities for growth in family and community</b>	<b>Process of innovation and transformation</b>	<b>Advocacy / Political</b>	<b>Links to the Tradition / History</b>
Regular contact points for cooperation	By working through social networking platforms	By engaging new minds and ears about cultural inclusion	By interrogating what situations add to this field of practice
New creative tools to map narratives of community regeneration	By working local – to change the visibility of local	Partnerships with Claiming Our Future, Afri, Spectacle of Defiance	By assessing and critiquing women's contribution to the field
By connecting FRCs to local arts and artists	By introducing new art clusters who can work with FRCs	Increasing awareness of FRCs creative work	By more links between FRC's and artists/organisations
By sharing know-how and tactics for community arts	By working trans local – to reset how art resources get through to the local	Petition for arts spending in disadvantaged families	By assembling initiators of community arts work to refresh the tradition