

**Registration number NI067915**

**The Big House (Ireland)**  
**Company limited by guarantee**  
**Directors report and financial statements**  
**for the year ended 31 January 2024**

## **The Big House (Ireland)**

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## **The Big House (Ireland)**

### **Directors Report for the year ended 31 January 2024**

The Directors present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 January 2024.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies to the accounts and comply with the charity's governing document, the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 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.

#### **Structure, governance and management**

The Big House (Ireland) is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Northern Ireland on 30th January 2008 and a charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland on 19th January 2015. Its governing documents are its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Directors of the Company are also the Charity Trustees and consist of the persons who are from time-to-time members of the Company. A Director must be someone who has confirmed their acceptance of the objects and ethos of the Company and their personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and belief in the Doctrines set out in article 3 of the Memorandum of Association.

The operation of the charity under the governance of the Board of Directors is the responsibility of the CEO (part-time, 15 hours per week). There is 1 full-time member of staff, Programme Worker (35 hours per week); 3 part-time members of staff responsible to the CEO: a House Chaplain (30 hours per week), House Manager (22.5 hours per week), Counsellor (15 hours per week), and two sessional workers. A sessional Counsellor (20 hours per week), and Grants Manager (8 hours per week).

The House Manager carries out administrative tasks associated with the running of the charity, Counselling service and co-ordinates programme and house bookings. The House Manager also ensures that the premises are fit for purpose. The House Chaplain has oversight of the prayer life and spiritual aspects of the charity and its' programme; supporting staff, volunteers, ministry leaders and young people. The House Chaplain also develops and delivers pastoral training to other organisations, leaders and volunteers and has oversight of the charity's Child Protection. The Programme Worker primarily visits youth groups & events; schools across Ireland and develops non-residential youth programmes at The Big House. The Counsellor provides counselling to young people through our Listening Space service and provides therapeutic input into training materials. The sessional Counsellor provides weekly counselling sessions for young people. The Grant Manager is responsible for the regular submission of grant applications to fund the charity's work.

The Big House benefits from additional volunteer help. This help has reduced post-Covid, but there is a current team of 18 volunteers who support and deliver programmes or maintenance in the House and grounds.

#### **Directors**

The directors who served during the year were as follows

Stephen Cave  
David Dunlop (Chair)  
David Ferguson  
Kathryn Harte  
Prof Dame Judith Hill  
Noel Lavery  
Ashley Parks  
Dr David Rock (from October 2024)



## **The Big House (Ireland)**

### **Directors Report for the year ended 31 January 2024**

#### **Objectives and activities**

The objects for which the company is established are:

The purposes of The Big House Ireland are:

- a) the advancement of the Christian Faith by Evangelism Discipleship and other means;
- b) the advancement of education of young people and adults such as may improve the health and wellbeing of young people;
- c) the relief of distress or mental illness and the enhancement of the wellbeing of young people by the provision of pastoral support and counselling;
- d) the promotion of social inclusion of young people in groups and organisations particularly, but not exclusively, those with a Christian ethos, through the provision of training, advice, support, and other resources;
- e) the helping of young people, especially but not exclusively through leisure time activities, so as to develop their capabilities that they may grow to full maturity as individuals and members of society;
- f) the provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and other leisure time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life of, particularly but not exclusively, young people living on the island of Ireland (the "area of benefit");
- g) the promotion of such other exclusively charitable purposes according to the law of Northern Ireland as may from time to time be determined by the Directors.

The current strategy of The Big House to deliver these purposes is through their value-led programmes, value-led place and value-led people. We want each young person who attends our programme, or place, to know that they are **MADE | KNOWN | LOVED | OF VALUE | WORTHY OF RESPECT** - no matter who they are or what they are facing in life. We find these values to have significant positive impact on a young person's adolescent journey and development of resilience and wellbeing in life.

There are five main areas of charitable focus:

#### **Youth Sessions**

At present we are unable to run residential programmes, so we run most of our value-led programmes during non-residential events at the House, when youth groups visit The Big House. We also take our programmes to local youth groups venues, schools and youth conferences/ events.

#### **Training**

The training delivered by The Big House is based on professional expertise, personal experience, and Biblical reflection. We aim to equip leaders, youth workers and parents to respond in caring, practical, and helpful ways when they encounter young people who are dealing with difficult issues or circumstances, also to understand the limitations of their role and know where to find further help. We seek to equip them with an understanding of the issues, provided directly and indirectly by experts in the field, with an insight into the young people's experience through personal stories, an understanding of how our Christian faith can shape our response, practical suggestions from those with experience of helping young people with the issue, and sources of further help and support. We deliver this training through our own events (in person and online) and at the invitation of churches, conferences, and other organisations to participate in their leader training programmes.

## **The Big House (Ireland)**

### **Directors Report for the year ended 31 January 2024**

#### **Youth Counselling and Listening Support**

Through our engagement with young people, and much current research, we continue to be very aware that many young people would benefit significantly from counselling but are often unable to access such a service. Service provision is significantly under resources in health and educational settings, and the charitable sector is then turned to. We are also aware that some young people connected with churches and Christian youth organisations struggle to know how their faith fits with their current experience and value the opportunity to include their faith in counselling conversations. Our counselling service, The Listening Space, regularly receives referrals from young people, parents, youth workers and G.Ps. Our counsellors are qualified and experienced in working with young people, and all young people can avail of the service regardless of their faith or background. We also provide a 'Talking Space' which is a one-off opportunity for young people to talk to a counsellor at a camp or conference.

#### **Youth Resources**

We currently have two resources that are available to pastorally support young people, along with training and session guides for their leaders. Shaken is a resource that takes young people through 20 positive coping mechanisms with the hope that some of these will provide positive ways to deal with issues as they arise. Steady is a resource that takes young people deeper into the journey of faith and how body, mind and spirit are connected as they develop in life and faith. It also has training and a leader's guide available. The final part of the series Strong will be completed during 2024. A further resource, Refresh, is in early planning stages and will be written during 2024. This resource will be aimed at adolescent females. The hope is that these resources individually and together will support the work of youth leaders and churches in helping young people to develop strong resilient lives that are fuelled by their faith in God.

#### **Retreats**

As part of our commitment to the pastoral support of those working with young people, and a prayerful approach in youth ministry, we have begun hosting regular retreats for organisational staff teams, ministry leaders, and individuals. Retreats are also available to youth groups.

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



**The Big House (Ireland)**  
**Directors Report**  
**for the year ended 31 January 2024**

**Achievements and performance**

This year has been a year of growth and change for The Big House.

**Programme**

In summary, we have provided:

- Approx 350 free counselling sessions for young people in The Listening Space
- Retreats at The Big House for 143 ministry leaders/clergy.
- Pastoral training and support for over 1000 youth and ministry leaders across Ireland.
- 140 youth sessions across Northern Ireland (youth groups / schools/ social work groups / CEF, YFC & SU groups).
- We have also provided Pastoral Support to SUNI's summer camps and missions programme, the Methodist Church in Ireland's Youth Weekend, Autumn Soul, and seminars at the Church of Ireland's Youth Festival, Summer Madness.

This has been achieved through the dedicated and skilled work of our staff team.

Our House Chaplain has developed a programme of retreats for church and youth leaders, which has steadily grown throughout the year. He has also been part of shaping a significant bespoke organisational pastoral support package for another charity during their summer youth programmes, SUNI. This has been a significant partnership to forge and will lay the groundwork for future collaboration.

Our House Manager has continued to provide significant administrative support to the organisation and is working to bring the House up to standard to become registered with the Tourism NI for overnight stays. This work will be completed later in 2024 and will assist with our finances.

Our programme worker has continued to deliver our Shaken programme to P7 pupils in schools and youth groups Ireland. He has also delivered youth sessions at denominational youth conferences and events. We have not been in a position to re-start our residential programme as our facility has not been able to accommodate enough people.

Our CEO has completed the writing of our third resource, Strong and this will move to design and publishing later in 2024. Additional versions of Shaken have also been explored, and conversations with Biblica as to overseas development have commenced.

Throughout 2023 The Listening Space has been full and often with a waiting list. Our student counsellor became a sessional worker in September 2024 and joins our employed counsellor in providing weekly counselling in Holywood. During 2023 we moved the location of our counselling practice from Holywood Baptist who had generously hosted us for several years, to Holywood Family Trust to accommodate both counsellors to practice at the same time. This has been a very positive partnership to enter. Our employed counsellor also provides counselling at the House in Limavady.

The staff team have been involved in our own, and larger denominational training events, providing bespoke training for those involved in the pastoral care of young people. They have also supported the charitable programme work of Home for Good and Starfish Soul Care at regional events.

During 2023, we saw a shift in our staff team, with our Finance and Facilities Manager leaving the organisation. This necessitated a change in the current staff team and the previous administrator and Homemaker role becoming the House Manager. This took effect in September 2023.

## **The Big House (Ireland)**

### **Directors Report for the year ended 31 January 2024**

#### **House & Grounds**

Work has continued in the House grounds, and the site is now a very attractive space which is ideally suited to large groups and leisure activities, as well as peaceful reflection.

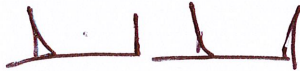
We were pleased to receive planning permission for our needed accommodation block, multi-purpose room and change of usage. We have not been successful in gaining grants towards this building project in 2023, so have not been able to commence building work.

We have installed a new 'working' kitchen which is where all the food preparation for our programmes takes place. This has all been installed to appropriate standards and relevant staff trained to use. It has helped us to achieve our purposes during 2023.

#### **Finances**

Financially, we have had a challenging year. Our regular support for which we are most grateful, continues to support the work and to mostly covers the cost of the loan repayments we have for the house. With a rise of interest rates on our mortgage and the cost-of-living crisis, we have found it a challenge to meet rising fuel and mortgage costs. We have also found it increasingly difficult to receive funding for core costs as financial strain is felt across the voluntary and charitable sector. We have been in receipt of some grants, fund-matching and one-off donations which has helped sustain our current operations.

This report was approved by the Board on 27 May 2024 and signed on its behalf by



**Director**