

Trustees' Report

For the Year Ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance

The charity's strategy "Promoting Independence for Disabled People" continues to guide the direction of the charity underpinned by the organisation's mission and values. This strategy is a pathway for CILNI's further development as it uses innovative approaches to support individuals and families living with disability to live the life that they choose.

The charity's 22nd Annual General Meeting took place in November 2023. The AGM is the opportunity for the members of the charity to appoint directors and receive the official reports. This year the members approved the establishment of a new fully owned company CILNI Enterprises C.I.C. as a means to expand the charity's already successful operational model.

The charity's significant flagship engagement event took place in October after a gap of several years. The Independent Living NI 2023 event brought together service users, service providers, policy makers and social care workers. Using the Stormont hotel, the event was well attended and provided a good engagement, networking and learning opportunity. The event resulted in a growth in CILNI membership, stronger partnerships with other organisations, good conversations with politicians and policy makers, opportunities to share best practice and a call for future action from NI grassroots disability activists.

CILNI completed the second year of delivering a regional advice service under contract to the Department of Health. The contract has been extended for a fourth year until March 2027 and the charity is commissioned to provide a regional advice, information and advocacy service to support people to manage their own care, using Direct Payments as part of the Self-Directed Support regime. The collaborative work arrangement with officials from the Department and the five Health and Social Care Trusts adds value to the service and overall policy framework. The advice team who are responsible for delivering the service have ensured that response times have improved and waiting times for appointments have reduced. At the end of the year, the management structure for the service

changed to allow for some internal job transfers. The service has continued to perform well in the majority of areas under the new leadership. The Advice Service responded to over 7,000 enquires from a total of 2,917 carers and service users. The Advice Service has undertaken a larger proportion of independent advocacy cases than required under the service contract. 24 information and training sessions were delivered to voluntary groups and social workers during the year. Online delivery has made it much easier for service users to join the sessions and access the information being shared, but unfortunately limits opportunities for informal networking and sharing of experiences/ideas. A new publication entitled “Purchasing support from a self-employed personal assistant” was completed and distributed. A business case to scope out and develop this workforce across Northern Ireland was prepared and supported by the Department of Health. The initial phase of this scoping project commenced during the year.

The payroll service has now completed 7½ years under CILNI’s management and it continues to offer a bespoke, specialized solution for employers of personal assistants when considering how to accurately pay their personal assistants and meet their statutory obligations. The management team worked throughout the period with their staff to maintain a high level of service through the investment in additional training and learning opportunities. This has resulted in a high level of satisfaction from clients that their compliance requirements are met and concerns addressed. As the number of employers administered by the payroll service continues to grow, the team responded to a larger number of enquiries than previous years. The use of the Connect digital system, introduced last year, has grown steadily and team are seeing more service users transferring from its paper-based service to its digital service. The new digital form for onboarding new clients was fully integrated into the payroll service as part of the payroll set-up process. This digital development has brought benefits for service users, their employees as well as to the operation of the payroll bureau. The payroll team was pleased to have been shortlisted as a Social Enterprise Awards NI 2023 finalist in two different categories, namely (1) outstanding social enterprise team and (2) outstanding young person in a social enterprise.

The Independent Living Accounts service which is available to assist service users in setting their personal budgets had another busy year. The service continues to offer support in a number of areas including initial budget setting as well as

reviewing budgets against a change in personal circumstances or funding arrangements. The annual announcement of the percentage uplift in the SDS hourly regional rate by the Department of Health was made earlier this year. To resource the growing workload generated by the early announcement, the team was augmented by other internal staff for a number of months.

The use of digital techniques to engage with people and bring efficiencies to the organisation was further embedded within the overall operations. A number of internal projects including the development of two new online resources was launched during the year. The first digital resource allows payroll service users to input their Direct Payment financial data onto the charity's website so that a personalised budget can be provided based on the information. The second digital resource allows for a convenient and efficient method of on-boarding new clients to the payroll service. These resources have brought admin and operational improvements to the service. They were both launched towards the end of the financial year. The staff team continue to embrace hybrid working arrangements and offer a range of in-person and online facilities to service users.

CILNI's policy activities continued throughout the year. CILNI was represented on the Independent Living Fund (ILF) NI Stakeholder Group and continues to work collaboratively for the re-opening of the ILF for grant applications from disabled people in Northern Ireland in line with the new policy in Scotland. CILNI attended meetings of both the All Party Group on Physical Disability and the All Party Group on Learning Disability as a means of receiving briefings from senior officials and influencing politicians. CILNI members participated in the Disability Forum set up by the UNCRPD Independent Mechanism in Northern Ireland. The role of the Forum is to provide a dedicated space to ensure disabled people are at the core of IMNI's work in promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland. CILNI took an active part in a number of IMPACT "IMProving Adult Social Care Together" programmes throughout the year. Staff participated in a number of co-design groups and availed of learning opportunities. The charity was successful in being awarded a Demonstrator site to scope transitioning in social care across the five HSC Trusts during the next financial year. CILNI board members and staff were part of a delegation in meetings with the PSNI Chief Constable and members of his senior leadership team. CILNI management continued to maintain and build good relations across

the public and private sector. Effective working relations was maintained with the five HSC Trusts, RQIA, PCC, NISCC, local charities and a number of private companies.

The 2023 user survey provided a welcome review of the experience of all respondents who have come into contact with CILNI's services. With a sample size of 100 respondents, the survey evidenced a high level of satisfaction that echoes the findings of the previous surveys and is testament to the need and value of the work done by the organisation. It was particularly pleasing to note that 79% felt confident in recommending CILNI's services to others. All the feedback provided helps the organisation to continue to develop and improve the way it supports individuals in their independence.

Plans for future periods

The current CILNI strategy will continue to guide the direction for the organisation in achieving its charitable objectives. The organisation's mainstream services, namely to deliver a regional independent advice and information service for independent living; the payroll service for employers of personal assistants; the independent living accounts service; and the campaigning activity will be maintained.

The charity will work on a number of strategic goals to advocate stronger for independent living values, principles and practices across Northern Ireland. It will seek to provide a leadership role as the voice of independent living by challenging and inspiring the people who benefit from and make use of the charity's services. This strategy is the core of the charity's mission to promote independent living and empower disabled people.

The charity will explore new ways of generating income through the establishment of a fully owned community interest company (C.I.C.). The trustees see this venture as an opportunity to build on its success in managing and delivering direct services to the public by transferring its knowledge and skills to a commercial trading environment.

CILNI will accelerate its digital strategy through website developments, App development, enhanced social media communication and adopt new technologies to support more on-line activity.