



# Irish Forest School Association

**DRAFT Minutes of AGM held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2024 Slieve Aughty Centre Loughrea**  
**66 members attended**

## **AGENDA**

1. Welcome
  2. Minutes of 2023 AGM for approval -see <https://irishforestschoollassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2023-IFSA-AGM-MINUTES-FOR-APPROVAL.pdf>
  3. Chairperson's report (Joan)
  4. Financial report (Lucy)
  5. Membership Report (Joan)
  6. Social Media/communications Report (Kerry)
  7. Regional report (Joan)
  8. Ratification of IFSA constitution <https://irishforestschoollassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IFSA-Constitution-CLG.pdf>
  8. Ratification of ACORN for 2024 – 2025
- Presentation to Ciara
9. Member News
  10. Close

## **Draft minutes**

Minutes 2023/24 were approved. Proposed by: CB Seconded by: RD

## **Chairperson's report**

Welcome to our 8<sup>th</sup> AGM. This report covers the period 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024.

Following the AGM in June 2023, 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 Lucy Bell 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.

A key task was the establishment of IFSA as a CLG, a Company Limited by Guarantee and we achieved that task being incorporated on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Our company name is the Irish Forest School Pedagogy Association CLG, CRO 746830, though we continue to be known as the Irish Forest School Association.

The next step was to seek approval from the Charities Regulator for the appropriate charitable status, which I'm delighted to say was approved just last Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> May (RCN 20206667) – while that doesn't fit within the reporting period of this report, it is momentous news to share.

This way of organising both protects us as Directors of the company and as trustees of the charity and opens up avenues in terms of potential both public and private funding going forward. Lucy will speak more about this later in her financial report. So it is onerous, but well worthwhile.

As always, 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.

I would also like to thank Miriam Bloem who retired from the ACORN during the year. Mirjam many of you will know looked after membership for us. We benefitted from her knowledge and passion for plants and the land and for her Dutch directness over the years she served IFSA.

## **EVENTS**

As you know events are core to our mission to promote FS across the island of Ireland. In this past year, Ellie who joined us last year, has led on the events side of things. She has brought her training and organisation skills and her enthusiasm to the task and we are very grateful.

The IFSA Annual Gathering 2023, our 5<sup>th</sup> on the theme of Rewilding our Forest Communities - reflecting on how we can rewild ourselves, our practice and our green spaces. took place in **CECAS, Leap, West Cork** <https://cecas.ie/> with 70 participants. We opened with a magical musical pied piper effect for our opening and closing circles. Keynote speaker Eoghan Daltun, author of “An Irish Atlantic Rainforest: A Personal Journey Into the Magic of Rewilding” sparked lots of different views and that was continued in our workshops and walks and on to a lively discussion inspired by local and IFSA members who are really making a difference in their own live and the lives of those in their communities in terms of the idea of in the broadest sense rewilding 70 participants

This was followed by our regional events in Autumn 2023, over the weekend of 21/22 October. Overall, we sold 76 tickets across 8 regional events. Excluding Dublin which sold out all 20 tickets, the average ticket sales across the 8 regions was 8. Of the overall sales; 57 members and 19 non-members/new-members. We say a big mile buiochas to the regional co-ordinators who led on these gatherings.

We want to remind you that this is a great chance to step up to the plate and showcase your practice in your region. Important way to build connections locally, accessing volunteers and supporting new trainees.

The model we have developed is that IFSA manage bookings and offers financial support. In 2023, each event can access up to €250 from IFSA towards expenses (ie venue/ provisions/ workshop leader/ equipment), paid upon receipt of an invoice. Details of the 2023 gatherings are as follows:

**Autumn Gathering - Region 1 (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 11:00 - 14:00

Sligo Woodland School, Sligo LETS Organic Gardens

A gathering filled with nature based skills & crafts and storytelling (Co-ordinator Trish MacLoughlin)

**Autumn Gathering - Region 2 (Derry, Antrim, Down, Monaghan, Cavan, Tyrone, Armagh)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 10:00 - 14:00

Rossmore Forest Park, Monaghan

Our Autumnal gathering will include an exciting workshop by the Magical Fungi on edible and medicinal fungi that lie within our forest. We will also have a skillshare of songs and

Halloween/Autumnal crafts with lots of chats in between. Bring along some songs and craft ideas to share with others.

(Co-ordinator Caitriona Ui Chléirigh)

#### Region 4

Our Autumn Gathering will take place this year in a young native woodland in North County Dublin called Among the Trees. We will begin our day with tea, coffee and seasonal treats, followed by a group workshop on Eco-Printing, run by Textile Creator Georgia Connolly.

This workshop takes place in The Cob (a room made of wood, clay and straw) and includes a foraging trip through the site to collect items for printing. We will then gather around the fire for a vegetarian lunch cooked with produce from the polytunnel on site.

The final session includes Samhain themed games, songs and pumpkin carving that will lead us to a fire spiral ceremony and our closing circle. There will be ample opportunity to meet with other leaders and share our knowledge, experience, laughter and love of the woods.

Participants are welcome to join from 11.30am for tea/coffee and chats.

(Co-ordinators; Dee Hurley, Briana O'Doherty, Ciara Hinksman & Róisín

Dexter) **LOCATION** Among the Trees, St Margaret's, North County Dublin K67DY03

#### **Region 5 (Kildare & Wicklow)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 11:00 - 15:00

Kildare Steiner School, Dunlavin Co. Wicklow

Experimental Archaeologist Anita Radini will be leading a workshop on natural fibre and colour, followed by a pot luck lunch and Samhain skillshare. This gathering will include a workshop on wool and fibre. (Co-ordinators; Amber Godwin, Lucy Bell, Kate Maher)

#### **Autumn Gathering - Region 7 (Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Waterford)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 10:00 - 14:00

Woodstock, Instioge, Co. Kilkenny

Mushroom Foragers, Roger and Olivia Goodwillie will open your eyes to the wondrous shapes and sizes of this fascinating group. They will show you the ones that are good to eat, and the ones that you must avoid and the huge number of beauties in between. We will also have some autumnal/Halloween craft sharing. Please note the barrier to the carpark will be lifted so there will be no carpark charge. (Co-ordinator Johanna Wakeham)

#### **Autumn Gathering - Region 8 (Cork & Kerry)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 11:00 - 14:00

Gap of Dunloe Killarney

The Harvest Feast gathering will be made complete by songs by the fire, seasonal fireside cooking and Halloween/Autumnal crafts and skillshare with lots of chats in between. Bring along some of songs and craft ideas to share with others. (Co-ordinators; Niamh Geoghegan & Kerry Walker)

**Autumn Gathering - Region 9 (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary)**

Sun 29 Oct 2023 11:00 - 14:00 Lees Road Amenity Park, Ennis Co Clare

A lovely mix of games, crafts, and chats by the fire with homemade food. Vegan soup will be provided, as well as tea and biscuits. Come to the main carpark and park with the athletic track fence in front of you. Walk along the fence to the left until you come to 2 picnic tables at the far end. We will be waiting there. Looking forward to meeting you. Bring a song to share if you have one. (Co-ordinators; Happy Out Forest School; Veronica McGuire & Gráinne Vaughan)

**Autumn Gathering - Region 10 (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon)**

Sun 22 Oct 2023 11:00 - 14:00

Forest School Story Share - let's gather around the fire, in the woods of Brigit's Garden Co Galway, to share stories, autumnal foraged treats and Autumn/Halloween crafts.

Please bring a story to share and some dried autumn leaves. (Co-ordinator, Carol Barrett)

**The 4<sup>th</sup> spring webinar series** was also well attended and led by three inspiring workshop facilitators. Over 60 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 wither months.

Monday 26th February 2024, 7-8pm, led by Carol Barrett

1500 year anniversary of St. Brigit: Celebrating the Saint, the Goddess and the law maker

Monday 11th March 2024, 7-8pm, led by Kerry Walker

How social media can support your nature based business - Tips and ideas about using social media to promote your Forest School practice

Monday 25th March 2024, 7-8pm, led by Clare Murphy

Myth; our collective home - Myth and Forest School practice

## **GOVERNANCE**

We made our annual Charities return.

Insurance Campaign - Ciara reported a q and a on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June via zoom. We also directed members to the additional information on the members section of the website.

### **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:**

We will proceed to wind up the existing Charity (Reg no 20201154) in line with the constitution.

Governance: Quality Framework – continued policy development

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

Seeking core funding for an administrative support officer

Regional groups Use of regional meetings to provide discussion/network/sharing forums for member practitioners,

Thank you all for your continued support.

Joan Whelan

Proposed by VOB Seconded ML

## IFSA Annual Financial Report (Lucy)

Reporting period: 1 May 2023 – 30 April 2024

Bank reconciliation: - May 2023 – April 2024

Bank Balance Forward - 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2023	<b>€9,173.73</b>
<b>Total Income:</b>	
<b>Breakdown:</b>	
Membership 2023-2024	<b>€3,745.16</b>
Annual Gathering 2023	<b>€7,948.23</b>
Autumn Gathering	<b>€1,329.32</b>
Spring Webinars	<b>€164.79</b>
<b>Total Income for the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b> <b>Membership, conference fees, autumn gathering</b>	<b>€13,133.50</b>

Total <b>Expenses</b> for the period 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2023 – 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	<b>€12,792.66</b>
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### Expense: May 2023 – April 2024

IT	<b>€1,298.56</b>
Garda Vetting	<b>€130</b>
Bank Charges	<b>€35.95</b>
Insurance	<b>€364.34</b>
Events	

• Annual Gathering 2023	€7,209.15
• Annual Gathering 2024	€1,500
• Autumn Gatherings	€1,573
Company Registration	€20
Charity Return	€50
Miscellaneous	€384.31
IFSA Supplies	€227.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>€12,792.66</b>

Closing Balance as of 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	<b>€9,514.57</b>
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Signed  
Lucy Bell

Treasurer



Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Joan Whelan

Chairperson

Date 28<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Copies available on request.

We made an application for funding to the Heritage Council which was unsuccessful.  
However this will be a priority going forward in 2024-25.

Proposed by GV Seconded by SC



## Membership (Joan)

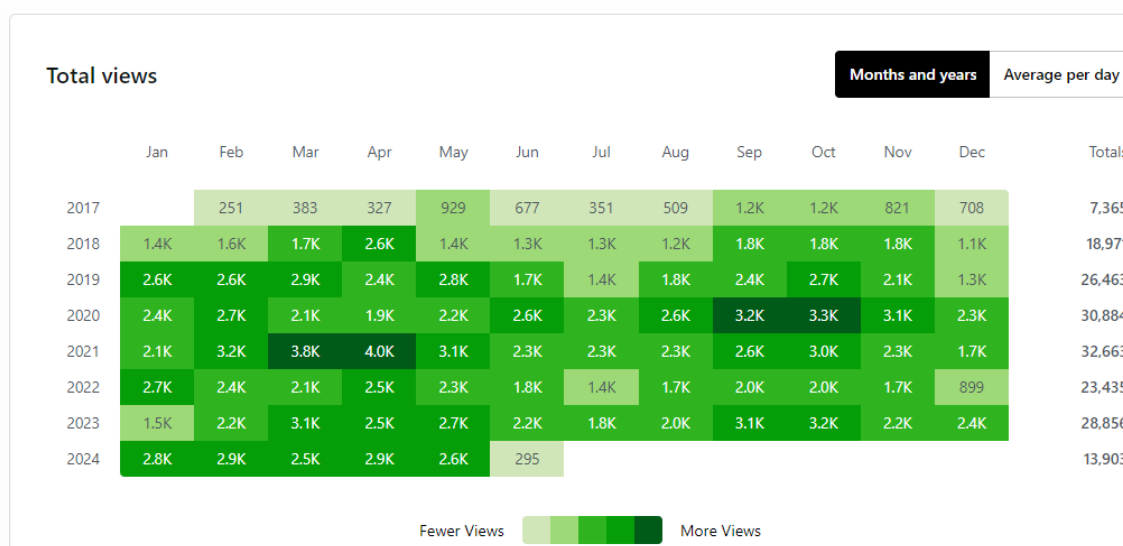
Maintaining our current membership and growing the membership of the Irish Forest School Association is core to our aims. To this end, we have seen consistent growth in our members this year. Membership will remain at €35.

Your membership profile enables you to access our Members Area on our website, which has details of regional WhatsApp groups you can join, IFSA graphics you can use on your own website to indicate your membership. More information will be added to the Members Area during the year.

Member benefits include :

- Supporting the growth and development of the Forest School movement in Ireland
- Discounts in attending our events
- Access to Garda Vetting\*
- Discounts with affiliate organisations e.g., training/professional development workshops with Earth Force Education.
- Access to 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.

## Social Media (Kerry)



Kerry will offer a social media clinic during the coming year.

## The regions (Joan/Caitriona)

Ten regional groups are all up and running and active to different extents.

Region 1: 3 participants

Region 2: 6 Participants

Region 3: 5 participants

Region 4: 12 Participants

Region 5: 15 Participants

Region 6: 6 Participants

Region 7: 6 Participants

Region 8: 8 Participant<sup>a</sup><sub>4</sub>

Region 9: 4 Participants

Region 10: 7 Participants

Coordinator WhatsApp group

Lots of meet and greet messages introducing themselves to their group and some groups are sharing local events and asking lots of questions that are region specific so they are serving a function and need at local level.

### **Ratification of amended constitution**

**Proposed: JWL Seconded LB Accepted unanimously**

### **Election of ACORN.**

The following were elected as Directors/Trustees for 2024-2025.:

Joan Whelan, Orla Gallagher, Lucy Bell, , Kerry Walker Jenny Dungan, Ellie McEwan

Sonia McGuirk, LK **Howells** , Cathy Daly and Leona **Cronin**

### **Presentation to Ciara**

Special thanks to Ciara Hinskman, our founding chairperson and a driving force in the development of FS in Ireland. She had a vision for a new way of being that promoted nature connection and with her usual tenacity she took her vision and worked hard towards her goal of establishing IFSA in Ireland. Together with Jenny Dungan, she convened a meeting in Sli na Banda in Wicklow in 2016 which ultimately brought together the fledgling FS community in Ireland.

She was a central part of the Heartwood group that worked with Brigits Garde in Galway to develop Irish accredited training and her land in Wicklow and now in Westmeath has been the

site of many new dawns for many of us and a reawakening of something deeper within in us towards a better world for us all.

She has a deep passion and commitment to the Art of Mentoring approach to leading and organising and being events.

She hasn't shied away for the murkier bits of setting up and developing an organisation either, developing policies rooting out insurance companies and responding to media.

So we are in her debt.

We want to bestow upon you honorary life membership of IFSA, the community based educational national organisation you co-founded, and continue to help to grow and develop in alignment with your principles of a different way of living in community with nature and your vision of the contribution FS can make to that challenging task.

**Member news and AOB: postponed to conversation café**

The meeting closed at 5.50pm.