

# RELATE NORTHERN IRELAND

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

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The trustees have pleasure in submitting their annual report together with the audited financial statements of the organisation for the year from 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Relate NI is a registered charity (No. NIC102102) and a company limited by guarantee (No. NI 032111). The company is registered at 3 Glengall Street, Belfast, BT12 5AB. The organisation is governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Trustees of the company consider the result and current financial position to be satisfactory.

### **The Board of Relate NI**

On the date of approval of this report, trustees were:

- Natalie Dowey (Chair)
- Aidan Bennett (Treasurer)
- Vernon Fox
- Felicity Lamrock
- Bernie Kelly (Vice-Chair)
- Sarah Cole
- Siobhan Casey
- Nikki Armstrong

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's governing document, the Companies Act 2006 and "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 (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

### **Vision, Mission and Values of Relate NI**

#### **Vision Statement**

Relate NI's vision is

"A future in which healthy relationships form the heart of a thriving society"

#### **Mission Statement**

Relate NI's mission is

"To make expert information and support for healthy relationships available for everyone"

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#### **Purpose and Activities of the Charity**

The purposes of the charity are:

- a) to educate the public and individuals concerning the institution of marriage, civil partnerships and secure couple relationships with particular reference to emotional, physical and sexual relationships and with a view to developing personal responsibilities and enriching family life.
- b) to promote research into all aspects of marriage, civil partnerships and secure couple relationships and to publish the results of all such research.
- c) to safeguard, seek to enhance and protect the good health both mental and physical of adults and children.
- d) to encourage conflict resolution and reconciliation and to prevent poverty, hardship and distress caused by the break-up of marriage, civil partnership or other relationship.
- e) to offer assistance and support to victims of domestic abuse.
- f) to educate and engage with perpetrators of domestic abuse in order to promote reconciliation and avoid future abuse from occurring.
- g) to offer psychosexual therapy.
- h) to offer assistance to individuals interacting with health and social care and the criminal justice systems; and
- i) to offer guidance and assistance to individuals, couples, groups and families on all aspects of relationships regardless of age, sexual orientation or relationship status.

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The main activities undertaken in relation to these purposes are:

Purpose (a) - Relate NI publishes a range of information in written and video format and on digital platforms for the benefit of the public, individuals, parents and service planners and to facilitate and promote access to our relationship counselling services for families, children and young people.

Purpose (b) - Relate NI undertakes evidence based and action research into a wide range of relationship issues and publishes the results of this research for the benefit of informing the public and to influence public policy on relationship issues.

Purpose (c) - Relate NI provides relationship counselling services throughout NI. We enhance emotional wellbeing in individuals, couples, families and communities by delivering professional counselling and therapeutic services.

Purpose (d) - Relate NI provides a range of counselling services which support individuals, couples, families, children and young people and develops and participates in integrated partnership projects with other organisations which focus on delivering joined up, wraparound services for the benefit of the community.

Purpose (e) - Relate NI provides counselling services to the victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Purpose (f) - Relate NI provides counselling services to the perpetrators of domestic abuse and delivers awareness and training programmes including our 'Safety in Relationships' programme to the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Purpose (g) - Relate NI provides psychosexual therapy to individuals and couples to help address sexual dysfunction and intimacy issues.

Purpose (h) - Relate NI provides counselling services in partnership with a range of partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors to people interacting with the health and social care and criminal justice systems and

Purpose (i) - Relate NI promotes equality of opportunity and good relations and we promote and deliver our counselling services to everyone in the community.

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#### **Public Benefit**

Relate NI's Trustee Board has taken due regard of the Northern Ireland Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. The organisation's counselling, information, education and training services further Relate NI's purposes for the public benefit in terms of the following:

- a) An understanding, knowledge and awareness by the public of what constitutes positive emotional relationships which contributes to healthy relationships;
- b) Increased individual and collective knowledge, understanding and awareness of the health and wellbeing needs of positive relationships which contribute to family policy development in Northern Ireland;
- c) Improved emotional, mental and physical health wellbeing and increased capacity to demonstrate resilience by both adults and children;
- d) Enhancement of the stability of relationships, relief of the emotional impact of separation due to family breakdown and re-establishment of a level of trust between couples and partners. This enables clients to lead more effective lives through improved relationships, enables them to continue with daily activities and improves their ability to continue in employment or education;
- e) Improved emotional and mental health wellbeing, enhanced self-esteem and resilience of the victims and survivors of domestic abuse and violence;
- f) Improved behavioural change amongst the perpetrators of domestic abuse which leads to reduced victimisation and a reduction in the frequency and severity of domestic abuse. Improved safety in relationships is also reported by partners and children affected by domestic abuse;
- g) Improved sexual function in response to the sexual difficulties experienced by clients;
- h) Improved emotional, mental and physical health wellbeing and increased resilience demonstrated by both adults and children;
- i) Improved emotional, mental and physical health wellbeing and resilience of individuals, couples, groups and families within an equality and diversity service delivery context.

All of the benefits in purposes (a) to (e) are demonstrated through feedback from our clients through evaluation questionnaires, the use of client outcomes measurement tools, monitoring and evaluation of our services by both statutory health and social care and voluntary funding organisations. These benefits are also demonstrated by independently commissioned evaluations of our services as may be undertaken from time to time.

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#### **Achievements and Performance**

Relate NI is the leading relationship support charity in Northern Ireland focused on the promoting the importance of healthy relationships; preventing relationship distress; and protecting people at times of relationship breakdown. We provide a range of high quality and specialist support services to people right across Northern Ireland.

Relate NI services include:

- Relate Kids - counselling for children from the ages of 4 - 12
- Relate Teen - counselling for young people from 13 - 19
- Adult Relationship counselling for couples and individuals
- Family Counselling
- Psychosexual Therapy
- Schools Counselling
- Education and training which includes our Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) work, education programmes and our counsellor training.
- Development and delivery of information campaigns aimed at supporting people with the knowledge and skills to be able to develop healthy relationships, recognise when relationships aren't healthy and negotiate relationship transitions.
- Delivery of projects in line with the organisation's charitable purposes. In 22/23, the delivery of Sustaining Healthy Relationships project continued and a new project, *Golden Threads: A Relational Approach to Improving Mental Wellbeing* commenced.

#### **Emerging themes from casework**

During 23/24 the emerging themes that have become evident are centered around domestic violence and abuse, family separation and family difficulties, child and adult safeguarding risks, mental health and addiction/ substance misuse.

There has been an increased need for support because of the escalating demand for health & social care statutory services which is often reflecting an increase in the complexity of issues and needs that clients are presenting with.

Through internal clinical consults and key findings from clinical practice, the data indicates:

- High levels of anxiety and stress in relation to work pressures and financial impact of cost of living rises with parents having to make radical choices to provide for families
- Financial worries impacting on individual well-being and family relationships
- Mental health of younger children, particularly experiencing anxiety and low mood with school refusal being identified
- In schools, there are higher levels of safeguarding issues and concerns regarding pupils. Many of these relate to issues in parents' own mental health and other live event traumas such as bereavement and losses, past DVA or historical abuse.
- Supporting family relationships around child diagnosis of neurodivergence and transgender identities. Increasing numbers of families unable to access assessment for children's diagnosis of Neurodivergence or able to meet thresholds for CAMHs services

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- Identified younger children in schools that do not meet their needs, i.e. specialist schools would be more appropriate however, limited spaces available, increase stress on teachers and parents as a result and possibly related to COVID-19 and lockdowns. (Schools)
- Slight increase in LAC clients (Schools)
- Increasing demand for separation and co-parenting counselling support and supporting CYP where family separation has been presented as a referring issue.
- Family separation: Increase in contact arrangements disputes and the impact on parents and children, court involvement and risk issues, CYP, Schools, Couples & Family services.
- Self-harm / suicidal ideation appears to have increased slightly in CYP & schools counselling.
- Complex couples' referrals. Traumatic backgrounds and social work involvement, often children being on the CPR or placed in care / kinship placements.
- Increase in referrals related to mental health conditions (some more complex and enduring) and their impacts on relationships.
- Small increase in addiction related issues and its impact on relationships and the wider family.

#### 2023 – 2024 – The year in review

In 2023-2024, Relate NI has continued its mission supporting individuals, couples and families to strengthen relationships through expert counselling, education and advocacy. In a year marked by unique challenges and opportunities, our team has worked tirelessly to adapt, innovate, and grow our core services to continue support to meet the growing needs of our communities.

#### Key Highlights

In September of 2023, we introduced a new customer Relationship Management system (CRM). With the collaboration of JP Morgan, we have worked closely in developing and streamlining how we support clients and manage data. The system has already led to enhanced efficiency. It has reduced administrative burdens and allowed for the enrichment of data collection and improved how we use this to improve our services.

Our Golden Threads Programme proved successful in the Southern Trust area. It was the cornerstone of our community work weaving together key themes that strengthen Relationships across all aspects of our services. Golden Threads was a unique Programme that allowed for the adaption of workshops to meet the needs of individuals in the community, with a focus on inclusivity and accessibility blended with one a time counselling session for those that required further therapeutic support.

Relate NI was nominated and shortlisted to the final 3 for a community impact award by the Parent Rooms highlighting the great work we have done with perinatal mental health.

In March 2022, we sought a research partner to uncover and collate academic evidence on the importance of relationships throughout life cycles. It is one thing knowing through our experience the fundamental importance; it is quite another to evidence this academically. The team at Ulster University have done so with clarity, enthusiasm and rigour. Not only have they evidenced the importance of relationships through various studies worldwide but have produced 20 recommendations for improved public policy commissioning including a Healthy Relationship Strategy for government that could tackle much of the silo working we experience and look at family ecosystems more holistically. The 'Sustaining Healthy Relationships' report along with 4 briefing papers were published in 2023/24.

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Relate NI has also tried to lead the way in well-being and support within the workplace and this year we put staff at the center of this. We joined the Belfast Business Promise ensuring we were leading in policy, terms and conditions for staff, green innovation and workplace wellbeing. We gained our member status and will continue next year to the next level of accreditation. We also continue to be a real living wage employer and have implemented in collaboration with other industries to create a well-being Programme for staff both face to face and online.

Relate NI completed BCACP level 5 couples counselling to increase capacity for couples counselling to meet the high demand. We have also successfully worked with Queens University and Ulster University to provide Placements for Family Systemic therapist and Art and Play therapy.

#### **Reach & Impact of Relate NI in 2022/2023**

##### **How much did we do?**

- Delivered 8436 counselling sessions across Northern Ireland.
- Received 2218 referrals for counselling services.
- 2,242 people were directly supported through the organisation's range of therapeutic services.
- Engaged with 73 community groups delivering 485 Relationship and sexuality workshops with a 94.7% completion rate.
- 740 people engaged in our Golden Threads Workshops in the Southern trust area through 111 workshops.
- Delivery of a *Relieve the Pressure* campaign over Christmas and new year to provide practical information and support to families over the festive period in conjunction with 5 partner organisations. The campaign engaged with 7065 people across an 8- week period.
- Relate NI's website had 39,161 users.
- Engaged with 11,641 people through our suite of digital resources including downloadable relationship self- help and video resources across the organisation's website.

##### **How well did we do it?**

- "You've been a big help to us as a family, thank you!"
- "I cannot praise the work that RELATE NI have done with our pupils enough. Feedback from our pupils was brilliant. They enjoyed how Geraldine delivered the programme and how she engaged with them. The Relationship and Sexual Education programme is something every school should use. Everything, from engaging with Kellie to setting up the programme to Geraldine coming into the centre was done professionally and efficiently. We will set this programme up on a yearly basis for our pupils."
- "Relate NI has been instrumental in mending my life for the past year. I want to specifically mention my counsellor who is an extremely talented, compassionate and comforting counsellor who has, in many ways, saved my life and allowed me to flourish in ways I didn't think possible before starting. The reception staff are always welcoming and friendly as well. There may be a bit of a waiting list, but that is more reflective of a lack of services across NI and the volume of individuals who require treatment not readily available in this country. Relate are worth the wait and I am blessed to have been provided their services which I continue to use when and as needed."
- "A very comprehensive yet user friendly service that supports individuals and community"
- "Kellie delivered an extremely informative session to our new parents to be in Gold Surestart which was so well received. We will use this service again in the coming months. Thank you"
- "She can talk more about how she is feeling, moments of sadness are less, and she bounces back more quickly, she can play in park again with friends and she is going to school each day"

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- The organisation's website audience continued to increase, by 12% in this year, with a corresponding 92% increase in website visits in 23/24, compared to 2022/23.
- The time users spend on the website increased from 1 minute 39 seconds in 2022/23 to 1 minute 44 seconds in 2023/24.

#### **What difference did we make?**

- 86% of respondents of Primary School Counselling reported that the relationship with their family was 'excellent +' or 'good' after counselling.
- 78% of children's behaviour improved.
- 77% of children's evaluations stated improvements were excellent or good.
- 97% of children stated that they enjoyed counselling.

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#### *What Issues Are People Seeking Support On?*

Anxiety	30%
Behavioural Issues	13%
Bereavement	9%
Family difficulties	8%
Low mood	7%
Communication issues	4%
Stress	4%
Relationship difficulties	4%
Self- worth	4%
Parental conflict	3%
Anger	3%
Problems at school	2%
Domestic violence/ abuse	2%
Problems with friends	2%
Bullying	2%
Sexual abuse/ assault	1%
Health	1%
Depression	1%

*Figure 5 – Presenting Issues*

Relationships experience distress for a range of reasons, when families are exposed to different stressors. Most issues that families experience which drive them to seek the support of Relate NI services are relational in nature. Increase in family difficulties; bereavement; separation & divorce; affairs; managing the impact of unemployment and financial worries on family relationships; and parenting are just some of the issues that people have identified when reaching out to Relate NI. However, health and wellbeing presentations also represent a significant portion of our presenting issues. Anxiety, stress and self-worth feature high on the list of health and wellbeing presentations into our services. However, there is also recognition of the linkages between relationship quality and health & wellbeing.

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#### **PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT**

##### **Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Trusts**

Relate NI provides delivers a range of counselling services under contract with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), formerly the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). Through this contract, we continue to work in partnership with the Department of Health, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the five Health and Social Care Trusts to provide relationship services to families throughout Northern Ireland. Relate NI works closely with social workers and health and social care professionals to facilitate access to our therapeutic services for the benefit of families, children and young people. We continue to participate in the review of the Department of Health's Regional Families Strategy. Over the course of this year and through this contract, we also consulted with Sure Start teams in Belfast to support better joint working, promote access to Relate NI services through the Sure Start network in Belfast.

##### **FSCN Schools Counselling**

Over the course of the 23/24 year, the Relate NI team continued to work flexibly to support the school community. This involved working with parents, teachers as well as school children to support wellbeing and adjustment to post pandemic through direct contact as well as through the development of information and video resources through school networks. Access to wider Relate NI services was facilitated where this was agreed by families as being of benefit. Schools Relate NI also developed an emotional wellbeing Programme to be delivered to primary school aged children by our school's counsellors.

##### **Hollywood Family Trust**

Hollywood Family Trust is based in North Down and the trust helps to equip individuals and families through some of the issues in their lives and contribute towards an inclusive community. Hollywood Family Trust appointed Relate NI to provide children and young person's counselling sessions.

##### **Parentline NI**

Relate NI has been delighted to continue our partnership with Children in NI (CiNI) to support delivery of the Regional Parenting Helpline Service to parents across NI. This work is provided under contract with the Health and Social Care Board. Over the course of this year, the Parentline NI team have been busy continuing to provide much needed support to parents through telephone, web and face to face appointments. Also in this year, a range of workshops for parents was developed and delivered by the Parentline NI Team.

##### **Delivery of Counselling, Education & Research in Surviving Sexual Violence and Abuse Service in Northern Ireland**

Relate NI is delighted to continue to work in partnership with Nexus NI to provide relationship counselling and support to survivors of sexual abuse, victims of sexual violence including those who have experienced rape and sexual assault. This service was also commissioned by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group of the Department of Health and operates on a referral basis with Nexus NI subcontracting Relate to deliver relationship counselling to their clients.

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#### **Psychosexual Therapy Services & Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

During 23/24, Relate NI continued to receive referrals from Knockbracken Psychosexual Services for those clients/patients with sexual dysfunctions under a contractual arrangement with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. We also continue to provide psychosexual services to people who refer themselves directly to Relate NI. As with all of our services, our PST work was transitioned to online and phone delivery.

#### **Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

Relate NI has been part of a partnership with Nexus and led by The Rainbow Project over the last 6 years to deliver RSE Programmes to young people in community settings. The Public Health Agency tendered for a new Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Project in December 2021. As part of this process, the current partnership reviewed partnership working over the last 6 years. As a result of this process, the partnership model has been updated, and Relate NI now lead this partnership which was successful in securing a new contract from the Public Health Agency. Over the course of the 23/24 year, we also reviewed the name of the Programme in partnership with young people. As a result of this, the RSE Programme will now be called 'Relateable'.

#### **BHSCT Primary Care Talking Therapies**

Relate NI works in partnership with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to deliver counselling services to clients experiencing low level anxiety and depression who are referred by GPs. We were delighted to be awarded a place on the new framework through a tender exercise completed this year.

#### **'Moving Up, Moving On' (MUMO) Service**

In 2015 Relate NI joined a consortium led by Forthspring Inter Community Group which submitted a proposal which was funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Since the project commenced in the spring of 2016, Relate NI has been an active partner in the MUMO partnership, providing a range of therapeutic services to families and primary school children of a Protestant and Catholic primary school in an interface area in West Belfast. We continue to provide therapeutic support to project participants and support the overall aims of this project.

#### **Northern Ireland Prison Service**

We were delighted to be able to return to on site delivery of our counselling work within Maghaberry during this year. The return to face-to-face delivery has enabled a more structured and steady support of clients supported through this work.

#### **The Parent Rooms**

Over the course of this year, we were delighted to continue our partnership with The Parent Rooms. This partnership provides much need and timely access to therapeutic support for parents struggling with mental health issues in recognition of the specific mental health challenges associated with the perinatal period.

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#### **Forward South Belfast – Seamless Transition through Education Project (STEP)**

During the year, we continued to work in partnership with the Seamless Transition through Education partnership. The partnership is an early intervention programme specifically designed to provide support to families and children to help them get the best start in life. Relate NI commenced provision of therapeutic support services to schools in the South Belfast area, supporting children, parents and teachers in order to enhance emotional wellbeing.

#### **Queens University Belfast**

Relate NI was delighted to establish a new partnership with Queens University Belfast through the MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy. Relate NI hosted placement clinics for a number of students completing their qualification, providing the clinical governance infrastructure and supervision, support and guidance to enable high quality therapeutic work to be undertaken.

#### **Ulster University**

We were also delighted to establish a similar partnership with Ulster University through the MSc in Art Psychotherapy course. We hosted a placement clinic for one of the students completing this qualification. As well as providing the clinical governance infrastructure and supervision, we also provided support through the appointment of a practice teacher who worked alongside the student throughout the course of the placement.

### **REVIEW OF OTHER ACTIVITIES & FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

#### **Governance**

As acknowledged in last year's Trustees Report, robust governance systems and processes have been and will continue to be a core feature of the organisation's strategic and operational systems. Many trustees have given freely of their time and expertise over 75 years to enable the organisation to deliver its charitable purpose for thousands of people each year and we wish to publicly thank those people as we celebrate this important milestone.

The important role of governance, and the availability of a diverse, skilled and experienced cohort of people willing to step into governance roles is the key reason why Relate NI was delighted to continue its support of the Boardroom Apprentice Programme, our 6th year of engagement. Boardroom Apprentices continue to impact positively on the work of governance at Relate NI, and participation in the Programme is an important way Relate NI can practically support the development of a growing number of people with the skills and values to lead in governance roles.

Over the past 12 months, the board has dedicated attention to the continued leadership and development of the organisation through focus on strategy, sustainability and performance monitoring. This involved the ongoing monitoring of the organisation's strategy, operational plans and annual budget as well as review and maintenance of the wider systems of control in place within the organisation.

Over the 23/24 year we also bade farewell to several trustees, namely Brendan Morrissey, and Maria Pimental. The board and staff of Relate NI wish to recognise their commitment and contribution to Relate NI over many years. Relate NI continued to grow its board through the Boardroom apprentice scheme for the 4th year in a row.

Natalie Dowey continues to provide leadership as chair, having been reappointed to the role. The organisation has prioritised robust board succession planning in recent years to ensure continuity and effective governance. As part of this effort, Bernie Kelly was appointed vice-chair at the AGM, bringing valuable experience and a fresh perspective to the board's leadership team.

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### **Governance and Strategic Development at Relate NI (2023-2024)**

Relate NI's Board of Trustees undertook several initiatives to advance the organisation's workforce development, operational sustainability, and governance standards.

In October last year, the Board of Trustees made the strategic decision to appoint an interim CEO following the departure of Duane Farrell, who had served as Relate NI's CEO for over five years. This executive decision was taken to ensure continuity while creating an opportunity to critically assess the organization's processes, policies, and structure, paving the way for sustained growth and development.

The Board appointed Katrina Hinfey as the Interim CEO, tasking her with a focused mandate to strengthen senior leadership governance and conduct a comprehensive organizational review. Over her tenure, Katrina prioritized stakeholder engagement, ensuring the voices of key partners, funders, and beneficiaries were heard and valued. She conducted in-depth interviews with staff to identify both strengths and areas for improvement within the internal culture and operational framework. Additionally, client testimonials were collected to provide honest, firsthand insights into the impact and perception of Relate NI's services.

This rigorous approach has enabled the organization to build a well-rounded, fair, and transparent understanding of its current state, laying the groundwork for informed and strategic decision-making by the Board in the upcoming 2024-2025 year. The review also facilitated a reassessment of operational priorities, allowing the Board to align Relate NI's objectives more closely with the evolving needs of its service users and stakeholders.

Katrina's leadership during this transitional period has been instrumental in maintaining stability while fostering a culture of reflection and openness. Her findings and recommendations will guide the organization's next steps, ensuring Relate NI remains well-positioned to deliver high-quality services and adapt to future challenges in a dynamic social and economic environment.

### **Workforce Development**

As trustees, we recognized the critical importance of addressing workforce challenges to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality services at Relate NI. In response to this, the Board initiated a comprehensive review of pay and compensation for our specialist services, particularly for counsellors and therapists. This review aimed to ensure that our remuneration packages were competitive and aligned with industry standards, fostering both retention and attraction of top talent. As a result, we successfully expanded our associate pool of counsellors across Northern Ireland, enabling Relate to meet the growing demand for services in a way that was sustainable and effective.

Engagement with staff was at the core of this initiative, with feedback collected through surveys, interviews, and team discussions. This invaluable input directly informed the development of a workplace wellbeing programme, which sought to enhance existing wellbeing initiatives by introducing new components tailored specifically to the needs and preferences of our staff. By blending existing strategies with fresh ideas based on team feedback, we created a more supportive work environment that helps to maintain staff engagement, job satisfaction, and overall wellbeing.

In addition to these internal developments, our longstanding partnership with Ulster University (UU) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB) continued to flourish. Together, we have supported high-quality MSc placements in Systemic Psychotherapy and Art Psychotherapy, which have been instrumental in developing a new generation of therapists. This collaboration not only enriched the skills of our workforce but also expanded Relate NI's capacity to serve clients through a growing team of qualified Art and Family Therapists.

As part of our commitment to creating a fair and equitable working environment, the Board endorsed Relate NI's application to become a Living Wage accredited employer. This decision reflects our dedication to ensuring that all our staff are compensated fairly, reinforcing our core values of equity and respect. Additionally, Relate NI joined the Belfast Business Promise, a collective effort to boost pledges aimed at improving local employment standards and fostering a more inclusive economy.

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In terms of Strategic Development Relate NI focused on core services of couples, families and individuals, increasing delivery within the Northern Ireland Prison Service and within the Belfast and southern Trust area. This not only highlights the quality of the services we provide but also underscores Relate NI's role as a leading training provider in the sector. By investing in the development of our staff and expanding our team of highly trained professionals, we are reinforcing our mission to support individuals and families across Northern Ireland through effective, compassionate therapy and support services.

#### **Sustainability Efforts**

As trustees, we have consistently acknowledged that sustainability remains one of the core challenges facing Relate NI. In the face of evolving financial pressures and increasing demand for services, we are committed to ensuring that the organization remains financially viable while continuing to deliver high-quality relationship support to those who need it most. To address these challenges, the Board has taken a proactive approach, continually reviewed our sustainability strategy and identified key areas for growth and improvement.

One of the key highlights of the year was the Trustee Away Day, where we took the opportunity to evaluate the progress we've made against our long-term organisational strategy. The Away Day was an essential forum for deep, strategic discussions, particularly focusing on the pillars of relationship support, digital engagement, and our ongoing brand alignment with Relate England. Trustees were pleased to see significant progress in these areas, particularly in the expansion of our digital platforms, which have allowed us to reach a broader audience, as well as aligning our brand more closely with the broader Relate network, ensuring consistency and shared values.

Equally important, the Away Day provided a valuable space for the Board to explore potential future partnerships and mergers to support Relate NI's long-term sustainability. After a thorough review of potential partners, discussions with Family Mediation Northern Ireland (FMNI) proved to be particularly promising. The collaborative discussions with FMNI centered around the mutual benefits of joining forces to create a more integrated service offering. We believe that a merger with FMNI will not only enhance our ability to deliver comprehensive relationship support services but will also strengthen our financial sustainability by pooling resources, expertise, and client bases.

Following these productive talks, trustees were pleased to move forward with the discussions, and formal negotiations to initiate the merger began. We believe this partnership will be a pivotal step in ensuring the ongoing viability of Relate NI, both in terms of financial sustainability and the continued quality of the services we provide. This forward-thinking approach to partnerships and mergers demonstrates our commitment to securing the future of Relate NI while continuously improving the breadth and depth of our support for individuals and families across Northern Ireland.

#### **Governance and Risk Management**

The Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) played a critical role, meeting quarterly to oversee risk, safeguarding, and infrastructure readiness. The ARC closely monitored the Corporate Risk Register, safeguarding practices, and financial health, ensuring robust controls and compliance. A focus on quality was evident through reviews of complaints, staffing concerns, and safeguarding self-assessments using Volunteer Now's tools. Trustees received unqualified audit opinions, reflecting strong fiscal governance.

These initiatives have positioned Relate NI to continue delivering impactful relationship support services while fostering staff wellbeing and ensuring long-term organisational sustainability.

In terms of Strategic Development Relate NI focused on core services of couples, families and individuals, increasing delivery within the Northern Ireland Prison Service and within the Belfast and southern Trust area.

## **RELATE NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)(INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)**

***FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024***

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#### **Stakeholder Engagement, Policy Development and Communications**

Relate NI believes that access to services is essential for people who are experiencing relationship distress or who are interested in preventative maintenance of their relationships. Action, such as access to high quality services at the individual or family level is a key building block to our vision of healthy relationships at the heart of a thriving society. At a societal level, access to information and effective public policy are also key cornerstones of that vision. To that end, Relate NI continues to engage with partners and stakeholders to build understanding of the challenges experienced by people and families across NI and to ensure that relevant public policy areas are influenced and shaped by the experiences of people who access Relate NI services.

The year started with a rebranding of our Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme, renaming the programme to 'Relateable'. A competition on social media was launched to win tickets to see Lizzo at Belsonic and our winner came up with the name.

In April 2023, Relate NI had two Belfast Marathon relay teams raise funds for Relate NI. After a successful fundraising campaign online, we raised a total of £680.

Relate NI continued to engage with political parties throughout the 23/24 year to engage MLAs in our 'Relationships Manifesto'. Staff members met with Cara Hunter MLA, Kate Nicholl MLA, David Brooks MLA and Cheryl Brownlee MLA with an ask of the introduction of compulsory, age- appropriate and evidence- based curriculum for RSE for schools in Northern Ireland. We were delighted that after our meetings, Kate Nicholl MLA raised a motion in the NI assembly to be debated, and the motion was passed.

Relate NI are proud to have with the Executive Office, alongside others in the Community and Voluntary sector on the co-design process of the Ending Violence against Women and Girl's strategic framework. We are delighted that 'healthy, respectful relationships' are being proposed as a key outcome of the Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategic framework.

The organisation continued to work to promote the importance of healthy relationships in the context of ending gender-based violence. We welcomed the opportunity to participate as a key stakeholder in a co-design process along with colleagues from across the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. This process represented a significant investment of time for all the organisation's represented. The resulting strategic framework which has emerged from this process has been welcomed by those who participated in the process.

We also continue to engage with partners in the third sector to share information, create organisational linkages in the best interests of the people we work with and to support the development of Relate NI and its team. Over the course of this year, we have also commented publicly on a range of issues relevant to the development and maintenance of healthy relationships and continue to ensure that public debate about the fundamental importance of healthy relationships to our health and wellbeing, physical and mental, continues to be included in relevant public debates.

## RELATE NORTHERN IRELAND

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)(INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

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#### **Financial Review**

Relate NI seeks to comply with best practice in managing the finances of the charity and as outlined in the Reserves Policy should aim to hold adequate reserves to cover no fewer than three months and no greater than six months full running costs of the charity.

The balance sheet as at the 31 March 2024 reflected cash at bank and in hand of £127,384. The Net Current Assets at 31st March 2024 were £206,325 and general unrestricted reserves were £183,220 which equates to 3 months running costs of the charity. The board will be considering appropriate actions over the year ahead to ensure the charity's policy is achieved.

#### **Reserves Policy**

The Trustees continually review the reserves policy. Considering the variable income and fixed commitments required to allow the charity to be managed effectively and to provide a buffer for uninterrupted services, the Board, has agreed that the organisation should aim to hold adequate reserves to cover no fewer than three months and no greater than six months full running costs of the charity.

#### **Risk Policy**

In line with the organisation's risk management strategy, the Trustees who served during the year have undertaken an analysis of the work of the charity and identified the major risks to which the charity is exposed. The Trustees are satisfied that appropriate policies, practices and procedures are in place to mitigate those risks.

Structure, Governance and Management  
Relate NI is constituted by way of a Memorandum and Articles of Association and is both a registered charity and a registered company limited by guarantee. The organisation is governed by a Board of Directors of up to 18 members. The Directors who are non-executive, represent a diverse range of relevant experience including finance, legal, management, administrative, education, clinical, health, housing and family services.

The Directors of the charity are its trustees for the purposes of charity law. The Directors who served the charity during the year are noted on Page 1.

The Board meets at least six times during the financial year with additional meetings called if necessary. Board members do not receive any remuneration in respect of their services to the charity. Receipted expenses are reimbursed when incurred. An Audit and Risk Committee meets and reports to Relate NI's Trustee Board.

The Board delegates the day to day management of Relate NI to an executive senior management team which comprises the Chief Executive Officer, the Business Services and Performance Manager and the Professional Services Manager.

The Trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.

#### **Ms N Dowey**

Trustee

Dated: 23 December 2024

## **RELATE NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES**

***FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024***

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The Trustees (who are also directors of Relate Northern Ireland for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company 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 company law 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 charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including income and expenditure, of the charitable company 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;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

#### **Disclosure of Information to Auditors**

To the knowledge and belief of the trustees, there is no relevant information that the charitable company's auditors are not aware of, and the trustees have taken all steps necessary to ensure the trustees are aware of any relevant information, and to establish that the charitable company's auditors are aware of the information.

#### **Small Company Provisions**

This report has been prepared in accordance with the small companies' regime under the Companies Act 2006.

By order of the Board of Trustees

Ms N Dowey  
**Trustee**

23 December 2024