

Chairperson's June Fest 2020 Review of Activities

In early March, we were getting down to serious planning for June Fest 2020 when Covid hit. At the time, we saw it as a short-term blip that would soon blow over. But, over time it dawned on us that the June Festival would not go ahead as usual.

On X March, we decided to put the festival on hold and to explore what might be possible online. At that time, we still thought that there would be a time in the autumn or maybe early winter when it would be possible to mount a post-Covid celebration. Thus, we applied for LPT funding to Kildare County Council and this funding in came through to the tune of €15,000 in early August.

In submitting our application for LPT funding we were required to provide a budget setting out what we proposed to use the money for, if our application was successful. This budget included a provision of €3,500 for a post-Covid celebration but, when this proved impossible, we sought permission from KCC to use this money for other purposes. We await a response to this request.

We used the LPT grant to build our capacity in several respects. We are in throes of having our website redeveloped with an eye to using it more effectively to facilitate and promote our work. We have acquired technology that will enable us to capture events on video to a high quality and make them available to the public on our website and social media platforms. We have, as you will see from the treasurer's report had our accounts professionally prepared and audited; and we are committed to doing this in the future.

We have also had a new constitution drafted with a view to registering as a charity with the Charities Regulator and with the Companies Office as a company limited by guarantee. Certainly, from the point of view of paperwork and formality, there are downsides to both of these proposed developments but the reality is that we are effectively a charity in terms of Charity Law and we were in breach of that law by not being registered as a charity. So, we have no option but to register as a charity – if we seek financial support from the public. Indeed, in the medium term, it is likely that government grants will be difficult if not impossible to obtain if an organisation is not a registered charity. All registered charities are required to comply with a robust code of governance and, while this involves significant work, this essentially gives an organisation real credibility when it comes to seeking grants or sponsorship.

Registration as a CLG on the other hand, while it also validates the bon fides of an organisation, is significant in that it protects the directors from financial loss in the event of a financial claim against the organisation being successful. This makes easier to attract people with appropriate experience and skills to serve as directors. Currently, many non-profit organisations recruit directors through boardmatch.ie but we are not eligible to recruit through it because we are neither a registered charity nor a CLG.

For these reasons it is very import that the AGM adopts the draft constitution that is being placed before it this evening so we may seek registration as a charity and as a CLG. We propose to seek registration as

a charity in the first instance because this is the more demanding hurdle to overcome. Also, it is our understanding that it is more difficult for a CLG to register as a charity rather than for a charity to register as a CLG.

By the way, the name change in the constitution is not something that we wanted to do but, if we are to register as a CLG, we have no option but to change the name from June Fest as it is not possible to register a company with the name of a company that has been 'delisted' until 20 years after the 'delisting' – even though, in the case of June Fest, it was a voluntary strike-off. The name change, however, will not prevent the organisation trading as June Fest. It is simply a matter of registering June Fest as a business name.

To run any kind of non-profit organisation today and be in full compliance with all relevant law, regulation and strategy is, to put it mildly, quite challenging. Since early March, the management committee has met with both Stephen and Martin Connelly each Monday evening for between 60 and 90 minutes and often for significantly longer. Stephen (Festival Director) and Martin (PRO) are both working with June Fest through community employment schemes and their contribution has been invaluable.

It has come to our attention that the Arts Council and others offer a raft of grant schemes. For example, the Arts Council offers grant aid to festivals through its festivals grants scheme. For a variety of reasons, it was not possible for us to apply for a festivals' grant this year. Hopefully, we can do so next year.

We did, however, apply for a grant under the Arts Council's [Capacity Building Support Scheme](#). Applying for such grants requires a lot of work and we have no idea how our application will be received but we should know the outcome by Christmas. The thinking behind this application was to build June Fest's capacity for the future in a number of ways. We urgently need to develop policies and strategies (that align with national local policies and strategies) both to guide our work – particularly around the arts – and to make it easier for us to obtain grants from bodies such as the Arts Council. We need to become more adept in the use of social media to promote June Fest generally and to promote specific activities and events. We also need state of the art technology and skills to facilitate several of our creative endeavours and, in particular, to facilitate the editing of video for broadcast on our website and on our social media platforms. Consequently, our application covers each of these three areas and was for a total of €12,847.00.

When, in late March it became obvious that we had no option but to abandon our plans for a June Festival, we advised all our partners. Once that decision was taken, we immediately commenced exploring ways in which June Fest might facilitate a community celebration once the current crisis had passed. Like a lot of people at that time, we thought the public health crises would blow over relatively quickly. Nevertheless, we also began to explore ways in which

during the lockdown, we could facilitate a range of web-based activities to connect people through their interests and we sought community input about what we might deliver online. At that point, we had no real idea about what it might be possible to deliver online but in the intervening months we have acquired considerable skills and insights into what is possible online and how to make it happen. Indeed, we can see that, even when Covid is no more than a memory, we will be able to use these skills to make festival activities accessible to those who, for one reason or another, would not otherwise be able to access them.

While Covid is something we could all have done without. It provided us with an opportunity to assess where we were at, to build capacity for the future and, in several respects, it has been a productive year even when you look at the events and activities that we either facilitated or delivered. For example:

- Yarn Bomb went ahead in a different guise with cars, houses, home and garden furniture, and private gardens being decorated with colourful creations as part of the first **National Yarn Bomb Day in aid of Barnardos**. This attracted both local and national media coverage people confined because of Covid were encouraged to brighten up their lives - with knitting or crochet needles and some coloured thread.
- Several online quizzes were run, and at the height of the lockdown, several hundred families participated in these quizzes. It was interesting see several Newbridge natives join in the quiz from around the world. The results of 'Newbridge / June Fest' round of questions gave us a good idea of the composition of the participants.
- Stephen Connelly, on behalf of June Fest, worked with Kildare Art Collective on a collaborative project (Art Feeds) involving 31 local artists - writers, musicians, poets, painters, sculptors, textile artists, etc. Though Covid ensured that the public were not able to visit the exhibition of the art works at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Stephen videoed the whole exhibition and interviews with many of the participating artists and anyone can tune in to the interviews or the exhibition online. This project was enormously successful, popular and relevant.
- One project the '*History of Newbridge: Buildings, Businesses & Architecture*' is now in its eighth month. The idea here was quite simple. Publish a photo of a local business premises in the Leinster Leader, on Newbridge Down Memory Lane and June Fest Facebook pages and invite the public to share their knowledge of the buildings and the people who lived and worked in them. The first building featured on 12 May was Moorefield Terrace. The public response since then has been superb. The Leinster Leader has been critical to the success of this project and, as well as publishing the weekly photo, it also devoted a full page to the project in its Kildare 2020 Annual.

- The June Fest Short Story competition was judged by Kildare Author, Orla McAlinden, who did a wonderful job in both promoting and judging the competition. The top three writers had their stories published in the Leinster Leader's Kildare 2020 Annual. The prizes were **€500, €250 & €150**. The Writers of the best 10 stories will participate in a writing workshop conducted by Orla McAlinden in February. Furthermore, prize winners will record themselves reading their stories and these will be broadcast on June Fest's social media platforms. Indeed, each short story will be accompanied by a 10-minute interview that Orla did with each of the three writers. It is of interest to note that the third prize winner is an 18-year-old Leaving Certificate student, which is very pleasing.
- A lecture and Q & A on *Protestant Nationalists* with historian Dr Conor Morrisey, from Milltown, attracted a live audience of 90 plus and since then it has been watched all over the world.
- Some 6 Lockdown Chats were broadcast on June Fest social media platforms. These were done in conjunction with CelticCon Midlands Comic Convention and focused on writing, illustrating and publishing the graphic novel, the animation industry and related matters. This was an interesting (sometimes hair-raising) project, and much was learned from it about how the model might be adapted to other topics. Interestingly, one of our posts about one of these chats was liked by David Bowie's sons – someone with a huge online following.
- Collaborated with the Irish Military Seminar in broadcasting Mario Corrigan's interviews on all June Fest social media platforms. These were very professionally produced in the Riverbank Arts Centre and demonstrate how similar events can be made accessible to a very wide audience of interested people. This is where digital marketing is so important.
- Delivered a widely watched 'live stream' from Moods bog – Mix & Fairbanks – at the height of the summer. This provided an enjoyable experience for young people without them congregating and putting their health at risk.
- Delivered a live stream gig with Ross D
- Promoted the Swift survey during Swift Awareness week and organised a related guided walk and talk in collaboration with Wild Kildare.
- During Pollinator week posted two videos on social media platforms to highlight the various pollinators and the challenges they face around Kildare and across the country.
- Broadcast the annual St Mark's Duck Race 2020 in aid of Hoped D and the Bridge Camphill community, which this year could not have an audience, on our social media platforms.
- Every effort be made in implementing future projects to ensure that HSE advice around social distancing and the use face masks is observed.

- Currently, we are posting photographs of shop fronts with good Christmas displays/lighting – so those able to visit the town (elderly, disables or living away from Newbridge may see and enjoy them. We are also asking the public to send us photos of well-decorated/lit homes – with a view to sharing them on our social media platforms.

A lot of work has been done on projects that remain to be concluded. For example:

- A virtual Bands on the Bank – involving six musicians and two poets.
- A documentary on the canals of Kildare – their history and their wildlife. One could see the Grand Canal as 132 km long national park. The videoing has been done and it now needs to be edited into some three 30-minute packages.
- A major wall mural on a suitable wall in Newbridge.

Looking to 2021, we have done quite a bit of thinking about what June Fest 21 might involve. Indeed, we have prepared a first draft of the festival programme and we would like you feedback on it. We do not have time to discuss the draft programme this evening, but we would be happy to share the draft with you and maybe, after Christmas, we could do a ZOOM meeting to receive your feedback. Alternatively, you might email us your ideas or reflections.

Looking to 2021, we are faced with the big unknowables. Will it be possible to run a family fun day or other events outdoors? Now, we think possibly not but, with the prospect of vaccines being widely available, the situation could change for the better quite quickly. We will have to keep everything under review and, come early March, we will be in a far better place to make an assessment about what will be possible, come June.

If it is obvious that the standard June Festival is possible, we will focus all our efforts on delivering a compacted programme in June. If not, we will probably have to spread our activities across a longer period of time.

In conclusion I would like to thank you most sincerely for joining us tonight. Your attendance is vital to our future in so many ways.

I would also like to thank our funders, Kildare County Council and all those bodies that we collaborate with – Co Kildare Library Services, the Riverbank Arts Centre, Bird Watch Ireland, Wild Kildare, The Leinster Leader, KFM and anyone or any organisation that has assisted us in any way.

One final thank you to the members of the management committee and to Stephen and Martin Connelly. The work both Stephen and Martin have put in this year is way beyond the call of duty.

Without this support, the June Fest festival would not be possible.

