



Irish Forest School Association

Irish Forest School Association

AGM

Date: 27 Aug 2020, 7-8pm

Venue: online, via Zoom

AGENDA

1. Minutes of 2019 AGM
2. Chairperson's report - incl Membership update (Mirjam) and Social Media Update (Nichola)
3. Financial report (Caroline)
4. Ratification of ACORN (Joan Whelan, Mirjam Bloem, Ciara Hinksman, Orla Gallagher, Shane Furlong, Caroline Percival, Lucy Bell, Nichola Salmon and co-option of 3 new members until May 2021 (Laura O Malley; Lucy O Hagan; Kerry Walker)
5. Back in the Woods - a short discussion led by Ciara Hinksman on how it feels to get back out in the woods as practices open up again.
6. Announcement of Autumn Gathering 2020 Saturday 17th October, Bushy Park, Dublin 6w 11-3pm

Registered to attend: 26 members

1. Minutes

Minutes of the 2019 AGM were taken as read (on website) were approved by the meeting. Proposed: LB/
Seconded AW. Accepted

2. Chairperson's report

Welcome to our 4th AGM - delayed due to Covid 19. This report covers the period to 30 April 2020, so does not fully include the Covid period, but I will say a few words about that.

Following the AGM in April 2018, we welcomed Marc Barker on to the ACORN. The new ACORN met in July, September, Oct, Nov, Jan and March. We normally meet for 10am to 3pm on Saturdays. Of course, since then, we have met virtually via zoom. Thanks to RMDS and to KCCC

Special thanks to Gretta Murphy who contributed to the development of the Association since its inception and who has now resigned from the ACORN. Thank her for her commitment to IFSA particularly around governance issues and also for her generous contribution to our development through making premises, admin support and stationery available to us over the past four years.

I would like to thank all the members of the ACORN for all the effort they put in to make our meetings so energising and positive. We try to ensure that the spirit of FS is part of the way we do our business on your behalf and that is working very successfully. There is a huge voluntary commitment put in to make the organisation successful and, on your behalf, I want to thank each and every one of them for that commitment.

It's been a strange year and remains so with positives and negatives for FS. We have really seen an increase in public awareness of FS over this year. We are getting increasing volumes of emails and requests for information – which bring its own challenges. To remind everyone of our mission:

Mission Statement:

- To bring Forest School practitioners together to inspire inclusive, playful learning for all, in nature.
- To build resilience and relationships, through our connection with each other, and the natural world, while inspiring creativity and supporting wellbeing.

Quality in FS is an ongoing topic of discussion for us. We have close links with two training organisations Forest School Ireland Circle of Life /Forest School Ireland and Huathe / Down to Earth. We continued our visits to both training groups this year and welcomed the new trainees to the FS community. We feel this is really important going forward and thank the training organisations for the warm reception.

Autumn Gathering

Forest School - Branching Out Saturday 19th October in All Hallows Campus, DCU, Drumcondra D9.

Jointly organised with the Outdoor Learning Group in DCU (co-ordinated by Orla Kelly a lecturer in DCU. Over 50 participants, a number of them recently trained and new to FS events.

At that gathering we began the work of establishing a quality framework for FS practice in Ireland – thank you Orla - which it was intended to further at our annual Gathering.

Sample Quality Framework

Principle One: Forest school is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visit; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.

Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.

A Forest School programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.

The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

Categories: Exceeds Criteria, Meets Criteria, Partially Meets Criteria, Improvement needed Meets

Criteria:

- Once a week, for 10 to 35 weeks
- Each session is a minimum of 2.5 hours onsite
- Same group of participants
- Small group size (maximum 15); average ratio age dependent, legal and insurance requirements
- Built-in review process, per session/programme/cycle. Review should include participant-led discussion, and practitioner reflection
- Flexible planning emergent approach dynamic
- Each participant is clearly aware of boundaries, i.e. where they are; awareness of boundary is internalised through everyone participating in discussion of boundary; the child is involved

We also began the process of establishing Regional Groups in a session led by Ciara and Shane.

Fundraising We discussed a funding strategy for IFSA going forward 2020- 2023. We identified the following projects (in no particular order). I would also like to thank Sarah Williams who gave of her time to meet with me and to guide us in the direction we need to go to source funds.

Administrator: The duties of the admin would be associated with:

- Answering emails
- Writing minutes and draft policy documents
- Day to day correspondence
- Day to day finance matters/ preparation of accounts for meetings
- Social media /website management
- Sourcing funding
- Events

We estimated the approx. cost (based on development officer rates at €60,000 over three years half time or €120,000 over three years full time. In addition, €10,000 would be needed to purchase a computer/phone/ office supplies service contracts, heat and light allowance (as we anticipate the person would work from home).

PR/Development Budget Role A budget for stalls at conferences and events to raise our profile and visibility and to promote the association – development officer role

A resource pack for new members comprising:

- Cloth bag
- Flyers and info about IFSA
- Reusable cup

Estimated cost of an ethically produced sustainable Irish made pack was 500 packs at a cost of €50 – total €25,000.

Forest School poster, building on the flyer we have at present to elaborate on the 6 principles – downloadable as well as printed. To be widely circulated.

Media and PR training for ACORN to promote FS effectively on local and national media

Forest School resources – employ a consultant to help develop – including reflection sheets for best practice; quality framework/ information sheets

General

We provide Garda vetting for FS trainees and leaders who have no access to training through other channels, through the Volunteer Centre Network. I want to highlight again the importance of full compliance with the law in terms of Garda vetting and child protection for us all.

We are members of Leave No Trace.

We were delighted to see positive reports on FS in the media and we encourage you to send into us any publications for the website and I'm sure there are others, so please share with us.

We published three 'Eletters' for members.

Insurance remains an ongoing concern.

We respond as well as we can to queries from both members and non-members

Our map of FS practitioners is on the website. And I would encourage any of you who are practicing and who are not yet on the map to complete the forms -

Membership (Mirjam)

Current members: 147

Maintaining our current membership and growing the membership of the Irish Forest School Association is core to our aims. The benefits are:

- Supporting the growth and development of FS in Ireland
- Discounts in attending our events/CPD
- Access to Garda Vetting

We are currently working hard on resources for members, and hope to be able to offer further benefits to members as our growth facilitates.

We have seen a good growth in members this past year, many either trainees or intending to train. We also emailed lapsed members to encourage them to renew their membership at a cost of €35 for the year to May 2020. We also offered people the option to remain on our mailing list. This is vital as our dormant members mailing list will not be in use beyond the end of this year due to data protection considerations.

We extended current membership to May 2021 to reflect the shut down for our members.

We opened our Virtual Campfire event to non-members. 58 people attended and 20 were non-members.

Communication/Social media (Nichola)

Our website is our main form of communication, although most seem to engage primarily through our social media platforms. We have seen a 43% increase on our Facebook page and we now have over 3,000 followers. Our Instagram and Twitter accounts have also seen a 50% increase over the year. Content is focussed on FS specific activities. A call was made for members to send in relevant content.

We have 122 members of our FS forum page, which his exclusively for members.

We participated in the online GOAL Global Sparks challenge during the Covid lockdown period to highlight the Sustainable Goals and thanks were extended ot Lucy O Hagan who made a video.

We agreed our next tasks going forward are to:

Support members in an era of Covid.

Lobbying stakeholders: who makes decisions that affect us (e.g. Coillte, Heritage Council, DCYA, DES)

Regional groups Use of regional meetings to provide discussion/network/sharing forums for member practitioners, to share both cultural and practical experiences. Regionally-based members would set up and run the meetings, rather than members of the IFSA ACORN.

Further exploration of an approach to fundraising to support IFSA that does not compromise members seeking funding for their activities.

Proposed: Lucy Seconded: Ann Report accepted

3. Financial report (Caroline)

Bank reconciliation: - May 2019 – April 2020

Balance forward April 2019	€5,062.66
Total Income for the period 1 st May 2019 – 30 th April 2020	€330.70
Total Expense for the period 1 st May 2019– 30 th April 2020	€3,832.24
Closing Balance as of 30 th April 2020	€1,561.62

WEBSITE	€503
GARDA VETTING	€10
BANK CHARGES	€64.26
INSURANCE	€375
MEMBERSHIP REFUNDS	€0
AUTUMN GATHERING	€468
AGM/ANNUAL GATHERING	€1683
ACORN MEETINGS	€48
MERCHANDISE	€187
TRAINING	€394
PRINTING/STATIONARY	
ARTS ED	€100
LEAVE NO TRACE	
TOTAL	€3,832.24

Income: - May 2019- April 2020 - €1,561.62

MEMBERSHIP	€315
BANK FEE (refund)	€15.70

Bank Issues rectified in August 2020 and will show in 2021 AGM Accounts

Signed _____
Caroline Carroll Treasurer

Signed _____
Joan Whelan Chairperson

Proposed Lucy/ Seconded Ann/ Accepted

4. Election of ACORN

Ratification of ACORN (Joan Whelan, Mirjam Bloem, Ciara Hinksman, Orla Gallagher, Shane Furlong, Caroline Percival, Lucy Bell, Nichola Salmon

Proposed: Mary Seconded: Ruairi Accepted

The meeting approved the co-option of Laura O Malley, Lucy O Hagan, and Kerry Walker to the IFSA ACORN

Proposed: Mary Seconded: Ruairi Accepted

5. Back in the Woods

A short discussion led by Ciara Hinksman on how it feels to get back out in the woods as practices open up again.

6. Announcement of Autumn Gathering 2020

Saturday 17th October, Bushy Park, Dublin 6w 11-3pm, subject to Covid 19 Govt guidelines.

The meeting concluded at 8pm with a song led by Lucy O Hagan.