

We started the 2022-23 year with an opening balance of £46,153, compared to an opening balance of £18,855 a year earlier. This very notable increase in funds left Downtown in a strong financial position at the start of the year, and provided some assurance should there be any significant reduction in opportunities to bid for funding during the year.

During 2022-23 our Centre Manager, Jill Watton, and Service Coordinator, Rebecca Chambers, have been successful in securing funding from a range of funding bodies. Bidding for funding is time consuming and funders increasingly require a substantial amount of evidence and input. Jill and Rebecca spend many hours dedicated to fundraising activity.

Downtown's biggest funder this year was Comic Relief with £13,023, followed by the Public Health Agency, through the CLEAR Health scheme, with £5,220. Our next biggest funders were the Foyle Foundation with £5,000, the Halifax Foundation and the John Moores Foundation, each with £4,000, our local council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council with £3,118, the Community Development Health Network and Telecommunity, each with £2,000, and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust with £1,955.

You will all be aware that many community and voluntary organisations lost their European funding during the year. As a result, these organisations have been seeking funding from other sources, including those which have traditionally been funders of Downtown, and I have already mentioned that many funders are requesting ever more exacting detail and evidence in their funding applications. This has created a much more challenging funding environment and Downtown has responded by increasing its own fundraising efforts, raising £9,418 during the year. First Lisburn Presbyterian Church has been a crucial and willing partner in many of the fundraising activities and I would want to take this opportunity to thank the Church and its staff and members for their unstinting support.

I would also like to thank First Lisburn for its crucial support in providing Downtown with the use of these premises and office space. In the year to August 2023 we did not need to draw any funding from First Lisburn and Downtown provided £610 to the Church for heating bills.

During the year Downtown delivered a wide range of services and activities to its members and spent £6,899 on those members events. A further £2,102 was spent on materials for activities such as arts and crafts, and £1,663 for equipment for members events and the office. Also £630 was spent on training for our much valued volunteers.

In summing up I would like to thank Jill and Rebecca for their enthusiasm for and sheer hard work in Downtown, for their excellent fundraising efforts and for their excellent financial record keeping. I would also want to thank Sandy Fitzpatrick for his excellent mentoring skills and Excel wizardry in preparing the accounts. I would also like to thank Johnston Graham Accountants, and Geraldine O'Neill in particular, for their work on salaries and pensions, and thank Jill Hanna for so readily agreeing to audit the accounts.

After a busy and successful year, our closing balance at the end of August 2023 was £43,389 – this again leaves Downtown in a solid financial position going into 2023-24. However, I must end on a word of caution as fundraising will become increasingly challenging going forward. We must all fully support Jill and Rebecca in this never-ending and never-easy task.

Thank you.

Richard Millen – 27 November 2023