

The Link Family and Community Centre

Directors' Report for the year ending 31st December 2022

The Trustees present their annual directors' report and Independently examined financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2022 which are also prepared to meet the requirements for a directors' report and accounts for Companies Act purposes.

The financial statements comply with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, the Companies Act 2006, the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) (effective 1 January 2015).

Chair's report

As 2022 began, we like many were encouraged to find the world returning to some sort of new normal! Social distancing and face covering began in the most cases to disappear into the rear-view mirror as life returned to something more familiar.

The Link was no different to many other organisations in welcoming these changes as it allowed us to get back to doing what we do best, meeting face to face with people to help them in the difficult situations in which they found themselves.

MARC clients were able to return to the Drop In and our English classes for speakers of other languages returned in person. Our work with young mothers also allowed more personal contact which was desperately needed and welcomed by our service users.

It is a sad indictment of our society that the Ards Churches Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre which we launched in January in conjunction with 15 local Churches is at full capacity. We currently have a waiting list of people who in a world of ever-worsening economic pain, are desperately seeking help with their financial situation. On the positive side it has been wonderful to see several clients who have engaged with our service become debt free after following the budget drawn up for them by our CAP Debt Centre Manager.

As always, we are so grateful for our dedicated staff as well as our fantastic team of more than 35 volunteers. Quite simply we could not do what we do without them. One of the upsides of restrictions being eased was that we were able to hold a thank you BBQ for our volunteers, our Volunteer Coordinator, John Melvin even organising the weather for it! One of our big frustrations during the pandemic was not being able to show in any sort of tangible way how much we valued and appreciated all that our volunteers do for The Link and for the wider community in Newtownards. It was fantastic to be able to get together in person onsite to enjoy food and each other's company. John Melvin retired from his paid role as our Drop In Support Worker and we wish to thank John for his years of faithful service. We are delighted that John has agreed to continue as our Volunteer Coordinator on a voluntary basis.

On the financial front, we are very grateful that our finances are in a healthy position, but this is something that we do not take for granted and the Board along with our Director are constantly monitoring the situation. For us as a Board it has never been about chasing money but rather, finding out what the need is and then seeking ways in which we can seek resources to address the particular need.

One of the undoubted highlights of 2022 was being able to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Charity. For any charitable organisation to make it to 25 is nothing short of remarkable given the ever-increasing pressure on funding. We were due to mark the anniversary on the 8th September but that afternoon, it was announced that Queen Elizabeth had very sadly passed away. As a mark of respect, we decided to postpone and rearrange the celebration for 24th October in Movilla Abbey Church. We were delighted that so many joined us to celebrate and it was great to share so many good memories and give thanks for the 25 years of the life and work of The Link.

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In summary we count it a privilege to be able to get to do what we do and we are thankful to God for his favour and goodness to The Link as look forward to another year in his service.

Our Aims and Objectives

The purposes of the charity are:

- To advance community development and, in particular, the promotion of the community and voluntary sector for the benefit of the public by providing support, information, services and facilities to churches and community and voluntary groups and encouraging such organisations to co-operate to achieve their aims
- To support those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, substance dependency, financial hardship or other disadvantage
- To advance education and training and promote the physical, Intellectual, and social development of young children
- To promote good community relations, religious and racial harmony and equality and diversity
- To promote volunteering and recruit, select and train volunteers for services within the area of benefit
- to promote the social economy and social enterprises within Newtownards and its environs for the benefit of the general public and
- to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and other leisure time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants of Newtownards and its environs.

The aspiration that shapes our annual activities remains to enable children, young people, adults and senior citizens to reach their full potential. In partnership with others, we also provide practical help and care for some of the most disadvantaged groups and individuals in the Ards and North Down Council area. Our projects address a number of key concerns: LYFE Youth project works with 'at risk' young people; the MARC Project seeks to support adults with substance addictions; the church engagement project aims to build relationships between churches and the local community; and the volunteer-led projects work with vulnerable senior citizens and minority ethnic communities. Our building is also a resource for other organisations based outside Newtownards to offer services to local people in their local area. These include counselling and youth services. We have around 40 committed volunteers who work across the organisation along with 10 part-time and full-time staff.

Statement of Public Benefit

In determining our objectives for the year and planning our activities, the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance 'The public benefit requirement (PBR1)' and also 'The Trustee's Annual Report and public benefit reporting (ARR08)'. The charity relies on grants from trusts and foundations, local government, and statutory bodies. It also generates income through its social economy retail shop and general fundraising activities.

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Achievements and performance

Addiction Support Services - MARC Project

Floating Support

Although the impact of the Covid pandemic began to diminish through the early months of 2022, the MARC staff team continued to ensure all relevant Covid guidance was adhered to. The MARC staff were delighted to be able to move from the previous 'remote working' pattern and to deliver a full client facing service throughout the year.

In addition to providing the usual range of support (e.g. housing support, benefit advice, assistance to address substance use), staff provided additional supports such as collection of prescriptions and food deliveries to Floating Support and Drop-In Centre clients.

The MARC Project played a significant role in addressing mental health and substance use problems which had often been exacerbated by the pandemic, through the loss of formal and informal support networks. Staff were highly professional and committed in assisting clients to access health support throughout this period, often having to provide transport and accompany clients to appointments.

The service provision continued to exceed the contracted activity figure of 18 clients; the Floating Support service was delivered to 36 individuals. The service continued to achieve excellent outcomes despite the immense challenges of the cost-of-living crisis which impacted on many of our already struggling service users. Many were assisted in making significant changes in their lives – reducing alcohol and drug use, maintaining tenancies, receiving bespoke benefit advice and accessing appropriate health and social care.

Drop-In Centre

The 'Drop In facility' functioned fully throughout 2022 and staff were able to provide a full range of support services and activities. Popular activities included guitar lessons, cookery classes and quizzes. The MARC staff also entered into an agreement with the local Benefits Office whereby their staff provided bespoke benefit advice on site at our Drop-In. Uptake for this service remained high throughout 2022.

As well as the Drop-In, MARC staff maintained regular telephone contact, which helped prevent social isolation and provided assistance with housing, benefits and other issues. They performed other tasks such as shopping, payment of gas and electricity "top-ups" and collection of prescriptions. Staff assisted service users to access support services in relation to health, social care and addiction.

Homelessness Prevention

The Homelessness Prevention Project continued to deliver services throughout the year. This project provided an invaluable support with clients regularly commenting on how beneficial they had found the service to be, particularly at a time when they had often struggled to access other services. MARC staff liaised closely with the Community Addiction Team and provided support for a number of their service users with housing and benefit problems. This was an invaluable asset, particularly for clients who had difficulty engaging with agencies or processing online applications. During 2022 there were 101 contacts with the service which more than doubled the targeted activity of 40. Issues being presented included addiction, homelessness and debt. Several of those engaging with the service did so at a time of crisis in their lives including a number who presented as homeless. A number of contacts were individuals who were living in private rented accommodation and had been issued with a 'Notice to Quit' due to landlords selling the properties. As was the case in 2021, 2022 presented significant challenges of a continuing increase in referrals from the wider Ards Peninsula area.

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Funding

Funding from The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Supporting People programme has supported much of the Floating Support service. Successful funding applications were also made to the NIHE for funding from its 'Housing Centre' and 'Homelessness Prevention Project'.

Youth Programme - LYFE

Young Parent Support

Throughout 2022, our LYFE staff were able to maintain a full, meaningful and effective service. They have continued to be flexible in their approach to service delivery in the midst of very challenging circumstances. This has provided an essential connection with the LYFE service users who particularly struggled with isolation and loneliness.

Our staff provided support and guidance for 22 families this year and continued to support young parents through face-to-face contact and telephone calls. Young parents have not had the opportunities to complete OCN or other courses face to face, but we have provided budgeting, slow cooker, sexual health and healthy eating group guidance online.

Funding from The Public Health Agency has been used to cover the salary and operating costs of our LYFE Project.

Youth Drop-in

The staff team reopened our Drop-In space in order to engage with 18-24 year-olds. We targeted this specific age group because many of these young people feel increasingly socially isolated and find it very difficult to engage with other youth services.

An average of 8 young people attended each session and the team provided essential support around self-esteem, personal growth and resilience. Two new volunteers came on board to help lead on a weekly basis.

Senior Citizens' Lunch Club and Drop-in

Our Senior Citizens' Lunch Club and Warm Space Drop-In recommenced in January 2022. Approximately 12 to 15 older people attended each Monday and our volunteer team fully operated this service. The Lunch Club provided a safe, welcoming and warm space for many older people who have been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Our English classes for speakers of other languages ran at full capacity throughout 2022. Our staff and volunteers taught an average of 12 face to face hours per week and classes included Pre-Entry Level/ESOL Literacy, Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 and Entry Level 3.

Alongside the service we provided to people from Syria, Bangladesh, Bengal, Poland, Latvia and Afghanistan, 2022 saw a huge influx of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. By the end of 2022, more than 70 Ukrainian women, children and young people had attended our English classes in person.

Our staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to also provide a broader range of support based on the trauma and complex needs these refugees had.

2022 saw most students complete a full course and progress to the next level. Classes provided ESOL lessons for mothers with small infants, particularly Syrian women who required particular cultural sensitivities.

Our volunteer tutors have kept in touch with vulnerable students and continue to go over and beyond in their attempts to provide essential support.

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'English for Driving' continues to be a popular weekly course facilitated by one of the volunteer tutors. Our tutors also work diligently to enable those who need it to train for and pass their *'Life in the UK'* course.

We continue to liaise with other ESOL providers and social support agencies in the area. We also continue to assist families with education, housing, health and other enquiries where required.

Funding from The Executive Office's Minority Ethnic Development Fund has been used to pay for an ESOL class coordinator and the National Lottery and John Moore Foundation have provided funding for our ESOL tuition.

We are very grateful to our team of 10 volunteer tutors, who have continued to make every effort to keep in touch with students and provide top quality tuition.

Church Engagement

One of our key strategic aims is to develop and grow our regular engagement with faith-based organisations in the Newtownards and surrounding area. 2022 has seen us put significant time and effort into community-wide engagement with Churches. The Link Family and Community Centre has re-established and leads the 'Ards Churches Together Forum' which aims at greater cohesion and community engagement by the churches in the area.

Our staff and volunteers continued to contribute to the significant support and emergency intervention provided through local churches. The support offered included signposting to local services, provision of meals and other essential supplies to those in need and pastoral support.

Ards Churches Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre

In partnership with 13 local churches, The Link continues to be the lead partner in operating the Ards Churches Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre based in our premises. The Debt Centre operated fully throughout 2022 and the Debt Centre Manager is employed and line managed by us.

We are excited to see the Centre assist local people of all faiths or none, to have the 'no strings attached' opportunity and support to face significant financial challenges and begin the journey toward becoming debt free. By the end of 2022, 4 families have now become debt free, and we are confident this number will be added to in 2023.

The Link Charity Shop

As with most retail outlets, our 6th year in the shop premises in Regent Street proved a challenging one. Trading has thankfully been more consistent than the previous two years, and our staff and volunteers have been encouraged by the business and support provided by both our local customers and donors.

We currently have 10 volunteers, some helping in the shop and others delivering and collecting donations in the van. A few of our volunteers had illnesses during the year but the remaining volunteers proved amazing in the way they stepped up to help when needed.

We continue to stock a great range of good quality second-hand furniture at reasonable prices and are so thankful for the support from the local community for the work of The Link.

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Financial Review

In 2022, the charity was able to again record a surplus of income against expenditure, amounting to £4,511. At 31st December 2022, the charity's funds were £578,805 of which £36,694 were restricted funds and £542,111 unrestricted.

The Link's charitable activities are supported by funding and donations from a wide range of organisations, charitable trusts, individuals and churches. The organisation's applications for funding from statutory and other bodies seek to secure full costs for the programmes and services provided. This is necessary for the sustainability of our work and for the delivery of the quality and standards which are appropriate for those we serve. The funding environment has been challenging for many years and with the severe financial crisis which has deepened in the past year, we have along with others had to face increased costs and continuing competitive processes for even more limited resources. This has had substantial impact within the voluntary and community sector. During 2022, the organisation been able to consolidate and continues to refine the process of restructuring to ensure that we can continue to deliver its work within resources available.

Reserves Policy and going concern

Reserves are needed to bridge the gap between the spending and receiving of income and to cover unplanned emergency repairs and other expenditure. The trustees review its reserves policy in light of risks associated with income streams and expenditure, planned activity level and organisational commitments. The target for 2022 was that the level of free reserves would equate to three month's expenditure, which is around £78,500.

Total funds stand at £578,805, of which £542,111 are unrestricted funds. Of these unrestricted funds, the available free reserve for the charity after excluding tangible assets and liabilities, amounted to £104,711 at 31st December 2022. This equated to approximately 4 months' expenditure.

The cash inflow from operating activities in 2022 was £5,617. The trustees are aware that efforts will need to continue to generate sufficient income to meet costs and maintain an appropriate level of free reserves. The organisation will continue to review initiatives to secure its sustainability and financial position. The trustees will retain the target for free reserves to cover at least three month's expenditure in 2023.

Plans for future periods

The report of The Link Family and Community Centre's programmes, activities and achievements during 2022 has highlighted the range of valuable work being provided to many people in the community, and in particular those who are most vulnerable and in need of support and intervention.

2022 has seen us face the significant challenge of recommencing many of the client facing programmes which had to be put on hold during the Covid pandemic. This required our staff and volunteers to constantly adapt our practices to ensure that we complied with necessary restrictions and, at the same time, maintain support and services to those most in need. The resilience of the organisation was tested, and we are delighted that the organisation passed this test with flying colours! The organisation is well-placed to continue its range of services across the community of Ards and North Down.

2022 saw us celebrate our 25th Anniversary and we continue to feel privileged to get to do what we do. The organisation has been an active and much needed provider and has faced many challenges in recent years. Despite the challenges, we remain focused on learning and development, based on our experiences, good and bad. We seek to use this learning as we plan our future service provision in a way which is fit for purpose.

While aiming to maintain service delivery to a high standard and meet the requirements of clients, service users, funders and other stakeholders, the Board, Staff and Volunteers at The Link are committed to:

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- ensure we secure a broad range of funding in order to sustain our programmes and services
- continually review our 2023-2026 strategy
- continually review our structures and assets to ensure that we maintain delivery of services which meet the needs of our community;
- consolidating our work with young people, supporting people with addictions and delivering our programmes; and
- continuing to actively engage with local churches and relevant organisations to build constructive and supportive relationships.

Reference and administrative details

Company Reg: NI 44326
Registered Charity No: NIC 101921
HMRC Reference: XR 60197
Registered Office: Lamont Building, 10 West Street, Newtownards BT23 4EN

Our advisers

Independent Examiner: Adrian Hall & Co, 1st Floor, 100 Main Street, Bangor BT20 4AG
Bankers: Co- Operative Bank, PO BOX 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT
Santander Commercial Bank, Bridle Road, Bootle, Merseyside GIR 0AA
Solicitors: Hewitt & Gilpin, 72 Hollywood Road, Belfast BT4 3BA

Directors and trustees

The directors of the charitable company (the charity) are its trustees for the purpose of charity law. The trustees and officers serving during the year and since the year end were as follows:

Key management personnel Link Family and Community Centre: Trustees and Directors Elected trustees:

Paul Black	
Sarah Cairnduff	(appointed September 2022)
Gerardine Cunningham	(Secretary)
Jonny Currie	(appointed September 2022)
Robert Hamilton	
Mark McFeeters	(appointed September 2022)
James Moore	
David Murdie	(Treasurer)
Natalie Porter	(resigned September 2022)
Michael Taylor	(Chair)

Key management personnel Link Family and Community Centre: Senior Managers

Director: Mark Houston

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Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

The Link Family and Community Centre is a company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 7th October 2002. In April 2015 it became a registered charity with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association and governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 18 May 2011. It is also registered as a charity with HM Revenue and Customs. In the event of the charity winding up members agree to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

Appointment of trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association the members present at the Annual General Meeting will elect the trustees. The number of the trustees shall not be more than fifteen and not less than six at any one time.

The trustees shall have the power at any time and from time to time to appoint any person to be a trustee, either to fill a casual vacancy or as an addition to the existing trustees. Any trustees so appointed shall hold office only until the next year following Annual General Meeting and shall then be eligible for re-election.

When considering co-opting trustees, the Board has regard to the requirement for any specialist skills needed.

Trustee Induction and training

New trustees undergo orientation to brief them on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit, and inform them of the content of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity. During the induction they meet key employees and other staff. Trustees are encouraged to attend appropriate external training events where these will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisation

The Management Committee administers the charity. The Board meets at least six times each year. A Director has been appointed by the Board to manage the day-to-day operations of the charity. To facilitate effective operations, the Director has delegated authority, within terms of delegation approved by the Committee, for operational matters.

Related Parties and co-operation with other organisations

None of our trustees received remuneration for services provided to the charity during the year. Any contractual relationship with a related party between a trustee or senior manager of the charity must be disclosed to the full board of trustees. In the current year no such related party transactions were reported.

The Link Family and Community Centre has close relationships with a number of statutory, voluntary and community bodies. We have representatives who serve on a number of committees and groups.

Local agencies with which the organisation engages include, Education Authority, Ards and North Down Street Pastors, Housing Executive, Probation Board, Social Services, Public Health Agency, and local churches. Other bodies with which we engage include, CO3, North Down YMCA, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Police Community Safety Partnership.

The organisation is also grateful to those individuals and organisations who offer financial support to the work of the project.

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The Link Family and Community Centre recognises the necessity and benefit of connecting people to other community services that offer support and encouragement at times of need. We believe that partnership working is essential if we are to build a stronger, healthier and vibrant community.

Risk Management

The Board regularly reviews risk in the organisation through an annual review of the risks the charity may face, establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate and manage risks identified, implementation and regular review of procedures designed to minimise any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

This work identified a number of risks but has also resulted in better management procedures and contingency plans. Particular attention has focused on non-financial risks from individual programmes and financial risks arising from securing funding for the range of programmes provided by the organisation. A key element in the management of financial risk is the review of the organisation's reserves policy, cash-flow forecasts and operating budgets.

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Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Trustees (and also the directors of the company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Trustees' report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

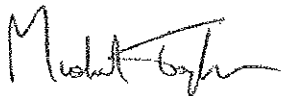
Charity Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the Trustees have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (United Kingdom Accounting Standards and applicable law). Under the relevant legislation the Trustees must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the net movement in funds for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent; and
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue on that basis.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and 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 applicable law and regulations. They 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.

Small company exemption - Companies Act 2006

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



Michael Taylor (Chair)

Date: 12th June 2023