



Crossfire Trust

The early years

In 1978 Ian Bothwell watched a television documentary that moved him. Not only did it move him, it prompted him to do something about a very bleak situation in the County Armagh border-town of Crossmaglen, Northern Ireland. His simple but potent message of God's love has brought about transformations still being felt 30 years later, as he continues to reach out in love to his community.

Ian was just 21 years old and living in Tynan, County Armagh when he watched the documentary. He had just returned from studying theology at Moorlands Bible College. After seeing the isolation and fear portrayed, Ian decided he would go to Crossmaglen and simply knock on doors and tell people that God loved them. At the height of the Troubles, however, that presented many challenges. Back then, Crossmaglen was hard to find as even the signposts were blackened out. Ian was also stopped at checkpoints by the Army and viewed with great suspicion.

Undeterred, Ian continued building trust and relationships with the people of Crossmaglen. Gradually, three volunteers joined him and one of them was a young lady called Pauline who would later become his wife. Ian and his team continued to visit people door to door and in 1980 they set up a market stall (which still continues today) to try and help alleviate poverty in the area. They provided family support and youth work in the form of a 5 day Children's Club with day trips and camping. They also started a coffee bar on a bus which they purchased from Ulsterbus in 1982. The bus was to become a vital tool in creating a forum for hospitality and cross community work which also still continues today.

Support from like minded people and faith groups meant the ministry was developing rapidly and led Ian and his three volunteers to establish themselves officially under Crossfire Trust in 1984. The name Crossfire was chosen

for a number of reasons. Firstly, Crossmaglen is known locally as *Cross* and they also wanted the name to convey the heart of God. The trustees felt that *Fire* represented the fire of God's love burning up the bitterness. Also, Ian and the team wanted to stand in the crossfire for Jesus. The remit of Crossfire Trust since then, was and continues to be 'caring for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the people, primarily in South Armagh.'

Darkley House

Ian describes the desire to buy a property to further Crossfire's work in 1986 as a 'faith venture'. The trustees fell in love with a two storey country house on the edge of Darkley village, County Armagh, which was on the market for offers over £38,000. Darkley House dates back to the 18th Century and used to be home to an entrepreneur named Mr Calvert who was responsible for much of the development of the linen industry in the area until 1959 when the mill closed. The surrounding community became cut off due to unemployment and few prospects for the future. The Troubles greatly added to the pressure, isolation and fears of that community.

Ian recalls: 'In 1986, people were wanting out of Darkley and we were wanting in. There had been massacres in the area and great unrest. After two years of prayer the property was sold to someone else but we still believed and prayed. The sale fell through and we were then able to purchase it. We received a gift of £10,000 and prayed for the rest. We secured a mortgage through Nationwide and they encouraged us to get sponsorship to make up the difference. We are so thankful for those who faithfully supported us on a monthly basis. Back then, we had no heating or a budget for renovation costs. The slates fell off the roof when we closed a door!

'We got married in 1986 and went on our honeymoon. We gave the money we received as wedding presents to the building fund. It was

our heart's desire to get that property! When we returned home from our honeymoon, we moved into the annexe of Darkley House, which was just about habitable at the time.'

In 1990, a second bus was purchased which enabled Crossfire Trust to maintain a presence locally at the height of the Troubles. In 1991, Ian and Pauline had an addition to the family, Justin. Two years later his sister Megan arrived. A third bus was purchased in 1997 but it was becoming apparent that a more substantial vehicle would be needed to support the growing ministry and prayer began for this need to be met.

Worn Again & New 2 U

In 1998 a charity shop was established called Worn Again. It came out of a desire to help alleviate the financial strain of buying clothing, blankets and curtains, etc. It is held every Wednesday from 11am-5pm at Darkley House and is a vital social and financial help to the community. Building on the success of Worn Again another initiative was set up called New 2 U, where old donated furniture is restored and sold on to make profits for community projects. New 2 U is open alongside Worn Again. Any donations to either of these projects will be gratefully received. With furniture donations, it would be preferable to have the items delivered directly to Darkley House (to keep costs down) although arrangements can be made through Ian for collection points in Bangor and Newcastle.

Shelter

In 1999, Darkley House was completely refurbished to bring it up to standard so that it could be approved by agencies like the Housing Executive and the Simon Community. The refurbishment created two lounges, four bathrooms, nine bedrooms, an office, a full kitchen with an Aga and a dining room. The increased facilities meant that Crossfire could reach out further out into the community as a care provider.



Crossfire's care programme provides mainly emergency, temporary or sometimes long-term accommodation for individuals or families who are homeless for a variety of reasons. It caters for people dealing with life challenges like drug/ alcohol addiction or domestic violence or people who have simply been lost in the system because of a shortage of resources. Agency resources are becoming increasingly stretched and referrals are often received from the Housing Executive and the Simon Community. The programme covers a 15 mile radius and is run by four staff members. It is funded by the Rural Development Council in Cookstown, County Tyrone.

There are in-house specialist counsellors available as the staff strive to meet emotional as well as physical and spiritual needs. Prayer and a listening ear is offered for anyone who expresses that need. Those who avail of the accommodation are made to feel at home and everyone sits down to meals and conversation at the kitchen table. Birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated and Christmas dinner is enjoyed by all!

The Singing Kettle

In 2000, a voluntary community group called the Singing Kettle was set up to provide support for the people of Darkley, particularly vulnerable members of the community and those marginalised by conflict. A group of local ladies wanted to put a smile on people's faces again and began to rent premises from Crossfire Trust in Darkley House.

The Singing Kettle offers a tea/coffee and sandwich service every Wednesday, which attracts around 60 people every week. Those who attend are generally over 50 years old although young people who are having problems at home and/ or school, also visit. The ethos is 'the kettles always on'. This is a really valuable service to the community in bringing people together especially for those without cars or transport to city or social services support.

Yarn & Darn

In 2003, a support group was set up by small group of women affected directly by the Troubles of the past in the area. Their ethos is simply to 'Talk back, look forward'. They meet every Wednesday in the back room of Worn Again and discuss their past hurts and scars and look forward together to a brighter future. The women are from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Together they make crafts which they sell and the profit replaces the materials. In 2004 they were able to purchase a sewing machine and craft items after receiving a Millennium Grant. Needless to say, Yarn and Darn is a very important support group for these women and a safe, relaxing forum where they can listen to others and also be heard.

Recognition

In 2003, Ian was awarded the President's Peace Prize by Mr George Bush for his cross-community work. Ian dedicated the prize to the people of Crossmaglen. Also, in July this year, Crossfire received the Queen's Award for Volunteering (a crystal cup) at Buckingham Palace.

Darkley Club House

In 2004, Crossfire Trust celebrated its 25th anniversary and a new programme was developed for 13-25 year olds which built on the success of previous youth activities such as barbeques and fun days. The programme was developed with the aim of empowering local young people through support, guidance and training in a safe and fun environment. A committee was set up by Crossfire Trust staff, local parents and young people. The club members meet twice weekly (Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons) in one of the nine garages, which form part of the Coach House. A refurbishment grant from the Community Relations Council has given them great facilities such as a snack bar and recreation equipment.

A fulltime youth worker (funded by the Youth Education Social Inclusion Partnership) runs educational and social programmes at the Club House. Some of the programmes undertaken so far have included guitar lessons, drug awareness, child protection training and a team-building tournament. Vandalism has greatly reduced in the area and community relations have also improved.

In 2005, a floodlit, five-a-side football pitch was built for members of the Darkley Club House and all local young people. The Banks was officially opened by Irish premier league football player, Steve Collier. Barclays Spaces for Sport and the Conservation Volunteers partly funded the project. The idea behind the project is to provide a meeting ground for young people from all communities to enjoy sport together.

Coach House Enterprise Park

In 2005, plans were laid by Crossfire Trust to develop a purpose built Business Park from the existing coach house building at Darkley House. The Park will allow local people to rent affordable units, thereby encouraging investment into the area and creating approximately 35 new jobs. Funding was received by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry (DETI) and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) along with private donations. Building work started in January 2008, costing almost £876,000 and is due to open in the coming months.

Mega Mobile

The Mega Mobile is a custom-built multi purpose vehicle which Crossfire Trust use for a variety of cross community projects. It

was obtained in 2006 and cost £150,000. A donation from the Irish Foreign Office started the fund but at the moment Crossfire still need approximately £50,000.

The Mega Mobile is equipped with a plasma screen (for presentations), comfortable seating areas and a snack bar. The comfortable setting makes it easy for people to feel safe and relaxed and allows them to have open discussions and receive advice and counselling. It proves especially effective with young people. The Mega Mobile has no denominational or political markings which means that it can go into any area and be used for social and educational purposes. It is used several times a week and travels on invitation to neighbouring towns to provide workshops, family support and counselling.

The vision for the Mega Mobile is to also make it available for hire to other churches, businesses, charities or educational groups which will benefit the whole community. There is a wealth of opportunity at the many community events and festivals each year which the Mega Mobile attends.

Support

To continue this vital work, Crossfire relies on the generosity of donors. There are many ways to give financially to Crossfire Trust such as cheque, postal order or standing order. For more details on how to donate, visit www.crossfire.net. You can also make a secure online donation.

You may also consider donating some of your free time to the charity. There are lots of activities you can get involved in such as a work day, helping out at the market stalls, etc. Alternatively you may have some household items, furniture or bric-a-brac to donate.

Another practical way which you can help is by donating some household items to cater for the growing demands on the temporary accommodation. Crossfire need everything you need to run a house! Items such as cups, plates, cutlery, toilet rolls, towels, bedding, mattresses etc are always appreciated. The Trust would also be keen to identify good local sources of food from supermarkets and bakeries to maintain a regular supply of food for those staying in temporary accommodation.

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