

LORAG Narrative 2022/23

In 2022/23 the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) has continued to deliver and enhance a range of important services to meet its strategic goals of providing health, social, leisure and community developmental activities and developing the socio-economic profile of the area. Our core projects in the areas of children, youth, health, and cohesion have operated extremely successfully, achieving key targets in terms of numbers attending and diversity as well as further developing the quality and effectiveness of the programmes on offer to the community.

LORAG as a community development organisation has maintained a “cradle to the grave” approach to the delivery of services with a key focus around children, young people and families, delivering holistic support to families with children from 2-18 years. Core to the organisation’s ability to deliver is the ongoing funding from the Department for Communities (DfC) through the Belfast Regeneration Office for the delivery of children and youth-based services, and the management of Shaftesbury. Programme delivery includes 260 afterschool sessions for 5–11 year-olds, 350 sessions for 2–11 year-olds over the school year, 10 specific targeted programmes for 65 children and 2 personal development residential breaks for 20 children aged 11 years old. The programme actively targets key times of school closure, Easter, Summer, Christmas, and Halloween breaks providing diversionary fun themed programmes that include sports camps, centre-based clubs, residentials, breaks and trips for children that might otherwise engage in anti-social activities over 9 weeks of the year.

DfC funding allows for delivery of core youth services providing a youth drop in 5 nights per week, OCN accreditations, art programmes and diversionary trips for young people aged 12-25 years old. The youth programme delivered by a trained youth staff team provides a safe space for young people to develop and build their skills and relationships and take part in a wide range of personal development programmes, tackling key issues for young people such as emotional wellbeing, mental health, drugs, and sexual health awareness. The youth project was able to fully engage in DfC’s Uniting Communities South Belfast Initiative working closely with East Africa NI, Lagan Village Community Centre, SOLAS and various South Belfast youth providers allowing 30 young people to take part in a 6-month good relations programme. The project also delivered a successful Good Relations programme “Our Kids Our Future Leaders” in partnership with Alternatives and Co-Operation Ireland which culminated in a ceremony in Queen’s University for both parents and young people.

Additional funding was received from the Education Authority for the summer period to support our work around good relations, community safety and diversionary activities in a period when young people were found to be most at risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviours particularly over the 7-week school closure period. Children and young people played a key role in shaping the development and delivery of the programmes delivered throughout the period.

A much-needed Early Years support service for the community, LORAG’s First Start, 2–4-year-old programme secured funding from the Pathway Fund to continue the delivery of this essential programme through the Early Years Pathway Fund. The funding allowed for the continued delivery of a bespoke community based, free service for children and their wider family, including key engagement with parents throughout the year. This project has been hugely successful and is in high demand, delivering 7+ sessions per week. The project has worked with 58 children through structured sessions within a nurturing environment. The project also delivered 14 stay and play sessions with 40 parents attending, 8 family trips with 50 families attending at least one trip along with 50 parent and toddler sessions.

As a Healthy Living Centre, health and well-being are at the core of all LORAG's projects. LORAG has developed bespoke programmes and delivered innovative initiatives across South Belfast and beyond, designed to improve health outcomes. Programmes delivered include a broad range of health improvements such as Choose-to-Lose Health Promoting Homes, Functional Fitness, Take 5 approach to mental health and wellbeing, Strength and Balance, Fit to Breathe and Diabetic Awareness raising, Couch-to-5k, Talking Therapies (Mental Health), Health-wise providing access to gym and specialist instructors. LORAG has been able to develop these programmes by creating key partnerships within the Inner South Neighbourhood Renewal Area and beyond which has secured funding from the Public Health Agency (PHA) and Active Belfast, Bogside, and Brandywell Health Forum as lead partner to National Lottery Community fund, South Belfast Health development fund, and Jog Belfast. PHA also funded a wellbeing programme for older people, Urban Villages funds supported the delivery of a bespoke paddle sports training programme aimed at developing a local interest in paddle sports. These programmes have allowed LORAG to further develop on key health improvement programmes across a wide range of areas and to a wider range of users leading to better health outcomes for those in greatest need.

Emotional Wellbeing is a key issue locally, LORAG has focused on providing a diverse of early intervention aimed at reducing the long-term impact of poor emotional and mental health on families locally. In 2022/23 LORAG launched the areas first self-referral Talking Therapies Service, allowing for self-referral access to a complementary therapy service delivered across the Inner South area with support of Community Foundation Mental Health Fund. Over 240 people locally have benefited from these 1-1 services the programme has also grown capacity for building future programmes. This fits with LORAG's established GP talking therapy services which are funded through BHSCT.

BHSCT fund LORAG to co-ordinate in the delivery of the South One Family Support Hub as part of the overall Belfast Family Support Network. The Network has available a small fund to support families with issues that are identified as "gaps" in service such as financial support through vouchers, access to services and uniform support.

The family support hub network gathers referrals, connects services and evaluates the Family Support services delivered and the effectiveness of these services for families throughout Belfast. The Network is now in its third year and has gone from strength-to-strength receiving 346 referrals from a broad range of agencies and families engaging 488 individuals in a service. Families referred have reported positive outcomes with 85% completing the service provided. One third of the referrals came from families as self-referrals which is a very encouraging statistic that evidences a high level of confidence and support for the services delivered.

Funding was secured from BHSCT for delivery of a needs led Family Support service delivering across the wider South Belfast area. Support delivered included 38 family support programmes, 52 play therapy and mentoring programmes that supported 52 children and their parents with key issues such as stress, anxiety, and worries, 94.5% of families completing programmes noticed improved outcomes in family relationships and 91% of children aged 5-11 years completing the mentoring programmes reported improved levels of confidence and self-esteem.

BHSCT funding support for the broad tapestry of health initiatives delivered by LORAG has been invaluable. Capacity building has allowed Shaftesbury the Centre to extend and share the reach of services beyond the local community.

Capacity created has allowed LORAG to further develop and has seen LORAG broaden our support for the Healthy Living Alliance. LORAG on behalf of the Alliance has co-ordinated the delivery of 46 regional Better Days Pain Management programmes through SPPG contract, which supported the delivery of Chronic pain services to 480 participants regionally and with 45 facilitators supported in 29 Healthy Living centres.

The Creating Cohesive Community Good Relations project has been able to provide a diverse range of programmes supported by funding from The Executive Office (TEO) with additional funding from Belfast City Council through their small grant's programmes, IFA and NIHE. Ongoing funding has enabled LORAG to work with key partners to deliver real and meaningful Good Relations work within the Lower Ormeau, Botanic, Market, Donegall Pass and the wider South Belfast communities. LORAG has continued to nurture a sense of "belonging" for everyone and strengthen good relations through various Men's and Women's programmes and the delivery of Intercultural festival events, such as an Intercultural day in August, St Patricks celebrations and the continued development of Christmas as a Winter Fest. These events / festivals have had in the region of 200-1000 people attend per event.

LORAG has sought to sustain the Social Economy income generating element within the organisation throughout a very challenging period to emerge from Covid pandemic into a cost-of-living crisis that has delivered unprecedented programme. Running costs and salary increases has placed a huge burden for services already under pressure. Shaftesbury Community & Recreation Centre continues to open Monday to Sunday covering 96+ opening hours per week, 360 days per year with an average daily footfall of 800 people per day, this is the clearest and purest indication of LORAG's commitment on behalf of the community.

Although lower than previous years, this footfall has allowed LORAG to maintain financial resources for the replacement of equipment, renewal of the pitch carpet and the continuation of service with a third of LORAG staff costs now met from income generated through Social Economy generated income.

Belfast City Council revenue grant for the management of the Centre along with additional funds for Capacity Building and a myriad of small programme grants has meant that LORAG have been able to offer some support for other smaller organisations, sports clubs and fledgling groups seeking support in the delivery of their programmes, governance, and development.

Féile na hAbhann was delivered for the fifth year as a waterway celebration festival with its key focus of reimagining the river Lagan and its Towpath with 10,000 people attending the family festival event. The festival has been developed in partnership with Féile an Phobail and a consortia of South and East Belfast partners. We aim to build on the festival and its offering to the wider community in the years to ahead.

Future Plans

LORAG has continued to work on the John Murray Lockhouse project, the JM Lockhouse was purchased in 2017 and since this time LORAG have completed a business case to DFC and in 2020/21 have a Good Relations Business case approved by Urban Villages / TEO. Key partners and funders are on board with the project which aims to develop a Healthy Living hub focused on emotional wellbeing following a community consultation. The building will house a café opening on to the

towpath, two large activity rooms for wellbeing activities, cookery space and a conference room for groups to meet and take part in programme delivery and development. This will open out onto a community garden and men's shed where horticulture and boat building, water-sports activities are to be based. LORAG has furthered our aim to develop onto the water and by providing a river access point for groups to use on the West bank of the river. Planning permission has been secured and build of the community garden and shed element has commenced with committed funds of £350,000 for this element. Funding is in place for the wider development with the aim of completion for 2023/24.

LORAGs plans will be to adapt the organisations delivery and services considering ongoing cost of living crisis, rising energy costs, overall running costs. LORAG will endeavour in the upcoming year to complete a new 5-year action plan considering these issues and the new JM Lockhouse development. To support us to keep within our strategic aims of community support and regeneration and our current goal of access to the towpath and waterways.

LORAG's ambition towards improving community health and wellbeing opportunities to the available blue and green space on our doorstep place the local community and organisation in a unique strategic position to grow greater sustainability for the aims of the organisation, the towpath, waterway and lockhouse are an excellent community regeneration resource to make this happen.

Designated funds 2023/24

Designated funds are made up as follows -

Equipment /

Furnishings	55,000
Running costs	50,000
Pitch carpet replacement	35,000 (3 years)
IT Systems	20,000
Projected Salaries	50,000

Total £210,000

The trustees previously designated unrestricted funds of £186,000 for the purchase of the John Murray Lockhouse for the development as a Healthy Hub providing, 2 spaces activity studios, conference room, café with access to a significant kitchen catering to a growing catering and training service. The Lockhouse will link with a community garden, poly-tunnel and shed, providing much needed access to green space. The final phase of the overall development will see the delivery of a footbridge and slipway for a new public river access point, and nearby boat storage area. LORAG contribution of £186,000 for the initial purchase of the property will form part of a title with The Executive Office for the period of 25 years.

Moving forward into 2023/24 as a community lead charity LORAG are conscious of the ongoing legacy of COVID 19 and the current economic climate and the potential challenges these will place on the organisation moving forward.