



# Community Action Network

Strategic Plan 2019-2022



## Mission and Guiding Principles

CAN is a non-governmental social justice organisation that is dedicated to creating a more equal, just society that has the well-being of citizens at its heart.

- We work with people to assert their rights to participate fully as subjects of their own lives, to have their voices heard and to have their choices respected.
- We work within a human rights framework, and we seek to develop leadership and participative democracy.
- We strive to create vibrant communities that have the capacity to participate in society and to challenge inequitable structures, policies and practices.
- We actively seek opportunities to do this work in local, regional, all-island and international contexts.

## Our Guiding Principles

The following principles give context to our work and guide how we work with communities.

**Poverty and exclusion are socially determined** - Poverty, exclusion, social injustice and inequality are rooted in the denial of rights, and in political, cultural and economic structures – and not simply in the frailties and inadequacies of individuals.

**The struggle for social justice requires creativity and imagination** - The inherent creativity, imagination and energy of individuals and communities are what drive the struggle for social justice.

**Those who live with inequality can determine their own development** - People who live with inequality and injustice have the capacity to guide their own development, to engage confidently with prevailing power structures, and to direct those structures towards addressing inequality.

**Creating positive change requires shared leadership** - Positive change is built on the inherent leadership qualities of individuals and communities.

**Developing the capacity to learn is a key tool for positive change** - Creating the conditions to learn is essential to enable individuals to arrive at a clear understanding of social and economic realities, and to equip them with the skills and tools to effect positive change.

**People have the right to influence and determine processes that shape their lives** - Communities and individuals need to be able to participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of decisions that impact on their daily lives.

This document outlines CAN's strategic plan for the period 2019 – 2021

## **The CAN Model**

CAN has developed many different tools, strategies, initiatives and templates to arrive at outcomes that deliver positive sustainable change in the life experience of those who face structural injustice and inequality. Over time, these various tools have merged and diverged, coalesced and grown, developed and changed to the extent that we now have a process that is recognisably and uniquely the CAN Model, a structured and outcomes-driven template for intervention.

The CAN Model involves two foundation principles, four action stages, and one all-encompassing practice of acting, reflecting and learning.

### **Two foundation principles**

The two foundation principles to the CAN model guide our interventions and keep us focused:

1. Change is not neutral and those who lead change initiatives towards social justice must be deeply connected to the value base of their actions. This requires an ongoing commitment to ensure there is a synergy between what we say and what we do. It means subjecting values to regular scrutiny, reconnecting with and nurturing the sources of value, and understanding this as a key part of leading and driving change.
2. Leadership is key to change and drawing out intrinsic leadership qualities from individuals and communities is an essential step in creating positive and sustainable change. Leadership is a matter of shared responsibility for common actions, one where different individuals and communities can undertake leadership roles that fit well with their own personal qualities and their wider community objectives.

### **Four action stages of change**

The CAN Model is a staged model, and our work usually progresses through four action stages:

1. Breaking the silence: a range of techniques for eliciting the lived experience of those who have been affected by social injustice or inequality.
2. Inside out analysis: ways of questioning the systems, structures and processes that cause and perpetuate inequality, from the lived perspective of those affected by it.
3. Imagining a better future: strategies for imagining a better future founded on strong community leadership and capacity building, and focused on creating new structures to reflect change in action.
4. Moving together: a range of strategies for engaging in positive collective action for change and for developing sustainable cross-issue partnerships.

## **Our Work 2019 - 2021**

Applying the model means that we attend to five main areas of work

1. Initiatives to tackle issues from a Human Rights perspective
2. Leadership Development
3. Dialogue
4. Organisational Development
5. Sustaining, maintaining and promoting CAN and its work

### **1. Initiatives to tackle issues from a Human Rights perspective**

CAN is committed to practicing the CAN model directly by working with those experiencing inequalities to impact on the system that generates them. The objective of this work is to enable people who live with inequalities to play a central role in changing the system that creates and sustains the inequalities

This involves facilitating people to:

- Identify themselves as Rights Holders, rather than victims
- Break the silence on those issues and build solidarity with others
- Analyse the system that is at the root of these issues and develop an alternative vision of how things could and should be different
- Engage the system so that change comes about

## **Strategic Objectives**

### **Rights Holders in poor public housing**

CAN has been to the fore in supporting communities living in public housing in poor condition to take a Collective Complaint to the Council of Europe (COE). The COE found in favour of the tenants in the substance of the argument and ruled that the Irish state must make an assessment of the issue and put in place a plan to remedy it.

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Support residents to monitor the delivery of the outcome of the Collective Complaint
- Work with key partners to hold the State to account on the issues of conditions in public housing

### **Rights Holders in Mortgage Distress**

CAN has been working with people in mortgage distress in collaboration with Human Rights advocates, legal practitioners and others. We have been promoting the use of EU human rights and consumer law to challenge abusive lending practices that have led to

mortgage distress in the legal process. This work has been part of the abusivelending.org project.

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Continue to organise those in mortgage distress to break the silence caused by their shaming by a narrative promoted by the system that created and sustains the situation.
- Challenge in the media and otherwise the stereotyping of people in mortgage distress as strategic defaulters or deserving of their fate.
- Work strategically to ensure EU human rights and consumer protections are afforded people in mortgage distress by the courts
- Create dialogue on the core issues within the system surrounding the issue of mortgage distress, engaging all parties to that system

### **Rights Holders living in unsafe communities**

CAN has worked for many years in supporting community resilience in the face of serious anti-social behaviour and criminality in their communities. Our work has involved supporting Local Policing Fora and other such partnerships, operating community safety groups in small areas, piloting Community Impact Assessment tools, developing specialised engagements with people involved in harming communities (Outreach and Bridging programmes and Restorative Practice) and

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Work closely with a range of Local Policing Forums to support their effectiveness in building community resilience
- Develop our Community Impact Assessment Instruments as a tool for assessing the impact of Anti-social Social Behaviour(ASB) on communities and planning a timed response by Duty Bearers
- Support local Community Safety groups to problem-solve ASB related issues in small neighbourhoods
- Sustain promote and expand the Intensive Outreach and Bridging Model which seeks to engage children and young adults involved in serious drug-related ASB and bridge them towards more constructive life-paths
- Expand and develop programmes that embed Restorative Practice as a culture across communities, particularly Dublin 8 and 12
- Write, publish and promote a Community safety Toolkit on strategies for building a community response to ASB

### **Rights-holders in the methadone maintenance programme**

CAN has established a *Service Users Rights in Action* (SURIA) group to campaign on issues of human rights for those in the National Opiate Treatment Programme.

During 2019-2022, we will

- Support SURIA to engage more fully with Duty Bearers (State bodies responsible for delivery of services in a rights-compliant way) to achieve remedy for human rights violations regarding the delivery of treatment.
- Support SURIA to move towards an independent human rights based advocacy group for those in treatment

### **Rights Holders far from the labour market**

CAN has worked to promote the use of public procurement contracts as a tool for targeting employment, training and other benefits at marginalised communities. We have succeeded in having social clauses included in Regeneration Projects within Dublin, establishing a Community Benefit Forum for projects using social clauses, and including a Community Benefit programme in the build of the New Children’s Hospital in Dublin. We have also enabled the use for the first time in Ireland, of Reserved Contracts, public procurement contracts reserved for organisations with a social purpose.

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Continue to build the Community Benefits Forum as a shared learning network
- Organise public events that showcase and promote Community Benefit
- Research further Community Benefit programmes in other countries and bring the learning to Ireland
- Continue to bed down the benefit of social clauses in the New Children’s Hospital through our chairing of the Employment and Training subgroup of the Hospital Community Benefits programme

### **Rights Holders who are part of Minority Ethnic Communities**

CAN is working closely with communities with a high stock of public housing with mostly white Irish populations in anticipation of a dramatic increase in allocations of Minority Ethnic Community people in the near future.

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Work dialogically to develop constructive responses to the anticipated situation including appropriate training, policies and practical supports for communities and migrants.
- Expand the learning for this project across Dublin city centre
- Research the response in other countries within the European Union and bring the learning to bear on the Irish situation.

## **2. Leadership Development**

The CAN model relies on leadership within communities that live with inequalities, those who wish to support them, and those working within the systems that need to change.

The objective of this work is to develop leadership capacity for real change among all groups with a role to play in social justice work

This involves

- Facilitating learning in leadership development among people impacted by inequalities, those working to support them and those working in the systems that need to change if inequalities are to be addressed
- Offering a range of learning experiences from tailor-made programmes to accredited courses at all levels
- Mentoring leaders as they engage in leadership for change

### **Strategic Objectives**

During 2019-22 CAN will

- Work in partnership with organisations and communities to design and deliver grassroots leadership initiatives, ranging from short bespoke courses to longer programmes
- Seek out and/or respond to new opportunities to design and deliver grassroots Leadership Development Programmes in geographic communities and with communities of interest; accredited and non-accredited according to specific requests
- Continue to work in collaboration with The Wheel and the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at Maynooth College to develop and deliver the Transformative Leadership Programme
- Seek out and/or respond to opportunities to deliver CAN's Integrated Collaborative Practice Programme
- Work with educational institutions to provide appropriate accreditation for programmes that require it
- Work with community and voluntary organisations to design and deliver bespoke leadership programmes for staff, volunteers and management
- Provide leadership coaching to those working in the community and voluntary sector to assist them to develop and enhance their own leadership model
- Continue to learn from our experience of designing and delivering leadership programmes and develop new materials and resources based on our practice.

### **3. Dialogue**

The CAN model relies on dialogue at all its stages. The change agenda in the Model relies on relationship-based engagements that bring us beyond the stuck patterns of dismissal and judgement.

The objective of this work is to facilitate dialogue between different parts of the systems that structure our lives in the interests of social justice. Dialogue is a communication process that enables inquiry into complex or recurring problems, bringing together people with diverse views or perspectives on those problems, and which has the declared intention of arriving at a shared understanding of how to achieve resolution and positive change. This will involve:

- Facilitating structured Dialogue on social justice related themes, bringing together all parts of the relevant system
- Developing CAN's own model of Dialogue that includes approaches such as World Café, Open Space and other large group participative methodologies
- Facilitating people with roles relevant to social justice work to work dialogically
- Bringing a dialogical character to learning events, organisational development work and projects in the interests of social justice

### **Strategic Objectives**

During 2019-'22 CAN will

- Continue to work Dialogically in the North East Inner City of Dublin with the Neighbourhood Dialogue Group to build effective and sustainable community engagement
- Develop and build on Community Participation Project commenced in Dunlaoghaire Rathdown with Southside Partnership and Dunlaoghaire Rathdown Drug and Alcohol Task Force
- Facilitate a Dialogue Community of Practice for those who have engaged in CAN Dialogue processes and want to continue reflection and learning
- Seek out and/or respond to opportunities to facilitate Dialogue as a strategy for promoting social justice
- Launch and promote the Tao of Dialogue – a publication co-authored by CAN staff with UK colleagues, on the nature and practice of Dialogue.

## **4. Organisational Development**

The CAN model relies on strong organisations to work in service of social justice and equality. People living with inequalities need to organise themselves, they rely on NGOs who support them, and engage with the organisational entities that sustain the system.

The objective of this work is to enable organisations with a role to play in creating and sustaining social justice and equality to be more effective in their work. For CAN this involves

- Assisting organisations to strategise and evaluate what they do in light of their core purpose
- Facilitating the development and sustainability of healthy relationships within organisations
- Facilitating the development of healthy collaborations between organisations in the interests of social justice

### **Strategic Objectives**

During 2019-'22 CAN will



- Work on an ongoing basis with some social justice organisations to support them in their development and practice and engage with others on shorter term interventions.
- Seek out and/or respond to opportunities to work with organisations that will create linkages with other aspects of CAN's work such as community safety, human rights, minority ethnic communities, regeneration and community engagement
- Reflect on and learn from our interventions so that we can improve and extend our range of interventions.

## **5. Sustaining, maintaining and promoting CAN and its work**

For CAN to engage in the work outlined above, we need to attend to our own organisational development needs. Our objective is to continue as an organisation with the highest standards of governance and staff development and welfare.

This involves

- Maintaining our adherence to the standards we have embraced in the Governance Code
- Maintaining a strong and united team of staff and voluntary management working together dialogically
- Achieving sustainability in capacity and resources

## **Strategic Objectives**

During 2019-'22 CAN will

- Engage in whole organisation review, reflection and planning, at least annually
- Continue on the journey of full compliance with the Governance Code
- Maintain and develop the CAN website as a means of communicating with others and promoting our purpose and activities
- Continue to build strategic relationships with current and potential funders and supporters of CAN's work