



# Investing in smart solutions to tough times

With cuts of between £1.5 billion and £2 billion in real terms expected to the Northern Ireland block in the 2011/2015 budget, NICVA is concerned that voluntary and community organisations delivering public services will be vulnerable to unfair and potentially disproportionate cuts. This is because voluntary and community sector providers are often seen as additional to statutory services. The important role played by voluntary and community organisations has been recognised in the 2010 NI Audit Office report *Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector* found that the voluntary and community sector “makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the Executive’s strategic goals and priorities.”

However the current Spending Review could pose a real threat to the capacity and capability of significant parts of the sector. The sector is realistic and is not adopting a begging bowl approach or seeking immunity from the financial pain. It is simply trying to ensure that it is not treated unfairly by accident rather than design.

The consequences of unfair and disproportionate cuts are likely to impact on the most vulnerable people in our society.

**Government in Northern Ireland can invest to save by:**

## Investing in Preventing re-offending

Jobtrack is a partnership between NIACRO, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), based on research that demonstrates employment as a significant factor in reducing offending.

In Northern Ireland there are 1,453 individuals in prison, **the rate of re-offending stands at 42.8%** and the cost of imprisonment is **£78,000 per prisoner per year**. The **Jobtrack programme has a re-offending rate of 24%** and works with an average of 1,000 prisoners and ex-offenders each year — a **potential saving of £14,780 million per year**.

## Investing in Preventing family breakdown

Social services, schools and other agencies refer families to Home-Start for a variety of reasons including child protection, mental health, disabilities, drug and alcohol misuse, multiple births, deprivation and hardship and domestic violence. Home-Start’s team of 900 dedicated volunteers work with over 3,000 children in Northern Ireland each year. These volunteers give more than **£2 million pounds worth of work to the Northern Ireland economy each year**. It costs £1,134 to provide Home-Start support to a family for a year and **Home-Start can support 40 children living at home for the cost of taking one child into care**.

**By investing in the voluntary and community sector the Northern Ireland Executive is investing in tackling some of the most pressing and expensive social, economic and environmental problems facing Northern Ireland.**

## Investing in Older people remaining independent

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Belfast Central Mission's LITE 60+ project enables vulnerable older people to continue to live independently in their own homes by providing a range of support services in areas such as: benefits, budgeting and banking; home security cleaning; personal appearance/hygiene and shopping, food preparation and healthy eating. BCM provides a handy person service which can help with the upkeep of older people's properties.

LITE 60+ costs approximately **£50 per service user per week compared to £430 for residential care and £570 for nursing care**. Postponing entry into residential care by just one year through adapting people's homes **saves £28,080 per person**. Housing adaptations reduce the need for daily visits and reduce or remove costs of home care - **savings range from £1,200 to £29,000 per year**.

## Investing in Raising levels of educational attainment

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The Princes Trust XL programme is a two year programme which runs throughout the last two years of compulsory education. It aims to re-engage young people at risk of being excluded or under-achieving. **The programme has a 90% success rate. It costs £250 per person for the XL programme. The cost per year of a young person excluded from school is £15,000.**

## Investing in Ensuring people have the income they are entitled to

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North Belfast Advice Alliance is a network of six advice centres established in 2003 to provide a free advice service to people living throughout North Belfast. The Alliance is currently funded by Belfast City Council, DSD Voluntary & Community Unit, BRO, DETI, Big Lottery Fund and investment of approximately £400,000 in services has **an impact which secured almost £8 million in additional income for local people in the last financial year**.

## Investing in Tackling fuel poverty

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In December 2008, Strabane Community Project, in conjunction with Strabane and District Community Network, secured funding from the Western Health Action Zone for a pilot Warm Zone initiative. Local Volunteers/Enablers from local community groups were recruited and they **visited 150 households during the first three months of 2009**.

As a result of the project 97 households on low incomes received energy saving adaptation's including new central heating and loft insulation. This was **a saving of approximately £41,700 of their energy bills**. 84 Access to Benefits checks carried out which showed **unclaimed pension credit of over £44,200 annually as well as unclaimed housing benefit and rate relief**.

## Investing in Avoiding expensive fines and infractions

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In Northern Ireland, **the RSPB spends at least £1.5million a year on delivering government commitments**, primarily around the global target to halt biodiversity loss. This includes managing protected sites, working with farmers to manage and restore the countryside and monitoring species and habitats. All of these things are responsibilities of government as required under European Directives. Despite the value of this work, **RPSB receives only £170,000 per annum from central government**, raising the rest of the money from supporters and other grant-making bodies.

## Investing in People with disabilities entering the labour market

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2% of Northern Ireland's population has some form of learning disability, amounting to over 30,000 people. 35% of all adults with disability / limitation are economically inactive and 25% of people with disabilities have no qualifications.

The NOW project delivers training and employment services for people with learning disabilities helping them get the job they want and keep it. By helping people into work in 2009-10 **NOW's programmes saved statutory providers £573,832. This includes £10,768 in social security benefits, £548,098 in day care places and £14,966 to Health and Social Care** in the year as participants were supported to travel more independently.

## Investing in **Reducing the number of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)**

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The Give & Take Scheme is run by Include Youth for young people between 16-21. 100% of the young people on the scheme are NEET, 34% have an offending background, 74% are care experienced young people. Half of the participants have left school early.

Despite having been assessed as unable to participate in mainstream training and employment opportunities, **60% of Give and Take participants achieved an Essential Skill qualification; 41% moved on to education/ training/ employment.**

A recent Audit Office report estimated that **the total financial cost to the economy and the Exchequer of each NEET young person is £160,000. The Give and Take scheme costs £6,700 per person.**

## Investing in **Helping Lone Parents find employment that works for them**

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Recent research commissioned by CFNI reveals that, of all groups in NI, one parent families will be hardest hit by planned changes to the benefit system. Marks & Start is an employability programme specially designed for lone parents who want to get back to work. It is a partnership between Gingerbread – the lone parent's organisation — and Marks & Spencer. Following a three week programme, which is delivered during school hours and tailored to suit parents, each participant is guaranteed an interview. **Of the 24 people who have completed the programme this year 21 have secured employment.**

## Investing in **Giving children the best possible start**

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Good quality early years can make a real difference to children's life chances. Disadvantaged children benefit most from early support that has both an educational and social focus and where parents are supported. **Research has shown that every £1 invested in early years saves government £17 by the time the child has reached adolescence.** Sure Start's 32 programmes across Northern Ireland work with approximately 34,000 children and their families. Sure Start offers outreach and home visiting services, family support, including befriending, social support and parenting information, good quality play, learning and child care experiences for children, primary and community healthcare and advice and support for children with special needs.

**Investment in early years in Northern Ireland stands at £630 compared to £2,000 per child in Britain.** Likewise if we compare the spend on **Sure Start**, it amounts to **£80 per child in Northern Ireland and an average of £600 per child in Britain.**

## Investing in **People transforming their local area**

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Seacourt is a mixed housing estate in Larne town. It had a very troubled profile with both interface and intra-community tensions. There was a waiting list for people who wanted to move out of the area. **The Community Foundation for NI invested £210,000 in the area** to develop new community structures, to build community cohesion and invest in community leadership. As a result of the establishment of Seacourt Community Council the estate has won the Best Kept large housing estate competition three times through local people undertaking environmental projects and working with agencies to refurbish and re-let empty properties. **Housing prices have quadrupled and there is now a waiting list for people who want to move in to Seacourt.**

## By investing in the voluntary and community sector the Northern Ireland Executive is investing in effective and efficient solutions.

In 2007 a House of Commons Select Committee compared the unique approach offered by the voluntary and community sector with the requirements of public service delivery. They found that:

- When government wants to deliver services to vulnerable people or disadvantaged communities the quality of the service can be difficult to specify, measure or monitor. Voluntary and community organisations **focus on the user** and are interested in **delivering a quality outcome**. Private sector providers may be tempted to reduce quality to increase profit. Voluntary and community organisations have no such incentive.
- When the demands of service users are highly differentiated the voluntary and community sector can **offer flexibility, innovation and a holistic approach**. Where public and private providers focus on services to large numbers of people the voluntary and community sector has the flexibility to deal with individual needs.
- When a service has to be directed at a certain locality or sections of the community that have been excluded from traditional service provision the voluntary and community sector brings **knowledge, expertise and experience**.
- When a service needs to be directed at users who do not trust government or business and will be suspicious of their motives, voluntary and community organisations bring **trust and accessibility**. They are genuinely **independent, supportive** and seen to be 'on the side' of the service provider.
- When service users are likely to require a co-ordinated portfolio of services voluntary and community organisations spend more time on **bringing services together** for the service user. They do not operate in silos and are genuinely motivated by getting the **best outcome** for the service user.

## Investing in the voluntary and community sector is a win-win

The voluntary and community sector presents smart solutions to difficult problems in tough times. These solutions deliver the preferred outcome for people, families and communities, eg keeping people out of care, while at the same time saving the cost of more expensive and less effective alternatives.

**In tough times the focus must be on finding more of these win-win solutions.**