



Irish Forest School Association

ANNUAL REPORT

IFSA AGM 2023

10th June 2023 CECAS, Myross Wood Co Cork

56 members attended

Agenda

The reports cover the period 1st May 2022 to 30th April 2023.

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of 2022 AGM for approval
3. Chairperson's report (Joan)
4. Financial report (Caroline/Joan)
5. Membership report (Joan)
6. Social media/communications Report (Kerry)
7. Regional report (Orla)
8. Ratification of ACORN for 2023 - 2024
9. Member news
10. Close

Minutes of 2022 AGM Approved. No queries received.

Proposer CH; Secunder KW

Chairperson's report

Welcome to our 7th AGM. This report covers the period 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2023.

It has been a momentous one for Forest School and for IFSA in Ireland as we hit the 10th anniversary of the first Forest School sprouts in Ireland.

Following the AGM in August 2022, we have continued to meet both online and in person online over the course of the year. We had an all-day meeting hosted by LB in Co Kildare in August where we enjoyed her beautiful garden and set out our priorities and shared out the roles for the year ahead.

Special thanks to CC who has been part of the IFSA ACORN (our management committee) since its foundation and who has been our treasurer for the past six years. Caroline also provided a meeting place in Dublin for us over those years and lots of nice buns and refreshments to nourish us. I would also like to thank Eithne and Clare who joined us on the ACORN this year – but due to other commitments, not least setting up their own businesses and Forest School practices, have decided to stake a step back from the ACORN.

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 Forest School 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.

EVENTS

In this past year, Ciara has led on the events side of things. She has brought her training and deep passion for the art of mentoring approach to leading and organising events. The Autumn Gathering is now established as an opportunity for us to develop regionally and this year we launched our ideas for the regions on 6th Nov in Larchill Arcadian Gardens Co. Meath - titled 'Gathering Acorns - Growing Community, Connection and Belonging'

It was a beautiful day to bring FS practitioners together who might otherwise work alone or feel isolated from other areas in the country. On the day, we had a carousel of activities led by the Midlands Tuatha and IFSA ACORN. This was followed by a series of skillshares offered by members of our incredible network. After lunch in the woods, we explored what being on an ACORN or DEARCÁN (the name we give the nature-centric organising team),

is like. We experienced how many individual parts can work creatively towards a common goal.

The theme was continued with the spring webinar series.

Monday 27th of February 2023 Story telling with Clare Murphy

Monday 13th of March 2023 Mycelium networks, connecting the regions of Forest school practice in Ireland

Monday 27th of March 2023 Mark Morey

Over 40 registered for each one. Over 35 attended each evening Again, this is now a key event in our calendar as we emerge from the quiet winter months. The IFSA understands that, like mycelia, autonomous, dynamic practitioners thrive when they are connected by a supportive community of practice. Thanks to Clare Murphy storyteller; to our own Caitriona Ni Cheallaigh our regional co-ordinator and to Mark Morey, internationally renowned nature connection mentor who closed out the series. We do intend to have these available on the website and technical difficulties and quality issues have prevented this, but hopefully in 2024.

New IFSA website

We launched our new website early in the New Year – with a members only section for the first time. This reflects our growth as an organisation. Thanks to Kelley Monks, web designer.

We have a Frequently Asked Questions page (FAQs). Please send on any regular questions (and answers if you have them) that you are asked about Forest School.

We also want short video clips of FS in action or of your FS site or maybe of your thoughts about FS. No particular format required. But make sure you have the permission of those in the clip for us to put it on our website.

We hope to have an Irish language version of the website in the not too distant future.

We welcome your ideas for what you would like to see on the website – so get in touch.

Insurance

We have become members of [BGI.eu](https://www.bgi.eu), who offer bespoke insurance solutions for the Health & Wellbeing sector– this will enable more of our members to access reasonably priced

insurance and access a small discount. Check out: <https://bgi.uk.com/associated-groups/irish-forest-school-association/>

Training

As you know at this stage Brigit's Garden <https://brigitsgarden.ie/learn/> in Galway has been approved as an education centre and is now offering the first Irish accredited at Level 6 Forest School Leadership training , to give it its full title. This has been a joint project with IFSA. We really welcome this and it is a step change for the development of FS in Ireland. We want to thank Huathe and Circle of life who have supported training in Ireland over the past 10 years. We wish the Brigit's Garde team all the very best of success and we will be closely monitoring the reaction to the training.

Governance

We have initiated the process for setting up IFSA as a limited company - at present we are an unincorporated association. It will mean that we can access public funding and grants to develop IFSA much more easily. The downside is that there are additional costs – for example accounts must be approved by an accountant annually. The company structure also offers us as a voluntary committee more protection and is more appropriate if IFSA wants to employ staff, for example an admin person, in the future.

General

We also kept in touch via email and tried to respond to your queries and suggestions as well as possible.

We continue to 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 remain members of Leave No Trace.

Going forward these are our priority areas for the next year:

- Restructure as a company limited by guarantee with the CRO and the Charities regulator
- Continued development of the website
- Governance: Quality Framework – continued policy development

- External lobbying stakeholders: who makes decisions that affect us (e.g. Coillte, Heritage Council, DCYA, DES)
- Regional groups
- Events

Thank you all for your continued support. Thank you all for your commitment to the development of Forest School in Ireland to date. As always, get in touch with your ideas, concerns and queries.

Joan Whelan

Proposer MD; Seconder RD

IFSA Financial Annual Report

Reporting period: 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2023

Bank reconciliation: - May 2022 – April 2023

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|---|------------------|
| Balance Forward - 1 st May 2022 | €7,019.69 |
| Total Income for the period 1st May 2022 – 30th April 2023 | €9,261.02 |
| Membership and conference fees | |

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Total Expenses for the period 1 st May 2022 – 30 th April 2023 | €7,107.38 |
|---|------------------|

Expense: May 2022 – April 2023

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| IT | €956.14 |
| Garda Vetting | €40.00 |
| Bank Charges | €214.89 |
| Insurance | €364.34 |
| Events | €5,316.01 |
| Refund | €100 |
| IFSA Supplies | €116 |
| Total | €7,107.38 |

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Closing Balance as of 30 th April 2023 | €9,173.73 |
|---|------------------|

Sign _____ **Caroline Carroll Treasurer**

Sign _____ **Joan Whelan Chairperson**

Date 19th May 2023

Proposer LB Seconder TH

Membership (Miriam)

Maintaining our current membership and growing the membership of the Irish Forest School Association is core to our aims. The redevelopment of the website has a members only area.

Member benefits include:

Supporting the growth and development of the Forest School movement in Ireland

Reduced price on events.

Access to Garda Vetting

Discounts with affiliate organisations

Access to our regional groups

Use of our logo

We have seen consistent growth in our members this year. During the covid period we extended membership – however going forward all members will need to ensure they are current and paid up in order to continue to access the members only section.

Membership will remain at €35.

200 members and friends mailing list of 150

Social Media (Kerry)

Our profile continues to grow apace.

2285 Facebook users

2313 Instagram followers

442 followers on twitter

Twitter account now active again

A rogue account, Forest School Ireland, with inappropriate content is consistently being reported by us to no effect. We will make an official complaint.

The regions (Caitriona / Orla)

The Regional Groups were launched during our Spring Webinar series on Monday 13th March. Groups are accessed via our members only section of the website.

IFSA were extremely excited to get this underway as this has been in the pipeline for some time.

The vision for these groups was to provide a forum for local practitioners to get to know each other, skillshare, share information on local events and much more.

There are 10 Regional groupings across the whole country with close to 80 participants in the groups.

Region 1 (Donegal, Leitrim & Sligo): 4 participants
Region 2 (Derry, Antrim, Down, Monaghan, Cavan, Tyrone, Armagh, Fermanagh): 7 Participants
Region 3: (Meath & Louth) 6 participants
Region 4: (Dublin) 13 Participants
Region 5: (Kildare & Wicklow) 15 Participants
Region 6: (Longford, Westmeath, Offaly & Laois) 7 Participants
Region 7: (Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Waterford) 6 Participants
Region 8: (Carok & Kerry) 9 Participants
Region 9 (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary: 4 Participants
Region 10: (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon 9 Participants

Each group has a co-ordinator based locally and also a member of IFSA in the background. The co-ordinator aims to promote local knowledge and also aims to pass any relevant information on that IFSA may release from time to time. As these groups are in their infancy, we look forward to watching these groups grow into communities of like-minded, nature loving folk that feel empowered and supported through their amazing work as forest school practitioners.

Going forward IFSA plan to create opportunities at our gatherings for face-to-face meet and greets for our regional groups

Ratification of ACORN

ACORN 2023 - we have eight nominations:

Joan Whelan Chairperson **Proposer OG Second CH**

Lucy Bell Treasurer **Proposer JW Second MD**

Ciara Hinksman **Proposer TDLC Second KW**

Kerry Walker **Proposer N? Second RD**

Mirjam Bloem **Proposer JW Second LB**

Caitriona Ní Chleirigh **Proposer CH Second MD**

Orla Gallagher **Proposer KW Second PP**

Ellie McEwan **Proposer JW Second MC**

Congratulations to all!

Member news and AOB:

Members were advised that Social Prescribing and Community Engagement Officers are now employed in the HSE regions – more information through the local HSE office and the Health and Community Welfare Officers. Fundings for Forest School as under these initiatives may be available. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/mental-health-and-wellbeing/social-prescribing/>

The Heritage in Schools panel is open until 17th July – the new panels will be in place until 2027. Reference the SESE and the Primary Curriculum documents in your application.

<https://www.heritageinschools.ie/about/news/heritage-in-schools-panel-2024-2027-recruiting-now>

It was noted that the new Primary Curriculum Framework does specify the outdoors as a learning environment, which helps strengthen the case for pedagogy like Forest School to be used to deliver the curriculum. <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/The-Primary-Curriculum-Framework/>

The Sports and Recreation Partnership funding may also be an avenue to explore.

Maria Edgeworth's Practical Education (which sets out a philosophy of education that shares much with Forest School) celebrate 225 years since its publication this year (2023) and is being celebrated in Longford /Roscommon. <https://mariaedgeworthcenter.com/>

The Bird ID app produced by the Merlin Cornell lab was recommended – free and high quality downloadable resource <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

Tusla First Five Outdoor Learning guidance https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/EYI-GDE12.65_When_the_Roof_is_the_Sky_.pdf

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c62e4-insights-effective-outdoor-learning-environment/#practioners>

Direct debit option for membership possibility.

Garda vetting through the local Volunteer centre useful <https://www.volunteer.ie/>

National biodiversity Data centre logger app - <https://biodiversityireland.ie/national-biodiversity-data-centre-launches-new-app-to-collect-pollinator-data/>

The meeting closed at 5.30pm.