

THE RAINBOW PROJECT LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The trustees of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, submit their annual report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024. The trustees have adopted the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" (FRS 102) in preparing the annual report and financial statements of the charity.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charitable company's [governing document], 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 (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Review of Activity and Future Developments

Welcome to The Rainbow Project's Trustee Report for 2023-24. This report contains details on what has been another very busy year for the Rainbow Project, and one marked by considerable change for the organisation, as we continue our work to Make Northern Ireland a better place for LGBTQIA+ people and their families.

In May we said goodbye to our Director of 8 years John O'Doherty, John takes up a position as Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the Community Foundation NI. We were delighted that John was awarded the Inspiring Leader of the Year at this years CO3 Awards, a fitting reward for his years of service to LGBTQIA+ communities in Northern Ireland.

Change

With endings also comes new beginnings and after a robust recruitment process the Board of Trustees were pleased in June 2023 to welcome Scott Cuthbertson as the organisation's new Director. Scott joins us from the Equality Network, a leading LGBTI charity in Scotland, and brings with him two decades of experience of advocacy and community development in both domestic and international settings. A leading voice in progressing LGBTI law and policy and former chair of the UK Alliance for Global Equality.

With a new Director in post and with Board support Scott begun with a review of the organisation, its strategic plan, structure, efficiency and effectiveness. In October 2023 he completed the first stage of an organisational restructure, intended to strengthen and protect the delivery services from the volatility impacting the LGBTQIA+ sector across the UK, and appointed Nuala Devenny as Deputy Director with responsibility for services.

The Board of Trustees changed the legal name of the organisation from Rainbow Health Ltd, to The Rainbow Project Ltd at the AGM in Oct 2023. This change aligned the operating and legal names of the organisation.

Our work

The organisation has delivered high quality training on LGBTQIA+ issues for many years, this year we have facilitated our Sexual Orientation and Gender Awareness Training to over 800 professionals from the community/ voluntary, public and private sectors. We were delighted in January to secure funding from Dormant Funds to employ our first designated Training Officer. The three year funding will allow us to develop our funding offer, and pursue Open College Network (OCN) accreditation, while also growing the organisation's unrestricted income through this channel.

After what we view to be a very successful Mental Health pilot project funded by the Department for Health and in partnership with HEReNI, we were disappointed not to secure new funding from the department to continue the project.

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Over the two years of the service, the staff members have:

- Supported 245 LGBTQIA+ people through their Health and Wellbeing consultation. The consultations are the start of a service user's support and their introduction to our services;
- Facilitated 314 listening ear sessions to support service users;
- Supported over 50 service users develop care plans;
- Supported over 50 service users with advocacy referrals;
- Facilitated over 30 workshops on a range of themes for service users;
- Developed 6 mental health awareness campaigns;
- Facilitated over 600 counselling sessions with service users;
- Supported over 20 families of LGBTQIA+ people.

With growing NHS waiting lists and ongoing pandemic-related impacts on LGBTQIA+ mental health this project has never been more needed by our communities. We will continue to seek funding for this vital project.

Rainbow Youth (formally known as OUT North West) is our youth service, based at our Foyle center. Over the past 5 years we have:

- Engaged with over 300 LGBTQIA+ young people and supported their parents and other family members;
- Supported over 470 LGBTQIA+ young people through a range of workshops;
- Supported over 150 LGBTQIA+ young people through 1-2-1 mentoring sessions;
- Supported over 170 LGBTQIA+ young people through creative, job skills or employability courses;
- Supported over 40 LGBTQIA+ young people in work placement/volunteer roles;
- Supported over 160 LGBTQIA+ young people through personal development programmes;
- Supported 30 LGBTQIA+ young people to complete their OCN Level 3 course in Youth Work.

At the end of year five the project's external evaluator asked participating young people; "Do you think the project is needed?" These are responses from 3 young people.

- *"Absolutely. I think through the project we learn about queer history in NI and how the sense of community was so important during the troubles and AIDS crisis to where we're at now. I think in terms of peacebuilding and community it is so important and that you are supported and valued even when you've outgrown the services."*
- *"Yeah. Partly for people who don't get that kind of support anywhere else, it's the only place for people to hear their actual name and pronouns but even for people with supportive families, community is needed and I think it's really important to have the space where people will help you out when you need it and just to know that there's common ground there and I think it's a really important way of making friends for young queer people especially if it's hard in school, so to get outside of that and meet others like you is important. I hate to bring this up but in the context of Northern Ireland with the whole catholic and protestant thing, I went to a catholic school and there's one protestant in my year which is totally accepted but at rainbow youth there's no divide like that. I've met a lot more people from the protestant community than I ever would have without it and that's important as well, outside of the queer part of it. I think it's absolutely needed and it massively helped me and a lot of people. I can't recommend it enough to young people I meet, Colleen is amazing, everyone's really friendly and nice. I don't know who I'd be without it – less good!"*
- *"Absolutely. I know I needed it as a young person and a lot of my friends too. Now I see it from the other side, seeing young people at the age I started and hearing them say they need a space like this. Especially for those not accepted or out at home or school, it's that one space of help and support and it's absolutely needed for a lot of reasons. A lot of good comes out of being part of a community and it's essential for every person, humans are very social creatures and we want to be surrounded by those we have in common. Being queer can feel really isolating especially when you are young so it's definitely needed."*

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In March 2024, The Rainbow Project got the terrific news that the National Lottery Community Fund would again fund Rainbow Youth for a further 4 years. Fantastic news for young LGBTQIA+ people in the North West.

This year we were delighted to secure increased funding from our partner SSE Airtricity that has enabled us to continue to work specifically with minority ethnic communities to provide health and wellbeing support. This work has been particularly important in the context of growing race hate incidents in Northern Ireland.

In April 2023, we saw SSE Airtricity launch a new campaign 'We are Northern Ireland' with The Rainbow Project. The campaign amplifies The Rainbow Project's main mission: to make everyone feel like they are not just a part of the LGBTQIA+ community - but part of Northern Ireland. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community and service users are featured in the campaign which was seen across television and billboards.

Over the past year we have been working with Macmillan Cancer Support, The UK's leading cancer care charity, on the development of a new support project to support LGBTQIA+ people across Northern Ireland who have been impacted by Cancer. In March 2024 we were pleased with the news our funding application had been approved. Over the 3 years of the project we will be running programmes, workshops and campaigns to dispel cancer myths and promoting the importance of screening. We will also provide support to a range of organisations such as cancer charities, cancer staff in health settings, hospices, residential care on how to become more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people. As well as funding 5 jobs at the Rainbow Project, Cancer Champions will also provide volunteering opportunities across Northern Ireland.

The Rainbow Project continues to work in partnership with Victim Support NI; Migrant Centre NI and Leonard Cheshire to offer a safe and confidential space to provide support to victims of hate and signal crimes across the different protected characteristics. The Hate Crime Advisory Service (HCAS) is jointly funded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Department of Justice (DOJ). In 2023/24 126 potential sexual orientation hate crimes were referred into the HCAS Service, with 43 referrals on grounds of transgender identity - This was a significant rise on 2022/23.

In 2023/2024 we were delighted to have secured funding from All State which enabled us to open a new LGBTQIA+ space in Union Street, Belfast. This venue is right in the heart of the Rainbow Quarter and was essential as more space was needed to facilitate, counselling, Health and Wellbeing Consultations with LGBTQIA+ individuals and a range of workshops and groups.

Despite significant challenges The Rainbow Project has continued to grow our partnership developed with Stonewall in the delivery of the Diversity Champions programme in Northern Ireland supporting employers in meeting the needs of their LGBTQIA+ employees. 24 organisations from across Northern Ireland are a part of the programme, and 40% of all income generated by Diversity Champions in Northern Ireland goes to the Rainbow Project.

We continue to work to support LGBTQIA+ communities across Northern Ireland with the support of Henry Smith Charity. In 2023/24 we have supported LGBTQIA+ groups in Strabane, Enniskillen, Causeway Coast and Glens, Ballymena, Ballycastle, Newtownabbey, Lisburn, and Bangor.

The Rainbow Project continued to be on the cutting edge of service provision during 2023-2024 with the continuation of Northern Ireland's only Co-Cultural LGBTQIA+ Affirmative Counselling Service resulting in over 1700 sessions delivered.

Highlights of our work completed with the support of PHA funding 2023/2023 was:

- 511 Health and Wellbeing consultations were facilitated to LGBTQIA+ people who were new service users and some service users who were returning for support after 1yrs+;
- 31,324 Safer Sex Packs were distributed across Northern Ireland;
- 189 rapid HIV and Syphilis tests were facilitated;
- 530 queries in relation to sexual health were completed;
- 60 Outreach sessions were delivered to clubs, pubs and other venues across Northern Ireland.

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We also delivered:

- Mental Health Campaigns;
- Workshops and social events for LGBTQIA+ people;
- Training to professionals;
- Support for regional groups.

Some of the high praise from our clients via our post-test evaluations who attended a Rapid HIV and Syphilis testing service:

- *"Every bit of the process were explained very nicely and gently. It really made me feel safe and understood the whole process of getting tested."*
- *"I was immediately put at ease."*
- *"Leo [has] excellent empathy and professionalism"*
- *"I really am grateful for their efforts and work in making everyone feel welcome"*

With support from Belfast City Council, and in partnership with other LGBTQIA+ sector organisations we took part in a feasibility study into the development of a new LGBTQIA+ hub for Belfast. The hub would act as a new home for the Rainbow Project, Cara Friend and HereNI in the city.

Through this robust process we have identified a suitable space and are working to secure the relevant permissions to facilitate the relocation to the new space, and the funding needed to create a state of the art LGBTQIA+ hub for Belfast and Northern Ireland.

We continue to strengthen relationship and partnerships with LGBTQIA+ organisations across the United Kingdom and Ireland. This year we were delighted to secure funding for The All Island LGBTQIA+ Forum, a partnership between the Rainbow Project and LGBT Ireland which brings LGBTQIA+ people and organisations together in a spirit of partnership and cooperation across the island of Ireland. This work is funded by the Community Foundation Ireland.

The Board of Trustees welcomed the restoration in February of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont, and of a power sharing Northern Ireland Executive. The Rainbow Project has always, and will always, work with elected representatives of all stripes to achieve progress on the issues that matter to LGBTQIA+ people and their families. The staff team have begun work on setting out our priorities and how we influence decision makers through our equality and human rights action plan, as part of our strategic plan, to progress equality and human rights for all LGBTQIA+ people in Northern Ireland.

While we continue working to achieve change in the views and attitudes of society in Northern Ireland that might have been unimaginable ten or twenty years ago, we cannot be complacent. Rising anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, and in particular anti-trans rhetoric, poses a huge challenge to our work and the work of partner organisation not only here in Northern Ireland but across the globe.

Our activity last year has been set against this backdrop of increased public debate about LGBTQIA+ issues, and progress on issues like trans health care, conversion practices and gender recognition have stalled. The Rainbow Project has been in the vanguard of promoting as well as defending the rights, needs, views and expectations of the LGBTQIA+ community in Northern Ireland for three decades continuing to engage with political parties, their elected representatives, and departments with or without a functioning Assembly and Executive.

During 2023-2024, the Trustees continued to focus on the governance of the organisation: on setting and monitoring strategy, ensuring systems of control were in place, monitoring finance, and considering major areas of risk. Day-to-day management decisions are delegated to the Director. During the year the Trustees continued a number of internal reviews to ensure best practice and good governance; including a review of The Rainbow Project's policies and procedures.

The Rainbow Project's strategic plan focusses on changing the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, changing lives, changing society and changing ourselves. This change will be achieved through the development and delivery of key services addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ people, working with others to increase their awareness and knowledge of the needs of LGBTQIA+ people, working to ensure society values the positive impact of LGBTQIA+ people and continuously developing our organisation to ensure not only that it is fit for purpose but it does act as a catalyst for change.

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Structure, governance and management

The Rainbow Project Ltd (previously Rainbow Health Limited) is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and is a company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 25 October 1995. It is governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association which were last amended on 22 September 2012.

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Ms Jenny Ashton	(Resigned 20 August 2023)
Mr Trevor Wright	(Resigned 14 September 2024)
Ms Kimberly Ann Walsh	(Resigned 24 February 2024)
Mr Ciaran Moynagh	
Ms Karen McShane	
Miss Nadine Campbell	
Mr Shane Lynch	
Mrs Lauren O'Sullivan-Harris	
Mr Jonathan Kyle	
Ms Norah Christie	
Ms Monica Fitzpatrick	
Mr Donall Henderson	
Ms Emma Wallace	(Appointed 1 June 2024)
Ms Caroline Maxwell	(Appointed 1 June 2024)
Mr Arón Hughes	(Appointed 1 June 2024)

None of the trustees has any beneficial interest in the company. All of the trustees are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.

No emoluments were paid to directors during the year.

Principal activity

To seek the benefit and enhancement of the mental, emotional and physical health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Northern Ireland and, in particular, to advance education and awareness by way of research, provision of advocacy services, development, assessment and development of information and education services; to provide care and support services, counselling services, clinical services and advice relevant to health, particularly sexual health, and well-being; and to promote the equality and rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Risk policy

The Trustees who served during the year have undertaken an analysis of the work of the charity; identified the major risks to which the charity is exposed and are satisfied that all appropriate policies, practices and procedures are in place to mitigate those risks. A Governance Sub-Group of the Board of Trustees has been formed and has produced a register of major risks and mitigating actions.

Financial review

During this reporting period, the charity has maintained a good financial position with an increase in donations and reserves held. The Trustees have reviewed the reserves of the charity. Considering the variable income and fixed commitments, as well as the wider funding climate, the review concluded that to allow the charity to provide a buffer for uninterrupted services, a general reserve equating to approximately four months of total expenditure should be maintained. The current free reserves held by the charity are £224,457 which is 27.1% or approximately three months of the total annual expenditure of the 2023/2024 financial year.

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Statement of trustees' responsibilities

The trustees, who are also the directors of The Rainbow Project Ltd for the purpose of company law, are responsible for preparing the Trustees' 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 trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

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

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

Auditor

A resolution proposing that Johnston Kennedy DFK be re-appointed as auditors of the charity will be put to the Annual General Meeting.

Disclosure of information to auditor

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 has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Ms Karen McShane
Chairperson

Date: 20/12/24