

## ACCESS EMPLOYMENT LTD

### DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2024

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The Directors of the Charity are pleased to present their report and the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2024. The Charity have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SoRP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" (FRS102) in preparing the annual report and financial statements of the Charity.

#### **Principal activities and objectives**

The objective of the Charity is to assist people with learning disabilities or physical, sensory, or other impairment, mental ill health or who are vulnerable due to social or economic circumstances, through the provision of advice, information and support in order to gain access to employment, education, economic, health, housing, leisure, social welfare and other services on the same basis as others without such disadvantages. This is achieved through the operation of a Social Firm which provides training, work experience and sustained employment for people with mental ill health, learning disability and others from a disadvantaged background.

The Social Firm has the following activities which provide training, work experience and employment as well as providing sustainable income:

#### Packaging & Assembly

AEL packages products for other companies as well as packaging its own products for sale on-line and also manufactures and prepares product samples for some of Northern Ireland's top Companies including K-Rend & Spirit.

#### Lunchbox Café

Located on-site the café has a 5-star rating from Environmental Health and a 5-star rating from Facebook with both sit in, takeaway and delivery options available.

#### Online Shops

Under the registered brand name, Candyrush AEL repackages goods which are imported from around the world and sells them online. Our product range includes Party Bags, Envelopes, Confectionery and Craft Products.

#### Facility Hire

Centrally located in Larne Town Centre the Larne Community Hub, makes the ideal location for group meetings, training courses, special events, displays, fairs, car boot sales etc.

#### Naggy Burn Allotments, Community Shed & Garden Centre

The Naggy Burn project encompasses our Community Shed, Allotments and Garden Centre. Each of these 3 projects dovetail with the other to offer a range of activities that provide social and physical interactions aimed at promoting health and wellbeing within the local community. Service users can simply rent an allotment and grow their own produce with the widely recognised benefits of being outside, working with nature, producing food and saving money; whilst the Community Shed offers an opportunity to try new things, increase skills and meet new friends with similar interests. Both elements are critical in terms of breaking down social isolation and tackling loneliness.

The Naggy Burn Garden Centre opened during summer 2020. Commercial activity has increased, and it now sells a variety of plants, seeds, compost, shrubs, tools and hanging baskets as well as providing a delivery service.

#### Create Gifts

Launched in 2022, AEL personalises products and giftware with logos and messages using our laser engraver. Our website is being developed to further promote Create Gifts to both personal and corporate customers.

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Our Charitable activities offer the following programmes:

#### Transitions Programme (School pupils aged 15-25)

The Transitions Programme is a job coaching programme facilitating early intervention with school aged young people. The primary focus is to better prepare young people to transition from school into adulthood, progress to the world of work and be active citizens in their communities.

#### PROSPER

This programme is for anyone who is economically inactive aged 16+, who requires support to gain employment and or enter long-term volunteering or further education. AEL is part of a consortium of 5 other organisations, delivering this programme under UKSPF. The programme commenced in April 2023 and is funded until end March 2025.

As part of the programme AEL will support trainees to gain work experience, develop their skills and confidence, reduce isolation, and build towards a positive pathway for their future.

#### Day Opportunities through AEL (aged 18 + referred through NHSCT)

Individuals who have been diagnosed with a learning disability and have been approved for receipt of community-based day services, through the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, can ask about coming along to AEL to volunteer 1 – 3 days per week. This helps them to gain work experience, boost their skills and confidence. It may also help them to think about possible work or volunteering opportunities, before deciding on their next steps.

#### Life Programme (Promoting a Life of Independence, Fulfilment & Experiences)

The LIFE Programme offers bespoke support which ensures trainees have choices in how they spend their day, who they spend it with, and the types of activities offered. We aim to share what's important to them, by developing a person-centred support and action plan that will set realistic goals and encourage the development of each trainee. LIFE will promote their physical, mental, and social health and enhance their quality of life.

#### Social Club

AEL also offers a fun packed fortnightly social club, with approximately 30 members attending each session. This club provides a safe and supportive environment for those with additional needs to come together and enjoy social and recreational activities, go on outings, develop new skills and meet new friends. The club is open to everyone, aged 16+ from the MEA council area.

#### Heroes+

Is a Youth programme funded by Peace Plus until February 2028 and run in partnership with Mencap (lead partner) incredABLE, Can Advocacy Network, Beam, Volunteer Now and AEL

The programme focuses on key youth work themes such as:

- Personal Development
- Good Relations
- Citizenship
- Employability Skills
- Positive Progression

It aims to promote and inspire participants, aged 14 – 24 who have additional needs, from different backgrounds to build, maintain and manage strong positive relationships and collective identities, developing their potential and providing safe spaces for them to contribute to building an inclusive and cohesive society.

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#### Public Benefit

In shaping the Charity's objectives, the Directors have considered the Charity Commission NI's guidance on public benefit including the Commission's 'Public Benefit Reporting' document CCNI PBR1.

The direct benefit which flows from this is that disadvantaged people are provided with support to access further training and employment opportunities, thus enhancing their lifestyle and quality of life and allowing them to operate more effectively in the community.

#### Achievements & Performance

Trainees have now returned to pre-covid service levels and are sampling work experience opportunities across all business areas. We have seen a marked increase in trainees social, communication, attitude to work, independence and skills and experience levels this year, compared to the same period last year. This is a direct result of services returning to pre-covid levels and our services adapting to meet trainees where they were in terms of the supports, they require.

At 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 the Charity was providing on average 73 training places to 35 individuals each week as well as mentoring an additional 11 individuals outside of AEL.

This year we have achieved and delivered the following:

Qualifications	Awarded
<b>OCN Level 1 Qualifications</b>	
Level 2 Employability	5
Level 2 Vocational Skills – Customer Care	5
Level 2 Vocational Skills – Team Work Skills	6
Level 1 Progression to Employment	19
Level 1 Independent Travel	1
Level 1 Food Hygiene	3
Level 1 World Host Customer Care	3
Level 1 Vocational Skills – Child Development	2
Level 1 Vocational Skills Animal Care	4
Level 1 Vocational Skills - Exploring Enterprise & Skills for Garden Horticulture	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Progression Pathways</b>	
Employment	7
Long term volunteering	1
Further Education	5

Whilst AEL prides itself in having a mixed ability workforce and continues to create sustainable employment opportunities, links have also been established and maintained with local employers via our Inclusive Employer Charter, which recognises those employers who provide work tours, placements, and employment/volunteering opportunities to our trainees, enabling them to reach their full potential outside of AEL and demonstrating their own corporate, social responsibility. We are delighted that these employers have continued to engage with us via the charter, and we continue to see a rise in external work placements and tours being offered.

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To end July 2024 employers have facilitated 6 external work placements ranging from ground maintenance to retail to mechanics. There has also been a total of 6 external work tours, across a variety of business sectors, including haulage, retail, catering, sport and fitness and ground maintenance. Personal development and monitoring of soft outcomes are also a key element of the Charity's training programmes. At 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 our distance travelled assessment of trainees revealed the following;

Soft Skill Area	Percentage Increase
Confidence/Self Belief	62.5%
Social/Friendships	25%
Coping Skills	62.5%
Skills & Experience	87.5%
Communication Skills	75%
Healthy Lifestyle	50%
Attitude to work	50%
Independence & Reliability	75%

#### Financial review

The Charity recorded a net deficit of (£88,378) for the year. When added to reserves brought forward the total reserves on 31 July 2024 are £433,456. As explained in the accounting policies the Charity's funds are normally either restricted or unrestricted.

The main funding streams of the Charity are its social enterprise activities in Packaging and Assembly, Online Retail, Giftware (Create Gifts), Rental, Lunchbox Café, Community Allotments and Naggyburn Garden Centre which together account for 68% of the charity's income. These activities support the Charity's training programmes for adults with disability and disadvantage. The Board have considered the risks involved in all our social enterprise activities and are agreed that the desired outcomes are of supporting sustainable disability employment and creating unrestricted revenue thereby reducing dependency on grant funding which is in line with the Charity's core aims and objectives. The Board will ensure that action is taken to reduce or mitigate losses in any of the social enterprise activities including ceasing loss making activities.

The legacy from the COVID 19 pandemic as well as the cost-of-living crisis are both making an impact on the activities of the charity as well as its ability to create and maintain meaningful businesses. The Board and Senior Management continue to seek to ensure that activities are making a financial and social contribution to the charity. Recent UK Government Budget announcements relating to National Minimum Wage and Employer National Insurance contributions will have an impact on the Charity.

#### Reserves Policy and Going Concern

At 31 July 2024 the Charity held £433,456 in unrestricted reserves and £nil in restricted reserves. The current unrestricted reserves of £433,456 include an amount of £147,546 which can only be realised by disposing of tangible fixed assets. The Charity therefore has free reserves of £285,910. It is the current policy of the Charity to seek to maintain unrestricted funds, which are the free reserves of the Charity, at a level which equates to between three and six months of resources expended on activities outside of funded projects costs. During the year 31 July 2024 this equated from £219,314 to £438,628.

The Directors consider that adequate resources continue to be available to fund the activities of the Charity for the foreseeable future and are of the view that the Charity is a going concern.

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#### **Plans for future periods**

AEL has a three-year Strategic Plan and a Risk Register to guide its activities. The Board and Senior Management Team continue to focus on strengthening and developing business growth. We continue to seek business activities which offer inclusion and experience for our service users.

Although AEL were fortunate to secure funding through UKSPF, following the end of ESF, the new funding is for a short 2-year period to 31 March 2025 and funding continues to be a major concern for AEL and the community and voluntary sector as a whole. We are working closely with our colleagues across the sector to lobby for support to maintain vital programmes as well as seeking funds where possible to bridge any gaps in service (working with statutory agencies and sources of grant funding).

#### **Structure, Governance & Management**

Access Employment Limited is a company limited by guarantee governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 21 December 1998 and amended to allow for current governance arrangement on 25th September 2014 and the liability of each member is limited to an amount not exceeding £1. It has been granted charitable status by HM Revenue and Customs and is registered with the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland.

The Directors who also act as Charity trustees are under Charity law legally responsible for the control, management and administration of the Charity.

At 31 July 2024 the Board of Directors consisted of eight members being a Chair, Vice Chair and six other members. Three of the members are male and five are female. The Board of Directors meet regularly, at intervals not exceeding three months. During the year 2 Directors retired and 3 new Directors were appointed.

A new three year plan (2024-2027) was adopted as part of our Vision 2030; this has three key objectives – Sustainable Financial Growth and Business Success, New Business and Development Opportunities, and Develop People and Organisation. Annual Operational Plans and Budgets are set to enable the Board to monitor progress against key performance indicators. The Board continually monitors the financial performance (and net contributions) of all the social enterprise activities.

Access Employment Limited has forty six employees as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 and in fulfilment of the strategic plan and in line with the Charity's objectives has delegated to the Chief Executive, assisted by colleagues on the Senior Management Team, responsibility for the day to day operation and management of the Charity

Terms and conditions of the contracts of employment of employees of the Charity are determined by the Directors. The pay of all staff including senior management is reviewed annually and normally increased in accordance with average earnings. The NJC pay scales are used as the remuneration benchmark for Senior Management.

#### **Appointment of Directors**

The Board has adopted a protocol for the appointment of new Directors based on a framework of desired skills and experience and seeking to meet skills gaps or address priority areas. The Board has carried out an external process to identify and recruit Directors to replace those due to retire as well as filling vacancies to ensure continuity and the availability of appropriate skills.

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#### **Director induction and training**

New Directors are provided with a tailored induction which includes background on the Charity, its current activities (including visits to operations), strategic and annual business plans, policies and financial position as well as roles and responsibilities of the Board. Ongoing training is provided for all Board members as required as part of annual business plan activities.

#### **Related Parties**

None of the Directors receive remuneration or other benefit from their work within the Charity.

#### **Risk Management**

The Directors identify the major risks to which the Charity is exposed each financial year when preparing the annual business plan, in particular those related to the operations and finances of the Charity. The Directors then review any major risks which have been identified and establish systems to mitigate those risks. The Charity is satisfied that the systems are in place to mitigate their exposure to the major risks which have been so identified and reviewed.

The Board has examined the major risks which the Charity faces and confirms that policies and procedures have been established so that the necessary steps can be taken to lessen these risks.

#### **Environmental Matters**

The Charity recognises its corporate responsibility to carry out its operations while minimising environmental impacts. The Board's continued aim is to comply with all applicable environmental legislation, prevent pollution and reduce waste wherever possible.

The Charity will actively pursue methods of reducing its carbon footprint.

# ACCESS EMPLOYMENT LTD

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### Reference & Administrative Details

Charity number: NIC100987  
HMRC charity number: NI00152  
Company number: NI 035373  
Registered Office: 32-34 Pound Street, Larne, Co Antrim, BT40 1SQ

### Our Advisors

**Auditors:** Harbinson Mulholland Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditors,  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, East Tower, Lanyon Plaza, 8 Lanyon Place, Belfast, BT1 3LP  
**Bankers:** Danske Bank, Donegal Square West, Belfast, BT1 6JS  
**Solicitors:** BLM, 51 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8FE

### Directors

The Directors of the charitable company are its trustees for the purpose of Charity Law.  
The Directors serving during the year and since the year end were as follows:

Hazel Bell (Chair)  
Grace Nesbitt (Vice Chair) (retired 25/01/24)  
Alison Allen (appointed 28/11/24)  
Maureen Hanvey (retired 25/01/24)  
Audrey Murray (Vice Chair from 25/01/24)  
Christine Barnhill (appointed 25/04/24)  
Joanne Liddle (appointed 25/01/24)  
Ciara Van Es (appointed 25/04/24)  
Andrew Clenaghan  
Ian McMaster (resigned 16/12/24)  
Trevor Ringland

### Senior Management Personnel

Chief Executive: Laura Steele  
Head of Services: Lorraine Black  
Head of Business: Jackie Reid


### Acknowledgements

The Board would like to thank all those bodies which have provided financial assistance in the last year. Their support has been essential to maintaining a varied programme of development and training for our beneficiaries which we would otherwise be unable to provide. Grants and donations that were received are set out in note 2 of the financial statements.

The Directors also acknowledge, with gratitude, the dedication and professionalism of its staff upon which it is wholly dependent for the Charity's success.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions relating to small companies within Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006.

By order of the Board

  
**Mrs Hazel Bell**  
Director  
16<sup>th</sup> January 2025

## ACCESS EMPLOYMENT LTD

### STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS' RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2024

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#### Directors' Responsibilities in relation to the financial statements

The Company Directors (who are also charity trustees of Access Employment Ltd) are responsible for preparing a Directors' annual report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the Directors to prepare the financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources including the income and expenditure of the organisation for that period. In preparing the financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the organisation will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the organisation and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the organisation and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.


The Directors are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of the financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

#### Statement of disclosure to auditors

So far as the Directors are aware at the time of approving the Directors annual report:

- there is no relevant information, being information needed by the auditor in connection with preparing their report, of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware, and
- the Directors, having made enquiries of fellow Directors and the charitable company's auditor that they ought to have individually taken, have each taken all steps that he/she is obliged to take as a director in order to make themselves aware of all relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

By order of the Board

  
**Mrs Hazel Bell**  
Director  
16th January 2025