



Registered Charity Number NIC 100906

Lower Oldpark Community Association
Company Limited by Guarantee

Unaudited Financial Statement for the Year Ending 31 March 2023

Lower Oldpark Community Association Trustees' Annual Report

The trustees are pleased to present their report and the unaudited financial statement of the charity for the year ending 31 March 2023.

Administrative Information

Charity Name	Lower Oldpark Community Association
Registered Address	9-23 Avoca Street Belfast BT14 6EN
Company Registration	NI635156
Charity Registration	NIC 100906
Board of Directors	Barbara McIlwrath (Chair) Laurence Hughes (Laura) (Treasurer) Thomas Dickson (Secretary) James R Wright (Honorary Chair) Eleanor Jamison Rosemary Rice Neil Huddleson Stephen Dixon Ezadin Thabet
Company Secretary	Janice Beggs
Auditors	PKF FKM 1-3 Arthur Street Belfast BT1 4GA
Solicitors	Hool Law Solicitors Scottish Provident Building 17 Donegall Square West Belfast BT1 6JH
Staff	Ellen Taggart, Gary Hughes, Claire McGuckin, Sarah McCann, Karen McClean, Lorraine Kidd, Julieann Johnston Beth Johnston and Janice Beggs

The trustees are pleased to present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The management of Lower Oldpark Community Association is made up of representatives from the local church and nominees from a range of local business, community organisations and residents.

Mission Statement

Its Mission is to provide a resource which supports and enables residents to improve the quality of life of the neighbourhood.

Organisational Structure

Lower Oldpark Community Association has a management committee of up to 9 representatives who meet up to ten times per year and are responsible for the strategic direction and policies of the charity. A scheme of delegation is in place and the day-to-day responsibility for the provision of the services rests with Centre Manager along with Project Manager and staff.

Affiliated Members

The management committee is elected at the Annual General Meeting after nominations have been received from the local community and any interested parties.

Overview

Lower Oldpark Community Association was established in 1972 in response to identified community need, with the aim of promoting community development and training. In the 1980's the area was subject to redevelopment and many of the residents' homes were vested and to this day have not been adequately replaced.

An interface area, we promote community safety, good relations, and urban regeneration of the locality. We operate a community centre and assist in the provision of other community facilities within the area of benefit. We focus on social welfare, education, and recreation with the objective of improving the conditions of life of residents who live, work and socialise in the community. In the community building we are welcoming and inclusive of all who have an interest in this area.

The Association has a vested interest in the residents. It offers open and accessible programmes to develop and promote civic values, and encourage voluntary and community activity focused on physical, economic and social renewal.

Strategic Aims

To work in partnership with communities and voluntary organisations to achieve social change and to promote the rights of those most disadvantaged and excluded in our society.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the Centre, as set out in our Articles of Association, are to:

1. Build a strong, safe, attractive, and sustainable community.
2. Help families by providing playgroup sessions, increasing the skills level of parents to help them towards employment.
3. Improve the physical regeneration of the area.
4. Improve community relations.
5. Raising educational attainment.
6. Engaging young people.
7. Improving health and wellbeing.
8. Support and care for older people.
9. Promote community safety
10. Promote social welfare

Beneficiaries

The charity's beneficiaries are those individuals living or working within the geographical catchment area as described in the governing document of Lower Oldpark Community Association.

LOCA was established to promote the benefit of the community, without distinction of gender political, religious, or other opinions, by the provision of education, cultural, recreational, training and employment to improve the quality of life within our catchment area.

In pursuit of these objectives LOCA delivers several interrelated projects. These are designed to remove and break the cycle of deprivation, reduce and alleviate poverty that is prevalent in the community. The projects include women and youth programmes, health and wellbeing for senior citizens projects, recreational activities and the promotion of neighbourhood renewal, including physical development, social development, capacity building, education and training, community safety, cross community and good relations work.

Reserves Policy

Reserves are needed to bridge the gap between spending and receiving income, essential expenditure items for which grant support is not available, for; unplanned emergency building repairs, and redundancy payments that would be liable if the Association is dissolved. The Trustees are of the opinion that the current level of reserves needs to be increased to adequately cover all these eventualities.

Key Management Personnel

The day-to-day operational management of LOCA, including all its programmes, projects, and activities, is the responsibility of The Centre Manager, Janice Beggs. As Centre Manager she currently reports to the Trustees and Directors.

Financial Risk Management

The Trustees continue to regularly review any major risks arising from or impacting on the activities of the charity. They are satisfied that the major risks identified have been adequately mitigated where necessary and consider that the financial systems and controls in place are appropriate to the size of the charity and the nature of its operations.

Finance

Funds received from International Fund for Ireland for the Peace Walls Programme covers the salary costs of Peace Wall Project Worker and part-time Admin Officer in LOCA and for a Peace Wall Project Worker in Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum.

The Trustees wish to place on record their appreciation for the accountancy service provided by PFK FPM in relation to LOCA's financial records and accounts. The Trustees are grateful to LOCA staff members for their assistance in this matter.

Chair Remarks

A warm welcome to our Annual Report for 2022 / 2023

As new Chair of Lower Oldpark Community Association, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our previous Chair Gordan Walker who left us in April 2022 and to thank him for his commitment and dedication during his time with us.

Our vision for the local community is for a peaceful, confident, and thriving neighbourhood where people want to live, and this requires the phased, progressive redevelopment of the area which for many years had been neglected.

Despite threats to funding, including the withdrawal of the Pathways Fund, our Playgroup staff have maintained a quality service that offers care to young children and support for their families. Thankfully, the Pathways fund was reinstated temporarily, and gave us much needed breathing space and a chance to continue the service. The future is still very uncertain, but we will endeavour to find ways to provide the community with services they need. Uncertainty is inevitable and is a feature of work in the Voluntary & Community Sector, but it does put pressure on the Board and Centre Manager.

Progress has been made on the Imagine Shared Space Project thanks to Project Worker Claire and Finance Sarah McCann. The cross-community women's groups goes from strength to strength.

I would like on behalf of the Board, to acknowledge our funding partners for the continuing faith they have shown in our projects and processes over the past year. Our aim is to use funding and grant income to deliver effective programmes, activities, and services for local people. We also need to ensure the long-term financial viability of the Association so are intending to diversify our income so we can become more independent of government and other external funding streams. We also need to make use we have reserves to allow us to deal with emergencies and contingencies, such as the rising cost of heating and lighting the centre.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of our staff and volunteers and recognise their invaluable contribution. I want to thank my fellow Board members for their generous donation of time, expertise and support.

The centre needs a degree of strong financial proficiency and administrative support, and we want to express the committee's gratitude to Ellen's diligence and efficiency.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our Centre Manager who has the responsibility of accessing funding, developing projects and at times delivering initiatives especially with our young people. She also maintains the association's connection with statutory, community and voluntary networks she also responds to immediate crisis and community needs.

Chair

Barbara A McIlwrath

Centre Manager's Report

This year, more than any year, has demonstrated what can be achieved by working collaboratively in partnership with stakeholders and other community organisations. As Centre Manager my role is to plan, organise and coordinate the daily professional operations of the business and this is made easier by the support and expertise of staff which I am so proud to work with on the various projects and activities.

The report below is a synopsis of the project work undertaken through this financial year.

Beat Initiative



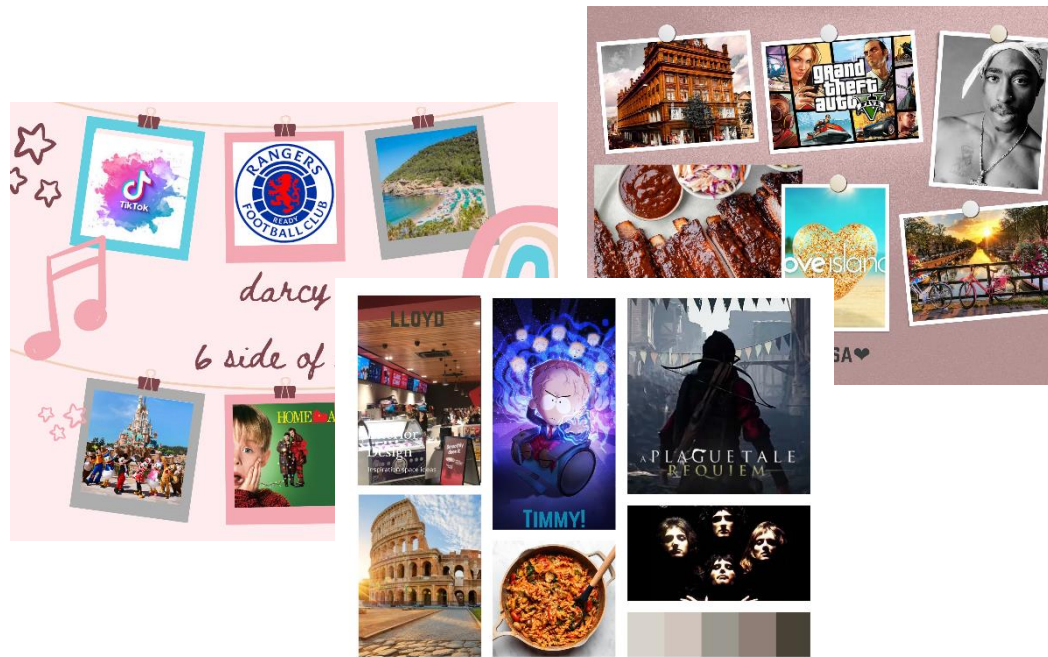
LOCA has been working with the BEAT Initiative for three years on their outreach programme. We would like to thank Rebecca, Project Manager from The Beat Carnival Centre for her support for the young people in our centre. Without their commitment and skills the young people would not have engaged in the arts. Through participating it has increased their confidence and developed new skills. One of the highlights was the “Neighbour Spring Carnival” which worked in partnership with Denmark Street Community Centre. Both groups took part in the Spring Carnival which brought them through each other’s neighbourhoods. They were accompanied by the Carnival band.

Thanks to Elisabeth Higginson and Rose who has worked tirelessly with the young people over the past three years developing their confidence and skills through music and dance. We had to say goodbye to Elisabeth as she returned home to Denmark with her family. Elisabeth has made her mark on the young people in the communities that she worked in. Thanks to Marika and Tanya for their continued work with the group in nurturing and developing their skills.

Minecraft Programme

Twelve young people attended a four-week multimedia workshop with Giga Training.

You can check out content they created below!



- On week one, the group got to experience a variety of creative and digital arts including learning Graphic Design skills by creating their own collages and logo's.



- On week two they got to grips with Music Production skills by creating their own electronic music track in Launchpad. The young people put their graphic design skills to good use by designing a piece of artwork for their tracks in the style of an album cover. With each topic covered, we had a complimentary Kahoot quiz based on logo design and world music.



- On the third week the group got to show their skills in Minecraft by building their version of the H&W Cranes before using their builds to design a Minecraft based poster.



- On the fourth week the group continued creating in Minecraft, only this time the task was to design a sign for their world and a climbing wall they would like to see in the new John Hewitt Park. The group also created logo's for the new park too!



Summer Scheme Programme

Our annual Summer Programme facilitated 52 young people from age 5- to 12-year-olds during July / August and was funded by Belfast City Council. This enabled us to take the young people out of the area and experience different fun and challenging environments.

Some of the activities included cooking classes, badge making and day excursions to:

Cooking workshops, Dance workshops, Wee Playhouse, Mo Mowlam Adventure Play Park, Belfast Activity Centre, Go-Karting to name a few.



Summer Intervention Programme



Lower Oldpark straddles two interfaces and at times can be volatile. The Intervention funding is vital to support the needs and emotional well-being of the young people, it is also immensely important as this diversionary programme allows us to take the young people away during times of tension in the summer months.

Group of ten young people took part in a camping experience facilitated by Connected Adventure facilitator Marty Pelan to Newcastle, Co Down. The young people were able to design a bespoke programme to suit their needs. The programme aim was to connect the young people to the outdoors through creative & adventure experiences, making memories and amazing moments.

The young people had a variety of outdoor experiences including bouldering, camping and cooking for themselves and the team.

Friendship Senior Group

The Friendship Senior Group continued to meet despite the prevailing impact of Covid, all be it in reduced numbers. Future plans may include linkages with other neighbouring groups and centres.

Housing Project Worker's (Gary Hughes)

Housing Project Worker Annual Progress Report April 2022 – March 2023

Housing Advice Service

During the 12 months to 31st March 2023, the LOCA Housing Advice Service was made available by the Housing Project Worker (HPW), Gary Hughes, five days per week (Monday to Friday), 8.30am to 11.30am and 1.00pm to 3.30pm. When the HPW wasn't available during these times appointments were arranged. The type and number of problems dealt with are summarised below.

Enquiries Dealt With

Enquiry Type	Number
Rehousing	71
Repairs	91
Benefits	9
ASB	23
Tenants' Rights	20
Miscellaneous	31
Total	245



Local Environment Monitoring

The HPW monitored local environmental problems in the area and highlighted these to relevant organisations for action. He carried out five inspections of the area as well as identifying and responding to problems on a day-to-day basis, including in response to reports from local residents. The type and number of problems dealt with are summarised below.

Problem	Number	Problems	Number
Dumping/ Litter	107	Weeds	3
Street and Path Cleaning	45	Vandalism	2
Exterior Building Maintenance	4	Graffiti	0
Empty Houses	14	Pest Control	1
Street Lights	0	Utilities	3
Unsafe Adopted Surfaces	7	Miscellaneous	12
Open Ground/ Planter Maintenance (NIHE)	32	Drains/ Sewers	1
Open Ground/ Planter Maintenance (Radius/ Clanmil)	2		
Open Vacant Property	0	Total	233

Neighbourhood Clean-ups

During the spring of 2022, the HPW organised a Big Spring Clean event involving local volunteers. He organised a further neighbourhood clean-up in June 2022.

Housing News Newsletter

The HPW prepared three Housing News (Lower Oldpark) newsletters (September 2022, November 2022 and January 2023) that were distributed to all local households in the neighborhood. The last two were special, cost of living editions.

Housing Website and Facebook Page

The Lower Oldpark Housing Website address is <https://loweroldparkhousing.co.uk>. The Housing Project Worker prepared and uploaded 19 news articles to the News page of the website during the period.

Lower Oldpark Housing Facebook page address is @loweroldparkhousing. The Housing Project Worker prepared and uploaded 27 posts.

Physical Regeneration

The Lower Oldpark neighbourhood has had a number of planned physical regeneration schemes. The role of the Housing Project Worker in relation to these schemes is summarized below.

Cliftonpark Avenue/ Crumlin Road Mixed Development Site

This scheme involved the development of a new petrol station/ retail unit on the vacant open space site at the junction of Cliftonpark Avenue and Crumlin Road as well as six new private, family homes on the Cliftonpark Avenue part of the site behind the new petrol station/ retail unit. Planning approval requires the development of an additional four private houses on the site of the old petrol station/ retail unit when it has been demolished.

The petrol station/ retail unit was completed and opened in January 2022 and the six houses were finished during the current reporting period.

LOCA asked the developer to carry out additional marketing among Lower Oldpark/ Greater Shankill residents for the six Cliftonpark Avenue houses for sale. Unfortunately, the developer didn't do this.

The HPW learnt that the owner of the Cliftonpark Avenue/ Crumlin Road Mixed Development Site intended to allow the former petrol station site to be used as a car wash centre. The HPW also spoke to the site owner and learnt that he was considering submitting a new planning application to build apartments rather than the houses required by the existing planning approval. This would be against what the site owner agreed with LOCA and local politicians. The HPW monitored planning applications for the site during the period.

Manor/ Alloa Social Housing Scheme

Clanmil Housing is the developer for the planned social housing scheme on the vacant, open space site running from Manor Street into Alloa Street and then into the former Annalee Court.

Progress with this scheme had been held up by Northern Ireland Water although a solution was identified, and the scheme technically went on site before the end of the reporting period. The HPW liaised with the developer, Clanmil Housing, in relation to progress.



Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut Site (Bonfire Site)

The NIHE began preparing an economic appraisal to decide what it would do with the large, vacant open space site at Mountview Street (Bonfire Site). LOCA had proposed that the site should be released for sale on the open market for the development of family, owner-occupier homes with an element of affordable owner-occupier housing included. The NIHE raised issues about controlling the type and tenure of the housing to be provided but LOCA argued strongly for the provision of three-bedroom owner-occupier housing.

Throughout the reporting period, LOCA continued to push for the NIHE to ensure that any new housing development on the site consisted of three-bedroom houses sold for owner-occupation.

Between May 2021 and March 2022, LOCA wrote to the NIHE Board Chairperson, Professor Peter Roberts, in relation to the matter on three separate occasions but he failed to respond to any of these letters during that reporting period.

The HPW supported LOCA to prepare letters to individual NIHE Board members in relation to a lack of response from the NIHE Board Chairperson Professor Roberts. The HPW also supported LOCA to communicate with the Chairperson when a response was finally received and to make six formal complaints against the NIHE (including the Chairperson) to the NIHE Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), and to communicate with NIPSO and the NIHE Chief Executive.

Courts' Project

The Courts' Project was a Department of Communities (Building Successful Communities) (DfC (BSC) initiative. It involved the upgrading of the vehicle and pedestrian surfaces in seven Lower Oldpark housing courts. The initiative was subject to considerable delays.



On completion of the scheme, new planted areas provided were the responsibility of the Department of Communities (DFC) (the developer) until they became NIHE responsibility. DfC said that it couldn't maintain the planted areas, so the HPW asked the NIHE to look after these planted areas even though it wasn't technically responsible. The HPW wanted to ensure these planted areas didn't become overgrown and covered in weeds and litter. The NIHE chose not to maintain the planted areas before they became technically responsible, and the areas became overgrown and covered in weeds and litter.

The HPW also worked to ensure that damage and weaknesses in the completed scheme would be addressed.

Interface Housing – Oldpark Road/ Manor Drive

The HPW worked with local political representatives to achieve improvements in the environment for residents living in 61-69 Oldpark Road and 1-7 Manor Drive.

Garden Equipment Lending Service



The HPW delivered the Lower Oldpark Garden Equipment lending service on four separate occasions.

The HPW was unsuccessful in securing further uptake of this service despite promoting it in the September 2022 issue of Housing News Lower Oldpark. This was probably because it was late in the season.

Crime/ Anti-social Behavior

The HPW organised and participated in a meeting involving the PSNI Area Commander in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (drug taking) at a property in Cliftonpark Avenue.

Alley Gates

The HPW met and liaised with local BCC political representatives and officers in relation to the planned provision by BCC of alley gates at seven locations throughout the Lower Oldpark neighbourhood.

Old Bank

The HPW requested and organised a meeting involving the PSNI North Belfast Commander, NIHE Belfast Housing Solutions Manager and the Old Bank owner and Manager to address ASB incidents linked to residents/ users of the Old Bank temporary hostel.

Build Shankill Initiative

The HPW participated in a series of Build Shankill meetings and events during the reporting period. BUILD Shankill is concerned with securing development on the many vacant sites across the Greater Shankill.

BCC Belfast Agenda

During the reporting period, the HPW attended a Belfast City Council consultation event in relation to its draft updated Belfast Agenda document.



Annual Report - April 2022 to March 2023

Avoca Playgroup is a community playgroup in the heart of the Lower Oldpark, which provides affordable, high quality sessional day care for children aged between 2 years 10 months and 4 years old. We are registered with and annually inspected by Health & Social Services Trust, ensuring that we maintain a high standard of care. We provide a safe, caring and stimulating environment for children, the playgroup operates between the hours of 9am and 12.30pm, with optional breakfast club from 8.35am for those needing Breakfast and an early drop off. As a community playgroup we are funded through fees paid by the parents of the children attending and additional funding through Education Authority's Pathway Fund, which is monitored by Early Years, this funding ensures we can continue to provide a high-quality service at an affordable price.

We value the community we work in and the roles they play in Avoca Playgroup, whether it is being part of the Committee, volunteering, staff, or a child each and every one of you is valued. From the moment you step through the doors you are welcomed, and you become part of our Avoca family. We work hard to build open trusting relationships with the families, and we work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children in our care. We support the families both physically and emotionally throughout the year, from offering a listening ear to talk about concerns, to working hard to keep the costs down for families, to providing Christmas hampers that are packed with essentials at a time when costs are raising. We network with other local services to get support for children with additional needs and endlessly apply for additional funding to buy equipment, provide additional experiences for the children and to pay staff.

A big THANK YOU all the team who worked exceptionally hard this year and adapted to lots of changes. To Julieann for temporarily covering the Deputy Leader role until a replacement was found, to Beth for single-handedly running Stay & Play Sessions and always being willing to work extra and to Lorraine a dedicated, hardworking, and loyal member of the team for too many years to mention. Lorraine was made redundant in September 22, and shortly afterwards we were devastated to learn of the death of her twin sister Elizabeth. Lorraine and Elizabeth both had dedicated years of their lives to working in Avoca Playgroup and for that we are forever grateful. Laura's temporary post finished in August she had been a great asset to the team, we were sad to see her go but wished her all the best in her new post in a local Nursery School. In September we welcomed Liane to the team as she took on Deputy Leader role, Liane had previously volunteered with us which made the transition smoother for the staff as she already knew the team. Liane is completing her Level 5 in Leadership and Management which is a requirement of the post, and we will fully support her with her studies. We were also able to facilitate placements for three local students – Adele who was completing her Degree at Queens, Dionne who was studying at Impact Training for her Level 2 in Childcare Learning & Development and Chelsea who was a student at Park School. We hope that they all enjoy and benefit from the valuable work experience.

We love the outdoors at Avoca and value the added aspect it brings to learning, whether it is heading off up Clifton Park Avenue on a Bear Hunt or having a Teddy Bears picnic in the park or posting letters to Santa at the post-box round the corner, we are always ready to explore or go on an adventure. We took part in a tree planting programme in John Hewitt Park in association with Belfast City Council and members of the local community, it will be great to see them grow and mature over the years and remember the children who planted them. Throughout the year the children have enjoyed being able to play in Gruffalo Alley at the rear of the Playgroup. We sourced funds to purchase waterproof suits for the children, they brought in wellies from home so that they could fully immerse themselves making dinner in the mud kitchen, pumping water, and digging for treasure in the sandpit, whatever the weather!

Throughout the year we have enjoyed monthly visits from Vicky and Jo Jingles introducing the children to music, rhythm, and song. Throughout May we took part in weekly visits to Abbey Gymnastics' giving the children the opportunity to explore the gym, the equipment and to develop their gross motor skills, the children absolutely loved the experience. Over July and August our Summer Programme ran for 5 weeks, offering 22 children aged 3 to 4 a place each morning from 9am to 12noon, we enjoyed learning the seaside, camping, holidays and enjoyed trips to the Transport Museum, Castle Espie and the Wee Playhouse. We had a visit from Wee Critters, Lil' Magic and the Community Police Team. We wrapped it up with a week of Pirates and Princesses and a BBQ in the park.

The playgroup team would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported us throughout the past year. At the end of March 2023, the current economic recession puts the future of Avoca Playgroup in question, as the Government announced the withdrawal of the Education Authority's Pathway Fund. We have been working in partnership with the Early Years Organisation to lobby government to reinstate the fund and have highlighted our case with local media including the BBC. We can only hope that Avoca Playgroup can continue to provide a valuable service to the young children and their families in our local community over then next year.

Karen McClean

Playgroup Manager





Peace Barriers Project

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) has invested substantial funds to positively transform interface neighbourhoods through a range of ‘confidence and relationship building interventions’ delivered through community-based organisations. Any efforts to remove the walls will be decided by the communities themselves, without whose permission, everyone has agreed, the walls will not be touched.

The project covers the areas of the Lower Oldpark and Cliftonville in North Belfast. The project is to improve the appearance of the area, holding statutory agencies to account for their responsibilities to peace walls and securing funding for aftercare for properties where changes have been made to peace barriers.

The Imagine Peace Barriers Project is now in its ninth year. The programme is funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). The project is a partnership between Lower Oldpark Community Association and Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum.

In the past year we have developed the concept of the Imagine Shared Space Project which proposes to provide a recreational, indoor play facility and retail units which will operate as a social or commercial enterprise. This will entail the remove of a section of the peace wall on Cliftonpark Avenue. The proposed building will replace a section of the peace wall.

International Fund for Ireland have funded a preliminary business case, and the next step is to produce a fully developed and robust business case.

In the year ahead a business plan and architectural designs will be prepared for local community consultation. A project team will also be established to drive the project forward.

During part of the period of this reporting period, the project had a number of temporary appointments. Jim Potts worked for a period of six months and helped to establish a men's group which is an important element to the project. Sarah El Jabri replaced Jim and left after a period of 4 months. We are sincerely thankful for all their endeavours and efforts on behalf of the Lower Oldpark Community Association.

The women's group was established several years ago and have been very proactive. Claire McGuckin took up the position of Project Peace Barrier Worker and Sarah McCann Finance Administrator posts in November 2022.

From taking over the project in Mid-October 2022 things were a little slow in terms of engagement.

The project has spent some time building capacity and working on issues that are challenging for the community at a grassroots level, identifying the needs of current and future participants.

The project is managing six sites for the reduction or removal of the barriers that surround the areas also working toward removing grills on windows on houses on the Oldpark Road into Manor Drive.

IMAGINE Shared Space project has a women's group and a men's group. The women's group is operating at a full cross community level. The men's group, however, is a little slower in terms of cross community. We have spent this year tackling the soft topics, building trust and confidence between the project and participants while also building participant to participant trust.

We have delivered many workshops and courses some being:

- Budgeting and money management.
- Women's Aid.
- Home safety.
- Mindfulness- Reflexology- sound bath.
- Mental health.
- Tree planting in the area.
- Xmas trips.
- Good Friday agreement.

And many more from October 2022 – March 2023.

The groups are now fully engaged, and we hope moving forward we can start to tackle some of the hard topics creating dialogue giving our communities a voice.

As a project we have made many partnerships with other organisations which has been key to moving forward as we have been able to provide a wide range of services for the groups and keeping them engaged with the project. The women's groups have moved from one day a week to three days a week, I think this shows great strength and determination from the group as a whole and the trust they have built with the project also outlines the need for this type of project in the area.

The Neighbours Over the Wall Project

A cross interface, cross community women's partnership between the Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) and the Thorndale Duncairn and Kinnaird Community Group. The partnership was formed in 2016 and local residents and volunteers have participated in Residentials, Walking tours of the surrounding interface districts, Community Fun Days, training workshops, community clean ups and study visits since that time.

As with a lot of community-based activity, the COVID pandemic prevented any meaningful gathering of local residents and the organized events associated with the NOW project stopped completely. Despite the restrictions imposed during the period of Covid, LOCA and TDK poured a lot of energy, resources and voluntary endeavour ensuring local vulnerable residents and families were supplied with sufficient food, medicines, support and advice.

With support from Belfast City Council Good Relations, the NOW project was able to re-establish connections between the groups, introduce new women to the project, reflect on the role of being a good neighbour at the Interface and discuss priorities for potential joint social action initiatives for future collaboration.

Residential Carnlough 3-4 February 2023

Eleven women and one facilitator descended on the Londonderry Arms Hotel one Friday in February – some old faces, some new - some experienced in community work, some novices – some older in years and some young mothers, some reconnecting and some meeting for the first time. Indeed, some participants had never been on a residential before, never mind a cross community residential experience! At the gathering's core was the presence of Janice Beggs (LOCA) and Rosemary McGreevy (TDK) who, between them have maintained a strong and trusting cross interface relationship and are the drivers to re-establish this local initiative.

The residential concentrated on creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere, a safe space to share and reflect on personal experiences, the trials and tribulations of life in interface communities, the urgency of issues in both neighbourhoods and the role of volunteers in making a difference in community life.

Themes and Learning

- Personal histories, journeys, stories and motivations
- Learning and sharing around local neighbourhood's needs, issues and priorities
- Developing potential cross community friendship and connection
- Developing a sense of cross interface solidarity around issues of common concern
- Creating a greater sense of different community pressures and environment on both sides of the interface
- Constraining influences on joint community initiatives
- Positive opportunities for mutual support across the interface
- Priorities for Social Action

Participants had an opportunity after discussion to name potential areas of cross interface cooperation which would help guide the themes and direction of future NOW project work.

Below is a list of the key themes and subjects which emerged from both group discussion and individual preference. In order of priority :-

- Support Local Community Food Bank
- Support for Families with Autism
- Support with Cost of Living Crisis
- General Volunteering Opportunities
- Support Elderly and Vulnerable
- Develop a Local Support Network
- COVID Response work
- Environmental Improvements and community clean ups
- Connect with other groups and similar projects.

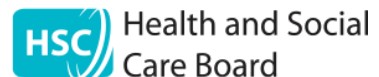
The NOW group has been re-booted with a new injection of people and potential volunteers. There is an appetite to explore avenues of joint social action and to help out in a variety of ways in each other's neighbourhoods – that's what good neighbours are for!



RELAND



Belfast City Council



LOCA acknowledges the support of its funders and thanks to everyone who has helped us throughout the year to make a real difference to the lives of those living in the community. We look forward to your continued support.