

Ashes to Gold Charity

Trustees' Report

The trustees present the annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 December 2024.

Objectives and activities

Objectives and aims

Looking back on 2024, Ashes to Gold saw another year of essential service delivery undertaken with the core aims of raising aspiration, confidence, hope and purpose whilst pushing back the impacts and strongholds of addiction, loneliness and worthlessness. As our communities continue to navigate a journey immersed in more and more technology and “connectivity”, often we see the outcome being the opposite where people feel more disconnected than ever and they’re anything but a part of “community”, and all this coupled with an ever-increasing struggle to access the vastly underfunded statutory health and support services. On a regular basis our project staff and volunteers encounter both sides of the needs spectrum, meeting service users who have slipped through the net and find themselves in crisis and also, local health trust staff seeking help to meet needs that their resources just simply cannot cover. So, we look to a dedicated team of staff and volunteers, some humble but impactful facilities and some strategic delivery partners and we find a way to help and support. Indeed, the Ashes to Gold team will always try to provide a way forward and fit a person to the service or the service to the person! With these factors in mind, the core aim of the Ashes to Gold charity remains to provide user led and purposeful activities to individuals in the Causeway Coast and Glens area who want to increase their confidence, motivation and self-belief while learning new skills. Across all our projects we focus on supporting people who have special or additional needs, have become isolated or are suffering with mental health issues, are long term unemployed or are navigating a journey through the judicial system. We support our clients by teaching them new skills, providing support with mental well-being and empowering them with the confidence and ability to make sustainable changes to their lives and enjoy their role in community.

At our Oasis project, we provide support to people who are struggling with addiction, loneliness, long term unemployment and are living with, or recovering from mental health issues, providing immediate support through our drop-in and other more focussed services and therapies. At our Oasis centre, anyone who is feeling low, isolated or lacking in confidence can come and meet our friendly staff and volunteers for a chat and a cuppa. We can provide one to one therapeutic support through our team of qualified counsellors along with providing plans to help an individual achieve their personal goals and progress from dependency to safe and sustainable independency. A focussed addictions awareness and support group is held on a weekly basis and an emergency foodbank is also available five days per week for anyone who finds themselves in food poverty crisis.

Ashes to Gold’s Grow project focusses on delivering various levels of therapeutic nature and gardening programs to a diverse range of groups from our community, including adults with physical and learning disabilities, veterans experiencing anxiety and PTSD, older individuals, community groups from areas of high disadvantage, and local primary schools seeking enriching outdoor learning experiences. Grow’s activities vary depending on the groups needs, encompassing gardening, horticultural therapy, food growing and harvesting, cookery lessons and environmental awareness education. Regardless of who visits, our goal is to inspire everyone to embrace the outdoors and experience the benefits of physical activity within a natural setting.

Ashes to Gold’s ‘Restore’ workshop is set up to provide DIY training and simple woodworking activities that not only inspire and teach its visitors but re-purpose both materials and people! The activities and support provided can help an individual to gain the confidence and skills required to better engage in community and step towards employment. As with the Grow project, this facility is serving a diverse set of groups from all sectors of the local community and further afield in some cases.

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Trustees' Report (continued)

Moorbrook - Fishing and time in the great outdoors has been proven to be useful, if not essential, in bringing improved mental well-being and equipping people with the skills to manage challenges in mental health. The aim of the Moorbrook site is to introduce the pastime of fishing along with a variety of other outdoor activities to a much wider community audience including children and the elderly and those with physical and mental disabilities with a focus being put on the health and well-being benefits of the various activities on offer.

Public benefit

Ashes to Gold aims to educate, empower and help those who require assistance to integrate back into society, and to support those who find themselves at an economic or social disadvantage by helping them to gain access to local businesses and services for financial, training or well-being assistance.

The charity also aims to provide facilities and tutors to

- assist with the educational needs of those who do not have access to learning in numeracy or literature,
- assist individuals with mental or physical disabilities to experience life enhancing opportunities,
- assist those experiencing long term unemployment or the elderly, who are suffering from financial hardship by giving advice and assistance in areas of debt management and money advice,
- provide support to people with mental health issues through mentoring and group or one to one counselling.

The trustees confirm that they have complied with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Achievements and performance

During the 2024 year, Ashes to Gold has seen a marked increase in delivery across most of the charity projects and this founded on a solid development of both staff and volunteer structure coupled with development of the necessary planning and compliance procedures associated with this increased delivery, with all being achieved under the careful direction of the board of trustees.

The Oasis project continued to deliver structured health and well-being programmes to individuals from areas of high deprivation and, under the leadership of a new lead counsellor, saw significant development of the counselling service and the physical environment where delivery takes place with over 1,200 hours of 1-2-1 therapy being delivered by the team of volunteer counsellors. In July 2024 Ashes to Gold Oasis once again gained major support for operating and programme costs through DFC (Department for Communities) to provide essential services to the most disadvantaged in our local communities.

Also, in collaboration with the landlords of the Ashes to Gold Oasis premises, Coleraine 1st Presbyterian Church, some of the Oasis service delivery which includes the weekly drop in and addiction support sessions now takes place in a much more suitable place in the neighbouring building at a sustainable cost to the charity. The need for emergency food and other "point of crisis" services stayed steady and we were able to meet most of that need through the generosity of several local churches and funders who either donated non-perishable food, personal hygiene products and pet food or the financial provision to cover emergency needs like electricity credit or food shopping vouchers to purchase essentials such as baby food and nappies.

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Trustees' Report (continued)

Through support from the ATG Group, the Moorbrook project was also subject to significant development after the appointment of a general manager to oversee both the day-to-day operations and the growth necessary to achieve some level of sustainability. This resulted in a rapid development of on-site activities and services and a marked increase in visitor footfall from a variety of sources including the local Education Authority and The Scouts. Funding through the Honourable The Irish Society enabled angling to be taught to multiple children and youth groups and funding from the Veterans Foundation enabled over 200 veterans of the armed forces and their family members to avail of some much-needed well-being retreats that included activity packages and food. All activities and services have at their core, the desire to engage people with nature, regardless of age or background, and to encounter opportunities to go forward in a more positive way. Several other smaller funds were also obtained for the delivery of community craft and fun events that proved to be an incredible success with full attendance at all events and some very positive feedback been given. The Moorbrook project was also successful in being awarded a Green Flag for providing a safe and inclusive space for community engagement and enjoyment in 2024.

Ashes to Gold's Grow and Restore Workshop projects continued to provide a safe and peaceful space for groups of all ages to engage with nature and enjoy the pastimes of cooking, gardening and woodworking, with guests coming from more than ten different routes of connection and referral to avail of the activities and therapies on offer. As is now commonplace, anxiety, isolation and other mental well-being challenges are on the increase and immeasurable economic difficulties continue to blight the lives of many in our community and often the testimony of Ashes to Gold being a "sanctuary" away from the pressure cooker of life is heard! This year saw a further two DGS (Defence Garden Scheme) ten-week horticultural therapy programmes delivered to veterans of the armed forces who were referred as a result of being negatively impacted by their military service with many suffering the effects of ongoing complex PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and other emotional, mental and physical challenges. There were many key outcomes from these programmes but two that stand out were a referral to and connection with a specialist veterans addiction service and the prevention of a well planned suicide. The Grow and Restore projects also saw ongoing facilitation of a weekly service to adults with a learning disability through the NHSCT Day Opportunities programme, where workplace style activities are undertaken in a workplace style environment, encouraging learning and self confidence and preparation for employment where appropriate. The early summer also saw a group from the local health trust adult day centre avail of twice weekly gardening and woodworking activities, with each participant being given the assistance, care, tools and training to fully take part regardless of their personal limitations. Ashes to Gold continues to strive to ensure that no one feels different or left out because of their mental or physical ability by learning about the differing needs and adapting accordingly, examples being workbenches that adapt to a mobility aid or wheelchair user and special frames that enable the safe use of a handsaw by someone with a dexterity issue, and, the adaptable benches blend in with the rest of the benches so no one is situated separately!

Once again, Ashes to Gold finds itself responding to significant increases in community and social need, with addiction, anxiety, isolation, self-harm and suicide all on the rise. Again, key indicators evidencing the increase in demand was the number of individuals who we would count as "Direct Beneficiaries" of the services delivered through the various projects. Many individuals simply had no option but to call at our projects and ask for help with energy costs, food, health, mental health or housing as they found themselves in crisis in one or more of these areas. Another key indicator was the increase in requests from local statutory health and support agencies for structured programs of health interventions including mental health and addictions support.

During the 2024 year, in excess of 1,000 people, mainly from local constituencies, received help and support through the Ashes to Gold charity and we can be confident that many more "indirect beneficiaries" felt the impact of this support through an emergency need that was met or an improved and more stable environment at home and/or in the workplace. This growth in service delivery was handled comfortably on the ground by the Ashes to Gold project managers with the support of the board of trustees, but all had to invest energy, time and wisdom in managing services and resources to cope with the increase in demand whilst navigating a tight financial environment.

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Trustees' Report (continued)

As with previous years, Ashes to Gold's Project Managers used existing resources well and performed brilliantly in recruiting more trusted volunteers to assist in the increased facilitation of services.

Again, Ashes to Gold was playing its part and many lives were being impacted as a result.

Structure, governance and management

Organisational structure

The governance and management structure of the charity has remained largely unchanged through the 2024 year except for the resignation of Mr Peter Finch who left the board in November. The board met regularly through the year and steered the organisation as it carried out the various project activities.

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Trustees' Report (continued)

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

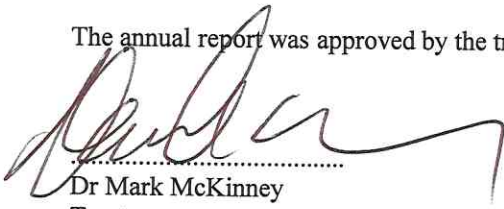
The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

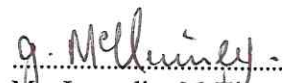
- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed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

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 20 August 2025 and signed on its behalf by:


.....
Dr Mark McKinney
Trustee


.....
Mrs Jacqueline McKinney
Trustee