

Trustee annual report 2024- Maghera Cross Community Link-

Charity number 101215

The purposes of the charity remains 'to provide facilities for recreation and leisure, to improve the image of the community, closer community co-operation and to provide children's activities. The group also provides a foodbank to assist the neediest families and individuals within the local Maghera area'.

The following were elected as trustees for the group on 23rd December 2024:

- Ruth Watterson (Chairperson)
- Jon James Boyd
- Claire Sweeney (Treasurer)
- Paula Convery (Secretary)
- Kirsty McFall
- Jane Mullan
- Ross Nicholl
- Brian Davey

Personal Youth Development Programme-

The organisation is now in its final month of our International Fund for Ireland Personal Youth Development Programme, due to end in December 2024.

24 young people were recruited:

- 16 are male, 7 are female and 1 identifies as non-binary
- 8 of Protestant faith, 10 of Catholic faith and 6 are other/ no religious beliefs
- 3 of the participants, who joined the programme in August are Syrian refugees. Throughout their time on the programme they received the support to achieve their UK residents status.

The young people involved in the programme have experienced many individual issues the young people have experienced, including low self esteem, poor mental health, sectarianism and difficulties with communication.

The programme is tailored to the participants, to best fit their needs. From the beginning of the programme, the participants have developed their personal capabilities, including increased skills, qualifications and confidence.

Heather listed the many qualifications the young people have undertaken, as well as non-accredited workshops and programmes, these have included; Manual Handling Awareness, Level 2 Food Safety, Level 3 Emergency First Aid at Work, OCN Level 2 Good Relations, Mental Health First Aid, Fire Safety Awareness, OCN Level 1 Managing risk, Level 1 Grassroots, OCN Level 1 Cultural Diversity, Level 1 Fire Safety, mental health workshops, driving theory support, cookery, caring for the centre's allotments, physical activity, one to one mentoring and teambuilding activities/ trips.

The programme has been extremely successful, with 10 young people entering employment, 1 gaining an apprenticeship and 5 going onto further education. The other 8 young people left the programme due to a variety of reasons including; moving from the area, mental health issues, maternity and taking on caring duties.

The group has been successful in securing funding to run another 2 year Personal Youth Development Programme thanks to International Fund for Ireland Funding. This programme is due to commence in January 2025.

Children/ young people classes-

Current programmes and classes the organisation offers, as well as the approximate number of attendees are as follows:

- Pre-school (18 months- 4 years): demand for our pre-school class increased significantly, therefore an additional day was added to the programme. The class runs every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 9:30am-11:30am, with 18 children attending each day.
- Art (4 years-11 years): art class runs every Wednesday from 3:30pm-5pm and is attended by 18 children.
- Baking (4 years- 11 years): baking class runs every Tuesday from 3:30pm-5pm and is attended by 18 children.
- Dance (4 years-11 years): dance class runs every Tuesday from 6:30pm-7:30pm and is attended by 24 children.

Three out of school schemes for those aged 4 years- 11 years were also run during the year:

- 3rd- 7th July 2023- 63 young people engaged
- 7th- 11th August 2023- 54 young people engaged
- 14th- 18th August 2023- 43 young people engaged

In addition, the group once again offered varied youth programmes:

- Junior group (10 years-13 years)- Our junior group, with up to 29 children in attendance, consisting of mainly children from King William III Crescent and Upperlands, has continued to meet each week. The group have made good progress, and have built strong relationships with staff and volunteers. They are able to openly talk about any issues they are facing. In addition to this, we have built up good relationships with the parents of the young people, which is helping us to build stronger inter community relationships. The group have been taking part in sports programmes, baking, art and teambuilding trips. Most recently, the group have attended a good relations visit to Derry/ Londonderry, involving visiting the Free Derry Museum and Apprentice Boys Museum, as well as ten pin bowling, the young people thoroughly enjoyed this as it was a completely new experience for them all. The group have been taking part in a wide variety of activities, including; sport, baking, art, good relations training and team building activities.
- Senior group (14 years- 18 years)- Up to 28 young people have attended our senior group, coming from Maghera and the surrounding rural areas. The group have taken part in many activities including meditation and relaxation, mental health workshops, cookery, caring for the centre's allotments and taking part in a study group. The group have also completed lots of new qualifications which will be of great benefit to help them find new jobs. The qualifications completed have included OCN Youth Leadership, OCN Customer Service Skills, Food Safety in Catering and Emergency First Aid in Work.

All our children and young people's programmes are funded through BBC Children in Need and BSG Family trust. Brian said it was evident these funders are essential in helping the organisation provide the opportunities it does.

BSG Family Trust-

The organisation's first funding from BSG Family Trust ended in March 2024, which funded 2 X 25 hour staff members, who are responsible for the running of Maghera Foodbank, as well as working within the pre-school respite services. The funding has allowed us to continue to work with the junior and senior group who had previously attended our Education Authority programme, where these young people continue to partake in weekly activities to increase confidence, improve emotional well being, as well as community relations. In addition, through the funding four X 6 week blocks of adult cookery classes were run successfully, providing opportunities for local adults to come together to socialise, as well as learn a range of cooking techniques.

Following our successful programme which ended in March 2024, we applied for funding to continue our activities, in which we were successful.

Through this funding the organisation is able to continue to run our friendship group. Staff have seen first-hand the impact rising household bills are having on local individuals, and therefore the importance of providing a warm, safe space to socialise in. The group is open to all, but is particularly beneficial for those who live in a hard to heat home, are isolated or worried about energy bills. Activities on offer within

the programme include cookery demonstrations, arts and crafts, educational talks (fire safety, medical etc), gardening and excursions.

The new funding allocation will cover the costs of 3 X 25 hour positions, in addition to programme costs.

BBC Children in Need-

Up to October 2023, the organisation received funding of £9970/year for tutor and programme costs, but successfully applied for BBC Children in Need's large grant, commencing in November 2023. The funding covers a 25 hour per week youth worker, to manage all children and young people's classes, as well as assist within the running of the classes. The fund covers tutor and material costs for our classes, including; baking, art, dance, boxercise and study groups, as well as 3 weeks of summer scheme activities each year, which will be open to those aged 4 years. This new funding has allowed us to increase our capacity and benefit more local children.

Foodbank-

1154 food parcels have been distributed between April 2023 and March 2024- a 54.6% increase compared to April 2022- March 2023.

The group continues to offer food parcels which contain non-perishable items, as well as fresh food and toiletries, ensuring families/ individuals have 4-5 days' worth of nutritionally balanced meals, as well as toiletries to meet their basic needs. In addition to food parcels, households can be directly supported with coal, oil stamps and vouchers to purchase fresh meat.

During school holidays, including summer, half term and Christmas, we provided extra support to families who have been struggling with their increased food bills due to their children being at home full time, by providing 'packed lunches' for the children.

Between November 2023 and March 2024, 64 households who use Maghera Foodbank were additionally supported with £200 electricity credit/ heating oil, through Bryson Energy Emergency Relief Initiative. The Bryson Energy Emergency Relief Initiative is a comprehensive program aimed at providing relief to those struggling with their energy bills. The initiative includes a range of measures designed to help people manage their energy costs, including grants, energy efficiency measures, and support for vulnerable households. These grants were targeted at low-income households who are particularly vulnerable to energy poverty. By providing financial assistance to these households, the initiative aims to alleviate some of the financial burden associated with energy bills, allowing people to better manage their energy costs and stay warm during the winter months.

We provide wrap around services, as we understand hunger is more than food, but a lack of income, among other issues. Our wrap around services ensure we are providing additional support alongside emergency food, to help clients address the underlying issues behind their crisis. We have built strong relationships with many referral agencies, including; Mid Ulster Support Hub Community Planning (PSNI), STEP Advice Services, Woman's Aid, NIHE and Alva Hasson Counselling.

During this period, the foodbank has been extremely busy, with an increased number of working families using the service, as they find it more and more difficult to stretch their income.

Organisations that use The Link building-

The centre is currently used by a wide range of organisations on a weekly basis, these include: Alva Hasson Counselling, ZEST, South Derry Downs Syndrome Group Maghera Baby Loss Group and self-help groups. In addition to this, several other groups use the facilities when required, including Lifeline and Northlands Addiction Centre. The organisations use the facilities free of charge, as we feel these services are essential and should be accessible to all.

The trustees reviewed all organisation policy's and procedures.

The group continues to operate under the terms of its constitution.

The charity remains in a healthy financial position and is appreciative of all funding received.

Signed: R. Watterson
Ruth Watterson (Chairperson)

Date: 27/12/24