



**THE BEGINNING EXPERIENCE
BELFAST TEAM
CHARITY NO 103816
CCNI:01272289**

**ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT
OF ACCOUNTS
TO 31ST JULY 2023**

**Beginning Experience Belfast
MAY 2024**

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1. Annual Report for the Year ending 31st July 2023

The Ministry of the Beginning Experience Belfast team in Northern Ireland during the Year 2022/23

- Beginning Experience Belfast offers its support programmes for those suffering the loss of a partner due to separation, divorce and bereavement across the entire province of Northern Ireland. Confidentiality and anonymity are essential components of the Ministry and this is reflected in the report where no names of individuals, either team members or participants other than Trustees, are included.
- During 2022/23 BE Belfast offered two core programmes; the **Coping programme (Level 1)** and the **Residential Weekend** programme.
 - The **Coping Programme** is a structured support programme designed to lead participants through their grief journey, providing a safe environment for them to identify how they are coping with practical issues of day to day living. It moves participants from the past into the present and on towards the future.

Schedule Saturday monthly meetings

2022	September 24 th to November 26 th
2023	January 28 th to 25 th March
	29 th April to 24 th June

- Each session was attended by between 12 and 15 participants. In the year ending 31st July 2023 the group met on 12 occasions (one Saturday per month) and offered support to an average of 15 participants at each meeting. Beginning Experience Belfast holds its monthly support programme meetings at St Bride’s Hall in the Parish of St Brigid’s in the Diocese of Down and Connor. St Bride’s Hall has now become BE Belfast’s working base.
- **The Beginning Experience Weekend** is the core programme of the ministry and was held on the weekend **10th – 12th March** when 11 of a potential 12 participants attended at the Drumalis Retreat and Conference Centre in Larne. It is residential and comprises a structured process to help the widowed, separated and divorced work through their loss and to help them start to work towards a new beginning in life. The benefits of this experience are felt by families as many of our participants have young children and dependents.

2. Team Membership, Meetings and Governance.

- BE Belfast provided these services through a trained Team of 12 volunteers.
- The team continues to seek the participation of new members.
- The work of the volunteer Team is governed by a local Board, which is accountable to the Great Britain and Ireland Regional Board, which is in

turn accountable to the International Ministry Board in Indiana, USA. The International Ministry Centre holds the copyright on the support Programmes the ministry offers, including the residential Weekend.

- The local Board provided an annual report of its activities to the Regional Board and these will also be reported and disseminated to team at the AGM, to be held on Saturday 9th September.
- Board members (9 in total) meet bi-monthly and team briefing meetings were held each month – 30 minutes prior to the commencement of the programme. These meetings allowed for team members to discuss any matters of concern and for relevant information to be cascaded to each member of the team.

3. Burden on volunteer Team

- BE is a Peer Ministry were the wholly volunteer team of people who carry out the work of this ministry carried a considerable burden personally, psychologically, emotionally, financially and in the extensive time dedicated to the work. This extended over 9 Saturdays per year at monthly meetings in addition to preparation for programmes delivery and planning for the residential weekend. This adds up to an intensive level of commitment and workload.
- This burden is defined thus:
 1. Small Team of highly dedicated, energetic and committed volunteers.
 2. Very generous contribution of time and skills.
 3. Difficult and demanding nature of grief work.
 4. Providing very valuable pastoral care within the Diocese.
 5. Supporting whole families through the trauma of separation and divorce

As a result of the small balance identified below, the team continued to be dependent on the generous support of its members in supplying photocopying, travel, refreshments, telephone calls, stationery and postage in an effort to counteract its effects.

- We have turned to the internet for our communications in an effort to reduce the cost of publicity and contact with the International and Regional Boards, answering enquiries and communicating with participants and local parishes.
 - We took the decision to reduce the costs of attendance at meetings by not taking up overnight accommodation.
 - The continued burden on team of travel costs was slightly offset by an additional payment of travel expenses during 2022/23. This is reflected in our accounts.
- Beginning Experience Belfast depends on financial assistance from the Diocese of Down and Connor and a full report of accounts is provided with each application

for funding. Additionally, the Treasurer reported on balances at each meeting of the Board and the AGM.

- BE Belfast acknowledges with gratitude the significant contribution of St Brigid's Parish to this ministry in the provision of excellent accommodation at St Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast for its home base, its weekly meetings and other ancillary activities including team training during 2022/23. This represents an effective contribution of over £1,000 per annum, based on the charging tariffs for the use of St Bride's Hall.
- Additionally, through the support of our Spiritual Director, Fr Brendan Keane C.Ss.R., we have been able to use premises at Clonard Monastery for meetings and training for a small charge, typically £60 per session.

4. Financial Review

Financial Performance.

Beginning Experience Belfast received funding from the Diocese of Down and Connor during the period 2022 to 2023 of £7000. A breakdown of that and any other expenditure and income is included in the statement of accounts

Income

In addition to Diocesan funds the Beginning Experience receives income from participants in its programmes.

Participants in the monthly support programme make a voluntary contribution towards the costs of venue use and sundries necessary for the maintenance of the programme. These include photocopying and refreshments. In order to avoid any discrepancy of the amount required for the payment of hall rental, participants are asked to pay in advance for the three sessions of the programme per term.

Occasionally cash donations are received by Beginning Experience and these are recorded in the accounts. Donations in kind such as tray bakes etc are not recorded.

Expenditure

Participants in the Residential Weekend are charged for their accommodation by the venue and this is collected and then paid by Beginning Experience on their behalf. Payment for team members who facilitate the weekend is also met by Beginning Experience.

Purchase of equipment such as media items and publicity materials are made as required and these are also included in accounts.

Organisational costs include public liability insurance and registration fees to the Regional Board of Great Britain and Ireland.

5. Accounts for the year ended July 31st 2023

Statement of Receipts and Payments - Year Ended 31 July 2023

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Receipts					
<i>Voluntary Receipts</i>					
Donations	0	-	-	0	0
Voluntary Contributions	0	-	-	0	0
Bank Interest	30	-	-	30	1
Diocesan funding	0	-	-	0	7000
From Participants					
Participant Payments	0	-	-	0	100
	0	-	-	0	0
Total Receipts	30	-	-	30	7,101
Payments					
Weekly / Monthly Support Group	609	-	-	609	646
Residential Weekends	1,717	-	-	1,717	0
Organisational Costs	2,323	-	-	2,323	678
Bank charges	36	-	-	36	21
Asset and Investments Purchased					
Purchase of equipment	0	0	-	0	0
Total Payments	4,685	0	-	4,685	1,346
Net receipts/(payments)	(4,655)	0	-	(4,655)	5,755
Transfers to/(from) funds	0	0			
Surplus/(deficit) for the year	(4,655)	0	-	(4,655)	5,755
Reconciliation 31/07/2023					
Cash in hand & at bank 31/7/2022	7,315	0	-	7,315	1,559
Surplus/(deficit) this year end	(4,655)	0	-	(4,655)	5,755
Cash in hand & at bank 31/7/2023	2,659	0	-	2,659	7,315

6. Impetus for change

- Regrettably separation and divorce is an increasing part of our modern society and death is an unavoidable part of everyone's life. In the last 38 years of BE Belfast's ministry the divorce rate has escalated. Many people are coping with young families or teenage children as separation increases among younger adults. More older people are living alone following the end of their relationship through death, separation or divorce.
- We continued to welcome people who had been referred by mental health professionals and GPs, local clergy and social workers, as well as those who sought help from other agencies such as Cruse, Relate, Accord and Lifeline, in their search for help and support following the loss of their spouse.
- Signposting by local clergy and word of mouth are major factors in disseminating our message of hope and we continued to be in regular contact with parishes to promote our ministry, typically emailing parish offices to advertise the dates of our meetings.
- The demand for the support provided by the BE ministry continued to increase and the need for BE Belfast to reach out to this need increased proportionately through publicity and dissemination of information. All of this had a heavy and continuing cost implication.
- Increased demand from those suffering means increased demands on already beleaguered volunteers, more training and more development and care of the Team; all again with increased cost implications.
- However, the team has been a victim of its own success and the Board has identified the need for continued development to be supported by a long term funding commitment of a further 3 years; and is seeking the continued support from the Diocese of Down and Connor.

7. Reference and Administrative Details

Charity Name

Beginning Experience Belfast

Charity Number

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland, No.103816

Principal Address

St Bride's Hall
Derryvolgie Avenue,
Malone Road,
Belfast

Charity Trustees as of 31/7/23

Mrs Marcella Phillips	President
Mrs Phil Gorman	Treasurer
Mrs Marie Carson	Secretary

Mrs Evelyn McClay
Mrs Irene McNally

Board Member
Board Member

Advisors

Banking

Ulster Bank Ltd
202 York Street
Belfast
BT15 1HY

Insurance

Ecclesiastical Insurance
Beaufort House
Brunswick Road
Gloucester
GL1 1JZ

8. Objectives and Activities

Vision, Mission, Ministry and Theology of Beginning Experience

- The **Vision** of Beginning Experience is that those suffering the pain of separation, divorce and bereavement will work through their grief, be healed, transformed and free again to love.
- Our **Mission** is to do our part in bringing about the Vision, by reaching out and being sent to others; to enable those suffering to follow this Vision, be healed, transformed and free again to love.
- Our **Ministry** is the methods for enabling others to be transformed:
 - enabling the individual to find his or her own answers.
 - act as enabling instruments of the power of God, who is the helper.
 - possess deep regard for the value of the individual.
 - remain open to offer each person what is needed at the moment.
 - go to and seek out others who are suffering.
- The **Theology** of Beginning Experience is founded on that of the Catholic Church and includes these basic beliefs:
 - when we feel loved, understood and accepted by others we feel loved, understood and accepted by God.
 - Jesus went through the grief stages of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, acceptance and reaching out. Participants of our ministry are helped to realise this, so that they can begin to sense that Jesus can identify with them.
 - in His life, Jesus came to new life through pain and so with us.
- During our **Residential Weekend** these beliefs are practised:

- by providing the experience of a Christian Community, where Jesus is amongst us, where we feel his healing power, where we offer the gift of our own pain for others, where we answer the call to reach out.
- in the Reconciliation Service we face our real guilt, believing in a God of total acceptance, become reconciled with God and others through acceptance of ourselves and others and experience forgiveness.
- the Eucharist at the close of the Weekend celebrates all of these beliefs; we are wounded, we belong to God and others, we die and rise with Jesus, we are his body, we reach out to others.

Charitable Objects

The object of Beginning Experience is as set out in our Vision and Mission Statement – to reach out to those suffering the pain of loss of a partner.

Public Benefit Statement

The Trustees of Beginning Experience Belfast confirm that they have complied with their duty under section 17 (5) of the Charities Act 2011 to have regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and that the public benefit requirement has informed the activities of Beginning Experience Belfast in the year to July 31st 2023. In evaluating public benefit the trustees note that participation in Beginning Experience programmes is open to all who share the experience of the loss of a spouse, regardless of gender, race, age, ability or creed. While the theology of Beginning Experience is rooted in the Catholic Church it is open to people of all faiths or none.

Summary of Main Activities

The core activities of Beginning Experience are:

- Delivery of a monthly meeting programme designed to address issues related to the loss of a spouse.
- Delivery of a Residential Weekend for participants including those unable or who choose not to participate in the monthly meetings.

There is a charge for participation in the monthly support meetings to cover the cost of the hall rental since this cannot be met from the Diocesan Funding.

Costs for the residential weekend are determined by the venue in addition to an individual participant fee levied by the International Ministry.

9. Structure, Governance, and Management

Governing Document and Constitution

Beginning Experience Belfast is governed by a constitution adopted on 6th June 2015 and is run entirely by its volunteer team members who receive a nominal amount towards travel expenses and who are reimbursed for any purchases made on behalf of the team. As of July 2023, the team had a membership of 12.

Trustee Selection and Management

Beginning Experience Belfast is managed by a local Board which consists of all the appointed trustees. A number of the trustees also hold offices within the Board, for example, Treasurer. These officers are noted in the list of current trustees above.

The Board meets typically bimonthly and a record of the meeting is circulated among members and maintained for scrutiny by the International Ministry and Regional Board on the occasion of Recertification which is required every three years.

At each meeting, the Treasurer presents the latest accounts and these are reviewed against budgets and forecasts; spending is discussed and approved. Board Officers may authorize some spending, between meetings, within set limits but must ensure such spending is reported at the next meeting.

The meetings also offer a forum to review recent activities and attendance within our programmes and to plan forthcoming events. Correspondence is disseminated among members. In addition, officers report on their areas of responsibility as appropriate. Further *ad hoc* meetings are called if required, for example to plan and manage special events or projects such as Diocesan Conferences or Recertification.

The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts are approved by the trustees and then presented to the members at the Annual General Meeting normally held on the first Saturday in June.

Related Organisations

Beginning Experience Belfast is an autonomous group affiliated to the International Ministry Based in Indiana, America and is guided by its policies and procedures. (For further information see www.beginningexperience.org) The Belfast team makes an annual registration payment to the Treasurer of the Regional Board as part of its continued participation in the Ministry and has also purchased Public Liability Insurance as part of the requirement for the use of St Bride's Hall. Details of these amounts are included in the accounts.

Members are also trained in POVCA as required by the Diocese Safeguarding Committee.

Approved and adopted by the Board of Beginning Experience Belfast on 28th May 2024
and signed on their behalf.

Marie Carson

Marie Carson
Secretary