

ACTION FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The trustees present their annual report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023.

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)" (as amended for accounting periods commencing from 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

The Belfast Agreement (1998) has necessitated engaging in post conflict transformation including; prisoner release and reintegration, decommissioning, police reform and economic investment. Within this broader context Action for Community Transformation (the ACT Initiative) emerged. Essentially, the ACT Initiative is a transformation process which supports former loyalist combatants on the road from conflict to peace. Since its inception in 2007, ACT Initiative has engaged hundreds of former combatants and is currently supporting 8 groups across Northern Ireland, with 1 central community hub in Belfast and 1 sub-office in North Ulster.

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

Achievements and performance

In broad terms, there are a number of significant initiatives throughout this year which are strategic to the development of ACT Initiative and presented under three themes.

Women in Peacebuilding

With having a main objective of increasing the participation of women in peacebuilding, this reporting period has been significant in this respect with the women involved within ACT Initiative embracing the challenge. Crucial to this has been the individual development of our female coordinator who has been extremely motivational in recruiting other women to the programme and accepting the opportunities presented to her to improve her own capabilities. In doing so, she has demonstrated clear leadership skills and now designs our women's practice. Examples of what the group have been involved in this year include; A regional outreach programme to recruit other women, successful in Londonderry, Coleraine, Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus; a shared history project in Belfast, across the 'peace line' with women from the neighbouring community, Clonard; playing a vital role in organising two festivals for the Shankill community, summer and winter, attended by over 10,000 people; educational visits to south Armagh, Londonderry and Dublin; an after-school project with children and their carers, in collaboration with Stranmillis teacher training college; attendance at a variety of international exchanges/conferences, including Liverpool, Columbia, Boston and Washington.

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Conflict Transformation

Repeatedly, it is reflected that this aspect of ACT's work often goes unrecorded because of its sensitive and confidential nature. Despite this, the work is underpinned by mitigating the potential risk to people and property. In doing so, most of our partnership working involves liaising with others to intervene when individuals/families are at risk. Whilst this type of work in communities usually requires a restorative approach, our well-established collaboration with Alternatives (a restorative justice project) makes it incumbent on groups such as ACT to help out, a responsibility which we are happy to accept. The additional main focus of our work in this period has been the development of our cultural model BCN, wherein we successfully engaged 16 communities in self-regulatory cultural expressions, relating to 11th July bonfires and the resurgence of our volunteer base with two successful training initiatives involving over 30 new participants.

Leadership and Diversity

Evidence of the project strengthening leadership is in our coordinators and volunteers' ability to sustain groups and individuals, in engagement with others, on issues requiring community leadership. As our events and activities demonstrate, this is evident in engaging 'hard to reach' individuals, on issues such as, bonfires and cultural traditions, exploring non-violent approaches to conflict using the principles and practices of Restorative Justice, working on new interface engagements, communicating with political representatives from across the political spectrum, engaging consistently with the PSNI and encouraging and supporting women to engage in peace-building initiatives. In doing so, our staff and volunteers continue to demonstrate leadership in relation to our project proposal. For example, we have on-going cross-community Legacy projects being facilitated at our Visitor Centre and other venues, we continue with our road-safety and anti-drug campaign on a regional basis, and we continue to engage in meetings, when requested, with for example, the Northern Ireland Office, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Security Office and the Independent Reporting Commission.

Financial review

The financial statements for the financial year show total income and endowments as £662,857, (2022: £399,112) total resources expended as £614,687, (2022: £406,496) with net income resources at £48,170, (2022: Deficit of £7,384). As a charity we are exempt for VAT purposes and most of our restricted finances come from four funding sources, namely the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust – JRCT, the International Fund for Ireland – IFI, The Big Lottery Dormant Accounts Fund and The Executive Office, 'Communities in Transition'. Additional restricted and unrestricted nominal fees are occasionally paid by organisations we apply to for programme costs or groups who avail of our services.

At 31 December 2023, the charity had total funds of £155,374 (2022: £107,204). Of these funds £127,457 was held for restricted purposes and not available for general purposes.

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Reserves Policy

It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to one month's expenditure. The trustees considers that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised.

The charity has free reserves of £22,530 (2022: £24,247) which represents 7 months of unrestricted expenditure on charitable activities.

Risk

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

Plans for Future Periods

This year, 2023, completes our fifth and final year of programme funding from International Fund for Ireland – IFI, for our ACT 'Peace Impact Programme'. However, our BCN model is also funded via IFI and will be a significant feature of our practice for 2024. We continue with the development of our central office as a Community Hub/Visitors' Centre, with funds from The Big Lottery 'Dormant Fund' being utilised by a broad range of service users and groups, and our CIT ex-prisoner project. Finally, in 2024, we hope to purchase the building via a 'Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund' with the Belfast City Council, thus improving our sustainability.

Structure, governance and management

ACT Initiative is a registered Northern Ireland Charity and a Limited Company by Guarantee. A Board of Directors and Advisors meet quarterly to oversee the governance and accountability of ACT Initiative. Directors are nominated and seconded each year at our AGM and Advisors are invited based on their expertise/ experience. In partnership with the project Director and a strategic review group, annual plans are developed to implement the aims and objectives of ACT Initiative in partnership and collaboration with all communities we have projects in. This is disseminated by our employed/volunteer organisers who coordinate community projects via our Area Action Groups. The organisers meet monthly to share practice and build cohesion. The project Director manages all aspects of practice.

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Mr W Hutchinson

Rev Dr G Mason

Mr T Harrison

Mr R McMurray

Mr T Roberts

Mr T Winstone

Mrs T Pollock

(Resigned 20 April 2024)

(Resigned 24 April 2023)

(Resigned 28 February 2024)

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Statement of trustees' responsibilities

The trustees, who are also the directors of Action for Community Transformation Initiative for the purpose of company law, are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

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

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. 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.


Auditor

In accordance with the company's articles, a resolution proposing that AAB Group Accountants Limited be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

Disclosure of information to independent examiner

Each of the trustees has confirmed that there is no information of which they are aware which is relevant to the independent examination, but of which the independent examiner is unaware. They have further confirmed that they have taken appropriate steps to identify such relevant information and to establish that the independent examiner is aware of such information.

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



Mr W Hutchinson

Trustee

Dated: 30-10-24