

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

The Directors present their report with the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024. The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the accounts and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association, 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 published in October 2019."

#### **Reference and Administrative Information**

Charity Name: Bolster Community

Charity Registration number: NIC107382

Company Registration number: NI655061

Registered Office: Whitegates Business Park, Unit 1 Killeavy Road, Newry, Northern Ireland, BT35 6UA.

Business Address: Whitegates Business Park, Unit 1 Killeavy Road, Newry, Northern Ireland, BT35 6UA.

#### **Directors**

E Connolly (Chairperson)

C Sweeney (Treasurer) (resigned 31st March 2024)

M Flynn (Vice Chair)

P Slevin

J White (resigned 1st January 2024)

J McConville

G Flynn

M Doyle

C Hughes

V Tohani

#### **Chief Executive Officer**

J Linden

#### **Secretary**

P Slevin

#### **Auditors**

McCreery Turkington Stockman LTD, 1 Lanyon Quay, Belfast, BT1 3LG

#### **Bankers**

AIB, 42/44 Hill Street, Newry, BT34 1AU

Danske Bank, Donegall Square West, Belfast, BT1 6JS

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

#### **Structure, Governance and Management**

The policy and general management of the affairs of the Initiative shall be directed by the Committee which shall meet not less than five times a year and shall consist of not less than four members of the Initiative elected at the Annual General Meeting. Aside from the management committee the organisation has a range of staff including a CEO, Head of organisation and development, an office and comms and marketing manager training officer, administration officers, support & Family Support Workers and a range of staff and volunteers who support the project.

#### **Recruitment and Appointment of Directors**

The Directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law. Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association the Directors hold office until the next Annual General Meeting and are eligible for re-election.

Individuals are invited to serve as Directors on the basis of their abilities and background so as to achieve a balance between those from the business, voluntary and charity sectors.

#### **Directors Induction and Training**

The Directors have conducted a review of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation of procedures for authorisation of all transactions and projects. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health and safety of staff, volunteers, clients and visitors to the premises. These procedures are periodically reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the charity.

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

#### **Public Benefit Statement**

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes include:

- Improved understanding, awareness and reduced social isolation leading to reduced levels of stress, anxiety and loneliness. These benefits are demonstrated through feedback from participants, regular evaluation and external monitoring and evaluation of our services.
  
- Improved partnership working to provide improved health and wellbeing for the constituents and awareness with and between the beneficiaries and stakeholders responsible for planning, services to promote health and wellbeing for an area.
  
- These benefits are demonstrated through feedback from participants, evaluation and monitoring of services. The benefits of this purpose are provided to those individuals who participate in the process of partnerships as a community representative or agency representative and provide Improved knowledge, resources and access to facilities and education within their locality which may lead to a better understanding of health and wellbeing choices.
  
- These benefits are demonstrated through feedback from participants and partners community engagement opportunities and through usage of programmes provided.
  
- Improved knowledge, improved collaborative working and information sharing as well as advice and practical support, for individuals and organisations which lead to a better shared understanding of health and wellbeing choices.
  
- Improved access to help and support so that individuals may reach their true potential regardless of ability, age, youth, infirmity or social and economic circumstance. Additional benefits may include enhanced confidence and serve to help others in the community develop skills as a result of witnessing the success of others

#### **Achievements and Performance**

Bolster Community, previously known as Space NI is a value`s driven, practical, hands-on social enterprise and charity that works to provide services, and support to improve wellbeing. Our business model is a hybrid of entrepreneurial vision and values that has earned an enviable reputation as a trusted partner to clients, funders, collaborators and requesters alike. We liken our culture at Bolster to a business head and a social heart. Since 2004, we've had the privilege of helping countless individuals reach their full potential. From early years right through to later years, we support and strengthen people facing life's tough challenges. Bolster Community has grown from a small campaigning organisation in Warrenpoint, to a key third sector agency providing services, support, training and leadership on community development, resilience and well-being.

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

**Our services are centred around supporting three categories - Family, Ability and Seniors.**

#### **Strategic Projects include:**

1. Coordination of Newry and Mourne Family Support Hub
2. Practical and therapeutic support for families, including lead organisation role to the Mourne's Sure Start project
3. Presenting themes for referrals to the family support Hub centre on, low mood/poor mental health in parents and children, Marriage breakdown, Autism, Poverty, Emotional and Behavioural Support for adolescents
4. Homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment projects- in partnership with the NIHE through practical activities including, a social kitchen, navigation and support service for individuals in housing distress.
5. Ability Services-provision of a wide range of community-based enterprise and training opportunities for young adults with a range of disability, adults with autism and families caring for children with additional needs
6. Home 2 hospital volunteer led service for adults in the Mourne's and Slieve Gullion areas requiring transport to out of area Hospital appointments
7. Levelling Up funded project creating opportunity for employment and training for hard-to-reach women
8. In partnership with Schools, the SHSCT and other partners we provide targeted and universal Family Support through a range of evidence-based training programmes and peer support networks
9. A social enterprise making and retailing natural soy wax candles, melts, diffusers whilst simultaneously providing day opportunities for young adults of mixed ability and developing and delivering evidence-based training programmes for children and parents in need.
10. Bolster Seniors- over the last year we started to rebuild our seniors' services to include Discover and connect sessions, tea - dances, clover social club, and we continued to provide signposting and practical support for Seniors operating a referral dial in and traffic light system to monitor seniors impacted by ill health, rural isolation and bereavement.
11. This year we also rolled out a range of evidence-based programmes to support children develop coping skills.

#### **Key Outcomes for 2024**

During the past year Bolster Community supported 9309 individuals' including parents, children, seniors and people of mixed ability. 7360 families and children were supported children and there were 8664 engagement opportunities for neuro diverse young adults.

In this financial year Bolster Community provided unique support to 497 single dwelling older people through our Home 2 hospital service and we also supported many vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness, through our Star bites 57 social café and navigator work in partnership with the NIHE. Over this year we sourced £80000 to distribute through our trusted partner network to directly impact people requiring practical financial support for seniors, families and people living with a disability.

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

2023/2024 was a very challenging year with increasingly complex requests for help and unprecedented need for practical help to support families struggling to support their children and siblings with disability. Increasingly service delivery is impacted with the cost of room hire, utilities and governance considerations and staff stress levels need managed carefully throughout all activities. We know our staff are also impacted by the unrelenting cost of living crisis and the uncertain funding climate causes heightened anxiety for all. In the early days of 2024, together with our board we independently assessed our strategic direction, governance and oversight board tenure and succession planning and began to systematically review a succession plan and TOR for audit and risk and other policy documents.

- Independent governance review completed Feb 2024 by Roger Courtney
- Independent review of strategy planning N. McKeagney
- New TOR for FARC was ratified by the trustees
- Developed a new strategic plan for 2025-2030
- A new succession plan for the board was ratified Feb 2024

#### **Social Return on Investment**

The charity completed an independent SROI study which calculated that the charity returned £24.00 of social value for every £1 invested.

#### **Other Charitable activity and milestones**

1. "Autism Connect" funded by The National Lottery, GP Federation and SHSCT to scale to Armagh and Banbridge over the next 5 years and provide ground-breaking social space for adults with autism but without a learning disability or mental health diagnosis
2. 944 individuals were supported by the N family support hub with 31% of referrals coming to Bolster Community and 329 services provided to families
3. 2296 children were supported in group and 1-1 support
4. 4032 short break sessions were provided to children with additional needs and their siblings
5. 497 older people benefitted from our Home2 hospital project accounting for 1400 individual journeys
6. 142 women have to date benefitted from our Building Futures programme funded by UKSPF
7. Mourne SureStart was expanded to the Annalong area and now services over 400 children under 4 in the Greater Mourne area
8. Short breaks for adults with disability (Bolster Buddy service) grown at pace

#### **During this year Bolster Community staff and CEO have provided input, representation and support to the following partnerships, organisations and committees and boards:**

- Co-Chaired the workstream 9, DOH NI review of children and young people's services
- Chaired the Board of CO3 NI
- Appointed SHSCT AIPB shadow member C sector representative
- Members of the South Armagh Locality Group
- Members of the CYPSP Southern area Outcomes group
- Members of the Strategic Stakeholder Partnership Newry and Mourne Down District council area
- Members of the strategic CYPSP regional Partnership
- Sustained corporate partnership with Keoghs Cars Newry, Killeavy Castle, Best Estate Agents Warrenpoint, Deanery Demesne Property Developers.
- We have provided mentorship to 3 organisations this year

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

#### **Funding- the following funding applications and income streams were successful in 2023/24**

- The National Lottery -Autism Connect 5-year project supported by the GP Federation MDT team and SHSCT
- Sure Start - Department of Education Sure Start extension Annalong
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust - Promoting Wellbeing Activities
- SHSCT-Family Support HUB/ disability/ autism connect
- Public Health Agency - EISS/ Parents Plus
- NM Council - Home 2 Hospital,
- Generated Income from Social Enterprise, Friends Resilience sales, donations and Room Hire

#### **Plans for the Future**

This is a small synopsis of the Charitable activity we have provided from April 23- March 2024 we look forward to progressing and developing relationships with Partner agencies, stakeholders and most importantly the seniors, individuals, children and families in the area to ensure more people can reach their potential and thrive. In October 2024 we will launch our 20-year celebrations along with our ambitious strategic plan and we hope that 2024/25 will bring more opportunity and much more resources so we can continue to do what we do best - help ordinary people overcome extraordinary challenges.

#### **Related parties**

None of the Trustees receive remuneration or other benefit from their work with the Charity. Any connection between a trustee or senior manager of the charity to related parties must be disclosed to the full Board of Trustees in the same way as any other contractual relationship with a third party. There were no such disclosures in the current year.

#### **Risk Management**

The Trustees have a risk management strategy which comprises:

- A finance, audit and risk sub-committee (FARC) which reviews all risk and completes the risk register prior to each board meeting and undertakes an annual review of the risks the charity may face
- The establishment of systems including a risk register, and procedures to mitigate those risk identified; and the implementation of procedures designed to minimise any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise

This work has identified that financial sustainability is a major financial risk for the charity. A key element in the management of financial risk is via the reserves policy. Attention has also been focused on non-financial risks arising from fire, cyber safety, health and safety of employees, volunteers and scheme users. In providing access and opportunities to people and children, the Charity recognises that there are potential risks to children and vulnerable adults. A key element in the management of non-financial risk is the establishment and implementation of a robust chart of policies and procedures including Access NI Disclosure Check, Child Protection Policy and the renewal and training of staff in this area.

The Trustees are satisfied that the necessary policies and procedures are in place to safeguard participants, and ensure that the benefits provided outweigh any potential harm.

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

#### **Financial Review**

The charity reported a net deficit of £41,905,( £9,885) (unrestricted) and (£32,020) (restricted) derived from a total income of £1,022,655.

The principal funding sources were grants, tenders, social enterprise generated income and income from donations and fundraising. The support of our funders and community advocates continues to be essential to maintaining our programme of activities.

#### **Reserves Policy**

The total reserves as at 31 March 2024 were £15,625 (restricted) and £398,324 (unrestricted). It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted reserves which have not been designated for a particular purpose should be maintained at a level to ensure that in the event of a significant drop in funding, we will be able to sustain the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. It is a strategic objective of the charity to hold a minimum reserves fund of 3 months, which would allow the organisation to be sustainable in times of challenge and to continue to operate without other sources of income. The Board of Directors are keen that a minimum fund of reserves is held for 3 months alongside a strategic aspiration of extending this to achieve a reserves fund of 6 months over the next 5 years. The directors consider that this level should be sufficient to cover three months expenses, and potential wind-up costs, currently totalling £266,140.

The Trustees regularly review the level of reserves held and consider opportunities to apply them in line with, and in furtherance of, its charitable objectives. The amount of unrestricted funds held at 31st March 2024 was £398,324. (For 2023 £408,209).

## **BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

### **Directors' Report for the year ended 31 March 2024**

#### **Statement of Directors' Responsibilities**

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors 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 directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for the year. In preparing those financial statements the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgments 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;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in operation.

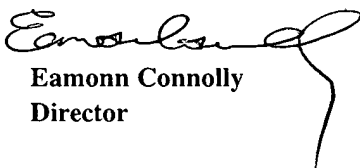
The directors are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

#### **Auditors**

In accordance with the company's articles, a resolution proposing that McCreery Turkington Stockman Ltd be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

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

This report was approved by the Board on 11th December 2024.

  
**Eamonn Connolly**  
**Director**