

Trustee's Annual Report

April 2022 – March 2023

It has been a pleasure to serve another year as a Trustee of the Centre For Health and Wellbeing. At the time of writing I am aware that the COVID – 19 inquiry features prominently on the news along with a new variant that threatens to occupy hospital staff over the Christmas and New Year period. All a reminder of the pandemic and also that the Centre responded admirably to the needs of our service users in the worst of times.

I would like to thank our previous Chairperson Thomas McCullough for his service to the Centre, Thomas made a valuable contribution to the governance and direction of travel of the Centre prior to resigning for health reasons on 26th May 2022. As a result of his resignation an Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 21 June 2022 which resulted in the election of the following Honorary Officers: Lorraine Mills – Co Chairperson; Cara Cash-Marley – Co Chairperson; Bernie McGlade – Treasurer and Karen Laverty - Secretary

I am delighted to report that during the year (March 2023) we welcomed four new Trustees, Raymond Blaney; Hanna Burton; Linda Doherty-Riley and Katherine Orr, each of whom have brought new skills and experience to the Board and I look forward to the contributions they will make in the years to come.

We would like to thank our main funders namely the Department for Communities and the Victims and Survivors Service, and the financial support from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for providing complementary therapies for carers. Funding provided by the Department for Communities and the Victims and Survivors Service rolled over for the year due to inactivity by the Northern Ireland Executive.

In addition during the year we received an additional £7,500 from VSS to provide extra complementary therapies, an additional £12,800 to deliver a social support programme to combat isolation and loneliness, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter, and a contribution towards increasing overhead costs. The social support programmes which are so important to mental wellbeing especially after COVID included: visits to Mount Stewart, Ulster American Folk Park, Titanic Experience and Crumlin Road Gaol, trips to the Opera House for Blood Brothers and the Hunchback of Notre Dame, craft classes, walking tours and finally 'Forest Bathing' in Finnebrogue Woods, Downpatrick. All activities were fully supported by service users and contributed significantly to improvements in mental wellbeing.

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The Centre also benefitted from the support carried forward from last year including the Carers Fund, £5,500, to help us continue with the counselling service, to provide additional complementary therapies and to provide personal development opportunities through the provision of extra classes. The counselling service also received support, £2,700 carried forward, from the Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland and £9,110 carried forward from Awards for All. I am pleased to say that the Centre was able to respond to the cost of living crisis being experienced by our service users. The successful application to Awards for All, £10,000, meant that starting in February 2023 we were able to begin to provide £50.00 and £100.00 electricity top ups to those experiencing difficulty in being able to afford energy cost in their homes. In total 191 service users were supported in this way.


Perhaps one of the most rewarding experiences during the year, in so many ways, was when the Centre partnered with Families Beyond Conflict from the Shankill to avail of PEACE IV funding, administered by VSS, to undertake a 'Lived Experience' creative writing project. What resulted was a publication where two groups of women from across the divide, Shankill and Upper Springfield / Whiterock, reflected upon their lives, experiences, memories and the city that they live in – a city that shaped them and, in turn, been shaped by them. All the participants, including myself, thoroughly enjoyed the sessions at Farset International expertly facilitated by playwright Fionnuala Kennedy who nurtured the creativity in the room. We are very proud of the publication which is archived in the Linen Hall Library and on display in the Shankill and Whiterock libraries. Thanks is due to Andrew and the team at the Victims and Survivor Service for having the vision, trust and commitment to obtain the funding to support victims and survivors in such an innovative way.

In total during the year with complementary therapies, counselling, personal development classes, activities to reduce social isolation and help with cost of living pressures, and a listening ear service to vulnerable carers, the Centre for Health and Wellbeing provided a positive mental wellbeing service to over 800 people, something we are justly proud of. The services cannot be delivered without the dedicated work of staff, Nigel and Patricia, and our team of complementary therapists and counsellors all of whom are highly valued by the charity and its service users.

I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues and volunteer Trustees who have ensured that good governance, and support when needed, remains a priority.

I would also express my thanks to Tony Clarke and his team from Clarke & Co for their support with financial administration and to Lawrence Shearer from O'Hara Shearer for the audit and presentation of financial statements. In speaking with Lawrence, I know that despite funding and financial challenges, the Centre's financial health is robust, depending on continued funding support, ensuring we remain viable and in a position to continue to serve the mental wellbeing needs of the local community.

With continued political uncertainty I do not know what the forthcoming year will bring in terms of service delivery and funding, but I do know that the Centre for Health and Wellbeing will continue to respond to community need for improved mental and physical wellbeing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Mills'.

Lorraine Mills
Co-Chairperson

18 December 2023