

The Big House (Ireland)
Directors Report
for the year ended 31 January 2025

The Directors present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 January 2025. 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 are 4 part-time members of staff responsible to the CEO: a House Chaplain (30 hours per week), Programme Worker (28 hours per week), House Manager (22.5 hours per week), and Counsellor (15 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 is 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 residential and 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 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)

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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

For much of 2024 we were unable to run residential programmes, so we ran most of our value-led programmes during non-residential events at the House, when youth groups visit The Big House. We also took our programmes to local youth groups venues, schools and youth conferences/ events. By the end of January 2025 we had held our first youth residential programme and will develop this work further as 2025 progresses.

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.

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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. This service was unfortunately reduced during 2024 due to a lack of funding.

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 was developed further during 2024 and should be published in the next financial year. A further resource, Refresh, remains in early planning stages and will be written more fully and designed as 2025 progresses. 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

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Achievements and performance

This year has been a year of significant challenge and for residential programme development for The Big House.

Programme

In summary, we have provided:

- Approx 330 counselling sessions for young people in The Listening Space
- Retreats at The Big House for over 60 ministry leaders/clergy.
- Pastoral training and support for over 1000 youth and ministry leaders across Ireland.
- Over 1500 young people in youth sessions across Northern Ireland (youth groups / schools/ social work groups / CEF, YFC & SU groups).
- We have also provided Pastoral Support to SUNIfs summer camps and missions programme and

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, organisational 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 other charities working with young people. These partnerships are important to The Big House and we hope to grow further in the next year.

Our House Manager has continued to provide significant administrative support to the organisation and has succeeded in bringing the House up to the required standard to become registered with the Tourism NI for overnight stays. This has allowed us to use overnight stays as a way of fundraising, and also to begin offering our youth residential programme.

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.

Our CEO is continuing to edit and develop our new resource, Strong and to work with our designer towards publication in Autumn 2025. Biblica translated and published our Shaken resource and Leader's Guide into Ukrainian and has distributed 30,000 copies.

Throughout 2024 The Listening Space has been full and often with a waiting list. Unfortunately counselling at the House came to an end in Sept 2024 due to a lack of funding.

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.

During 2024, we saw a shift in our staff team, with our employed counsellor leaving, and our sessional counsellor becoming employed. Our Programme Worker's hours were reduced from full-time to 28 hours per week. Our sessional Grants Manager left to enjoy maternity leave. This has necessitated her role being split between our House Chaplain and CEO.

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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 2024, so have not been able to commence building work.

We have installed an accessible en-suite in one of our bedrooms with the help of a LIFT team who gifted us their time and expertise.

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 cover the cost of the loan repayments we have for the house. We have not been able to make projected repayments on interest-free loans as we would have hoped and we are very thankful for the understanding we have been given in this. We have found it increasingly difficult to receive funding for core costs as financial strain is felt across the voluntary and charitable sector. We have applied for a large number of grants and been unsuccessful in them - with over subscription or a closure of funds being cited as the reason. We are very grateful for the generosity of fund-matching and one-off donations that have sustained our current operations in 2024.

This report was approved by the Board on 7 July 2025 and signed on its behalf by

Director