

# Stepping Stones NI

Northern Ireland · Charity number 100727

## Details

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**Status** Received

**Registered** 2014-12-09

**Register** [View on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland register](#)

## Contact

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Lisburn  
County Antrim  
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**Website** [www.steppingstonesni.com](http://www.steppingstonesni.com)

## Activities

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**Purposes:** Purpose To advance education, relieve unemployment and develop the capacity and skills of individuals aged 16 and over with learning disabilities and learning difficulties (hereinafter called “the beneficiaries”), and in particular: (a) to provide, or assist in the provision of, programmes of education, including accredited and vocational training designed to assist the beneficiaries to lead to employment and volunteering opportunities and to enhance their personal development; (b) to provide support and guidance to the beneficiaries in the transition towards employment; (c) to establish and manage community-owned-business projects promoted by the company to create training and employment opportunities for the beneficiaries in the area of benefit; (d) to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

**What the charity does:** The advancement of education, The advancement of health or the saving of lives, The advancement of citizenship or community development, The relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage

**How the charity works:** Community development, Community enterprise, Disability, Education/training, Volunteer development, Youth development

**Who the charity helps:** Adult training, General public, Learning disabilities, Men, Mental health, Volunteers, Women, Youth (14-25 year olds)

## Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-03-31	£2,253,774	£2,156,864	£-297,731	105

## Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Mr Michael Drayne		
Mrs Emma Simms		
Mrs Jenna Gardiner		
Mrs Lisa Beers		
Mrs Lorraine Acheson		
Shirley Ann Smylie		

**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Accounts

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

( A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

**COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 031411**

**CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 100727**

**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
**547 FALLS ROAD**  
**BELFAST**  
**BT11 9AB**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**  
**OFFICERS AND OTHER INFORMATION**

<b>Directors</b>	Michael Scott (Chair) Michael Drayne Cormac O'Donnell Lisa Beers Sarah Johnston Shirley Smylie
<b>Secretary</b>	Paula Jennings
<b>Registered Office</b>	Stepping Stones NI 39 Seymour Street Lisburn County Antrim BT27 4SY
<b>Auditors</b>	O'Hara Shearer Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors 547 Falls Road Belfast BT11 9AB
<b>Solicitors</b>	Donaldson McConnell & Co Solicitors 8-10 Graham Gardens Lisburn County Antrim BT28 1YS
<b>Bankers</b>	Danske Bank 62-66 Bow Street Lisburn BT28 1YS
<b>Company Registration Number</b>	NI 031411
<b>Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number</b>	NIC 100727

**Section 1: The organisation**

**Section 2 : Who we are**

**Section 3 Our Purpose, mission and values**

**Section 4: Strategy for delivery**

**Section 5: Performance and achievements**

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## **SECTION 1- The Organisation**

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### **Reference and Administrative Details**

Registered Company number NI031411 (Northern Ireland)

### **Registered Charity Number**

100727

### **VAT Number**

701 428570

### **Date of Incorporation**

October 1996

### **Registered Office**

39 Seymour St

Lisburn

Co Antrim

BT27 4SY

### **Trustees**

Michael Drayne

Michael Scott Chair

Cormac O Donnell ( resigned July 2024)

Sarah Johnston (resigned June 2025)

Shirley Ann Smylie

Lisa Beers

Jenna Gardiner (joined September 2024)

### **Company Secretary and Chief Officer**

Paula Jennings

**Independent Auditors**

Laurance Shearer: O'Hara Shearer  
547 Falls Road, Belfast BT11 9AB

**Solicitor**

Donaldson Mc Connell & Co  
8-10 Graham Gardens  
Lisburn Co Antrim BT28 1XE

**Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow St  
Lisburn BT28 1YS

**Website**

<https://www.stepsstonesni.com/>

## SECTION 2- Who we are

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Stepping Stones NI is an award-winning charitable organisation and company limited by guarantee that has provided training and employment services for people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism who often are furthest away from the labour market, for over 27 years. We do this in conjunction with social enterprise activity. The company was first established in 1996 to fill the gap in service provision for people with learning disabilities who had no access to training to advance their skills towards employment, education and volunteering. Stepping Stones NI opened its doors in January 1998 providing training and supported opportunities for people with severe learning disabilities.

In the reporting period from **1<sup>st</sup> April 2024- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025** we continued to deliver our range of services providing opportunities for people with disabilities to advance their personal and employability skills and overall health and wellbeing, towards a life more fulfilled.

The services and social enterprises at Stepping Stones NI during the reporting period included:

- **Youth Service:** engaging with young people aged 16-24 who were not in any form of training or employment through a range of employability and personal development activities.
- **Training:** offering training and outreach training to people in various courses leading to the attainment of accredited qualifications including customer service, health and safety, work appropriate behaviour, catering, financial literacy, and mental health etc.
- **Employment Service and Academies:** providing employment support to people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. This included help with writing CVs, application form preparation, interviews preparation and support in the workplace with employers.
- **The Courtyard Cafe:** Social enterprise Café in Lisburn delivering quality training for people with learning disabilities in hospitality, customer service and food preparation.
- **Pink Elephant Cards:** Social enterprise specialising in bespoke wedding stationery and greeting cards made by people with learning disabilities.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Cafe:** social enterprise providing volunteering opportunities to adults with learning disability as well as an outside catering service.
- **Stepping Stones NI Picture Framing:** Social Enterprise offering training in picture framing and customer service to people with learning disabilities. Recognised by the Fine Art Trade Guild as quality provider of framing services and staff trained to Guild Commended Framer standard.

- **The Gatelodge Café:** Social enterprise Café in Newtownards delivering quality training for people with learning disabilities in hospitality, customer service and food preparation.
- **Navigation House:** programme for young people to advance their skills in horticulture and to engage health and wellbeing activities
- **Delivering social impact at Lisburn Island Centre delivering contracted catering provision for Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council .**

Stepping Stones NI ensures that people with a learning disability, autism, and barriers to learning have the support and opportunity to develop their skills, realise their talents, try new things, attain accredited qualifications, and live as active citizens in their community.

We develop quality training and employment services for people with a variety of learning abilities who require the support they need to advance their training and gain the support to gain employment. The work during the delivery period was supported by UK Shared Prosperity Fund, contracts including Health Trust Contracts and Department for Communities funding to deliver local labour market partnerships, as well as income generated through our social enterprises which is reinvested back into the organisation to creating social impact.

Stepping Stones NI continued work successfully through PROSPER funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund in collaboration with Triangle Housing Association Limited, AEL Ltd, CAN Ltd and Appleby Trust . The PROSPER programme commenced delivery on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 for a period of two years. (an extension of one year was granted from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026)

## SECTION 3- Our Vision, Values and Objectives

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Stepping Stones NI is a Limited Company with charitable status that has been delivering services since January 1998. It provides quality training and employment services for people with a range of disabilities who often are furthest removed from the labour market, helping those people to find a job if it is their ambition.

### **Our Vision**

A socially enriched world where every individual can take proud steps towards a life fulfilled

### **Our Purpose**

To nurture the potential of people with a disability to thrive in a socially inclusive society.

### **Our Values**

**Respect:** We respect everyone's right to a life more fulfilled and respect each other in the process

**Inspire:** We inspire employers and the wider community to see disability differently

**Empowering:** We empower each other to make a positive impact on the world and in the organisation, we work

Our Values drive our behaviours and govern our actions. They are at the heart of our culture and define who we are, and how we present ourselves every day.

### **Our Behaviours**

**Driven:** We are driven, seizing every opportunity to create better lives

**Honest:** We are honest and always do the right thing

**Positively Charged:** We are positively charged and passionate about making things possible.

**Nurturing:** We Nurture all our People to be their best

**Quality focused:** We are quality focused, to always ensure the highest standard.

## **Our Culture**

People and Purpose are at the centre of everything that we do. Through our culture our values will be instilled throughout the organisation, making a positive difference to people's lives

Our team will work with purpose and passion to go the extra mile for our people.

## **Our Objectives**

- To develop services and social enterprises which will provide appropriate training opportunities leading to employment for adults with learning difficulties.
- To equip individuals participating in projects and services with knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualifications to enable progression to supported employment.
- To increase disability awareness amongst society.
- To promote independence, wellbeing and social inclusion amongst adults with learning difficulties participating in projects.
- To provide a quality service to stakeholders accessing Stepping Stones NI services and social enterprises.
- To promote cooperation and develop links with other relevant agencies to maximise opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

For the purposes of this report the expression "learning difficulty" shall include any learning disability, difficulties, and associated problem or those who appear on the autistic spectrum, a developmental disability of the mind, sensory impairment, acquired brain injury or mental health problem. Neurodiverse refers to is a term that has gained traction in recent years to describe people with disability/difficulties as having a brain that works differently from the average or "neurotypical" person.

## SECTION 4- Strategy for Delivery

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Our strategic focus for the next 4 years (2024 -2028) is to channel a more holistic approach to the delivery of our services and to seize every opportunity for our participants and trainees. We passionately believe that people with disabilities should have access to every opportunity that leads to a life more fulfilled. We will sustainably grow our services and social enterprises for purpose for people with a learning disability and barriers to learning



### Our Strategic Priorities

- 1. Quality:** Striving for excellence and the highest standard in all that we do
- 2. Team:** Attracting and developing a team of well skilled, confident, and professional people
- 3. Social Enterprise:** Building on and expanding social enterprises to grow our income always with a balance on our people and mindful of our Stepping Stones NI purpose.
- 4. Employment, Training and Youth Services and wellbeing:** Developing and delivering employment and training services to find jobs for people to prosper and live well.
- 5. Technology:** Embracing technology to drive quality, performance and innovation.

**6. Sustainability:** Developing a more sustainable and responsible business model and financial sustainability with purpose at this core.

Stepping Stones NI was incorporated in 1996 and is established under Articles of Association which sets out the objects and powers of the company, and the company is governed under its Articles of Association. These articles were revised and updated during the reporting period by the board of Trustees and passed to the Charities Commission of Northern Ireland for review.

### **Our Public Benefit**

In shaping the strategy and objectives of Stepping Stones NI the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission NI guidance on public benefit including the commissions Public Benefit Reporting Document and confirm that they have complied with the requirements of section 4 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes to advance education, relieve unemployment and develop the capacity and skills of individuals aged 16 and over with learning disabilities and learning difficulties, are:

- to provide or assist in the provision of, programmes of education, including accredited and vocational training designed to assist the beneficiaries to lead to employment and volunteering opportunities and to enhance their personal development.
- to provide support and guidance to the beneficiaries in the transition towards employment.
- to establish and manage community-owned-business projects promoted by the company to create training and employment opportunities for the beneficiaries in benefit.
- to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

## **Our Benefits**

The organisation is committed to delivering services to people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties that assist in their development and personal progression leading to employment we do this through:

- The provision of a range of services and social enterprises that provide the opportunity for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties to gain qualifications leading to employment.
- The increased personal development and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Attainment of qualifications and skills development of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Youth service, training and employment service provide job support and delivery employer lead academies for people to gain volunteering and employment in the community.
- Social enterprises that provide a realistic working environment in which people can develop their work skills, gain qualifications and engage with customers thus increasing their self-esteem, confidence and independence.
- The development of programmes and services that will support people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties fulfil their full potential in society.

## SECTION 5- Achievements and Performance 2024/2025

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### Our Services

During 2024/2025 Stepping Stones NI our services continued to thrive with continued support from new funders, employers and stakeholders. We continued to deliver and build on our quality services that support people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism to develop their employability skills and achieve qualifications leading to employment. We did this across Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Belfast City Council areas.

We continued to deliver the **provision of catering services at Lisburn Civic Centre, for Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council**, putting social enterprise at the heart of a community and civic space whilst generating income for the organisation.

### Employment Service

The Employment Service supports participants to gain employment/jobs and/or voluntary placements of their choice.

The employment service provided people with opportunities to avail of:

- Innovative pre-employment “**BE IN WORK**” academy training courses with industry specific companies that led to a paid job for participants. We embedded our newly branded “**BE IN WORK**” Academies into the Stepping Stones to Employment delivery model within the new PROSPER consortium, to address local labour market skills shortages, as well as meeting individual employer training requirements.
- Since **1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025** there were:
  - 531 referrals from participants who were economically inactive/ with long term complex health needs /disability
  - 201 jobs secured for people accessing our services.
  - 79 people with a learning disability engaging with Stepping Stones NI
  - 19 referrals to our Youth Service
  - 307 accredited qualifications
- **32** industry led **employment academies**, in partnership with a number of employers including:
  - OCS
  - EE

- Peacocks
  - Decora
  - Haldane Fisher
  - Hendersons Retail Group
  - Premier Inn
  - Popeyes
  - McDonalds
  - Foot Antsey McKees
  - HCL
  - Poundstretcher
- 
- The academies were aimed at labour market employment gaps where we worked with premier employees in the following industries: construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and catering, IT and customer service.
  - Access to a range of training courses to help people prepare for work, including CV building, job search, customer services skills, effective communication skills and essential skills
  - Tailored career guidance to help people find a new job and career.
  - A broadened curriculum to embed wider societal inclusion topics such as, LGBTQIA+, Mental Health First Aid to promote equality and provide a safe space for participants.

The Employment Service delivered its services across council areas noted below under the UK Shared Prosperity funded, PROSPER programme.

- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Belfast City Council

Stepping Stones NI is delighted and proud to report that on our second year under UK Shared Prosperity Fund- PROSPER Programme we delivered:

- **154 people gained paid employment**
- **393 economically inactive people with a disability or health condition participated in employment support: exceeded target by 105%.**
- **192 accredited qualifications were gained by 176 participants**

Stepping Stones NI employment team continued to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes of people with disabilities in our communities. The team were instrumental in assisting employers and business to support our people to achieve employment and volunteering dreams.

## Stepping Stones NI “BE IN WORK” Academies



Our Employer partnerships are very extremely important to us, and we are grateful to our employers for the opportunity to be a recruitment partner to ensure increased inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Our employer academies provide accredited training in a group setting to a maximum of 10 people leading to a supported interview, leading to employment for ring fenced jobs.

### What our employer partners said (5/5 satisfaction rating)

“Kelly was amazing. She was organised and great at communicating with us. This academy was by far the most successful and I am putting that down to Kelly. It was great being able to go in and chat with the candidates prior to their interview. I also think that Kelly's presence in the store was beneficial for the candidates. We will most definitely be doing more Academy's soon!”

“Bethany was excellent, Made the process very easy, was always on hand for support and was always positive with any queries I had.

Great approach to understanding requirements of roles within Finnebrogue and understanding the opportunity offered”.

“Working in partnership with Stepping Stones supported us delivering a successful warehouse operative recruitment campaign. The candidates were very engaged with the programme and took a lot away from it. We look forward to our next academy later in 2025.”

### **When asked would they recommend us to other employers**

“I have already”

“Yes - professional approach throughout all stages of the academy from pre-planning and preparation, during and after.”

“Yes, as this was a different approach to recruitment within the local community. Seeing candidates complete the 3-day program showed a level of commitment which can transfer to the workplace.”

“Yes - have recommended to another McDonald's in the group”.

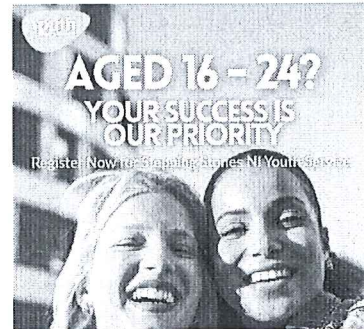
“Yes, I would”

### **What our participants said (Overall 9.5/10 satisfaction rating)**

- “ training team was incredibly supportive, and I learned so much about effective communication, handling different customer needs, and maintaining a positive attitude in every interaction. They really made the learning experience engaging and gave me the information to confidently handle various situations.”
- “I enjoyed the training as it improved my communication, problem-solving, and customer handling skills. The interactive sessions and real-life scenarios boosted my confidence, while learning about company policies and service tools helped me assist customers more efficiently”
- “I really appreciated how Andrew (our instructor) focused on training us for a customer-centric role. His approach made it clear how to understand and address customer needs effectively, which will be valuable in real-world scenarios”
- “On learning--- Yes, before now I believed verbal communication was the most important in communication but yesterday, I learned non-verbal communication is more essential in communication”
- “Yes, I’ve learned a lot from the training. It has helped me develop a deeper understanding of customer-centric approaches, effective communication skills, and problem-solving techniques. I also gained practical insights into handling customer interactions more efficiently”.

- “I learned a lot of things from the training the key takeaways are usually focused on communication, empathy, problem-solving, and maintaining professionalism.”

## Youth Service



The Youth Service delivered the following throughout the year:

- **5 people achieved paid employment**
- **13 people progressed to education and training**
- **19 referrals to the service**
- **12 Accredited Qualifications**

During the year the Youth Service had:

- **Educational/Careers talks from:** Belfast Metropolitan College and SERC (local further education colleges), Connected Minds, Resurgam Trust, Tesco, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, PSNI, Lisburn Library, Coca Cola HBC, the young people also attended Belfast and Lisburn Job Fairs
- **Work Tasters:** work experience from Little Wing Pizza, Sonas, Tesco, EE, MB Chicken
- **Advice and Guidance:** Talks from Citizens Advice Bureau (Benefits and Entitlements), Links Counselling (Mental Health), HYPE (Relationships/Personal Safety/LGBTQ+), Relate NI (Relationship and Sexuality Education), Caroline McGrath-Southeastern Trust (Take 5 Mental Health, Chi-Me) Invisible Traffik (Awareness of Human Trafficking and Exploitation)
- **Education/Training Providers for progression:** Belfast Met, SERC, YMCA
- **Participation** with an LGBTQ+ support group. Cara Friend
- **Personal Development** – Mind Out Programme – Promoting the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Young People, Money Matters Programme, Bells Lane Horticultural Programme with LCCC, Compost Workshop LCCC, Belfast City Hall (Local history tour), Archaeological Dig with Queens University Belfast
- **Accredited Training including** Mental Health First Aid

- **Activities/Trips** – The Youth Service took part in the annual Lord Mayors Parade in Lisburn, attended the annual Balmoral Show, visited The Ulster and Ulster Transport Museums. The Youth Service also took part in an outreach programme with **R-Space Gallery**, in partnership with the Halifax Foundation NI. As part of this initiative, a local artist delivered a series of art workshops, giving our young people the opportunity to create their own pieces of artwork — which were later exhibited at R-Space Gallery. This was a fantastic experience that allowed participants to express their creativity, develop new skills, and showcase their individual artistic talents.
- We held a coffee morning to welcome the **Mayor of Lisburn, Councillor Kurtis Dickson**, to introduce our Youth Service and outline the range of programmes and initiatives we deliver. The meeting offered a valuable opportunity to discuss our ongoing work in supporting and empowering young people within the community. Following our coffee morning, we were delighted to be invited to the Mayor’s Office at the Civic Centre for lunch with the mayor and a tour of the impressive facilities. It was a wonderful opportunity to continue our discussions and strengthen our connection with the mayor’s office.

The Youth Service worked with Atlas Counselling Service, MACS - Supporting children and Young People, Links Counselling Service, YMCA Lisburn, Resurgam Trust, Emerge Counselling Services and Lisburn City Council to provide opportunities for employability, horticulture experience and counselling support.

## Training

The training services at Stepping Stones NI offers a comprehensive range of courses designed to support individuals with learning disabilities and learning difficulties in achieving paid employment or meaningful placements. Tailored training is designed and delivered to address specific needs of the client and business partners; we equip participants with the skills and confidence necessary to succeed in the workplace.

Our courses cover a variety of essential topics, including food safety & allergens, health and safety, world host principles of customer service. These accredited qualifications not only enhance employability but also provide participants with valuable knowledge and practical skills, build confidence and social skills. Additionally, we actively engage with community groups to deliver our training services, community groups thrive from the accredited and soft skills we deliver on both personal and professional basis.

We delivered to **176 participants** working with business partners through bespoke academies and community groups throughout Northern Ireland, **delivering 192 qualifications** in total through Prosper.

### **Accredited qualifications delivered included:**

- Mental Health first aid Level 1
- Emergency First aid level 3
- Paediatric First aid level 3
- Food Safety level 1
- Food allergens level 2
- Health and safety level 1
- Fire safety level 1
- Manual handling level 2
- World Host Principles of customer care L2

Our soft skills focused on confidence building, communication and interview skills & money matters.

Our training team supported the achievement of 104 qualifications through Labour Market Partnerships.

### **Living Life Loving Life and ASDAN**

A programme of both soft and accredited is delivered on a weekly basis to our Learning disability participants through our Living Life Loving Life programme. Our outcomes for all sessions are directly linked to improving social skills, communication, employability and confidence through fun relevant activities and outings, as well as embedding practice of functional skills, literacy, math and ICT. The introduction of ASDAN qualifications give participants the opportunity to gain accredited qualifications in everyday life topics such as, independent travel and basic money management.

## Our Stepping Stones NI Football Team

Football is an extracurricular activity that we offer with a multitude of benefits for the ten football enthusiasts. Beyond the physical aspects of the sport, it fosters essential life skills such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Engaging in football has significantly improved participant's mental health by providing a positive outlet for stress, boosting self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. The team has participated in local football competitions George Best Cup in Northern Ireland and in doing so participants connected with peers, fostered friendships, learnt valuable social skills and creating lasting memories.



## Labour Market Partnerships

Local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) were established in each of the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs) in Northern Ireland (NI) to develop a range of new employability provisions that address the specific labour market needs and challenges of the local areas. The Department for Communities funds Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP) in each council area. Labour Market Partnerships develop programmes to help people find employment and training opportunities in their local area. In the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 we were successful in tendering for LMP's in both **Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council LMP.**

### Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Stepping Stones NI was awarded the contract by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council to deliver its LMPs:

- Multiply **SPARKS** programme that supporting 45 people with disabilities to gain outcomes in relation to advancement of learning of numeracy through bootcamps .
- Pathways to Employment for individuals with a Disability Programme **Thrive 2** to support and connect 40 people with disabilities / long-term health conditions with accredited qualifications, work placements and employment opportunities.

### SPARKS: How did we do?

Outputs	Target	Actual Achieved
Referrals	40	45
Completers	36	40
Gaining accredited OCN entry level numeracy	10	11
Satisfaction Rate – soft skills, numeracy, employability and confidence	100%	Average 9.9 out of 10 satisfaction rating

### Thrive 2 : How did we do?

Outputs	Target	Achieved
No of participants in paid employment	9	16
Completers	17	29
Benefit 25 Participants No of participants Recruited	25	40
Satisfaction Rate Evaluations	100%	100% 10/10 satisfaction
Gained qualifications	17	37

## Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council LMP Outcomes

Stepping Stones NI was awarded the contract to deliver its Disability Employment Programme to support local people with a disability and health outcomes into employment. Through the programme and we successfully made difference in employability and skills outcomes through its training provision and employment support, working with a range of employers.

Stepping Stones NI supported **56 people** with disabilities into employment in sectors including retail, hospitality, catering, construction, warehousing, education, domestic services, despatch and facilities working in partnership with local employers.

Outputs	Target	Actual
No of participants in paid employment	23/40	26
Completers	40	40
Benefit 54 Participants No of participants Recruited	50	56
Satisfaction Rate Evaluations	100%	100% 10/10 satisfaction
Gained qualifications	35	55

### This is what our participants said about the LMP programmes.

“Stepping Stones NI helped me to get my CV ready and I was able to apply for jobs. I am really pleased to have got a job now with the trust doing what I do best. I am very grateful for the Labour Market programme and support from Stepping Stones NI.”

“I have never had a CV before so having that for the first time has really benefited me in being able to see for myself what all I have achieved. I am also very grateful for the accredited training and support I have received. I am so happy to be in employment.”

## **Social Enterprise**

At the year-end 79 people with a learning disability were engaging and participating in training through Social Enterprise activity in:

- Pink Elephant Cards
- The Courtyard Café Lisburn
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café Lisburn
- Stepping Stones Picture Framing Lisburn
- The Gatelodge Café Newtownards
- Navigation House

Our Social Enterprises provide the working environment for people with learning disabilities to learn and develop employability skills in a realistic commercial environment potentially leading to a paid job or experiencing the world of work in the future. All income generated from our social enterprises is reinvested back into the organisation to support service delivery for people who access our services.

Our Day Opportunities Contract with South- Eastern Health and Social Care Trust supports the activities for people with a learning disability across all our social enterprises to promote training and employment.

### **Pink Elephant Cards**

This social enterprise produces a bespoke range of handcrafted wedding stationery and greeting cards and craft projects for people with a learning disability.

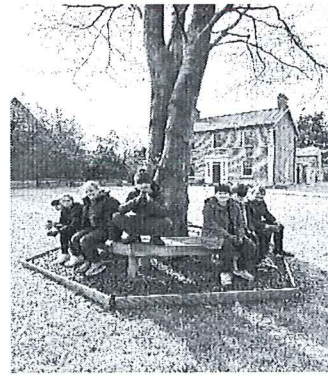
### **Picture Framing**

As a member of the Fine Art Trade Guild our team provided a high-quality framing service offering a wide range of frames and mounts.

**Our cafes and catering: The Courtyard Café, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café and The Gatelodge** continued to trade and provide hospitality skills training for people with a learning disability.

**Lisburn Civic Centre:** During the year our catering team continued to provide catering provision at Lisburn Civic Centre at Lisburn City Council offices in Lisburn, whilst at the same time providing training and skills development for people with disabilities through employment.

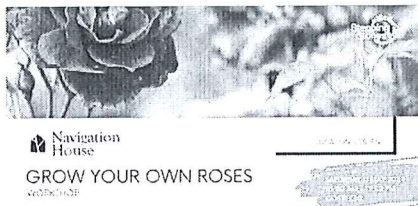
## Navigation House



At Navigation House we introduced programmes and activities that enriched the lives of people who are Neurodiverse and those with a learning disability .

### Key activities during the year were as follows:

- **We developed a horticultural social enterprise activity** focusing on the growing of organic and pesticide free produce herbs, edible flowers, fruit and vegetables involving people with a range of disabilities from the Lisburn and Castlereagh area. With the addition of a Garden Shop selling baskets and containers of seasonal flowers and plants, grown by the trainees
- **Two “Grow your own Roses” workshops**



- **24 External event bookings and 4 Workshops** included over workshops and external hire events across several public, council and charity organisations.
- **Christmas 2024 events**



**Quality Standards** During the year we successfully achieved revision of the BSI ISO: 9001:2015 in July 2024

## **SECTION 6: Structure, Governance and Management**

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### **Structure**

Stepping Stones NI is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, incorporated in 1996 and commenced delivering services for people with learning disabilities in Jan 1998.

Stepping Stones NI has capacity for a Board of 10 Trustees as per Articles of Association who meet 6 times a year and are responsible for setting the strategic direction and the policies in which the organisation is governed. There organisation has two sub committees of the board a Finance Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) and a Human Resource Governance and Nominations Committee (HRGN).

The Trustees serving from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31 March 2025 were as follows:

1. Michael Drayne (HRGN Committee)
2. Michael Scott ( Chair )
3. Cormac O Donnell
4. Sarah Johnston
5. Shirley Ann Smylie
6. Lisa Beers
7. Jenna Gardiner

### **Company Secretary**

A scheme of matters reserved for the Board is in place and the day-to-day responsibility for the implementation of the strategy and the provision of services is that of the Chief Officer Paula Jennings. The Chief Officer works alongside the Senior Team which has operational, service delivery, marketing and finance responsibilities.

The Trustees manage the business of the company unless they are subject to any restrictions imposed by the Companies Act, the articles or any special resolution. Trustees of the Board should include at least one member who is a parent or carer of a person with a learning disability or a learning difficulty.

Stepping Stones NI Chief Officer is Paula Jennings who has the sole responsibility of leading and implementing the strategies set by the board of Trustees.

## **Recruitment of Trustees**

### **Board Recruitment and Appointment**

The recruitment of new board members helps to strengthen the corporate governance of the organisation. Stepping Stones NI conducts a skills and experience analysis of the existing board prior to advertising or liaising in networks i.e. Institute of Directors IOD, Engage Executive Recruitment, business community, to ensure the desired skills and experience are required with a view to attract suitable candidates to apply who meet the requirements of the board and ultimately govern the charity.

Following an initial expression of interest submission and interview the suitability of candidates is assessed on how the candidate meets the criteria, what skills and influence they bring to the board and how their experience and attributes fit with the organisational culture and vision and what they hope to achieve in the role. Following meeting with the Chair and Chief Officer a recommendation for the appointment of new Trustees is placed at HRGN Committee. This Committee will make the recommendation to the full board for approval and appointment as a Trustee of Stepping Stones NI.

The Office Bearers of the Company are appointed at the first meeting of the Board of Trustees after the annual general meeting. All new members are elected to the board at the AGM. A Trustee is on the Board for a period of 3 years where upon such members must retire but may be eligible for re-election. Trustees shall be elected at the annual general meeting AGM by the members present.

### **Trustee Induction and Training**

New Trustees undergo an induction to brief them on their role as a Trustee of the company. New Trustees are provided with information to brief them on their legal obligations under charity and company law i.e. the content of the Articles of Association, the strategy and recent set of end of year accounts. All New Trustees are formally inducted to the organisation with the Chief Officer with visits to all sites of the organisation.

### **Decision making within Stepping Stones NI**

The Board of Trustees comprises a - Chairperson and Trustees who bring a range of skills and experience appropriate to the requirements of the Board. They provide support to the Chief Officer and their purpose is to contribute to the effective governance of Stepping Stones NI promoting the vision, mission, aims and objectives of the

organisation. The full board of Trustees meets bi monthly with sub group meetings and full board meetings.

The Chief Officer provides a report to the Board of Trustees at each board meeting, with updates on key performance indicators of the organisation presented on a Balanced Score Card format. This ensures that the Board of Trustees are fully informed of activities, performance, and achievements of the organisation.

The chair of each subcommittee i.e FAR and HRGN reports to the board at each board meeting.

All members of the Board of Trustees give up their time voluntarily and receive no financial or other benefits from the organisation.

### **Risk Management**

The Finance Audit and Risk (FAR) sub group review corporate risk and financial information with reporting back to the Board of Directors. The corporate risk register details low, medium and high risk in the following areas – People, Operations and Financial which is continuously reviewed. Where appropriate mitigation steps are put in place to protect the organisation against risk.

The organisation has implemented the ISO quality standard 9001:2015 during the reporting period and was awarded reaccreditation following audit inspection.

## 7. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

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### FINANCIAL REVIEW 2024/2025

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS		2025	2024
Income increased by:	7.9%	2,253,774	2,074,894
Surplus increased significantly by:	46.6%	96,910	51,703
Reserves have strengthened by:	10.3%	944,657	847,747
Trading income rose by:	11.6%	472,927	417,985
Wages & salaries increased by:	7.9%	1,617,836	1,490,317
Spending on charitable activities up:	10%		
Staff increased by :	20%		
Cash reserves increased by:	3%		

As always, we strive to obtain value for money in all our purchases while trying to remain socially responsible. Consistently we are looking for savings, income generation and the tendering our services into the supply chain.

We would like to thank who invested in us during the year: Councils (LMP and catering provision), Westminster (UKSPF), South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SETRUST), companies, employers and individuals who generously supported us during this reporting period providing the financial support we need to deliver our services and programmes.

Thank you also to our staff team and volunteers who continuously go the extra mile and our customers who buy from our social business.

#### Objectives and policies

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it to several financial risks including credit risk, cash flow risk and liquidity risk. The use of financial derivatives is governed by the charity's policies approved by the board of Trustees, which provide written principles on the use of financial derivatives to manage these risks. The charity does not use derivative financial instruments for speculative purposes.

#### Reserves Policy

An extensive reserves base is essential for Stepping Stones NI to continue to manage risk and deliver its services and social enterprises. The Trustees of Stepping Stones NI wish to continue to build a general level of reserves (excluding tangible fixed assets) that has a target of six months of unrestricted expenditure.

Stepping Stones NI needs to maintain this level of reserve for the following:

- Cash flow to ensure amounts due to creditors and fulfilment of contracts and leases.
- Gaps and loss in funding provision
- Organisational wind up and redundancy pay
- New development plans for service delivery in the future.

Stepping Stones NI reserves can be understood under the following areas:

- Protected Funds: to sustain and support at least 6 months organisational costs.
- Designated Funds: to prepare for potential redundancy costs at the end of a funding cycle.
- Infrastructure Funds: to support the refurbishment and renewals of Stepping Stones NI social enterprises and assets.
- Opportunity Funds: to explore future opportunities and projects that benefit people with disabilities.

## **Cashflow**

Core funding activities are secured until March 2026 through Shared Prosperity Fund. Stepping Stones NI must ensure that adequate reserves are available to bridge any potential shortfall in funds and to allow enough time for replacement or additional funds to be found. Legally, Stepping Stones NI must be able to meet its debts as they fall due. Since restricted funds can only be used for the purpose for which they are given, Stepping Stones NI must always ensure that it can support at any given time (from its reserves cash or otherwise) viable and contracted programmes should it ever encounter difficulties. The cash reserves protected funds enables the organisation to meet its obligations for six months if no funding becomes available. Stepping Stones NI must also ensure that it is able to respond to any cashflow problems as a result in delays from either funders or debtors.

## **Plans for future periods**

The implementation of the organisation's strategy will support the growth and development of the charity and as such enhance the lives of and create a better future for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.

Stepping Stones NI will work to ensure that we continuously have opportunities to ensure continuation of service provision and opportunities for people with disabilities and through with barriers to learning into the future.

## **Cash flow risk**

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it primarily to regular payments from funders. This is carefully managed and monitored by the FAR committee.

## **Credit risk**

Stepping Stones NI principal financial assets are bank balances and cash, trade and other receivables, and investments. Stepping Stones NI credit risk is primarily attributable to its trade receivables.

Stepping Stones NI has no significant concentration of credit risk, with exposure spread over many counterparties and customers.

## **Liquidity risk**

To maintain liquidity to ensure that sufficient funds are available for ongoing operations and future developments.

## **Disclosure of information to auditor**

Each trustee has taken steps that they ought to have taken as a Trustee in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Charity's auditor is aware of that information. The Trustees confirm that there is no relevant information that they know of and of which they know the auditor is unaware.

## **Statement of Trustees Responsibilities**

The Trustees (who are the Directors of Stepping Stones NI for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom generally accepted Accounting Practice), including Financial Report Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare a financial statement 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 income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and the apply them consistently
- Observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is

inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statement comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Trustees 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.

**Valuing our Volunteers and donations.**

Stepping Stones NI values, the contribution that our volunteers bring to the organisation and the donations that we receive each year. We are grateful and thank them for their support which allow us to fulfil our charity objectives.

**Awards received during the period**

Chief Officer Paula Jennings Leader of the Year at Social Enterprise Awards NI and Highly commended at the Social Enterprise Uk Awards

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS RESPONSIBILITIES**

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2025. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

**By order of the board:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE** 4th December 2025

**DATE** 4th December 2025

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Stepping Stones NI (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 March 2025 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 *The financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2025 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

**Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC'S Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

**Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Trustees and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- sufficient accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

**Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, the trustees, who are also the directors of the charity for the purpose of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

**Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

The objectives of our audit in respect of fraud, are to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements due to fraud; to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud, through designing and implementing appropriate responses to those assessed risks; and to respond appropriately to instances of fraud or suspected fraud identified during the audit. However, the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both management and those charged with governance of the Charity.

Our approach was as follows:

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to the charity and considered that the most significant are the Companies Act 2006 and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102).
- Enquiry of management, those charged with governance and the entity's solicitors around actual and potential litigation and claims.
- Enquiry of entity staff in compliance functions to identify any instances of any non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

- Auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, and evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:


- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purposes of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

**Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditors' report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and its members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.



**LAWRENCE SHEARER F.C.A., Senior Statutory Auditor**  
**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF O'HARA SHEARER, Statutory Auditor**  
**O'HARA SHEARER**

**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**  
**AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**

547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Dated:** 4th December 2025

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

**Accounting Convention and Basis of Accounting**

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard which applies in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

**Going Concern**

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees' have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees' continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

**Income Recognition**

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

**Interest Receivable**

Interest on funds held is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

**Resources Expended**

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and is classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category.

Fundraising costs include the costs of advertising, producing publications, printing and mailing fundraising material, and staff costs in these areas.

Costs of charitable activities include direct expenditure incurred through operational activities.

Governance costs represent the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity which relate to the general running of the charity as opposed to those costs associated with fundraising or charitable activity.

**Fixed Assets**

All tangible fixed assets are recorded at cost.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Depreciation**

Depreciation is calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives at the following rates:

Freehold Property	2% straight line
Improvements to property	10% straight line
Fixtures and fittings	20% straight line
Computer equipment	25% straight line

**Investments**

Unlisted equity investments are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently measured at fair value. If fair value cannot be reliably measured, assets are measured at cost less impairment.

Listed investments are measured at fair value with changes in fair value being recognised in income or expenditure.

**Repairs and Renewals**

All repairs and renewals are written off as incurred

**Pension Costs**

The charity does currently operate a defined contribution pension scheme.

**Debtors and Prepayments**

Trade debtors and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered.

Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

**Creditors and Provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

**Financial Instruments**

The Charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

**Foreign Currencies**

Monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Exchange differences are taken into account in arriving at the net movement in funds.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Fund Accounting**

Unrestricted funds are general funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the charity unless the funds have been designated for other purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

Restricted funds are those given for use in a particular area or for specific purposes, the use of which is restricted to that area or purpose.

Endowment funds are subject to specific conditions by donors that the capital must be maintained by the charity.

The income received from funders depends on the charity meeting detailed criteria on expenses plans.

Grants given under such conditions are also given subject to them being obtained for in connection with the furtherance of the charity's aims and objectives.

Such income can be repayable to the funder if such expenses plans and criteria are not met.

Such income is only deferred when the donor specifies that the grant/donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Income from charitable activities includes income received under contract or where entitlement to grant funding is subject to specific performance conditions is recognised as earned as the related goods/services are provided.

Grant income included in this category provides funding to support performance activities and is recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Income is deferred when: fees/performance related grants are received in advance of the performance/event to which they relate.

**Reserves Policy**

Stepping Stones NI reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained for a period of at least 3 to 6 months in the event of major funding streams ending. The reserves policy also takes account of covering costs in the event of closure, to cover redundancies, rents, and fees that are due including statutory audit fees. It also takes account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time.

Stepping Stones NI maintain unrestricted reserves if accrued should be used for the purposes which meet the aims and objectives of Stepping Stones NI. The board should monitor and review the amount of unrestricted reserves monthly in addition to the level of any restricted reserves.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (incorporating the income and expenditure account)**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

	NOTES	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	TOTAL 2025 £	TOTAL 2024 £
<b>INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:</b>						
Donations and legacies	1	12,752	-	-	12,752	14,975
Income from investments	2	15,431	-	-	15,431	9,872
Income from charitable activities	3	485,262	1,235,744	-	1,721,006	1,575,312
Income from other trading activities	4	489,585	15,000	-	504,585	474,735
<b>TOTAL INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS</b>		<b>1,003,030</b>	<b>1,250,744</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,253,774</b>	<b>2,074,894</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>						
Expenditure on raising funds	5	155,208	-	-	155,208	166,762
Expenditure on charitable activities	6	681,659	1,319,997	-	2,001,656	1,856,429
Other expenditure		-	-	-	-	-
Net gains/(losses) on investments		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		<b>836,867</b>	<b>1,319,997</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,156,864</b>	<b>2,023,191</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>166,163</b>	<b>(69,253)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>96,910</b>	<b>51,703</b>
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-	-
<b>NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS</b>		<b>166,163</b>	<b>(69,253)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>96,910</b>	<b>51,703</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>						
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>		<b>707,963</b>	<b>139,784</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>847,747</b>	<b>796,044</b>
Prior year adjustment		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>874,126</b>	<b>70,531</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>944,657</b>	<b>847,747</b>

**The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses in the year and therefore a  
Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses has not been prepared**

**All of the above amounts relate to continuing activities**

The accompanying accounting policies and the notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 31ST MARCH 2025**

	NOTES	2025 £	2024 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets	9	323,759	342,933
Investments	10	-	-
		323,759	342,933
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Stocks		12,125	11,424
Debtors and prepayments	12	193,344	79,028
Cash at bank	11	709,701	690,882
Cash in hand		3,459	1,074
		918,629	782,408
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(144,607)	(98,948)
		774,022	683,460
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		774,022	683,460
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT ASSETS/( LIABILITIES )</b>		1,097,781	1,026,393
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	14	(153,124)	(178,646)
		944,657	847,747
<b>NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		944,657	847,747
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
<b>ENDOWMENT FUNDS</b>			
		-	-
<b>UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	874,126	707,963
<b>RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	70,531	139,784
		944,657	847,747
		944,657	847,747

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS :

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
 DIRECTOR

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
 DIRECTOR

DATE 4th December 2025

DATE 4th December 2025

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

	NOTES	2025 £	2024 £
<b>CASHFLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Cash generated from operations	16	38,156	168,666
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities		38,156	168,666
<b>Investing activities</b>			
Investment income		-	-
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	9	(17,212)	(11,590)
Acquisition of investments	10	-	-
Amounts owed between funds		-	-
Disposal of investments		-	-
Disposal of tangible fixed assets		260	-
Net cash from investing activities		(16,952)	(11,590)
Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year		21,204	157,076
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		691,956	534,880
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	11	713,160	691,956
Relating to:			
Cash at bank and in hand	11	713,160	691,956

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**1. DONATIONS AND LEGACIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
Donations	12,752	-	12,752	14,975	-	14,975
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>12,752</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>12,752</u>	<u>14,975</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>14,975</u>

**2. INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
Income from UK listed investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income from cash	15,431	-	15,431	9,872	-	9,872
	<u>15,431</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>15,431</u>	<u>9,872</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>9,872</u>

**3. INCOME FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	322,817	-	322,817	302,789	-	302,789
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	-	1,155,000	1,155,000	-	1,100,000	1,100,000
Baily Thomas Charitable Fund	-	10,000	10,000	-	-	-
The Rank Foundation	-	30,222	30,222	-	-	-
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	152,835	15,000	167,835	-	26,920	26,920
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council	9,460	-	9,460	-	104,033	104,033
Capital Grant Released	-	25,522	25,522	-	25,522	25,522
Sundry income	150	-	150	16,048	-	16,048
Less: Deferred Income (See Note 12)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>485,262</u>	<u>1,235,744</u>	<u>1,721,006</u>	<u>318,837</u>	<u>1,256,475</u>	<u>1,575,312</u>

**4. INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
Trading Income	472,927	-	472,927	417,985	-	417,985
Fundraising	3,653	15,000	18,653	27,375	19,961	47,336
Training Fees	4,080	-	4,080	3,458	-	3,458
Other Income	8,925	-	8,925	5,956	-	5,956
	<u>489,585</u>	<u>15,000</u>	<u>504,585</u>	<u>454,774</u>	<u>19,961</u>	<u>474,735</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**5. EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
Direct expenditure	155,208	-	155,208	165,501	1,261	166,762

**6. EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2025 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £
Direct expenditure	609,422	1,199,687	1,809,109	542,687	1,098,697	1,641,384
Support Costs and Governance costs	72,237	120,310	192,547	124,898	90,147	215,045
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>681,659</b>	<b>1,319,997</b>	<b>2,001,656</b>	<b>667,585</b>	<b>1,188,844</b>	<b>1,856,429</b>

**7. NET GAINS/(LOSSES) ON INVESTMENTS**

Net (gains)/losses on investments			-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

<b>7. NET (OUTGOING)/ INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>This is stated after charging/(crediting)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditors remuneration	3,996	4,062
Depreciation	36,386	42,510
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

<b>8. SALARY COSTS AND EMOLUMENTS</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Total staff costs were as follows:		
Wages and salaries - key management personnel	245,102	232,934
Wages and salaries - other staff	1,143,731	1,056,414
Employer social security costs - key management personnel	61,874	56,500
Employer social security costs - other staff	167,129	150,470
Employer social security costs - SMP & SPP Recoverable	-	(6,001)
Employer social security costs - Employment Allowance	-	-
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
	1,617,836	1,490,317

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
	105	87
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

**Trustees' remuneration and benefits**

There was no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 31st March 2025. (2024: £Nil)

**Trustees' Expenses**

There were no trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 31st March 2025. (2024: £Nil)

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Freehold Property £	Improvements to Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST</b>					
As at 1st April 2024	563,028	42,335	190,470	60,006	855,839
Additions	-	-	8,113	9,099	17,212
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-
As at 31st March 2025	<u>563,028</u>	<u>42,335</u>	<u>198,583</u>	<u>69,105</u>	<u>873,051</u>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>					
As at 1st April 2024	285,407	17,679	157,455	52,365	512,906
Charge for year	11,261	4,233	14,725	6,167	36,386
Eliminated on disposal					-
As at 31st March 2025	<u>296,668</u>	<u>21,912</u>	<u>172,180</u>	<u>58,532</u>	<u>549,292</u>
Net book value 2025	<u>266,360</u>	<u>20,423</u>	<u>26,403</u>	<u>10,573</u>	<u>323,759</u>
Net book value 2024	<u>277,621</u>	<u>24,656</u>	<u>33,015</u>	<u>7,641</u>	<u>342,933</u>

**11. CASH AT BANK**

	2025 £	2024 £
Danske Bank - Current Accounts	95,370	126,784
Danske Bank - Investment Accounts	614,331	564,098
	<u>709,701</u>	<u>690,882</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**12. DEBTORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2025	2024
	£	£
Trade debtors	199,556	57,684
Other debtors	-	14,191
Prepayments	(6,212)	7,153
	193,344	79,028

**13. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2025	2024
	£	£
Bank loans and overdrafts ( <i>See Note 17</i> )	-	-
Trade creditors	54,299	34,093
Value Added Tax	-	-
Social security costs and other taxes	-	-
Other creditors	-	-
Deferred income	-	-
Sundry creditors and accrued expenses	90,308	64,855
	144,607	98,948

**14. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR**

	2025	2024
	£	£
Bank loans	-	-
Deferred capital funding	153,124	178,646
	153,124	178,646

**15. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS**

	Tangible Fixed Assets	Investments	Debtors and Prepayments	Cash at Bank and in Hand	Creditors and Accruals	Transfers between Funds	2025	2024
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted Funds	323,759	-	205,469	489,505	(144,607)	-	874,126	707,963
Restricted Funds	-	-	-	223,655	(153,124)	-	70,531	139,784
Total Funds	323,759	-	205,469	713,160	(297,731)	-	944,657	847,747

**16. RECONCILIATION OF OPERATING PROFIT TO NET CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES**

	2025	2024
	£	£
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	96,910	51,703
Depreciation	36,386	42,510
Movement in stocks	(701)	(843)
Movement in debtors	(114,316)	116,698
Movement in creditors	20,137	(41,402)
(Gain)/Loss on investments	-	-
(Profit)/Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets	(260)	-
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities	38,156	168,666

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

**17. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS**

	Opening Balance £	Income £	Expenditure £	Net Movement in Funds 2025 £	Transfers between Funds £	Prior year Adjustment £	2025 £	2024 £
Unrestricted Funds	707,963	1,003,030	(836,867)	166,163	-	-	874,126	707,963
Restricted Funds	139,784	1,250,744	(1,319,997)	(69,253)	-	-	70,531	139,784
	<b>847,747</b>	<b>2,253,774</b>	<b>(2,156,864)</b>	<b>96,910</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>944,657</b>	<b>847,747</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025**

<b>18. UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2024	707,963	789,025
Incoming resources for the year	1,003,030	798,458
Resources expended for the year	(836,867)	(833,086)
Transfer between funds	-	(46,434)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2025	<u>874,126</u>	<u>707,963</u>

<b>19. RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2024	139,784	7,019
Incoming resources for the year	1,250,744	1,276,436
Resources expended for the year	(1,319,997)	(1,190,105)
Transfer between funds	-	46,434
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2025	<u>70,531</u>	<u>139,784</u>

**20. DESIGNATED FUNDS**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

**21. LEGAL STATUS**

Stepping Stones NI is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up.

Stepping Stones NI is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, Charity Number 100727. Date of registration 9th December 2014.

Stepping Stones NI is a recognised Charity within the definition of Section 360(3) Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 by the Commissioners of the HM Revenue & Customs.

**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Accounts

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

( A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

**COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 031411**

**CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 100727**

**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
**547 FALLS ROAD**  
**BELFAST**  
**BT11 9AB**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**OFFICERS AND OTHER INFORMATION**

**Directors**

Michael Scott (Chair)  
Kenneth Alderice (Resigned 2nd February 2024)  
Karen Carmichael (Resigned 5th March 2024)  
Kieran Corrigan (Resigned 28th February 2024)  
Michael Drayne  
Brenda McMullan (Resigned 10th August 2023)  
Cormac O'Donnell  
Lisa Beers (Appointed 28th February 2024)  
Sarah Johnston (Appointed 28th February 2024)  
Shirley Smylie (Appointed 28th February 2024)

**Secretary**

Paula Jennings

**Registered Office**

Stepping Stones NI  
39 Seymour Street  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT27 4SY

**Auditors**

O'Hara Shearer  
Chartered Accountants  
& Statutory Auditors  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Solicitors**

Donaldson McConnell & Co  
Solicitors  
8-10 Graham Gardens  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT28 1YS

**Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow Street  
Lisburn  
BT28 1YS

**Company Registration Number**

NI 031411

**Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number**

NIC 100727

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST 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 regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2024. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

**By order of the board:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE**    5th December 2024

**DATE**    5th December 2024

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Stepping Stones NI (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 *The financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

**Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC'S Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

**Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Trustees and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- sufficient accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

**Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, the trustees, who are also the directors of the charity for the purpose of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

**Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

The objectives of our audit in respect of fraud, are to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements due to fraud; to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud, through designing and implementing appropriate responses to those assessed risks; and to respond appropriately to instances of fraud or suspected fraud identified during the audit. However, the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both management and those charged with governance of the Charity.

Our approach was as follows:

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to the charity and considered that the most significant are the Companies Act 2006 and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102).
- Enquiry of management, those charged with governance and the entity's solicitors around actual and potential litigation and claims.
- Enquiry of entity staff in compliance functions to identify any instances of any non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

- Auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, and evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

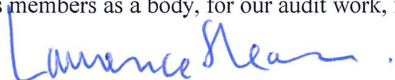
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purposes of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

**Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditors' report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and its members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.



**LAWRENCE SHEARER F.C.A., Senior Statutory Auditor**  
**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF O'HARA SHEARER, Statutory Auditor**  
**O'HARA SHEARER**

**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**  
**AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**

547 Falls Road

Belfast

BT11 9AB

**Dated:** 5th December 2024

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

**Accounting Convention and Basis of Accounting**

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard which applies in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

**Going Concern**

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees' have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees' continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

**Income Recognition**

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

**Interest Receivable**

Interest on funds held is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

**Resources Expended**

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and is classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category.

Fundraising costs include the costs of advertising, producing publications, printing and mailing fundraising material, and staff costs in these areas.

Costs of charitable activities include direct expenditure incurred through operational activities.

Governance costs represent the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity which relate to the general running of the charity as opposed to those costs associated with fundraising or charitable activity.

**Fixed Assets**

All tangible fixed assets are recorded at cost.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Depreciation**

Depreciation is calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives at the following rates:

Freehold Property	2% straight line
Improvements to property	10% straight line
Fixtures and fittings	20% straight line
Computer equipment	25% straight line

**Investments**

Unlisted equity investments are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently measured at fair value. If fair value cannot be reliably measured, assets are measured at cost less impairment.

Listed investments are measured at fair value with changes in fair value being recognised in income or expenditure.

**Repairs and Renewals**

All repairs and renewals are written off as incurred

**Pension Costs**

The charity does currently operate a defined contribution pension scheme.

**Debtors and Prepayments**

Trade debtors and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

**Creditors and Provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

**Financial Instruments**

The Charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

**Foreign Currencies**

Monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Exchange differences are taken into account in arriving at the net movement in funds.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Fund Accounting**

Unrestricted funds are general funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the charity unless the funds have been designated for other purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

Restricted funds are those given for use in a particular area or for specific purposes, the use of which is restricted to that area or purpose.

Endowment funds are subject to specific conditions by donors that the capital must be maintained by the charity.

The income received from funders depends on the charity meeting detailed criteria on expenses plans.

Grants given under such conditions are also given subject to them being obtained for in connection with the furtherance of the charity's aims and objectives.

Such income can be repayable to the funder if such expenses plans and criteria are not met.

Such income is only deferred when the donor specifies that the grant/donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Income from charitable activities includes income received under contract or where entitlement to grant funding is subject to specific performance conditions is recognised as earned as the related goods/services are provided.

Grant income included in this category provides funding to support performance activities and is recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Income is deferred when: fees/performance related grants are received in advance of the performance/event to which they relate.

**Reserves Policy**

Stepping Stones NI reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained for a period of at least 3 to 6 months in the event of major funding streams ending. The reserves policy also takes account of covering costs in the event of closure, to cover redundancies, rents, and fees that are due including statutory audit fees. It also takes account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time.

Stepping Stones NI maintain unrestricted reserves if accrued should be used for the purposes which meet the aims and objectives of Stepping Stones NI. The board should monitor and review the amount of unrestricted reserves monthly in addition to the level of any restricted reserves.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (incorporating the income and expenditure account)**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	TOTAL 2024 £	TOTAL 2023 £
<b>INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:</b>						
Donations and legacies	1	14,975	-	-	14,975	5,673
Income from investments	2	9,872	-	-	9,872	1,216
Income from charitable activities	3	318,837	1,256,475	-	1,575,312	1,309,431
Income from other trading activities	4	454,774	19,961	-	474,735	392,571
<b>TOTAL INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS</b>		<b>798,458</b>	<b>1,276,436</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,074,894</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>						
Expenditure on raising funds	5	165,501	1,261	-	166,762	118,303
Expenditure on charitable activities	6	667,585	1,188,844	-	1,856,429	1,684,707
Other expenditure		-	-	-	-	-
Net gains/(losses) on investments		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		<b>833,086</b>	<b>1,190,105</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,023,191</b>	<b>1,803,010</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(34,628)</b>	<b>86,331</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>
Transfers between funds		(46,434)	46,434	-	-	-
<b>NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS</b>		<b>(81,062)</b>	<b>132,765</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>						
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>		<b>789,025</b>	<b>7,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>
Prior year adjustment		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>707,963</b>	<b>139,784</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>847,747</b>	<b>796,044</b>

**The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses in the year and therefore a Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses has not been prepared**

**All of the above amounts relate to continuing activities**

The accompanying accounting policies and the notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	2024 £	2023 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets	9	342,933	373,853
Investments	10	-	-
		342,933	373,853
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Stocks		11,424	10,581
Debtors and prepayments	12	79,028	195,726
Cash at bank	11	690,882	533,059
Cash in hand		1,074	1,821
		782,408	741,187
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(98,948)	(114,828)
		683,460	626,359
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		683,460	626,359
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT ASSETS/( LIABILITIES )</b>		1,026,393	1,000,212
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	14	(178,646)	(204,168)
		847,747	796,044
<b>NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		847,747	796,044
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
<b>ENDOWMENT FUNDS</b>			
		-	-
<b>UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	707,963	789,025
<b>RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	139,784	7,019
		847,747	796,044
		847,747	796,044

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS :

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
 DIRECTOR

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
 DIRECTOR

DATE 5th December 2024

DATE 5th December 2024

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	2024 £	2023 £
<b>CASHFLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Cash generated from operations	16	168,666	(241,754)
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities		168,666	(241,754)
<b>Investing activities</b>			
Investment income		-	-
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	9	(11,590)	(34,423)
Acquisition of investments	10	-	-
Amounts owed between funds		-	-
Disposal of investments		-	-
Disposal of tangible fixed assets		-	-
Net cash from investing activities		(11,590)	(34,423)
Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year		157,076	(276,177)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		534,880	811,057
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	11	691,956	534,880
Relating to:			
Cash at bank and in hand	11	691,956	534,880

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**1. DONATIONS AND LEGACIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Donations	14,975	-	14,975	5,673	-	5,673
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-	-
	14,975	-	14,975	5,673	-	5,673

**2. INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Income from UK listed investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income from cash	9,872	-	9,872	1,216	-	1,216
	9,872	-	9,872	1,216	-	1,216

**3. INCOME FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	302,789	-	302,789	-	291,312	291,312
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	-	1,100,000	1,100,000	-	-	-
Stepping Stones to Employment - ESF- DfE - DfC	-	-	-	-	866,530	866,530
Business Services Organisation - Special Recognition Grant	-	-	-	-	35,018	35,018
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	-	26,920	26,920	-	23,156	23,156
Newry, Mourne and Down Council	-	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Ards and North Down Council	-	-	-	-	40,558	40,558
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council	-	104,033	104,033	-	15,483	15,483
Capital Grant Released	-	25,522	25,522	-	25,522	25,522
Sundry income	16,048	-	16,048	1,852	-	1,852
Less: Deferred Income (See Note 12)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	318,837	1,256,475	1,575,312	1,852	1,307,579	1,309,431

**4. INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Trading Income	417,985	-	417,985	334,556	-	334,556
Fundraising	27,375	19,961	47,336	1,058	53,385	54,443
Training Fees	3,458	-	3,458	-	3,572	3,572
Other Income	5,956	-	5,956	-	-	-
	454,774	19,961	474,735	335,614	56,957	392,571

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**5. EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Costs of trading income	146,656	-	146,656	118,237	-	118,237
Bad debts	6	-	6	66	-	66
Promotional and fundraising costs	18,839	1,261	20,100	-	-	-
	165,501	1,261	166,762	118,303	-	118,303

**6. EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Wages and salaries ( <i>See Note 8</i> )	416,308	873,040	1,289,348	80,776	1,169,845	1,250,621
Social security costs ( <i>See Note 8</i> )	61,688	139,281	200,969	31,807	128,683	160,490
Equipment hiring and leasing	4,403	4,403	8,806	8,732	-	8,732
Computer and IT costs	3,749	11,247	14,996	15,796	-	15,796
Staff training and welfare	15,779	15,780	31,559	31,718	-	31,718
Staff travel and trainee costs	3,189	3,517	6,706	4,097	6,145	10,242
Client training and expenses	10,936	10,937	21,873	-	10,955	10,955
Recruitment costs	-	-	-	3,385	6,715	10,100
Academies and market partnership costs	-	11,236	11,236	-	-	-
Events and hospitality costs	3,733	3,734	7,467	2,513	-	2,513
Youth service expenses	3,343	-	3,343	-	3,222	3,222
(Profit)/ Loss on disposal of fixed assets	-	-	-	-	-	-
Depreciation ( <i>See Note 9</i> )	16,988	25,522	42,510	47,558	-	47,558
Sundry expenses	2,571	-	2,571	3,081	-	3,081
	542,687	1,098,697	1,641,384	229,463	1,325,565	1,555,028

**Support Costs and Governance costs**

Telephone and internet	3,216	5,513	8,729	3,018	4,526	7,544
Rent payable	50,823	44,500	95,323	35,317	10,000	45,317
Rent payable - arrears reduction settlement	-	-	-	(31,100)	-	(31,100)
Water rates	1,978	1,084	3,062	2,037	-	2,037
Insurance	4,122	4,122	8,244	7,675	-	7,675
Light and heat	17,524	19,502	37,026	14,951	22,426	37,377
Printing, postage and stationery	4,163	417	4,580	4,001	-	4,001
Repairs and maintenance	24,880	1,379	26,259	22,060	-	22,060
Cleaning, consumables and laundry	3,565	-	3,565	4,325	-	4,325
Advertising and promotions	-	-	-	4,016	-	4,016
Audit fees	2,031	2,031	4,062	4,965	-	4,965
Accountancy fees	2,100	1,500	3,600	4,214	-	4,214
Legal and other professional fees	7,029	7,029	14,058	14,496	-	14,496
Subscriptions and licences	3,070	3,070	6,140	2,006	-	2,006
Bank interest and charges	397	-	397	746	-	746
	124,898	90,147	215,045	92,727	36,952	129,679

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

**667,585    1,188,844    1,856,429    322,190    1,362,517    1,684,707**

**7. NET GAINS/(LOSSES) ON INVESTMENTS**

Net (gains)/losses on investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

<b>7. NET (OUTGOING)/ INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>This is stated after charging/(crediting)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditors remuneration	4,062	4,965
Depreciation	42,510	47,558
	<hr/> <hr/>	

<b>8. SALARY COSTS AND EMOLUMENTS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Total staff costs were as follows:		
Wages and salaries - key management personnel	232,934	191,178
Wages and salaries - other staff	1,056,414	1,059,443
Employer social security costs - key management personnel	56,500	36,049
Employer social security costs - other staff	150,470	153,110
Employer social security costs - SMP & SPP Recoverable	(6,001)	(23,669)
Employer social security costs - Employment Allowance	-	(5,000)
	<hr/> <hr/>	
	1,490,317	1,411,111
	<hr/> <hr/>	

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
	87	93
	<hr/> <hr/>	

**Trustees' remuneration and benefits**

There was no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 31st March 2024. (2023: £Nil)

**Trustees' Expenses**

There were no trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 31st March 2024. (2023: £Nil)

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Freehold Property £	Improvements to Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST</b>					
As at 1st April 2023	563,028	42,335	183,513	55,373	844,249
Additions	-	-	6,957	4,633	11,590
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-
As at 31st March 2024	<u>563,028</u>	<u>42,335</u>	<u>190,470</u>	<u>60,006</u>	<u>855,839</u>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>					
As at 1st April 2023	274,146	13,446	136,103	46,701	470,396
Charge for year	11,261	4,233	21,352	5,664	42,510
Eliminated on disposal					-
As at 31st March 2024	<u>285,407</u>	<u>17,679</u>	<u>157,455</u>	<u>52,365</u>	<u>512,906</u>
Net book value 2024	<u>277,621</u>	<u>24,656</u>	<u>33,015</u>	<u>7,641</u>	<u>342,933</u>
Net book value 2023	<u>288,882</u>	<u>28,889</u>	<u>47,410</u>	<u>8,672</u>	<u>373,853</u>

**11. CASH AT BANK**

	2024 £	2023 £
Danske Bank - Current Accounts	126,784	151,043
Danske Bank - Investment Accounts	564,098	382,016
	<u>690,882</u>	<u>533,059</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**12. DEBTORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Trade debtors	57,684	19,285
Other debtors	14,191	171,930
Prepayments	7,153	4,511
	<u>79,028</u>	<u>195,726</u>

**13. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Bank loans and overdrafts ( <i>See Note 17</i> )	-	-
Trade creditors	34,093	37,569
Value Added Tax	-	(11)
Social security costs and other taxes	-	7,016
Other creditors	-	3,662
Deferred income	-	23,356
Sundry creditors and accrued expenses	64,855	43,236
	<u>98,948</u>	<u>114,828</u>

**14. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Bank loans	-	-
Deferred capital funding	178,646	204,168
	<u>178,646</u>	<u>204,168</u>

**15. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS**

	Tangible Fixed Assets	Investments	Debtors and Prepayments	Cash at Bank and in Hand	Creditors and Accruals	Transfers between Funds	2024	2023
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted Funds	342,933	-	76,261	434,151	(98,948)	(46,434)	707,963	789,025
Restricted Funds	-	-	14,191	257,805	(178,646)	46,434	139,784	7,019
Total Funds	<u>342,933</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>90,452</u>	<u>691,956</u>	<u>(277,594)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>847,747</u>	<u>796,044</u>

**16. RECONCILIATION OF OPERATING PROFIT TO NET CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	51,703	(94,119)
Depreciation	42,510	47,558
Movement in stocks	(843)	(2,347)
Movement in debtors	116,698	(27,347)
Movement in creditors	(41,402)	(165,499)
(Gain)/Loss on investments	-	-
(Profit)/Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets	-	-
<b>Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities</b>	<u><b>168,666</b></u>	<u><b>(241,754)</b></u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**17. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS**

	Opening Balance	Income	Expenditure	Net Movement in Funds 2024	Transfers between Funds	Prior year Adjustment	2024	2023
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted Funds	789,025	798,458	(833,086)	(34,628)	(46,434)	-	707,963	789,025
Restricted Funds	7,019	1,276,436	(1,190,105)	86,331	46,434	-	139,784	7,019
	<b>796,044</b>	<b>2,074,894</b>	<b>(2,023,191)</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>847,747</b>	<b>796,044</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

<b>18. UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2023	789,025	885,163
Incoming resources for the year	798,458	344,355
Resources expended for the year	(833,086)	(440,493)
Transfer between funds	(46,434)	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2024	<u>707,963</u>	<u>789,025</u>

<b>19. RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2023	7,019	5,000
Incoming resources for the year	1,276,436	1,364,536
Resources expended for the year	(1,190,105)	(1,362,517)
Transfer between funds	46,434	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2024	<u>139,784</u>	<u>7,019</u>

**20. DESIGNATED FUNDS**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

**21. LEGAL STATUS**

Stepping Stones NI is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up.

Stepping Stones NI is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, Charity Number 100727. Date of registration 9th December 2014.

Stepping Stones NI is a recognised Charity within the definition of Section 360(3) Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 by the Commissioners of the HM Revenue & Customs.

**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Annual report

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# Annual Trustee Report

## 1 April 2023 to

## 31 March 2024



# Celebrating 25 years

**Section 1: The organisation**

**Section 2 : Who we are**

**Section 3 Our Purpose, mission and values**

**Section 4: Strategy for delivery**

**Section 5: Performance and achievements**

**Section 6 : Financials**

## **SECTION 1- The Organisation**

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### **Reference and Administrative Details**

Registered Company number NI031411 (Northern Ireland)

### **Registered Charity Number**

100727

### **VAT Number**

701 428570

### **Date of Incorporation**

October 1996

### **Registered Office**

39 Seymour St

Lisburn

Co Antrim

BT27 4SY

### **Trustees**

Michael Drayne

Michael Scott Chair

Cormac O Donnell ( Co-opted March 2023)

Karen Carmichael (resigned March 2024)

Kieran Corrigan (resigned March 2024)

Ken Alderdice (January 2024)

Sarah Johnston (February 2024)

Shirley Ann Smylie (February 2024)

Lisa Beers (February 2024)

**Company Secretary and Chief Officer**

Paula Jennings

**Independent Auditors**

Laurance Shearer: O'Hara Shearer

547 Falls Road, Belfast BT11 9AB

**Solicitor**

Donaldson Mc Connell & Co

8-10 Graham Gardens

Lisburn Co Antrim BT28 1XE

**Bankers**

Danske Bank

62-66 Bow St

Lisburn BT28 1YS

## SECTION 2- Who we are

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Stepping Stones NI is an award-winning charitable organisation and company limited by guarantee that provides training and employment services for people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism who often are furthest away from the labour market. We do this in conjunction with social enterprise activity. The company was first established in 1996 to fill the gap in service provision for people with learning disabilities who had no access to training to advance their skills towards employment, education and volunteering. Stepping Stones NI opened its doors in January 1998 providing training and supported opportunities for people with severe learning disabilities. In 2023 Stepping Stones NI celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

In the reporting period from **1<sup>st</sup> April 2023- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024** we continued to deliver our range of services providing opportunities for people with disabilities to advance their personal and employability skills and overall health and wellbeing, towards a life more fulfilled.

The services and social enterprises at Stepping Stones NI during the reporting period included:

- **Youth Service:** engaging with young people aged 16-24 who were not in any form of training or employment through a range of employability and personal development activities.
- **Training:** offering training and outreach training to people in various courses leading to the attainment of accredited qualifications including; customer service, health and safety, work appropriate behaviour, catering, financial literacy, and mental health etc.
- **Employment Service and Academies:** providing employment support to people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. This included help with writing CVs, application form preparation, interviews preparation and support in the workplace with employers. We also delivered Disability Awareness Training for five local employers.
- **The Courtyard Cafe:** Social enterprise Café in Lisburn delivering quality training for people with learning disabilities in hospitality, customer service and food preparation.
- **Pink Elephant Cards:** Social enterprise specialising in bespoke wedding stationery and greeting cards made by people with learning disabilities.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Cafe:** social enterprise providing volunteering opportunities to adults with learning disability as well as an outside catering service.
- **Stepping Stones NI Picture Framing:** Social Enterprise offering training in picture framing and customer service to people with learning disabilities.

Recognised by the Fine Art Trade Guild as quality provider of framing services and staff trained to Guild Commended Framers standard.

- **The Gatelodge Café:** Social enterprise Café in Newtownards delivering quality training for people with learning disabilities in hospitality, customer service and food preparation.
- **Navigation House:** programme for young people to advance their skills in horticulture up to Level 1 OCNNI and to engage health and wellbeing activities

Stepping Stones NI ensures that people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties have the support and opportunity to develop their skills, realise their talents, try new things, attain accredited qualifications, live as active citizens in their community and find employment.

We develop quality training and employment services for people with a variety of learning abilities who require the support they need to advance their training and gain the support to gain employment. The work during the delivery period was supported by UK Shared Prosperity Fund, contracts including Health Trust Contracts and Department for Communities funding to deliver local labour market partnerships, as well as income generated through our social enterprises which is reinvested back into the organisation to deliver create our social impact.

Stepping Stones NI secured funding under the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund by collaborating with four other charities, Triangle Housing Association Limited, AEL Ltd, CAN Ltd and Appleby Trust to form a consortium named PROSPER. The PROSPER programme commenced delivery on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 for a period of two years .

In 2023 we celebrated our 25 year anniversary of the organisation with a gala event held in November 2023 at La Mon House and Country Club Belfast . This was hosted by Cate Conway and 300 invited guests attended to celebrate the organisation's birthday. Stepping Stones NI event received sponsorship from suppliers and business we supported the organisation for the event.

## **SECTION 3- Our Vision, Values and Objectives**

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Stepping Stones NI is a Limited Company with charitable status that has been delivering services since January 1998. It provides quality training and employment services for people with a range of disabilities who often are furthest removed from the labour market, helping those people to find a job if it is their ambition.

### **Our Vision**

A socially enriched world where every individual can take proud steps towards a life fulfilled

### **Our Purpose**

To nurture the potential of people with a disability to thrive in a socially inclusive society.

### **Our Values**

**Respect:** We respect everyone's right to a life more fulfilled and respect each other in the process

**Inspire:** We inspire employers and the wider community to see disability differently

**Empowering:** We empower each other to make a positive impact on the world and in the organisation, we work

Our Values drive our behaviours and govern our actions. They are at the heart of our Culture and define who we are, and how we present ourselves every day.

### **Our Behaviours**

**Driven:** We are driven, seizing every opportunity to create better lives

**Honest:** We are honest and always do the right thing

**Positively Charged:** We are positively charged and passionate about making things possible.

**Nurturing:** We Nurture all our People to be their best

**Quality focused:** We are quality focused, to always ensure the highest standard.

## **Our Culture**

People and Purpose are at the centre of everything that we do. Through our culture our values will be instilled throughout the organisation, making a positive difference to people's lives

Our team will work with purpose and passion to go the extra mile for our people.

## **Our Objectives**

- To develop services and social enterprises which will provide appropriate training opportunities leading to employment for adults with learning difficulties.
- To equip individuals participating in projects and services with knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualifications to enable progression to supported employment.
- To increase disability awareness amongst society.
- To promote independence, wellbeing and social inclusion amongst adults with learning difficulties participating in projects.
- To provide a quality service to stakeholders accessing Stepping Stones services and social enterprises.
- To promote cooperation and develop links with other relevant agencies to maximise opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

For the purposes of this report the expression "learning difficulty" shall include any learning disability, difficulties, and associated problem or those who appear on the autistic spectrum, a developmental disability of the mind, sensory impairment, acquired brain injury or mental health problem. Neurodiverse refers to is a term that has gained traction in recent years to describe people with disability/difficulties as having a brain that works differently from the average or "neurotypical" person.

## SECTION 4- Strategy for Delivery

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Our strategic focus for the next 4 years (2024 -2028) is to channel a more holistic approach to the delivery of our services and to seize every opportunity for our participants and trainees. We passionately believe that people with disabilities should have access to every opportunity that leads to a life more fulfilled. We will sustainably grow our services and social enterprises for purpose for people with a learning disability and barriers to learning



### Our Strategic Priorities

The board of Trustees met in March 2023 to review its Strategy with members of the senior management team of Stepping Stones NI. The revised strategic priorities are:

- 1. Quality:** Striving for excellence and the highest standard in all that we do
- 2. Team:** Attracting and developing a team of well skilled, confident, and professional people
- 3. Social Enterprise:** Building on and expanding social enterprises to grow our income always with a balance on our people and mindful of our Stepping Stones NI purpose.
- 4. Employment, Training and Youth Services and wellbeing:** Developing and delivering employment and training services to find jobs for people to prosper and live well.

**5. Technology:** Embracing technology to drive quality, performance and innovation.

**6. Sustainability:** Developing a more sustainable and responsible business model and financial sustainability with purpose at this core.

Stepping Stones NI was incorporated in 1996 and is established under Articles of Association which sets out the objects and powers of the company, and the company is governed under its Articles of Association. These articles were revised and updated during the reporting period by the board of Trustees and passed to the Charities Commission of Northern Ireland for review.

### **Our Public Benefit**

In shaping the strategy and objectives of Stepping Stones NI the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission NI guidance on public benefit including the commissions Public Benefit Reporting Document and confirm that they have complied with the requirements of section 4 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes to advance education, relieve unemployment and develop the capacity and skills of individuals aged 16 and over with learning disabilities and learning difficulties, are:

- to provide or assist in the provision of, programmes of education, including accredited and vocational training designed to assist the beneficiaries to lead to employment and volunteering opportunities and to enhance their personal development.
- to provide support and guidance to the beneficiaries in the transition towards employment.
- to establish and manage community-owned-business projects promoted by the company to create training and employment opportunities for the beneficiaries in benefit.
- to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

### **Our Benefits**

The organisation is committed to delivering services to people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties that assist in their development and personal progression leading to employment we do this through:

- The provision of a range of services and social enterprises that provide the opportunity for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties to gain qualifications leading to employment.
- The increased personal development and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Attainment of qualifications and skills development of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Youth service, training and employment service provide job support and delivery employer lead academies for people to gain volunteering and employment in the community.
- Social enterprises that provide a realistic working environment in which people can develop their work skills, gain qualifications and engage with customers thus increasing their self-esteem, confidence and independence.
- The development of programmes and services that will support people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties fulfil their full potential in society.

## SECTION 5- Achievements and Performance 2023/2024

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### Our Services

During 2023/2024 Stepping Stones NI our services continued to thrive with continued support from new funders, employers and stakeholders. We continued to deliver and build on our quality services that support people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism to develop their employability skills and achieve qualifications leading to employment. We did this across Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Belfast City Council areas.

We continued to deliver the provision of catering services at Lisburn Civic Centre, for Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, putting social enterprise at the heart of a community and civic space whilst generating income for the organisation.

### Employment Service

The Employment Service supports participants to gain employment/jobs and/or voluntary placements of their choice.

The employment service provided people with opportunities to avail of:

- Innovative pre-employment “**BE IN WORK**” academy training courses with industry specific companies that led to a paid job for participants. We embedded our newly branded “**BE IN WORK**” Academies into the Stepping Stones to Employment delivery model within the new PROSPER consortium, to address local labour market skills shortages, as well as meeting individual employer training requirements.
- Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 there were:
  - 26 industry lead employment academies
  - 401 referrals from participants who were economically inactive/ with long term complex health needs /disability
  - 112 jobs secured for people accessing our service.
- The academies were aimed at labour market employment gaps where we worked with premier employees in the following industries: construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and catering, IT and customer service.
- Access to a range of training courses to help people prepare for work, including; CV building, job search, customer services skills, effective communication skills and essential skills
- Tailored career guidance to help people find a new job and career.

- A broadened curriculum to embed wider societal inclusion topics such as, LGBTQIA+, Mental Health First Aid to promote equality and provide a safe space for participants.

The Employment Service delivered its services across council areas noted below under the UK Shared Prosperity funded, PROSPER programme.

- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Belfast City Council

Stepping Stones NI is delighted and proud to report that on our first year under UK Shared Prosperity Fund- PROSPER Programme we delivered:

- **112 people gained paid employment**
- **401 economically inactive people with a disability or health condition participated in employment support: exceeded target by 105%.**
- **293 accredited qualifications were gained by our participants**

Stepping Stones NI employment team continued to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes of people with disabilities in our communities. The team were instrumental in assisting employers and business to support our people to achieve employment and volunteering dreams.

## Stepping Stones NI “BE IN WORK” Academies



Our Employer partnerships are very extremely important to us, and we are grateful to our employers for the opportunity to be a recruitment partner to ensure increased inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Our employer academies provide accredited training in a group setting to a maximum of 15 people leading to a supported interview leading to employment for ring fenced jobs.

## What our employer partners said

“Thank you for the commitment and for getting us good people who want to work!”

“Thank you for all the support. Constant communication, great understanding and real dedication to their jobs. They are an asset to Stepping Stones!”

“The experience has been great and I will definitely tell other colleagues about it and if they could benefit from it”

“100% retention is a big thing for us and we know have staff that are committed”

“Definitely, the academies are a great concept and when launching new store I am sure Hendersons will continue to partner with the Stepping Stones NI ”

## What our participants said

“The employment academy gave me a better insight into health and safety and etiquette for interviews and in person scenarios.”

“The employment academy got me back into employment again and got me my SIA licence again and gave me hope again.”

“I feel more comfortable interacting with people which is the greatest skill I learned there it will make my life easier if I know how to effectively communicate with others.”

## Youth Service

**Young people aged 16-24** participated in our Youth Service with the opportunity to get involved in a range of activities that encouraged independence, improvements in self-esteem and overall confidence and team building in conjunction with attainment of qualifications, further education or paid employment. The programme offered young people the opportunity:

- to gain accredited qualifications
- to develop soft skills

- to experience work tasters and educational tasters and work placement
- to develop as young people through The Youth Service
- receive support to achieve employment through CV building, completing application forms and interview prep

The Youth Service delivered the following throughout the year:

- **3 people achieved paid employment** in local businesses – Action Cancer Boutique- Soy Sauce Bistro and Omniplex.
- **8 people progressed to education and training**
- **25 referrals to the service**
- **7 people participated in placements**
- **39 Accredited Qualifications**

During the year the Y.O.U Service had:

- **Educational/Careers talks from:** Belfast Metropolitan College and SERC (local further education colleges), Skill Up Programme, Volunteer Now, Connected Minds, Resurgam Trust, Praxis Care, Tesco, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, PSNI, Lisburn Library. The young people also attended Belfast and Lisburn Job Fairs
- **Work Tasters:** work experience from Little Wing Pizza, Sonas, Tesco, EE
- **Advice and Guidance:** Talks from Citizens Advice Bureau (Benefits and Entitlements), MACS (Independent Living), Links Counselling (Mental Health), HYPE (Relationships/Personal Safety/LGBTQ+), Relate NI (Relationship and Sexuality Education), Caroline McGrath-Southeastern Trust (Drugs and Alcohol awareness, Chi-Me) Shirley Camblin Brown (Art therapy for mental health), Invisible Traffik (Awareness of Human Trafficking and Exploitation)
- **Education/Training Providers for progression:** Belfast Met, SERC, Belfast Works Connect
- **Participation** with an LGBTQ+ support group
- **Personal Development** – Bells Lane Horticultural Programme with LCCC, Bryson energy (Healthy Eating Programme), Belfast City Hall (Local history tour), Self Defence Classes with Lisburn Castlereagh City Council
- **Accredited Training including;** World Host Customer Service, Mental Health First Aid, Health and Safety, First Aid at Work and Food Safety
- **Activities/Trips** – The Youth Service took part in the annual Lord Mayors Parade in Lisburn, the Twilight Parade, Lisburn Christmas Market (where we made and sold items to raise money for our Youth Service), attended The Ulster Museum and took part in the “Investigate Natural History” Workshop, Linen Museum for the travelling Hieroglyphics exhibition.

- We held a coffee morning for parents and carers where our amazing young people gave a presentation to showcase their success over the year and the qualifications they had achieved during their time on the Youth Service.

The Youth Service worked with Atlas Counselling Service, Links Counselling Service, YMCA Lisburn, Resurgam Trust and Lisburn City Council to provide opportunities for employability, horticulture experience and counselling support.

## **Training**

The training services at Stepping Stones NI offers a comprehensive range of courses designed to support individuals with learning disabilities and learning difficulties in achieving paid employment or meaningful placements. Tailored training is designed and delivered to address specific needs of the client and business partners, we equip participants with the skills and confidence necessary to succeed in the workplace.

Our courses cover a variety of essential topics, including food safety & allergens, health and safety, world host principles of customer service. These accredited qualifications not only enhance employability but also provide participants with valuable knowledge and practical skills, build confidence and social skills. Additionally, we actively engage with community groups to deliver our training services, community groups thrive from the accredited and soft skills we deliver on both personal and professional basis.

We delivered to 185 participants working with business partners through bespoke academies and community groups throughout Northern Ireland, delivering 287 qualifications in total.

### **Accredited qualifications delivered included:**

- Mental Health first aid Level 1
- Emergency First aid level 3
- Paediatric First aid level 3
- Food Safety level 1
- Food allergens level 2
- Health and safety level 1
- Fire safety level 1
- Manual handling level 2
- World Host Principles of customer care L2

Our soft skills focused on confidence building, communication and interview skills & money matters.

### **Living Life Loving Life and ASDAN**

A programme of both soft and accredited is delivered on a weekly basis to our LD participants supporting 24 participants over 3 days per week in our Living Life Loving Life programme. Our outcomes for all sessions are directly linked to improving social skills, communication, employability and confidence through fun relevant activities and

outings, as well as embedding practice of functional skills, literacy, math and ICT. The introduction of ASDAN qualifications give participants the opportunity to gain accredited qualifications in everyday life topics such as, independent travel, basic money management and the world around us.

### **Our Stepping Stones NI Football Team**

Football is an extracurricular activity that we offer with a multitude of benefits for the ten football enthusiasts. Beyond the physical aspects of the sport, it fosters essential life skills such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Engaging in football has significantly improved participant's mental health by providing a positive outlet for stress, boosting self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. The team has participated in local football competitions George Best Cup in Northern Ireland and in doing so participants connected with peers, fostered friendships, learnt valuable social skills and creating lasting memories.



### **Local Labour Market Partnerships**

Local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) were established in each of the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs) in Northern Ireland (NI) to develop a range of new employability provisions that address the specific labour market needs and challenges of the local areas. The Department for Communities funds Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP) in each council area. Labour Market Partnerships develop programmes to help people find employment and training opportunities in their local area. In the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 we were successful in tendering for LMP's in both **Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council LMP .**

Stepping Stones NI was awarded the contract by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) following a competitive e-tender process to deliver its LMP programme to deliver the Economic Inactivity linked to Disability programme to support and connect a 24 people with disabilities / long-term health issues who are

unemployed/economically inactive with accredited qualifications, work placements and employment opportunities.

### Lisburn and Castlereagh LMP : What we achieved/The Outcomes

Outputs	Target	Actual
No of participants in paid employment	9	9
Completers	17	23
Benefit 24 Participants No of participants Recruited	24	24
Satisfaction Rate Evaluations	100%	Average 4.9 out of 5 satisfaction rating
Gained qualifications	17	23
Into other education and training	7	7

### Additional Outcomes

- 71% (17) participants complete programme- **100% (23) completed the programme**
- 71% (17) employers who reported satisfaction with the programme- **100% of employers was satisfied with the support from Stepping- Stones NI**
- 71% (12) of completing participants who reported satisfaction with the programme- **100% of the 19/23 participants who completed scored the programme an average of 4.9/5 for satisfaction**
- 63% (15) of completing participants who complete a work placement- **11/15 completed work placement as these were all participants that required a work placement**
- 80% (12) of completing participants who reported that the work placement was beneficial -**100% reported work placement was beneficial – 2 employers converted placements to jobs**
- 71% (12) of completing participants who gain a qualification- **23 participants completed a qualification**
- 41% (7) of completing participants who undertake further education of training following completion of the project- **7 participants continued with education**
- 53% (9) of completing participants gaining new employment- **9 participants gained employment with associated IRIs (evidence)**
- 44% (4) of completing participants still in employment 6 months post completion

**6-month data (participants still in employment 6 months later) will not be available until December 2024 as participants did not commence employment until June 2024, as such this figure will be reported in next year's return**

### **Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon LMP Outcomes**

Stepping Stones NI was awarded the contract following a competitive tender process by ABC to deliver its Disability Employment Programme 2023/2024 to support the local economy and support local people with a disability into employment. Through the programme and our delivery Stepping Stones NI successfully made difference in Employability and Skills outcomes through its training provision and employment support.

Stepping Stones NI supported **22 people** with disabilities into employment in sectors including; retail, hospitality, catering, construction, warehousing, education, domestic services, despatch and facilities.

#### **Additional outcomes**

- **57 people were recruited** onto the programme with **49 completers**.
- **49 completers achieved an accredited qualification** in Excellence in World Host, Level 1&2 Mental Health Awareness Training, Level 1 Food Safety, Level 1 Health and Safety.
- **100%** of completed participants **felt more confident to apply for a job** following completion of the project.
- **95% of people** reported **satisfaction** with the project.

#### **6-month data (participants still in employment 6 months later)**

Number of Participants Employed because of the 23-24 LMP Programme	22
Number of Participants employed 6 months post programme completion	14

#### **This is what people said who benefited from our support and service delivery**

“Stepping Stones NI helped me to get my CV ready and I was able to apply for jobs. I am really pleased to have got a job now with the trust doing what I do best. I am very grateful for the Labour Market programme and support from Stepping Stones NI.”

“I have never had a CV before so having that for the first time has really benefited me in being able to see for myself what all I have achieved. I am also very grateful for the accredited training and support I have received. I am so happy to be in employment.”

## **Social Enterprise**

At the year-end 79 people with a learning disability were engaging and participating in training through Social Enterprise activity in:

- Pink Elephant Cards
- The Courtyard Café Lisburn
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café Lisburn
- Stepping Stones Picture Framing Lisburn
- The Gatelodge Café Newtownards
- Navigation House

Our Social Enterprises provide the working environment for people with learning disabilities to learn and develop employability skills in a realistic commercial environment /employability hub potentially leading to a paid job in the future. All income generated from our social enterprises is reinvested back into the organisation to support service delivery for people who access our services.

Our Day Opportunities Contract with South- Eastern Health and Social Care Trust supports the activities for people with a learning disability across all our social enterprises to promote training and employment.

### **Pink Elephant Cards**

Pink Elephant Cards social enterprise was impacted greatly by the pandemic and changes in the wedding stationery market. This social enterprise produces a bespoke range of handcrafted wedding stationery and greeting cards Pink Elephant Cards and craft projects for trainees with a learning disability.

### **Picture Framing**

As a member of the Fine Art Trade Guild our team provided a high-quality framing service offering a wide range of frames and mounts and was open during the pandemic in line with restrictions.

**Our cafes and catering: The Courtyard Café, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café and The Gatelodge** continued to trade and provide hospitality skills training for people with a learning disability.

**Lisburn Civic Centre:** During the year our catering team continued to provide catering services at Lisburn Civic Centre at Lisburn City Council offices in Lisburn, whilst at the same time providing training and skills development for people with disabilities through employment.

## Navigation House



During the year at Navigation House Stepping Stones NI introduced programmes and activities that enriched the lives of people who are Neurodiverse and created greater social and economic impact within Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

### Key activities during the year were as follows:

- Our first cohort of 5 young people commenced OCNNI Level 1 in Horticulture at Navigation House in February 2024. This OCNNI Level 1 comprises of specifically chosen units to meet the needs of the trainees. The first three mandatory units included; Personal Confidence and Esteem, Work Placement and Oral presentation skills. To consolidate industry relevant practical skills the three mandatory units, included; Pruning Plants, Skills for Plant Propagation and Soils/Growing Media. As part of the qualification the group also made an industry visit to CAFRE Greenmount Agriculture College. Placements for young people were secured and included Hillsborough Castle Gardens and Rowallane Gardens.
- In March 2024 three of the trainees grew and submitted entries to the World Daffodil Convention and two out of the three daffodils won the highest accolade!
- **We developed a horticultural social enterprise activity** focusing on the growing of organic and pesticide free produce herbs, edible flowers, fruit and vegetables involving people with a range of disabilities from the Lisburn and Castlereagh area. With the addition of a Garden Shop selling baskets and containers of seasonal flowers and plants, grown by the trainees
- **Introduction of e learning in relation to environmental and green Issues**, circular economy, the world around us, and the roll out of Loving Life Programme and cookery programmes
- **The Roll out of Wellbeing Programme** to include Yoga, exercise classes, mindfulness and outdoor physical activities including walking and cycling groups for people with a disability.
- **External event bookings and Workshops** included over 14 workshops and external hire events across several public, council and charity organisations

## **Quality Standards**

During the year we successfully achieved revision of the BSI ISO: 9001:2015 in July 2024

## **SECTION 6: Structure, Governance and Management**

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### **Structure**

Stepping Stones NI is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, incorporated in 1996 and commenced delivering services for people with learning disabilities in Jan 1998.

Stepping Stones NI has capacity for a Board of 10 Trustees as per Articles of Association who meet 6 times a year and are responsible for setting the strategic direction and the policies in which the organisation is governed. There organisation has two sub committees of the board a Finance Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) and a Human Resource Governance and Nominations Committee (HRGN).

The Trustees serving from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31 March 2024 were as follows:

1. Michael Drayne (HRGN Committee)
2. Ken Alderdice (FAR Committee)
3. Karen Carmichael (HRGN Committee)
4. Michael Scott ( Chair )
5. Kieran Corrigan (HRGN Committee)
6. Cormac O Donnell
7. Sarah Johnston
8. Shirley Ann Smylie
9. Lisa Beers

### **Company Secretary**

A scheme of matters reserved for the Board is in place and the day-to-day responsibility for the implementation of the strategy and the provision of services is that of the Chief Officer Paula Jennings. The Chief Officer works alongside the Senior Team which has operational, service delivery, marketing and finance responsibilities.

The Trustees manage the business of the company unless they are subject to any restrictions imposed by the Companies Act, the articles or any special resolution. Trustees of the Board should include at least one member who is a parent or carer of a person with a learning disability or a learning difficulty.

Stepping Stones NI Chief Officer is Paula Jennings who has the sole responsibility of leading and implementing the strategies set by the board of Trustees.

## **Recruitment of Trustees**

### **Board Recruitment and Appointment**

The recruitment of new board members helps to strengthen the corporate governance of the organisation. Stepping Stones NI conducts a skills and experience analysis of the existing board prior to advertising or liaising in networks i.e. Institute of Directors IOD, Engage Executive Recruitment, business community, to ensure the desired skills and experience are required with a view to attract suitable candidates to apply who meet the requirements of the board and ultimately govern the charity.

Following an initial expression of interest submission and interview the suitability of candidates is assessed on how the candidate meets the criteria, what skills and influence they bring to the board and how their experience and attributes fit with the organisational culture and vision and what they hope to achieve in the role. Following meeting with the Chair and Chief Officer a recommendation for the appointment of new Trustees is placed at HRGN Committee. This Committee will make the recommendation to the full board for approval and appointment as a Trustee of Stepping Stones NI.

The Office Bearers of the Company are appointed at the first meeting of the Board of Trustees after the annual general meeting. All new members are elected to the board at the AGM. A Trustee is on the Board for a period of 3 years where upon such members must retire but may be eligible for re-election. Trustees shall be elected at the annual general meeting AGM by the members present.

During the year an Engage Executive Recruitment were appointed to advertise for new Trustees to the board.

### **Trustee Induction and Training**

New Trustees undergo an induction to brief them on their role as a Trustee of the company. New Trustees are provided with information to brief them on their legal obligations under charity and company law i.e. the content of the Articles of Association, the strategy and recent set of end of year accounts. All New Trustees are formally inducted to the organisation with the Chief Officer with visits to all sites of the organisation.

## **Decision making within Stepping Stones NI**

The Board of Trustees comprises a - Chairperson and Trustees who bring a range of skills and experience appropriate to the requirements of the Board. They provide support to the Chief Officer and their purpose is to contribute to the effective governance of Stepping Stones NI promoting the vision, mission, aims and objectives of the organisation. The full board of Trustees meets bi monthly with sub group meetings and full board meetings.

The Chief Officer provides a report to the Board of Trustees at each board meeting, with updates on key performance indicators of the organisation presented on a Balanced Score Card format. This ensures that the Board of Trustees are fully informed of activities, performance, and achievements of the organisation.

The chair of each subcommittee i.e FAR and HRGN reports to the board at each board meeting.

All members of the Board of Trustees give up their time voluntarily and receive no financial or other benefits from the organisation.

## **Risk Management**

The Finance Audit and Risk (FAR) sub group review corporate risk and financial information with reporting back to the Board of Directors. The corporate risk register details low, medium and high risk in the following areas – People, Operations and Financial which is continuously reviewed. Where appropriate mitigation steps are put in place to protect the organisation against risk.

The organisation has implemented the ISO quality standard 9001:2015 during the reporting period and was awarded reaccreditation following audit inspection.

## 7. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

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### FINANCIAL REVIEW 2023/2024

In the reporting period in April 2023 we ,started off on a positive note with confirmation of our funding for two years from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund under People and Skills of £2.3 million approximately over 2 years as the replacement fund for European Social Fund. This funding was welcomed as Stepping Stones NI was part of the consortium of 4 organisations that formed “Prosper” to deliver the SPF programme to reduce economic inactivity. This funding secured our market position but also enabled Stepping Stones NI to ensure sustainability following an uncertain previous year, and in particular it provided security in it’s the organisation celebrated 25 years of delivering services , social enterprise and creating social impact.

This boost of funding for the whole organisation also had a ripple effect on our social enterprises which for the fiscal year end 2024 saw sales from social enterprises up 16% on budget with the contribution up also on budget by 10%.

We are delighted to report also that our overall income in the organisation is up on budget by 8.4% for the year to £2,015,336. Considering our income 10 years for the same period was 50% less than our income in the reporting period now, demonstrating growth and development in which we are proud.

As always, we strive to obtain value for money in all our purchases while trying to remain socially responsible. Consistently we are looking for savings, income generation and the tendering our services into the supply chain. Overall, as an organisation we made savings of 2% on overheads on our forecasted budget.

Our year end surplus was £25,225 which was welcome. Salaries represent 82% of our total expenditure which has increased from 78% the previous year. This can be explained as we employed additional staff to work on our catering contract for Lisburn Island Centre in the delivery of its catering provision.

Cashflow is a measured target and it remains significantly healthy with £461,837 recorded in the bank with our reserves are recorded at £731,200. This is a drop in the previous year, however the board of Trustees during the year agreed to use the reserves throughout the year for expenditure not covered by UK Shared Prosperity Fund and until such times we are able to get non-funded activity funded.

We would like to thank our funders and supporters during this reporting period:

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Ards and North Down Council

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Newry & Mourne District Council

Rank Foundation

Kier Group

Fona cab

Danske Bank

Barclay Communication

MXB Marketing Agency

Henderson Food Service

RES

Stanley Gordon and Sons

TL Dallas

Mark McCall

Beyond HR

### **Objectives and policies**

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it to a number of financial risks including credit risk, cash flow risk and liquidity risk. The use of financial derivatives is governed by the charity's policies approved by the board of Trustees, which provide written principles on the use of financial derivatives to manage these risks. The charity does not use derivative financial instruments for speculative purposes.

### **Reserves Policy**

An extensive reserves base is essential for Stepping Stones NI to continue to manage risk and deliver its services and social enterprises. The Trustees of Stepping Stones NI wish to continue to build a general level of reserves (excluding tangible fixed assets) that has a target of six months of unrestricted expenditure.

Stepping Stones NI needs to maintain this level of reserve for the following:

- Cash flow to ensure amounts due to creditors and fulfilment of contracts and leases.
- Gaps and loss in funding provision

- Organisational wind up and redundancy pay
- New development plans for service delivery in the future.

Stepping Stones NI reserves can be understood under the following areas:

- Protected Funds: to sustain and support at least 6 months organisational costs.
- Designated Funds: to prepare for potential redundancy costs at the end of a funding cycle.
- Infrastructure Funds: to support the refurbishment and renewals of Stepping Stones NI social enterprises and assets.
- Opportunity Funds: to explore future opportunities and projects that benefit people with disabilities.

### **Cashflow**

Core funding activities are secured until March 2025 following a successful UKSPF bid. Stepping Stones NI must ensure that adequate reserves are available to bridge any potential shortfall in funds and to allow enough time for replacement or additional funds to be found. Legally, Stepping Stones NI must be able to meet its debts as they fall due. Since restricted funds can only be used for the purpose for which they are given, Stepping Stones NI must always ensure that it can support at any given time (from its reserves cash or otherwise) viable and contracted programmes should it ever encounter difficulties. The cash reserves protected funds enables the organisation to meet its obligations for six months if no funding becomes available. Stepping Stones NI must also ensure that it is able to respond to any cashflow problems as a result in delays from either funders or debtors.

### **Plans for future periods**

Our aim to channel a more holistic approach to the delivery of our services. We understand now more than ever that skills development and work are just one aspect of an individual's life. Our focus and our scope of services include:

1. Social Enterprise
2. Employment
3. Skills and Training
4. Health and Well-Being

The implementation of the organisation's strategy will support the growth and development of the charity and as such enhance the lives of and create a better future for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.

Stepping Stones NI will work to ensure that opportunities presented through UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be maximised to ensure continuation of service provision and opportunities for people with disabilities into the future.

### **Cash flow risk**

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it primarily to regular payments from funders. This is carefully managed and monitored by the FAR committee.

### **Credit risk**

Stepping Stones NI principal financial assets are bank balances and cash, trade and other receivables, and investments. Stepping Stones NI credit risk is primarily attributable to its trade receivables.

Stepping Stones NI has no significant concentration of credit risk, with exposure spread over a large number of counterparties and customers.

### **Liquidity risk**

In order to maintain liquidity to ensure that sufficient funds are available for ongoing operations and future developments .

### **Disclosure of information to auditor**

Each trustee has taken steps that they ought to have taken as a Trustee in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Charity's auditor is aware of that information. The Trustees confirm that there is no relevant information that they know of and of which they know the auditor is unaware.

### **Statement of Trustees Responsibilities**

The Trustees (who are the Directors of Stepping Stones NI for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom generally accepted Accounting Practice), including Financial Report Standard 102 “The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare a financial statement 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 income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and the apply them consistently
- Observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent

- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statement comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Trustees 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.

### **Valuing our Volunteers and donations.**

Stepping Stones NI values, the contribution that our volunteers bring to the organisation and the donations that we receive each year. We are grateful and thank them for their support which allow us to fulfil our charity objectives.

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**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Annual return

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

( A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

**COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 031411**

**CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 100727**

**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
**547 FALLS ROAD**  
**BELFAST**  
**BT11 9AB**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**OFFICERS AND OTHER INFORMATION**

**Directors**

Michael Scott (Chair)  
Kenneth Alderice (Resigned 2nd February 2024)  
Karen Carmichael (Resigned 5th March 2024)  
Kieran Corrigan (Resigned 28th February 2024)  
Michael Drayne  
Brenda McMullan (Resigned 10th August 2023)  
Cormac O'Donnell  
Lisa Beers (Appointed 28th February 2024)  
Sarah Johnston (Appointed 28th February 2024)  
Shirley Smylie (Appointed 28th February 2024)

**Secretary**

Paula Jennings

**Registered Office**

Stepping Stones NI  
39 Seymour Street  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT27 4SY

**Auditors**

O'Hara Shearer  
Chartered Accountants  
& Statutory Auditors  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Solicitors**

Donaldson McConnell & Co  
Solicitors  
8-10 Graham Gardens  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT28 1YS

**Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow Street  
Lisburn  
BT28 1YS

**Company Registration Number**

NI 031411

**Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number**

NIC 100727

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST 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 regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2024. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

**By order of the board:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE**     5th December 2024

**DATE**     5th December 2024

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Stepping Stones NI (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 *The financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

**Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC'S Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

**Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Trustees and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- sufficient accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

**Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, the trustees, who are also the directors of the charity for the purpose of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

**Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

The objectives of our audit in respect of fraud, are to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements due to fraud; to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud, through designing and implementing appropriate responses to those assessed risks; and to respond appropriately to instances of fraud or suspected fraud identified during the audit. However, the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both management and those charged with governance of the Charity.

Our approach was as follows:

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to the charity and considered that the most significant are the Companies Act 2006 and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)).
- Enquiry of management, those charged with governance and the entity's solicitors around actual and potential litigation and claims.
- Enquiry of entity staff in compliance functions to identify any instances of any non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

- Auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, and evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

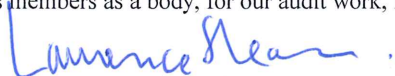
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purposes of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

**Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditors' report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and its members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.



**LAWRENCE SHEARER F.C.A., Senior Statutory Auditor**  
**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF O'HARA SHEARER, Statutory Auditor**  
**O'HARA SHEARER**

**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**  
**AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**

547 Falls Road

Belfast

BT11 9AB

**Dated:** 5th December 2024

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

**Accounting Convention and Basis of Accounting**

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard which applies in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

**Going Concern**

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees' have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees' continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

**Income Recognition**

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

**Interest Receivable**

Interest on funds held is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

**Resources Expended**

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and is classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category.

Fundraising costs include the costs of advertising, producing publications, printing and mailing fundraising material, and staff costs in these areas.

Costs of charitable activities include direct expenditure incurred through operational activities.

Governance costs represent the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity which relate to the general running of the charity as opposed to those costs associated with fundraising or charitable activity.

**Fixed Assets**

All tangible fixed assets are recorded at cost.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Depreciation**

Depreciation is calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives at the following rates:

Freehold Property	2% straight line
Improvements to property	10% straight line
Fixtures and fittings	20% straight line
Computer equipment	25% straight line

**Investments**

Unlisted equity investments are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently measured at fair value. If fair value cannot be reliably measured, assets are measured at cost less impairment.

Listed investments are measured at fair value with changes in fair value being recognised in income or expenditure.

**Repairs and Renewals**

All repairs and renewals are written off as incurred

**Pension Costs**

The charity does currently operate a defined contribution pension scheme.

**Debtors and Prepayments**

Trade debtors and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

**Creditors and Provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

**Financial Instruments**

The Charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

**Foreign Currencies**

Monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Exchange differences are taken into account in arriving at the net movement in funds.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Fund Accounting**

Unrestricted funds are general funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the charity unless the funds have been designated for other purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

Restricted funds are those given for use in a particular area or for specific purposes, the use of which is restricted to that area or purpose.

Endowment funds are subject to specific conditions by donors that the capital must be maintained by the charity.

The income received from funders depends on the charity meeting detailed criteria on expenses plans.

Grants given under such conditions are also given subject to them being obtained for in connection with the furtherance of the charity's aims and objectives.

Such income can be repayable to the funder if such expenses plans and criteria are not met.

Such income is only deferred when the donor specifies that the grant/donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Income from charitable activities includes income received under contract or where entitlement to grant funding is subject to specific performance conditions is recognised as earned as the related goods/services are provided.

Grant income included in this category provides funding to support performance activities and is recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Income is deferred when: fees/performance related grants are received in advance of the performance/event to which they relate.

**Reserves Policy**

Stepping Stones NI reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained for a period of at least 3 to 6 months in the event of major funding streams ending. The reserves policy also takes account of covering costs in the event of closure, to cover redundancies, rents, and fees that are due including statutory audit fees. It also takes account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time.

Stepping Stones NI maintain unrestricted reserves if accrued should be used for the purposes which meet the aims and objectives of Stepping Stones NI. The board should monitor and review the amount of unrestricted reserves monthly in addition to the level of any restricted reserves.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (incorporating the income and expenditure account)**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	TOTAL 2024 £	TOTAL 2023 £
<b>INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:</b>						
Donations and legacies	1	14,975	-	-	14,975	5,673
Income from investments	2	9,872	-	-	9,872	1,216
Income from charitable activities	3	318,837	1,256,475	-	1,575,312	1,309,431
Income from other trading activities	4	454,774	19,961	-	474,735	392,571
<b>TOTAL INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS</b>		<b>798,458</b>	<b>1,276,436</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,074,894</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>						
Expenditure on raising funds	5	165,501	1,261	-	166,762	118,303
Expenditure on charitable activities	6	667,585	1,188,844	-	1,856,429	1,684,707
Other expenditure		-	-	-	-	-
Net gains/(losses) on investments		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		<b>833,086</b>	<b>1,190,105</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,023,191</b>	<b>1,803,010</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(34,628)</b>	<b>86,331</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>
Transfers between funds		(46,434)	46,434	-	-	-
<b>NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS</b>		<b>(81,062)</b>	<b>132,765</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>						
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>		<b>789,025</b>	<b>7,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>
Prior year adjustment		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>707,963</b>	<b>139,784</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>847,747</b>	<b>796,044</b>

**The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses in the year and therefore a Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses has not been prepared**

**All of the above amounts relate to continuing activities**

The accompanying accounting policies and the notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	2024 £	2023 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets	9	342,933	373,853
Investments	10	-	-
		342,933	373,853
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Stocks		11,424	10,581
Debtors and prepayments	12	79,028	195,726
Cash at bank	11	690,882	533,059
Cash in hand		1,074	1,821
		782,408	741,187
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(98,948)	(114,828)
		683,460	626,359
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		683,460	626,359
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT ASSETS/( LIABILITIES )</b>		1,026,393	1,000,212
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	14	(178,646)	(204,168)
		847,747	796,044
<b>NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		847,747	796,044
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
<b>ENDOWMENT FUNDS</b>			
		-	-
<b>UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	707,963	789,025
<b>RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	139,784	7,019
		847,747	796,044
		847,747	796,044

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS :

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**SHIRLEY ANN SMYLIE**  
**DIRECTOR**

DATE 5th December 2024

DATE 5th December 2024

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

	NOTES	2024 £	2023 £
<b>CASHFLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Cash generated from operations	16	168,666	(241,754)
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities		168,666	(241,754)
<b>Investing activities</b>			
Investment income		-	-
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	9	(11,590)	(34,423)
Acquisition of investments	10	-	-
Amounts owed between funds		-	-
Disposal of investments		-	-
Disposal of tangible fixed assets		-	-
Net cash from investing activities		(11,590)	(34,423)
Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year		157,076	(276,177)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		534,880	811,057
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	11	691,956	534,880
Relating to:			
Cash at bank and in hand	11	691,956	534,880

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**1. DONATIONS AND LEGACIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Donations	14,975	-	14,975	5,673	-	5,673
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>14,975</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>14,975</u>	<u>5,673</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5,673</u>

**2. INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Income from UK listed investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income from cash	9,872	-	9,872	1,216	-	1,216
	<u>9,872</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>9,872</u>	<u>1,216</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,216</u>

**3. INCOME FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	302,789	-	302,789	-	291,312	291,312
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	-	1,100,000	1,100,000	-	-	-
Stepping Stones to Employment - ESF- DfE - DfC	-	-	-	-	866,530	866,530
Business Services Organisation - Special Recognition Grant	-	-	-	-	35,018	35,018
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	-	26,920	26,920	-	23,156	23,156
Newry, Mourne and Down Council	-	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Ards and North Down Council	-	-	-	-	40,558	40,558
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council	-	104,033	104,033	-	15,483	15,483
Capital Grant Released	-	25,522	25,522	-	25,522	25,522
Sundry income	16,048	-	16,048	1,852	-	1,852
Less: Deferred Income (See Note 12)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>318,837</u>	<u>1,256,475</u>	<u>1,575,312</u>	<u>1,852</u>	<u>1,307,579</u>	<u>1,309,431</u>

**4. INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Trading Income	417,985	-	417,985	334,556	-	334,556
Fundraising	27,375	19,961	47,336	1,058	53,385	54,443
Training Fees	3,458	-	3,458	-	3,572	3,572
Other Income	5,956	-	5,956	-	-	-
	<u>454,774</u>	<u>19,961</u>	<u>474,735</u>	<u>335,614</u>	<u>56,957</u>	<u>392,571</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**5. EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Costs of trading income	146,656	-	146,656	118,237	-	118,237
Bad debts	6	-	6	66	-	66
Promotional and fundraising costs	18,839	1,261	20,100	-	-	-
	165,501	1,261	166,762	118,303	-	118,303

**6. EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £
Wages and salaries ( <i>See Note 8</i> )	416,308	873,040	1,289,348	80,776	1,169,845	1,250,621
Social security costs ( <i>See Note 8</i> )	61,688	139,281	200,969	31,807	128,683	160,490
Equipment hiring and leasing	4,403	4,403	8,806	8,732	-	8,732
Computer and IT costs	3,749	11,247	14,996	15,796	-	15,796
Staff training and welfare	15,779	15,780	31,559	31,718	-	31,718
Staff travel and trainee costs	3,189	3,517	6,706	4,097	6,145	10,242
Client training and expenses	10,936	10,937	21,873	-	10,955	10,955
Recruitment costs	-	-	-	3,385	6,715	10,100
Academies and market partnership costs	-	11,236	11,236	-	-	-
Events and hospitality costs	3,733	3,734	7,467	2,513	-	2,513
Youth service expenses	3,343	-	3,343	-	3,222	3,222
(Profit)/ Loss on disposal of fixed assets	-	-	-	-	-	-
Depreciation ( <i>See Note 9</i> )	16,988	25,522	42,510	47,558	-	47,558
Sundry expenses	2,571	-	2,571	3,081	-	3,081
	542,687	1,098,697	1,641,384	229,463	1,325,565	1,555,028

**Support Costs and Governance costs**

Telephone and internet	3,216	5,513	8,729	3,018	4,526	7,544
Rent payable	50,823	44,500	95,323	35,317	10,000	45,317
Rent payable - arrears reduction settlement	-	-	-	(31,100)	-	(31,100)
Water rates	1,978	1,084	3,062	2,037	-	2,037
Insurance	4,122	4,122	8,244	7,675	-	7,675
Light and heat	17,524	19,502	37,026	14,951	22,426	37,377
Printing, postage and stationery	4,163	417	4,580	4,001	-	4,001
Repairs and maintenance	24,880	1,379	26,259	22,060	-	22,060
Cleaning, consumables and laundry	3,565	-	3,565	4,325	-	4,325
Advertising and promotions	-	-	-	4,016	-	4,016
Audit fees	2,031	2,031	4,062	4,965	-	4,965
Accountancy fees	2,100	1,500	3,600	4,214	-	4,214
Legal and other professional fees	7,029	7,029	14,058	14,496	-	14,496
Subscriptions and licences	3,070	3,070	6,140	2,006	-	2,006
Bank interest and charges	397	-	397	746	-	746
	124,898	90,147	215,045	92,727	36,952	129,679

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

**667,585    1,188,844    1,856,429    322,190    1,362,517    1,684,707**

**7. NET GAINS/(LOSSES) ON INVESTMENTS**

Net (gains)/losses on investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

<b>7. NET (OUTGOING)/ INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>This is stated after charging/(crediting)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditors remuneration	4,062	4,965
Depreciation	42,510	47,558
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

<b>8. SALARY COSTS AND EMOLUMENTS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Total staff costs were as follows:		
Wages and salaries - key management personnel	232,934	191,178
Wages and salaries - other staff	1,056,414	1,059,443
Employer social security costs - key management personnel	56,500	36,049
Employer social security costs - other staff	150,470	153,110
Employer social security costs - SMP & SPP Recoverable	(6,001)	(23,669)
Employer social security costs - Employment Allowance	-	(5,000)
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
	1,490,317	1,411,111

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
	87	93
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

**Trustees' remuneration and benefits**

There was no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 31st March 2024. (2023: £Nil)

**Trustees' Expenses**

There were no trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 31st March 2024. (2023: £Nil)

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Freehold Property £	Improvements to Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST</b>					
As at 1st April 2023	563,028	42,335	183,513	55,373	844,249
Additions	-	-	6,957	4,633	11,590
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-
As at 31st March 2024	<u>563,028</u>	<u>42,335</u>	<u>190,470</u>	<u>60,006</u>	<u>855,839</u>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>					
As at 1st April 2023	274,146	13,446	136,103	46,701	470,396
Charge for year	11,261	4,233	21,352	5,664	42,510
Eliminated on disposal					-
As at 31st March 2024	<u>285,407</u>	<u>17,679</u>	<u>157,455</u>	<u>52,365</u>	<u>512,906</u>
Net book value 2024	<u>277,621</u>	<u>24,656</u>	<u>33,015</u>	<u>7,641</u>	<u>342,933</u>
Net book value 2023	<u>288,882</u>	<u>28,889</u>	<u>47,410</u>	<u>8,672</u>	<u>373,853</u>

**11. CASH AT BANK**

	2024 £	2023 £
Danske Bank - Current Accounts	126,784	151,043
Danske Bank - Investment Accounts	564,098	382,016
	<u>690,882</u>	<u>533,059</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**12. DEBTORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Trade debtors	57,684	19,285
Other debtors	14,191	171,930
Prepayments	7,153	4,511
	79,028	195,726
	79,028	195,726

**13. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Bank loans and overdrafts ( <i>See Note 17</i> )	-	-
Trade creditors	34,093	37,569
Value Added Tax	-	(11)
Social security costs and other taxes	-	7,016
Other creditors	-	3,662
Deferred income	-	23,356
Sundry creditors and accrued expenses	64,855	43,236
	98,948	114,828
	98,948	114,828

**14. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Bank loans	-	-
Deferred capital funding	178,646	204,168
	178,646	204,168
	178,646	204,168

**15. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS**

	Tangible Fixed Assets	Investments	Debtors and Prepayments	Cash at Bank and in Hand	Creditors and Accruals	Transfers between Funds	2024	2023
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted Funds	342,933	-	76,261	434,151	(98,948)	(46,434)	707,963	789,025
Restricted Funds	-	-	14,191	257,805	(178,646)	46,434	139,784	7,019
Total Funds	342,933	-	90,452	691,956	(277,594)	-	847,747	796,044
	342,933	-	90,452	691,956	(277,594)	-	847,747	796,044

**16. RECONCILIATION OF OPERATING PROFIT TO NET CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	51,703	(94,119)
Depreciation	42,510	47,558
Movement in stocks	(843)	(2,347)
Movement in debtors	116,698	(27,347)
Movement in creditors	(41,402)	(165,499)
(Gain)/Loss on investments	-	-
(Profit)/Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets	-	-
<b>Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities</b>	<b>168,666</b>	<b>(241,754)</b>
	<b>168,666</b>	<b>(241,754)</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

**17. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS**

	Opening Balance	Income	Expenditure	Net Movement in Funds 2024	Transfers between Funds	Prior year Adjustment	2024	2023
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted Funds	789,025	798,458	(833,086)	(34,628)	(46,434)	-	707,963	789,025
Restricted Funds	7,019	1,276,436	(1,190,105)	86,331	46,434	-	139,784	7,019
	<b>796,044</b>	<b>2,074,894</b>	<b>(2,023,191)</b>	<b>51,703</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>847,747</b>	<b>796,044</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024**

<b>18. UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2023	789,025	885,163
Incoming resources for the year	798,458	344,355
Resources expended for the year	(833,086)	(440,493)
Transfer between funds	(46,434)	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2024	<u>707,963</u>	<u>789,025</u>

<b>19. RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2023	7,019	5,000
Incoming resources for the year	1,276,436	1,364,536
Resources expended for the year	(1,190,105)	(1,362,517)
Transfer between funds	46,434	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2024	<u>139,784</u>	<u>7,019</u>

**20. DESIGNATED FUNDS**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

**21. LEGAL STATUS**

Stepping Stones NI is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up.

Stepping Stones NI is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, Charity Number 100727. Date of registration 9th December 2014.

Stepping Stones NI is a recognised Charity within the definition of Section 360(3) Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 by the Commissioners of the HM Revenue & Customs.

**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Accounts

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

( A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

**COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 031411**

**CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 100727**

**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
**547 FALLS ROAD**  
**BELFAST**  
**BT11 9AB**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**  
**OFFICERS AND OTHER INFORMATION**

**Directors**

Michael Scott (Chair)  
Kenneth Alderice  
Belinda O'Neill (Resigned 30th January 2023)  
Karen Carmichael  
Kieran Corrigan  
Michael Drayne  
Brenda McMullan  
Cormac O'Donnell (Appointed 31st March 2023)  
Diana Farrelly (Resigned 1st December 2022)  
Melanie Jones (Resigned 4th April 2022)

**Secretary**

Paula Jennings

**Registered Office**

Stepping Stones NI  
39 Seymour Street  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT27 4SY

**Auditors**

O'Hara Shearer  
Chartered Accountants  
& Statutory Auditors  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Solicitors**

Donaldson McConnell & Co  
Solicitors  
8-10 Graham Gardens  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT28 1YS

**Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow Street  
Lisburn  
BT28 1YS

**Company Registration Number**

NI 031411

**Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number**

NIC 100727

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS RESPONSIBILITIES**

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2023. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

**By order of the board:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE**    6th December 2023

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**KAREN CARMICHAEL**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE**    6th December 2023

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Stepping Stones NI (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 March 2023 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 *The financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

**Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC'S Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

**Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Trustees and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- sufficient accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

**Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, the trustees, who are also the directors of the charity for the purpose of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

**Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

The objectives of our audit in respect of fraud, are to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements due to fraud; to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud, through designing and implementing appropriate responses to those assessed risks; and to respond appropriately to instances of fraud or suspected fraud identified during the audit. However, the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both management and those charged with governance of the Charity.

Our approach was as follows:

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to the charity and considered that the most significant are the Companies Act 2006 and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)).
- Enquiry of management, those charged with governance and the entity's solicitors around actual and potential litigation and claims.
- Enquiry of entity staff in compliance functions to identify any instances of any non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

- Auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, and evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

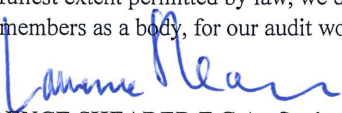
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purposes of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

**Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditors' report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and its members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

  
**LAWRENCE SHEARER F.C.A., Senior Statutory Auditor**  
**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF O'HARA SHEARER, Statutory Auditor**  
**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**  
**AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Dated:**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

**Accounting Convention and Basis of Accounting**

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard which applies in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

**Going Concern**

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees' have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees' continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

**Income Recognition**

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

**Interest Receivable**

Interest on funds held is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

**Resources Expended**

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and is classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category.

Fundraising costs include the costs of advertising, producing publications, printing and mailing fundraising material, and staff costs in these areas.

Costs of charitable activities include direct expenditure incurred through operational activities.

Governance costs represent the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity which relate to the general running of the charity as opposed to those costs associated with fundraising or charitable activity.

**Fixed Assets**

All tangible fixed assets are recorded at cost.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Depreciation**

Depreciation is calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives at the following rates:

Freehold Property	2% straight line
Improvements to property	10% straight line
Fixtures and fittings	20% straight line
Computer equipment	25% straight line

**Investments**

Unlisted equity investments are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently measured at fair value. If fair value cannot be reliably measured, assets are measured at cost less impairment.

Listed investments are measured at fair value with changes in fair value being recognised in income or expenditure.

**Repairs and Renewals**

All repairs and renewals are written off as incurred

**Pension Costs**

The charity does currently operate a defined contribution pension scheme.

**Debtors and Prepayments**

Trade debtors and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

**Creditors and Provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

**Financial Instruments**

The Charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

**Foreign Currencies**

Monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Exchange differences are taken into account in arriving at the net movement in funds.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Fund Accounting**

Unrestricted funds are general funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the charity unless the funds have been designated for other purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

Restricted funds are those given for use in a particular area or for specific purposes, the use of which is restricted to that area or purpose.

Endowment funds are subject to specific conditions by donors that the capital must be maintained by the charity.

The income received from funders depends on the charity meeting detailed criteria on expenses plans.

Grants given under such conditions are also given subject to them being obtained for in connection with the furtherance of the charity's aims and objectives.

Such income can be repayable to the funder if such expenses plans and criteria are not met.

Such income is only deferred when the donor specifies that the grant/donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Income from charitable activities includes income received under contract or where entitlement to grant funding is subject to specific performance conditions is recognised as earned as the related goods/services are provided.

Grant income included in this category provides funding to support performance activities and is recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Income is deferred when: fees/performance related grants are received in advance of the performance/event to which they relate.

**Reserves Policy**

Stepping Stones NI reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained for a period of at least 3 to 6 months in the event of major funding streams ending. The reserves policy also takes account of covering costs in the event of closure, to cover redundancies, rents, and fees that are due including statutory audit fees. It also takes account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time.

Stepping Stones NI maintain unrestricted reserves if accrued should be used for the purposes which meet the aims and objectives of Stepping Stones NI. The board should monitor and review the amount of unrestricted reserves monthly in addition to the level of any restricted reserves.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (incorporating the income and expenditure account)**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	TOTAL 2023 £	TOTAL 2022 £
<b>INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:</b>						
Donations and legacies	1	5,673	-	-	5,673	4,988
Income from investments	2	1,216	-	-	1,216	171
Income from charitable activities	3	1,852	1,307,579	-	1,309,431	1,348,642
Income from other trading activities	4	335,614	56,957	-	392,571	196,977
<b>TOTAL INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS</b>		<b>344,355</b>	<b>1,364,536</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>	<b>1,550,778</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>						
Expenditure on raising funds	5	118,303	-	-	118,303	76,050
Expenditure on charitable activities	6	322,190	1,362,517	-	1,684,707	1,531,316
Other expenditure		-	-	-	-	-
Net gains/(losses) on investments		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		<b>440,493</b>	<b>1,362,517</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,803,010</b>	<b>1,607,366</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(96,138)</b>	<b>2,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>(56,588)</b>
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-	-
<b>NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS</b>		<b>(96,138)</b>	<b>2,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>(56,588)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>						
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>		<b>885,163</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>890,163</b>	<b>946,751</b>
Prior year adjustment		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>789,025</b>	<b>7,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>

The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses in the year and therefore a Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses has not been prepared

All of the above amounts relate to continuing activities

The accompanying accounting policies and the notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	2023 £	2022 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets	9	373,853	386,988
Investments	10	-	-
		373,853	386,988
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Stocks		10,581	8,234
Debtors and prepayments	12	195,726	168,379
Cash at bank	11	533,059	809,531
Cash in hand		1,821	1,526
		741,187	987,670
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(114,828)	(254,805)
		626,359	732,865
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		626,359	732,865
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT ASSETS/( LIABILITIES )</b>		1,000,212	1,119,853
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	14	(204,168)	(229,690)
		796,044	890,163
<b>NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		796,044	890,163
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
<b>ENDOWMENT FUNDS</b>			
		-	-
<b>UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	789,025	885,163
<b>RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	7,019	5,000
		796,044	890,163
		796,044	890,163

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS :

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**KAREN CARMICHAEL**  
**DIRECTOR**

DATE 6th December 2023

DATE 6th December 2023

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	2023 £	2022 £
<b>CASHFLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Cash generated from operations	16	(241,754)	24,189
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities		<u>(241,754)</u>	<u>24,189</u>
<b>Investing activities</b>			
Investment income		-	171
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	9	(34,423)	(43,946)
Acquisition of investments	10	-	-
Amounts owed between funds			146,430
Disposal of investments		-	-
Disposal of tangible fixed assets		-	-
Net cash from investing activities		<u>(34,423)</u>	<u>102,655</u>
Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(276,177)	126,844
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		811,057	684,213
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	11	<u><u>534,880</u></u>	<u><u>811,057</u></u>
Relating to:			
Cash at bank and in hand	11	<u><u>534,880</u></u>	<u><u>811,057</u></u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**1. DONATIONS AND LEGACIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Donations	5,673	-	5,673	4,988	-	4,988
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-	-
	5,673	-	5,673	4,988	-	4,988

**2. INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Income from UK listed investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income from cash	1,216	-	1,216	171	-	171
	1,216	-	1,216	171	-	171

**3. INCOME FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	-	291,312	291,312	-	280,269	280,269
Stepping Stones to Employment - ESF- DfE - DfC	-	866,530	866,530	375,347	352,052	727,399
Business Services Organisation - Special Recognition Grant	-	35,018	35,018	-	-	-
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	-	23,156	23,156	-	105,000	105,000
HM Revenue & Customs	-	-	-	-	69,556	69,556
Youth Service - ESF - DfE	-	-	-	-	71,669	71,669
Newry, Mourne and Down Council	-	10,000	10,000	-	10,000	10,000
Ards and North Down Council	-	40,558	40,558	-	36,000	36,000
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council	-	15,483	15,483	-	23,227	23,227
Capital Grant Released	-	25,522	25,522	-	25,522	25,522
Sundry income	1,852	-	1,852	-	-	-
Less: Deferred Income (See Note 12)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1,852	1,307,579	1,309,431	375,347	973,295	1,348,642

**4. INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Trading Income	334,556	-	334,556	190,819	-	190,819
Fundraising	1,058	53,385	54,443	2,294	-	2,294
Training Fees	-	3,572	3,572	3,534	-	3,534
Other Income	-	-	-	330	-	330
	335,614	56,957	392,571	196,977	-	196,977

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**5. EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Direct expenditure	118,303	-	118,303	76,050	-	76,050

**6. EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Direct expenditure	229,463	1,325,565	1,555,028	392,285	984,988	1,377,273
Support Costs and Governance costs	92,727	36,952	129,679	154,043	-	154,043

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	<b>322,190</b>	<b>1,362,517</b>	<b>1,684,707</b>	<b>546,328</b>	<b>984,988</b>	<b>1,531,316</b>
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**7. NET GAINS/(LOSSES) ON INVESTMENTS**

Net (gains)/losses on investments		-	-		-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

<b>7. NET (OUTGOING)/ INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>This is stated after charging/(crediting)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditors remuneration	4,965	5,296
Depreciation	47,558	45,831
	<hr/> <hr/>	

<b>8. SALARY COSTS AND EMOLUMENTS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Total staff costs were as follows:		
Wages and salaries - key management personnel	191,178	179,909
Wages and salaries - other staff	1,059,443	1,004,127
Employer social security costs - key management personnel	36,049	-
Employer social security costs - other staff	153,110	75,517
Employer social security costs - SMP & SPP Recoverable	(23,669)	-
Employer social security costs - Employment Allowance	(5,000)	-
	<hr/> <hr/>	
	1,411,111	1,259,553

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
	93	58
	<hr/> <hr/>	

**Trustees' remuneration and benefits**

There was no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 31st March 2023. (2022: £Nil)

**Trustees' Expenses**

There were no trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 31st March 2023. (2022: £Nil)

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Freehold Property £	Improvements to Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST</b>					
As at 1st April 2022	563,028	42,335	154,822	49,641	809,826
Additions	-	-	28,691	5,732	34,423
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-
As at 31st March 2023	<u>563,028</u>	<u>42,335</u>	<u>183,513</u>	<u>55,373</u>	<u>844,249</u>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>					
As at 1st April 2022	262,885	9,213	108,816	41,924	422,838
Charge for year	11,261	4,233	27,287	4,777	47,558
Eliminated on disposal					-
As at 31st March 2023	<u>274,146</u>	<u>13,446</u>	<u>136,103</u>	<u>46,701</u>	<u>470,396</u>
Net book value 2023	<u>288,882</u>	<u>28,889</u>	<u>47,410</u>	<u>8,672</u>	<u>373,853</u>
Net book value 2022	<u>300,143</u>	<u>33,122</u>	<u>46,006</u>	<u>7,717</u>	<u>386,988</u>

**11. CASH AT BANK**

	2023 £	2022 £
Danske Bank - Current Accounts	151,043	358,732
Danske Bank - Investment Accounts	382,016	450,799
	<u>533,059</u>	<u>809,531</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

<b>12. DEBTORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Trade debtors	19,285	16,500
Other debtors	171,930	146,430
Prepayments	4,511	5,449
	<u>195,726</u>	<u>168,379</u>

<b>13. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Bank loans and overdrafts ( <i>See Note 17</i> )	-	146,430
Trade creditors	37,569	28,689
Value Added Tax	(11)	2,668
Social security costs and other taxes	7,016	-
Other creditors	3,662	3,662
Deferred income	23,356	-
Sundry creditors and accrued expenses	43,236	73,356
	<u>114,828</u>	<u>254,805</u>

<b>14. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Bank loans	-	-
Deferred capital funding	204,168	229,690
	<u>204,168</u>	<u>229,690</u>

**15. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS**

	Tangible Fixed Assets £	Investments £	Debtors and Prepayments £	Cash at Bank and in Hand £	Creditors and Accruals £	Transfers between Funds £	<b>2023</b> £	<b>2022</b> £
Unrestricted Funds	373,853	-	10,581	519,419	(114,828)	-	789,025	885,163
Restricted Funds	-	-	195,726	15,461	(204,168)	-	7,019	5,000
Total Funds	<u>373,853</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>206,307</u>	<u>534,880</u>	<u>(318,996)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>796,044</u>	<u>890,163</u>

**16. RECONCILIATION OF OPERATING PROFIT TO NET CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES**

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	(94,119)	(56,588)
Depreciation	47,558	45,831
Movement in stocks	(2,347)	(2,582)
Movement in debtors	(27,347)	70,800
Movement in creditors	(165,499)	(33,101)
(Gain)/Loss on investments	-	(171)
(Profit)/Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets	-	-
<b>Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities</b>	<u><b>(241,754)</b></u>	<u><b>24,189</b></u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**17. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS**

	Opening Balance £	Income £	Expenditure £	Net Movement in Funds 2022 £	Transfers between Funds £	Prior year Adjustment £	2023 £	2022 £
Unrestricted Funds	885,163	344,355	(440,493)	(96,138)	-	-	789,025	885,163
Restricted Funds	5,000	1,364,536	(1,362,517)	2,019	-		7,019	5,000
	<b>890,163</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>	<b>(1,803,010)</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>-</b>		<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

<b>18. UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2022	885,163	946,251
Incoming resources for the year	344,355	577,483
Resources expended for the year	(440,493)	(622,378)
Transfer between funds	-	(16,193)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2023	<u>789,025</u>	<u>885,163</u>

<b>19. RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2022	5,000	500
Incoming resources for the year	1,364,536	973,295
Resources expended for the year	(1,362,517)	(984,988)
Transfer between funds	-	16,193
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2023	<u>7,019</u>	<u>5,000</u>

**20. DESIGNATED FUNDS**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

**21. LEGAL STATUS**

Stepping Stones NI is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up.

Stepping Stones NI is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, Charity Number 100727. Date of registration 9th December 2014.

Stepping Stones NI is a recognised Charity within the definition of Section 360(3) Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 by the Commissioners of the HM Revenue & Customs.

**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Annual report

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**TRUSTEE REPORT**

**1 April 2022 to**

**31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

## **Trustee Report - Stepping Stones NI**

### **1 The Organisation**

#### **Reference and Administrative Details**

Registered Company number NI031411 (Northern Ireland)

**Registered Charity Number** 100727      **VAT Number** 701 428570

#### **Date of Incorporation**

October 1996

#### **Registered Office**

39 Seymour St  
Lisburn  
Co Antrim  
BT27 4SY

#### **Trustees**

Michael Drayne  
Ken Alderdice  
Belinda O Neill  
Karen Carmichael  
Michael Scott (Appointed Chair Dec 22)  
Kieran Corrigan  
Brenda Mc Mullan  
Diana Faralley  
Melanie Jones (Resigned 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022)  
Cormac O Donnell ( Co-opted March 2023)

#### **Company Secretary**

Paula Jennings Chief Officer

#### **Independent Auditors**

Laurance Shearer: O'Hara Shearer  
547 Falls Road, Belfast BT11 9AB  
BT28 1XE

#### **Solicitor**

Donaldson Mc Connell & Co  
8-10 Graham Gardens Lisburn Con Antrim

#### **Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow St  
Lisburn BT28 1YS

#### **Chief Officer**

Paula Jennings

## 1 Who we are

Stepping Stones NI is an award-winning charitable organisation and company limited by guarantee that provides training and employment services for people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism who often are furthest away from the labour market. We do this in conjunction with social enterprise activity. The company was first established in 1996 to fill the gap in service provision for people with learning disabilities who had no access to training to advance their skills towards employment and volunteering. Stepping Stones NI opened its doors in January 1998 providing training and supported opportunities for people with severe learning disabilities.

In this reporting period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 we continued to deliver our range of services providing the opportunity for people with disabilities to advance skills, employability and overall health and wellbeing of our trainees and clients towards a life more fulfilled. January 2023 was the beginning of our 25<sup>th</sup> year of delivering services in Northern Ireland.

The services and social enterprises at Stepping Stones NI during the reporting period included:

- **Youth Service:** engaging with young people aged 16-24 who are not in any form of training or employment through a range of activities.
- **Transitions Service:** supporting school leavers with learning disabilities/difficulties to make the move from school to further education, employment or training.
- **Training:** offering training and outreach training to people in various courses leading to the attainment of accredited qualifications including; customer service, health and safety, work appropriate behaviour, catering, money management etc, anti-bullying etc.
- **Employment Service:** providing employment support to people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. This includes help with; writing CVs, application form preparation, interviews preparation and support in the work place with employers. We help people to gain employment with more community participation.
- **The Courtyard Cafe:** The coffee shop is a registered site for NVQ catering qualifications in Food Preparation and Food Service and Customer Service providing a realistic training environment in which people can develop their catering and hospitality skills.
- **Pink Elephant Cards:** Social enterprise specialising in bespoke wedding stationery and greeting cards made by people with learning disabilities.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Cafe:** social enterprise providing volunteering opportunities to adults with learning disability as well as an outside catering service and room hire.
- **Stepping Stones Picture Framing:** Social Enterprise offering training in picture framing and customer service to people with learning disabilities. Recognised by the

Fine Art Trade Guild as quality provider of framing services and staff trained to Guild Commended Framers standard.

- **The Gatelodge Café:** Social enterprise Café in Newtownards delivering quality training for people with learning disabilities in hospitality, customer service and food preparation.
- **Navigation House:** a new service and project for young people to advance their skills in horticulture and to engage health and wellbeing.

Stepping Stones NI ensures that people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties have the support and opportunity to develop their skills, realise their talents, try new things, attain accredited qualifications, live as active citizens in their community and find employment. We develop quality training and employment services for people with a variety of learning abilities who require the support they need to advance their training and gain the support to gain employment. The work during the period was supported by government departments, European Social Fund, contracts including Health Trust Contracts and income generated through our social enterprises which is reinvested back into the organisation to deliver create our social impact.

### **Our Mission and Values and objectives**

Stepping Stones NI is a Limited Company with charitable status that has been delivering services since January 1998. It provides quality training and employment services for people with a range of disability who often are furthest removed from the labour market, helping those people to find a job if it is their ambition.

### **The Purpose and Mission of Stepping Stones NI is:**

“To nurture the potential of people with a disability to thrive in a socially inclusive society”.

### **Our Vision**

“A socially enriched world where every individual can take proud steps towards a life fulfilled”.

### **Our Values Drive Our Actions**

**We Respect** everyone’s right to a life more fulfilled.

**We Inspire** employers and the wider community to see disability differently.

**We Nurture** all of our People to be their best.

**We Empower** each-other to make a positive impact on the world.

**We are Driven**, seizing every opportunity to create better lives.

**We are Honest** and always do the right thing.

**We are Positively Charged** to make things possible.

**We are Quality Focussed**, to always ensure the highest standard.

## **Our Objectives**

- To develop services and social enterprises which will provide appropriate training opportunities leading to employment for adults with learning difficulties.
- To equip individuals participating in projects and services with knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualifications to enable progression to supported employment.
- To increase disability awareness amongst society.
- To promote independence, wellbeing and social inclusion amongst adults with learning difficulties participating in projects.
- To provide a quality service to stakeholders accessing Stepping Stones services and social enterprises.
- To promote cooperation and develop links with other relevant agencies to maximise opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

For the purposes of this report the expression "learning difficulty" shall include any learning disability, difficulties, and associated problem or those who appear on the autistic spectrum, a developmental disability of the mind, sensory impairment, acquired brain injury or mental health problem.

## **Strategy for delivery**

Our strategic plan focuses on the following themes:

- 1. Social Enterprise**
- 2. Employment**
- 3. Skills and Training**
- 4. Health and Well-Being**

The board of Trustees met in March 2023 to review its Strategy with members of the senior management team of Stepping Stones NI .

Stepping Stones NI was incorporated in 1996 and is established under Articles of Association which sets out the objects and powers of the company, and the company is governed under its Articles of Association.

## **Our Public Benefit**

In shaping the strategy and objectives of Stepping Stones NI the Trustees have taken into account the Charity Commission NI guidance on public benefit including the commissions

Public Benefit Reporting Document and confirm that they have complied with the requirements of section 4 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes to advance education, relieve unemployment and develop the capacity and skills of individuals aged 16 and over with learning disabilities and learning difficulties, in particular are:

- to provide or assist in the provision of, programmes of education, including accredited and vocational training designed to assist the beneficiaries to lead to employment and volunteering opportunities and to enhance their personal development.
- to provide support and guidance to the beneficiaries in the transition towards employment.
- to establish and manage community-owned-business projects promoted by the company to create training and employment opportunities for the beneficiaries in the area of benefit.
- to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

### **Our Benefits**

The organisation is committed to delivering services to people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties that assist in their development and personal progression leading to employment we do this through:

- The provision of a range of services and social enterprises that provide the opportunity for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties to gain qualifications leading to employment.
- The increased personal development and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Attainment of qualifications and skills development of people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Youth service, transition service and employment service provide job support for people to gain volunteering and employment in the community.
- Social enterprises that provide a realistic working environment in which people can develop their work skills, gain qualifications and engage with customers thus increasing their self-esteem, confidence and independence.
- The development of programmes and services that will support people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties fulfil their full potential in society.



## **2 Achievements and Performance 2022/2023**

### **Our Services**

During 2022/2023 Stepping Stones NI our services continued to thrive with continued support from funders, employers and stakeholders. We continued to deliver and build on our quality services that support people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and Autism to develop their employability skills and achieve qualifications leading to employment. We did this across Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council , Ards and North Down Borough Council, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Belfast City Council areas.

We continued to deliver the provision of catering services at Lisburn Civic Centre, for Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, putting social enterprise at the heart of a community and civic space whilst generating income for the organisation.

With support from our funders, partners, employers, volunteers and a range of other stakeholders we made a positive impact to the lives of people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties, Autism and those with health conditions through our programmes. We

have a dedicated team of Staff and Trustees who work alongside our volunteers and community champions. This was the last year of the European Social Fund Programme to Northern Ireland and the final year of this funding stream for Stepping Stones NI with the UK exit from the European Union - Brexit.

## **Our Performance**

### **Employment Service**

The Employment Service supports clients to gain employment/jobs and/or voluntary placements of their choice.

The employment service provided people with opportunities to avail of :

- Innovative pre-employment “STEP INTO” academy training courses with industry specific companies that led to a paid job for participants. We embedded our “ Step into” Academies into the Stepping Stones to Employment delivery model to address local labour market skills shortages, as well as meeting individual employer training requirements. Since April 2022 there have been 12 academies, 50 referrals and 36 jobs secured. The academies were aimed at labour market employment gaps where we worked with premier employees in the following industries: construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and catering, IT and customer service. an Employment Officer to support people to prepare for employment or volunteering.
- Support to find and sustain employment or volunteering.
- Access to a range of training courses to help people prepare for work, including; CV building, job search , customer services skills, effective communication skills and essential skills
- Tailored career guidance to help people find a new job and career.
- A broadened curriculum to embed wider societal inclusion topics such as, LGBTQIA+, to promote equality and provide a safe space for participants.
- “Mini Wellbeing Retreats” during March 2023 to broaden the wellbeing curriculum for up to 40 participants to improve mental and physical health through horticultural therapy.

The Employment Service delivered its services across 4 council areas under the European Social Fund Programme – “Stepping Stones to Employment 2” funded until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 under Call 3.

- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

Stepping Stones NI is delighted and proud to report that on our ESF Programme:

**73 people gained paid employment : target exceeded by 200%**

**276 people with a disability or health condition participated in employment support: exceeded target by 126%.**

**55 people went into education and training with 338 accredited training courses delivered**

Stepping Stones NI employment team continued to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes of people with disabilities in our communities. The team were instrumental in assisting employers and business to support our people to achieve employment and volunteering dreams.

### **Academies**

Our Employer partnerships are very important to us and we are grateful to our employers for the increased inclusion and diversity in the workplace . During the period we delivered 12 employment “Step Into” academies across a number of industries in hospitality, retail and manufacturing to 50 people with 36 jobs secured through them . These academies provide accredited training in a group setting to a maximum of 8 people leading to a supported interview leading to employment for ring fenced jobs.

This is what Hendersons Foodservice had to say in our evaluation of our academy with them:

“These academies are much more than promoting equality but are a valuable part of an inclusive and effective talent strategy- we have been able to appoint highly talented individuals through the STEP into academies- one of our valued colleagues who joined as a result of a STEP into academy was subsequently an award winner within their team. The approach of the Stepping Stones NI team is one of the things that sets these initiatives apart in the first instance- there is a high level of interest in the needs of the job role and employer, together with a real concern for matching clients to a role that is mutually beneficial and therefore likely to establish long term employment and success. We are working together with the same objective in mind- the success of the employee on completion of the academy”

This is what the client has said :

“I started Stepping Stones NI in June 2018. I was quite nervous on my first day and lacked confidence in myself, but my NVQ course tutor, supported me and encouraged me and I soon relaxed and fitted in. I really have enjoyed my time at Stepping Stones NI, gaining my NVQ’s and working with the team. I got to learn new skills in cooking and baking. I was able to further develop these skills during work placements in Lisburn Cathedral Coffee Room, Pimento Cafe Moira, The Quirky Bird Tea Rooms and the Haslem Hotel.

I then got an opportunity to complete a Deli Academy with Henderson's and Stepping Stones NI and I am delighted to have secured a job working at the Deli Counter in the Spar, Glenavy Road, Moira. I love it there. Many thanks to my Employment Officer for all her support and encouragement throughout my time at Stepping Stones NI”

36 people successfully secured employment with support from the academies.

**Stepping Stones**  
**STEP INTO RETAIL**  
in partnership with **HENDERSON GROUP**

**Stepping Stones**  
**STEP INTO DELI**  
in partnership with **HENDERSON GROUP**

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## YOU Service (Youth Onwards and Upwards)

Young people aged 16-24 participated in our You Service with the opportunity to get involved in a range of activities that encouraged independence, improvements in self-esteem and overall confidence and team building in conjunction with attainment of qualifications and paid employment. The programme offered young people the opportunity:

- to gain accredited qualifications
- to develop soft skills
- to experience work tasters and educational tasters
- to develop as young people through The Youth Service
- receive support to achieve employment

The You Service delivered the following throughout the year :

- 4 people achieved paid employment
- 14 people progressed to education and training

- 35 referrals to the service
- 7 people participated in placements

During the year the You Service had:

- Educational/Careers talks from Belfast Met and SERC (local further education colleges, Skill Up Programme, Volunteer Now and Connected Minds).
- Work Tasters from Little Wing Pizza and Seagoe Youth Group (based on feedback about interest in hospitality and youth work).
- Advice and Guidance: Talks from Citizens Advice Bureau (Benefits and Entitlements), Housing Executive (Independent Living), Links Counselling (Mental Health), HYPE (Relationships/Personal Safety/LGBTQ+) and Common Youth (Sexual Health/Boundaries/Consent).
- Education/Training Providers for progression: Clanrye, Belfast Met, SERC, NRC, Ulster University.
- 5 in 1 Media Presentations: Opportunity to explore film industry and make films based on their disability.
- Participation with a LGBTQ+ support group

The YOU Service worked with with Atlas Counselling Service. Links Counselling Service, YMCA Lisburn and Lisburn City Council to provide opportunities for employability, horticulture experience and counselling support.

## **Training**

Our Training Service supports people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties and autism on their journey to finding a paid job through the provision of a range of training courses that meet the specific learning needs and ability of the participants on the course. 338 accredited units were delivered and achieved during the year through our Stepping Stones to employment programme, with 1024 soft skill outcome achieved.

A comprehensive prospectus was designed in May 2022 detailing all the non-accredited and accredited training, and programmes available to a wide range of stakeholders.

Training for employers and other community stakeholders became a focus with over 142 courses delivered to over 10 community groups, providing upskilling opportunities to local people furthest removed from the labour market

**338 accredited and non- accredited training units achieved by people with learning difficulties across the organisation.**

**1024 soft skills outcome achieved**

## **Accredited Units**

Accredited units successfully completed related to practical and industry relevant skills, life skills and personal development skills.

- Food allergens level 2
- Health & Safety level 1
- Food safety level 1
- Paediatric 1st aid level 3
- Manual handling level 2
- Fire safety level 1
- Emergency First aid at work 3
- OCN Level 1 Certificate in Appropriate Workplace Behaviour
- RSPH L1 in Food Hygiene Awareness
- COSHH
- World Host -Principles of customer service online
- Barista Training

## **Soft Skills Training**

- Online safety
- Navigators
- Managing Stress
- looking after our planet
- Alpha Bravo Charlie
- Appropriate workplace behaviour
- Managing Money
- Talking loneliness
- Talking mental wellness
- Talking emotions
- Talking mental wellness
- Barista
- Culture & Diversity
- Sales Skills training
- Communication in the workplace



### **Living Life loving life**

The training service supported people with a learning disability through its Living Life Loving life classes to trainees with a learning disability . The loving life programme supports our trainees to enjoy a range of activities that are engaging, fun and creative .

### **Transitions**

Making decisions and moving from school to training, further education or employment can be a challenging time for parents and young people. The Transitions Service is a service that supports pupils and students with learning difficulties in their final years at school, to explore options for their future. The Transitions team supports pupils to make the move from school to further education, vocational training, or employment as seamless as possible by working with the young people, their families and key professionals.

Through the work of our Transitions team, we continued to work in partnership with local schools- Beechlawn, Parkview School and SERC Students availed of mentoring support to

improve their employability and personal development skills leading to increased progression pathways known as a Job Club.

### **Physical Activities and Football**

Indoor football continues to be a great success with this year no exception with our Team playing every Wednesday night in Lisburn and was a great opportunity for people to increase their physical and mental health and friendships. In the past year the team have competed at the George Best Disability Cup and the Clanrye Cup and have won two friendlies with Harry's Place in Ballynahinch.

Navigation House will be used as for exercise and wellbeing into the future.

### **Social Enterprise**

At the year-end **77** people with a learning disability were engaging and participating in training through Social Enterprise activity in:

- Pink Elephant Cards
- The Courtyard Café Lisburn
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café Lisburn
- Stepping Stones Picture Framing Lisburn
- The Gatelodge Café Newtownards
- Civic Centre Lisburn
- Navigation House

Our Social Enterprises provide the working environment for people with learning disabilities to learn and develop employability skills in a realistic commercial environment /employability hub potentially leading to a paid job in the future. All income generated from our social enterprises is reinvested back into the organisation to support service delivery for people who access our services.

Day Opportunities Contract with South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust supports the activities for people with a learning disability across all our social enterprises to promote training and employment.

### **Pink Elephant Cards**

Pink Elephant Cards social enterprise was impacted greatly by the pandemic and the challenge for the period was to rebuild the social enterprise as restrictions in relation to weddings eased. This social enterprise produces a bespoke range of handcrafted wedding stationery Pink Elephant Cards.

### **Picture Framing**

As a member of the Fine Art Trade Guild our team provided a high-quality framing service offering a wide range of frames and mounts and was open during the pandemic in line with restrictions.

**Our cafes and catering: The Courtyard Café, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Café and The Gatelodge** continued to trade and provide hospitality skills training for people with a learning disability .

**Lisburn Civic Centre:** During the year our catering team continued to provide catering services at Lisburn Civic Centre with Lisburn City Council , providing training and skills development for people with disabilities.

### **NAVIGATION HOUSE**

During the year Stepping Stones NI was working on its projects to create services that would address the health and wellbeing of its clients and trainees. An exciting new development was realised in In February 2023 following the submission of an expression of interest and business case for the newly refurbished and restored Navigation House. Stepping Stones NI took the lease of Navigation House, 148 Hillsborough Road Lisburn a B listed building and site from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. This fantastic site located adjacent to the towpath aim is to create a health and wellbeing hub for participants engaging in Stepping Stones NI services through the creation of a horticultural project and social enterprise working with other community partners. With new staff to the project funded by Queens Jubilee Fund through The National Lotteries Community Fund a new polytunnel was erected to start our horticultural social enterprise, and new brand logo and brand identity created.

At Navigation House Stepping Stones NI will introduce programmes and activities that will enrich the lives of people who are Neurodiverse and create greater social and economic impact within Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council . At Navigation House Stepping Stones NI will:

- **Develop a horticultural social enterprise activity** focusing on the growing of organic and pesticide free produce herbs, edible flowers, fruit and vegetables involving people with a range of disabilities from the Lisburn and Castlereagh area.
- **Introduce learning in relation to environmental and green Issues**, circular economy, the world around us, and the roll out of Loving Life Programme and cookery programmes
- **Deliver OCN NI Level 1 Award / Certificate in Vocational Skills (Horticulture)**  
This qualification is designed to provide learners with an introduction to skills

and knowledge required for working in Horticulture, as well as valuable general skills for the workplace

- **Deliver various employment Academies** to advance training leading to a paid job in partnership with local employers .
- **Roll out of Wellbeing Programme** to include Yoga, exercise classes, mindfulness and outdoor physical activities including walking and cycling groups for people with a disability.

## Navigation House



## Quality Standards

During the year we successfully achieved revision of the BSI ISO: 9001:2015 .

## Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

In November 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an ESF Call 3 visit to Stepping Stones NI on behalf of Department for Economy to evaluate the capacity of Stepping Stones NI to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision of its Stepping Stones to Employment 2 programme.

During the visit, ETI evaluated the effectiveness of the quality improvement planning processes and focused on two of the key areas which the organisation had prioritised for improvement through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes:

- to further develop the lesson observation process; and
- to review how the e-safety and safeguarding training for participants focuses on learning disability.

The ETI visit identified the following key findings as per ETI report:

- An appropriate curriculum is in place to underpin the three key overarching strands of the project: to support participants in their transition from both mainstream and special schools (transition); to provide participants with relevant training and employment opportunities (employment); and to support the participants' personal and social development (youth).
- All of the participants are assigned a key worker at the beginning of the project and a tailored programme is devised and delivered flexibly to meet their individual learning and development needs. Most of them have multiple and complex barriers to learning and progression.
- Stepping Stones NI employment academies provide the participants with relevant opportunities to work towards accredited industry and/or vocationally related qualifications at level 1 or 2, in areas such as food hygiene, health and safety, hospitality and catering, manual handling, and world host, as well as preparation for a guaranteed job interview with an employer. The participants and employers reported on the benefits of the academies, including the support for the participants to develop interview skills, and the disability awareness, and autism specific training provided for employers. Employers further reported that the clear communication between the employer, the participant and Stepping Stones NI is a key feature of their successful partnership. They commented positively on the level of pre- and post-employment support which Stepping Stones NI provides, including attendance with participants at interviews and the post-employment engagement with participants and employers.
- Additionally, there are skills academies which are used well to support the development of the employability, personal and social skills of those participants not yet ready to progress to employment. They help to build the participants' confidence and cover a variety of disciplines including communication, healthy living, mental health, and mindfulness.
- Stepping Stones NI has rebranded their youth work delivery model through a review and transformation of their youth services in consultation with the participants. In the Youth Onwards Upwards (Y.O.U) programme strand, the participants discussed and planned with one another for the forthcoming local Christmas market, developing customer service skills and creating products to sell on behalf of the organisation. Through this strand, the participants are making new friendships and social connections which are helping them overcome issues such as anxiety and social isolation. Their interactions with one another were good humoured, respectful, and confident and they have established an excellent rapport and trusting relationships with the staff.
- The employment and skills academies and the Y.O.U programme strand support the participants to make new friendships and social connections. The learning and development

sessions observed were effective. There was evidence of effective planning, mutually respectful relationships between the participants and the tutors, and most of the participants engaged well in their learning. They responded well when questioned, seeking clarification when appropriate, and most participated well in the small and larger group discussions. The participants were comfortable to share their personal and work experiences which enabled them to learn with and from one another. The positive affirmations by the facilitators were contributing to their self-esteem and confidence to speak out. An appropriate lesson observation process has been implemented across the organisation. This will be developed further over the coming year to support new tutors and encourage peer observation among staff.

- Stepping Stones NI have established five social enterprises which offer participants good opportunities to undertake a work experience placement in a realistic training environment. The three cafes, picture framing and wedding stationery businesses help the participants to develop a range of social and employability skills, including customer service and food hygiene. Participants working in the cafes have the opportunity to undertake national vocational qualifications at level 1 and level 2 in catering and hospitality.

- The needs and progress of the participants are recorded effectively by the staff. The regular reviews capture well their views on their learning and personal and social development, demonstrating an understanding of the challenges that they as young people face, and the effective support given by the staff. In discussions, the participants highlighted that what they are learning is useful; for example, in retail work environments they learn about roles, regulations and expectations. They stated that their learning is relevant to their work aspirations and that they find the regular contact from the staff supportive and helpful.

- The participants avail of a wraparound support service which is inclusive and delivered flexibly, responsively and sensitively to meet their individual needs. Appropriate links and partnerships have been developed with an extensive range of stakeholders, including community organisations, employers, statutory agencies, support organisations, and other key stakeholders for referral and recruitment purposes and to support and signpost participants to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression.

- The stakeholders interviewed reported that the participants are supported well to overcome challenges in their personal lives and in their workplaces, and cited the availability of wider family support, if required, as a notable benefit. In supporting an ethos and culture of inclusion across the organisation, Stepping Stones NI is currently reviewing the content of its e-safety and safeguarding training to ensure there is a clear focus on participants with a learning disability, and plans are in place to provide gender identity and sexual orientation training for staff, participants and other relevant stakeholders.

- Recruitment to the project has exceeded the overall target. The target for participants progressing to employment has also been exceeded, and to date, education and/or training is at 80% of the target set. All of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. The organisation is committed to ensuring that that all of the participants recruited,

and who remain on the project when ESF ends, complete and achieve their individual targets. Management is also currently reviewing how longer-term support can be provided for participants after the end of ESF if required.

- The project is well led at both strategic and operational levels. Management have taken appropriate action to address the areas for development identified at the previous monitoring visit in July 2021. The training accommodation and physical resources in place to support the delivery of the project are of a high quality. Additional accommodation to support participants interested in horticulture has been recently secured and planning is well developed to extend the curriculum offered to participants.
- The project staff are well-experienced in working with adults and young people with learning, personal and social development needs. Those interviewed, including a small number of new staff recruited over the past 18 months, report that they have good opportunities to undertake continuous professional development, that effective collegial working relationships exist among management and staff, and they feel well-supported by management. A number of incentives have been introduced by management to support the mental health and well-being of staff and promote a healthy work-life balance; this is viewed as a positive and welcome development by staff. Despite continuing to advertise job posts, management are finding it increasingly difficult to fill a number of current vacancies for the project.
- An appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process is in place. The documentation provides a concise evaluation of the quality of the provision and identifies key strengths and relevant areas for improvement. An appropriate action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement. Overall, the leadership and management is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants.

### **Safeguarding**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the visit, the arrangements for safeguarding participants of the Stepping Stones to Employment 2 ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

### **Overall outcome**

At the time of the visit, and in the areas evaluated, Stepping Stones NI demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Stepping Stones to Employment 2 ESF project

### **Awards during the year**

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council: Business Awards 2023: Winner of Best Social Enterprise

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council: Business Awards 2023: High Commendation for Best Company to Work For

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council: Mayor's Community Awards 2023: Transforming Lives

National Learning Disabilities & Autism Awards 2023: Sporting Chance Award (Disability Football Team)

National Learning Disabilities & Autism Awards 2023: Outstanding Contribution from Stepping Stones NI Chief Officer Paula Jennings

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

#### **Structure**

Stepping Stones NI is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, incorporated in 1996 and commenced delivering services for people with learning disabilities in Jan 1998.

Stepping Stones NI has a Board of 10 Trustees as per Articles of Association who meet 6 times a year and are responsible for setting the strategic direction and the policies in which the organisation is governed. There organisation has two sub committees of the board a Finance Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) and a Human Resource Governance and Nominations Committee (HRGN).

The Trustees serving from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31 March 2023 were as follows:

1. Michael Drayne (HRGN Committee)
2. Ken Alderdice (FAR Committee)
3. Belinda O Neill (HRGN Committee resigned 1 February 2023)
4. Karen Carmichael (HRGN Committee)
5. Michael Scott ( Chair )
6. Kieran Corrigan (HRGN Committee)
7. Brenda Mc Mullan (FAR Committee)
8. Diana Farrelly (resigned 4<sup>th</sup> January 2023)
9. Cormac O Donnell ( Coopted 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023)

#### **Company Secretary**

On 1st April 2022, there were 8 Trustees on the Board. A scheme of matters reserved for the Board is in place and the day-to-day responsibility for the implementation of the strategy and the provision of services is that of the Chief Officer Paula Jennings. The Chief Officer works alongside the Senior Team which has operational, service delivery, marketing and finance responsibilities.

The Trustees manage the business of the company unless they are subject to any restrictions imposed by the Companies Act, the articles or any special resolution. Trustees of the Board should include at least one member who is a parent or carer of a person with a learning disability or a learning difficulty.

Stepping Stones NI Chief Executive is Paula Jennings who has the sole responsibility of leading and implementing the strategies set by the board of Trustees.

## **Recruitment of Trustees**

### **Board Recruitment and Appointment**

The recruitment of new board members helps to strengthen the corporate governance of the organisation. Stepping Stones NI conducts a skills and experience analysis of the existing board prior to advertising or liaising in networks i.e. Institute of Directors IOD, CO3, business community , to ensure the desired skills and experience are required with a view to attract suitable candidates to apply who meet the requirements of the board and ultimately govern the charity.

Following an initial expression of interest submission and interview the suitability of candidates is assessed on how the candidate meets the criteria, what skills and influence they bring to the board and how their experience and attributes fit with the organisational culture and vision and what they hope to achieve in the role. Following meeting with the Chair and Chief Officer a recommendation for the appointment of new Trustees is placed at HRGN Committee. This Committee will make the recommendation to the full board for approval and appointment as a Trustee of Stepping Stones NI.

The Office Bearers of the Company are appointed at the first meeting of the Board of Trustees after the annual general meeting. All new members are elected to the board at the AGM. A Trustee is on the Board for a period of 3 years were upon such members must retire but may be eligible for re-election. Trustees shall be elected at the annual general meeting AGM by the members present.

### **Trustee Induction and Training**

New Trustees undergo an induction to brief them on their role as a Trustee of the company. New Trustees are provided with information to brief them on their legal obligations under charity and company law i.e. the content of the Articles of Association, the strategy and recent set of end of year accounts. All New Trustees are formally inducted to the organisation with the Chief Officer with visits to all sites of the organisation .

## **Decision making within Stepping Stones NI**

The Board of Trustees comprises a - Chairperson and Trustees who bring a range of skills and experience appropriate to the requirements of the Board. They provide support to the Chief Officer and their purpose is to contribute to the effective governance of Stepping Stones NI promoting the vision, mission, aims and objectives of the organisation. The full board of Trustees meets bi monthly with sub group meetings and full board meetings.

The Chief Officer provides a report to the Board of Trustees at each board meeting, with updates on key performance indicators of the organisation presented on a Balanced Score Card format. This ensures that the Board of Trustees are fully informed of activities, performance, and achievements of the organisation.

The chair of each subcommittee i.e FAR and HRGN reports to the board at each board meeting.

All members of the Board of Trustees give up their time voluntarily and receive no financial or other benefits from the organisation.

### **Risk Management**

The Finance Audit and Risk (FAR) sub group review corporate risk and financial information with reporting back to the Board of Directors. The corporate risk register details low, medium and high risk in the following areas – People, Operations and Financial which is continuously reviewed. Where appropriate mitigation steps are put in place to protect the organisation against risk.

The organisation has implemented the ISO quality standard 9001:2015 during the reporting period.

## **4 FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS**

### **FINANCIAL REVIEW 2022/2023**

In the reporting period we delivered the final call and year of European Social Fund funding to Northern Ireland. Call 3 of “Stepping Stones to Employment 2” funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and Department for the Economy match funded by:

- Department for the Communities
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

This was a challenging and difficult year for the organisation and for the disability sector in Northern Ireland. It was the final year of ESF funding to Northern Ireland due to Brexit with uncertainty of replacement funding and future funding sustainability to the organisation, which had historically been supported by European Funding since inception in 1998. Stepping Stones NI through its Chief Officer during the year continuously attended meetings and seminars in relation to future funding arrangements under UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) and lobbied local politicians to highlight a cliff edge scenario for many organisations without future funding. With an application process for UKSPF “People and Skills” launched in late December 2022 for submission on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Stepping Stones NI worked to collaborate with a number of disability organisations to submit a bid for funding. Stepping Stones NI formed a collaboration with the following organisations for its submission : Triangle Housing Association , Compass Advocacy Network, ApplebyTrust and AEL.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 Stepping Stones NI was notified by Westminster that the collaborative funding application for UKSPF under People and Skills was successful.

The organisation recorded a deficit of £94,119 for the period . This was due to:

- the ESF funding model for Call 3 funding. Stepping Stones NI lost funding from its funding allocation when staff were not in post due to maternity, sickness and leavers to the organisation . The organisation lost £45,545 in funding contribution to overheads for this reason .
- Increased costs due to the cost of living crisis on food costs and utilities.
- Depreciation costs £47,558
- Contribution to new lease at Navigation House
- Cost of living crisis

We would like to thank our funders who supported us this year

- Department for the Economy
- European Social Fund
- Department for Communities
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- Lisburn City and Castlereagh Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Newry & Mourne and Down District Council
- Rank Foundation
- Queens Jubilee Platinum Fund/The National Lottery Community Fund

And for everyone for their kind and generous donations received and employer partnerships.

## **Objectives and policies**

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it to a number of financial risks including credit risk, cash flow risk and liquidity risk. The use of financial derivatives is governed by the charity's policies approved by the board of Trustees, which provide written principles on the use of financial derivatives to manage these risks. The charity does not use derivative financial instruments for speculative purposes.

## **Reserves Policy**

An extensive reserves base is essential for Stepping Stones NI to continue to manage risk and deliver its services and social enterprises. The Trustees of Stepping Stones NI wish to continue to build a general level of reserves (excluding tangible fixed assets) that has a target of six months of unrestricted expenditure.

Stepping Stones NI needs to maintain this level of reserve for the following:

- Cash flow to ensure amounts due to creditors and fulfilment of contracts and leases.
- Gaps and loss in funding provision
- Organisational wind up and redundancy pay
- New development plans for service delivery in the future.

Stepping Stones NI reserves can be understood under the following areas:

- Protected Funds: to sustain and support at least 6 months organisational costs.
- Designated Funds: to prepare for potential redundancy costs at the end of a funding cycle.
- Infrastructure Funds: to support the refurbishment and renewals of Stepping Stones NI social enterprises and assets.
- Opportunity Funds: to explore future opportunities and projects that benefit people with disabilities.

## **Cashflow**

Core funding activities are secured until March 2025 following a successful UKSPF bid in January 2023. Stepping Stones NI must ensure that adequate reserves are available to bridge any potential shortfall in funds and to allow enough time for replacement or additional funds to be found. Legally, Stepping Stones NI must be able to meet its debts as they fall due. Since restricted funds can only be used for the purpose for which they are given, Stepping Stones NI must always ensure that it can support at any given time (from its reserves cash or otherwise) viable and contracted programmes should it ever encounter difficulties. The cash reserves protected funds enables the organisation to meet its

obligations for six months if no funding becomes available. Stepping Stones NI must also ensure that it is able to respond to any cashflow problems as a result in delays from either funders or debtors.

### **Plans for future periods**

Our aim to channel a more holistic approach to the delivery of our services. We understand now more than ever that skills development and work are just one aspect of an individual's life. Our focus and our scope of services include:

1. Social Enterprise
2. Employment
3. Skills and Training
4. Health and Well-Being

The implementation of the organisation's strategy will support the growth and development of the charity and as such enhance the lives of and create a better future for people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties. A strategy day took place in March 2023 attended by Trustees along with senior staff

During the year Stepping Stones NI acquired the lease from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council for Navigation House to delivery health and well being programmes following the competitive submission of an expression of interest and business case .

Stepping Stones NI will work to ensure that opportunities presented through UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be maximised to ensure continuation of service provision and opportunities for people with disabilities into the future.

### **Cash flow risk**

Stepping Stones NI activities expose it primarily to regular payments from funders. This is carefully managed and monitored by the FAR committee.

### **Credit risk**

Stepping Stones NI principal financial assets are bank balances and cash, trade and other receivables, and investments. Stepping Stones NI credit risk is primarily attributable to its trade receivables.

Stepping Stones NI has no significant concentration of credit risk, with exposure spread over a large number of counterparties and customers.

### **Liquidity risk**

In order to maintain liquidity to ensure that sufficient funds are available for ongoing operations and future developments .

### **Disclosure of information to auditor**

Each trustee has taken steps that they ought to have taken as a Trustee in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Charity's auditor is aware of that information. The Trustees confirm that there is no relevant information that they know of and of which they know the auditor is unaware.

### **Statement of Trustees Responsibilities**

The Trustees (who are the Directors of Stepping Stones NI for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom generally accepted Accounting Practice), including Financial Report Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare a financial statement 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 income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and the apply them consistently
- Observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statement comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Trustees 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.

### **Valuing our Volunteers and donations.**

Stepping Stones NI values, the contribution that our volunteers bring to the organisation and the donations that we receive each year. We are grateful and thank them for their support which allow us to fulfil our charity objectives.



**Stepping Stones NI**

Northern Ireland - Charity number 100727

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# Annual return

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

( A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

**COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 031411**

**CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 100727**

**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
**547 FALLS ROAD**  
**BELFAST**  
**BT11 9AB**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

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**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**  
**OFFICERS AND OTHER INFORMATION**

**Directors**

Michael Scott (Chair)  
Kenneth Alderice  
Belinda O'Neill (Resigned 30th January 2023)  
Karen Carmichael  
Kieran Corrigan  
Michael Drayne  
Brenda McMullan  
Cormac O'Donnell (Appointed 31st March 2023)  
Diana Farrelly (Resigned 1st December 2022)  
Melanie Jones (Resigned 4th April 2022)

**Secretary**

Paula Jennings

**Registered Office**

Stepping Stones NI  
39 Seymour Street  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT27 4SY

**Auditors**

O'Hara Shearer  
Chartered Accountants  
& Statutory Auditors  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Solicitors**

Donaldson McConnell & Co  
Solicitors  
8-10 Graham Gardens  
Lisburn  
County Antrim  
BT28 1YS

**Bankers**

Danske Bank  
62-66 Bow Street  
Lisburn  
BT28 1YS

**Company Registration Number**

NI 031411

**Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number**

NIC 100727

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS RESPONSIBILITIES**

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year.

The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2023. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

**By order of the board:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE** 6th December 2023

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**KAREN CARMICHAEL**  
**DIRECTOR**

**DATE** 6th December 2023

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Stepping Stones NI (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 March 2023 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 *The financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

**Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC'S Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

**Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

**Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

**Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Trustees and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- sufficient accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

**Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, the trustees, who are also the directors of the charity for the purpose of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

**Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

**Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

The objectives of our audit in respect of fraud, are to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements due to fraud; to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud, through designing and implementing appropriate responses to those assessed risks; and to respond appropriately to instances of fraud or suspected fraud identified during the audit. However, the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both management and those charged with governance of the Charity.

Our approach was as follows:

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements applicable to the charity and considered that the most significant are the Companies Act 2006 and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)).
- Enquiry of management, those charged with governance and the entity's solicitors around actual and potential litigation and claims.
- Enquiry of entity staff in compliance functions to identify any instances of any non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO THE MEMBERS'**

- Auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, and evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

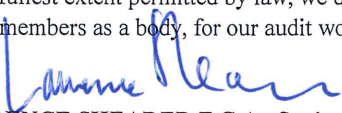
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purposes of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

**Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditors' report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and its members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

  
**LAWRENCE SHEARER F.C.A., Senior Statutory Auditor**  
**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF O'HARA SHEARER, Statutory Auditor**  
**O'HARA SHEARER**  
**CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**  
**AND STATUTORY AUDITORS**  
547 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT11 9AB

**Dated:**

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

**Accounting Convention and Basis of Accounting**

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard which applies in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Companies Act 2006.

**Going Concern**

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees' have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees' continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

**Income Recognition**

Income is recognised when the Charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the item(s) of income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

**Interest Receivable**

Interest on funds held is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

**Resources Expended**

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and is classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category.

Fundraising costs include the costs of advertising, producing publications, printing and mailing fundraising material, and staff costs in these areas.

Costs of charitable activities include direct expenditure incurred through operational activities.

Governance costs represent the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity which relate to the general running of the charity as opposed to those costs associated with fundraising or charitable activity.

**Fixed Assets**

All tangible fixed assets are recorded at cost.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Depreciation**

Depreciation is calculated to write off the cost of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives at the following rates:

Freehold Property	2% straight line
Improvements to property	10% straight line
Fixtures and fittings	20% straight line
Computer equipment	25% straight line

**Investments**

Unlisted equity investments are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently measured at fair value. If fair value cannot be reliably measured, assets are measured at cost less impairment.

Listed investments are measured at fair value with changes in fair value being recognised in income or expenditure.

**Repairs and Renewals**

All repairs and renewals are written off as incurred

**Pension Costs**

The charity does currently operate a defined contribution pension scheme.

**Debtors and Prepayments**

Trade debtors and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

**Creditors and Provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

**Financial Instruments**

The Charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

**Foreign Currencies**

Monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Exchange differences are taken into account in arriving at the net movement in funds.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)**

**Fund Accounting**

Unrestricted funds are general funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the charity unless the funds have been designated for other purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

Restricted funds are those given for use in a particular area or for specific purposes, the use of which is restricted to that area or purpose.

Endowment funds are subject to specific conditions by donors that the capital must be maintained by the charity.

The income received from funders depends on the charity meeting detailed criteria on expenses plans.

Grants given under such conditions are also given subject to them being obtained for in connection with the furtherance of the charity's aims and objectives.

Such income can be repayable to the funder if such expenses plans and criteria are not met.

Such income is only deferred when the donor specifies that the grant/donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or the donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

Income from charitable activities includes income received under contract or where entitlement to grant funding is subject to specific performance conditions is recognised as earned as the related goods/services are provided.

Grant income included in this category provides funding to support performance activities and is recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Income is deferred when: fees/performance related grants are received in advance of the performance/event to which they relate.

**Reserves Policy**

Stepping Stones NI reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained for a period of at least 3 to 6 months in the event of major funding streams ending. The reserves policy also takes account of covering costs in the event of closure, to cover redundancies, rents, and fees that are due including statutory audit fees. It also takes account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time.

Stepping Stones NI maintain unrestricted reserves if accrued should be used for the purposes which meet the aims and objectives of Stepping Stones NI. The board should monitor and review the amount of unrestricted reserves monthly in addition to the level of any restricted reserves.

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (incorporating the income and expenditure account)**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	TOTAL 2023 £	TOTAL 2022 £
<b>INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:</b>						
Donations and legacies	1	5,673	-	-	5,673	4,988
Income from investments	2	1,216	-	-	1,216	171
Income from charitable activities	3	1,852	1,307,579	-	1,309,431	1,348,642
Income from other trading activities	4	335,614	56,957	-	392,571	196,977
<b>TOTAL INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS</b>		<b>344,355</b>	<b>1,364,536</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>	<b>1,550,778</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>						
Expenditure on raising funds	5	118,303	-	-	118,303	76,050
Expenditure on charitable activities	6	322,190	1,362,517	-	1,684,707	1,531,316
Other expenditure		-	-	-	-	-
Net gains/(losses) on investments		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>		<b>440,493</b>	<b>1,362,517</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,803,010</b>	<b>1,607,366</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(96,138)</b>	<b>2,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>(56,588)</b>
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-	-
<b>NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS</b>		<b>(96,138)</b>	<b>2,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>(56,588)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>						
<b>TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>		<b>885,163</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>890,163</b>	<b>946,751</b>
Prior year adjustment		-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>789,025</b>	<b>7,019</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>

The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses in the year and therefore a Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses has not been prepared

All of the above amounts relate to continuing activities

The accompanying accounting policies and the notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	2023 £	2022 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets	9	373,853	386,988
Investments	10	-	-
		373,853	386,988
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Stocks		10,581	8,234
Debtors and prepayments	12	195,726	168,379
Cash at bank	11	533,059	809,531
Cash in hand		1,821	1,526
		741,187	987,670
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	(114,828)	(254,805)
		626,359	732,865
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		626,359	732,865
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT ASSETS/( LIABILITIES )</b>		1,000,212	1,119,853
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	14	(204,168)	(229,690)
		796,044	890,163
<b>NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)</b>		796,044	890,163
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
<b>ENDOWMENT FUNDS</b>			
		-	-
<b>UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	789,025	885,163
<b>RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	15/16/17/18/19/20	7,019	5,000
		796,044	890,163
		796,044	890,163

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS :

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**MICHAEL SCOTT**  
**DIRECTOR**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**KAREN CARMICHAEL**  
**DIRECTOR**

DATE 6th December 2023

DATE 6th December 2023

The accompanying accounting policies and notes form part of these financial statements

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

	NOTES	2023 £	2022 £
<b>CASHFLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Cash generated from operations	16	(241,754)	24,189
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities		<u>(241,754)</u>	<u>24,189</u>
<b>Investing activities</b>			
Investment income		-	171
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	9	(34,423)	(43,946)
Acquisition of investments	10	-	-
Amounts owed between funds			146,430
Disposal of investments		-	-
Disposal of tangible fixed assets		-	-
Net cash from investing activities		<u>(34,423)</u>	<u>102,655</u>
Increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(276,177)	126,844
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		811,057	684,213
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	11	<u><u>534,880</u></u>	<u><u>811,057</u></u>
Relating to:			
Cash at bank and in hand	11	<u><u>534,880</u></u>	<u><u>811,057</u></u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**1. DONATIONS AND LEGACIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Donations	5,673	-	5,673	4,988	-	4,988
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>5,673</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5,673</u>	<u>4,988</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,988</u>

**2. INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Income from UK listed investments		-	-		-	-
Income from cash	1,216	-	1,216	171	-	171
	<u>1,216</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,216</u>	<u>171</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>171</u>

**3. INCOME FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	-	291,312	291,312	-	280,269	280,269
Stepping Stones to Employment - ESF- DfE - DfC	-	866,530	866,530	375,347	352,052	727,399
Business Services Organisation - Special Recognition Grant	-	35,018	35,018	-	-	-
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	-	23,156	23,156	-	105,000	105,000
HM Revenue & Customs	-	-	-	-	69,556	69,556
Youth Service - ESF - DfE	-	-	-	-	71,669	71,669
Newry, Mourne and Down Council	-	10,000	10,000	-	10,000	10,000
Ards and North Down Council	-	40,558	40,558	-	36,000	36,000
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council	-	15,483	15,483	-	23,227	23,227
Capital Grant Released	-	25,522	25,522	-	25,522	25,522
Sundry income	1,852	-	1,852	-	-	-
Less: Deferred Income (See Note 12)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<u>1,852</u>	<u>1,307,579</u>	<u>1,309,431</u>	<u>375,347</u>	<u>973,295</u>	<u>1,348,642</u>

**4. INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Trading Income	334,556	-	334,556	190,819	-	190,819
Fundraising	1,058	53,385	54,443	2,294	-	2,294
Training Fees	-	3,572	3,572	3,534	-	3,534
Other Income	-	-	-	330	-	330
	<u>335,614</u>	<u>56,957</u>	<u>392,571</u>	<u>196,977</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>196,977</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**5. EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Direct expenditure	118,303	-	118,303	76,050	-	76,050

**6. EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2023 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2022 £
Direct expenditure	229,463	1,325,565	1,555,028	392,285	984,988	1,377,273
Support Costs and Governance costs	92,727	36,952	129,679	154,043	-	154,043
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>322,190</b>	<b>1,362,517</b>	<b>1,684,707</b>	<b>546,328</b>	<b>984,988</b>	<b>1,531,316</b>

**7. NET GAINS/(LOSSES) ON INVESTMENTS**

Net (gains)/losses on investments			-	-	-	-
			-	-	-	-

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

<b>7. NET (OUTGOING)/ INCOMING RESOURCES FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>This is stated after charging/(crediting)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditors remuneration	4,965	5,296
Depreciation	47,558	45,831
	<hr/> <hr/>	

<b>8. SALARY COSTS AND EMOLUMENTS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Total staff costs were as follows:		
Wages and salaries - key management personnel	191,178	179,909
Wages and salaries - other staff	1,059,443	1,004,127
Employer social security costs - key management personnel	36,049	-
Employer social security costs - other staff	153,110	75,517
Employer social security costs - SMP & SPP Recoverable	(23,669)	-
Employer social security costs - Employment Allowance	(5,000)	-
	<hr/> <hr/>	
	1,411,111	1,259,553

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
	93	58
	<hr/> <hr/>	

**Trustees' remuneration and benefits**

There was no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 31st March 2023. (2022: £Nil)

**Trustees' Expenses**

There were no trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 31st March 2023. (2022: £Nil)

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**9. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Freehold Property £	Improvements to Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST</b>					
As at 1st April 2022	563,028	42,335	154,822	49,641	809,826
Additions	-	-	28,691	5,732	34,423
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-
As at 31st March 2023	<u>563,028</u>	<u>42,335</u>	<u>183,513</u>	<u>55,373</u>	<u>844,249</u>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>					
As at 1st April 2022	262,885	9,213	108,816	41,924	422,838
Charge for year	11,261	4,233	27,287	4,777	47,558
Eliminated on disposal					-
As at 31st March 2023	<u>274,146</u>	<u>13,446</u>	<u>136,103</u>	<u>46,701</u>	<u>470,396</u>
Net book value 2023	<u>288,882</u>	<u>28,889</u>	<u>47,410</u>	<u>8,672</u>	<u>373,853</u>
Net book value 2022	<u>300,143</u>	<u>33,122</u>	<u>46,006</u>	<u>7,717</u>	<u>386,988</u>

**11. CASH AT BANK**

	2023 £	2022 £
Danske Bank - Current Accounts	151,043	358,732
Danske Bank - Investment Accounts	382,016	450,799
	<u>533,059</u>	<u>809,531</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

12. DEBTORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR	2023	2022
	£	£
Trade debtors	19,285	16,500
Other debtors	171,930	146,430
Prepayments	4,511	5,449
	<u>195,726</u>	<u>168,379</u>

13. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR	2023	2022
	£	£
Bank loans and overdrafts ( <i>See Note 17</i> )	-	146,430
Trade creditors	37,569	28,689
Value Added Tax	(11)	2,668
Social security costs and other taxes	7,016	-
Other creditors	3,662	3,662
Deferred income	23,356	-
Sundry creditors and accrued expenses	43,236	73,356
	<u>114,828</u>	<u>254,805</u>

14. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR	2023	2022
	£	£
Bank loans	-	-
Deferred capital funding	204,168	229,690
	<u>204,168</u>	<u>229,690</u>

**15. ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS**

	Tangible Fixed Assets £	Investments £	Debtors and Prepayments £	Cash at Bank and in Hand £	Creditors and Accruals £	Transfers between Funds £	2023 £	2022 £
Unrestricted Funds	373,853	-	10,581	519,419	(114,828)	-	789,025	885,163
Restricted Funds	-	-	195,726	15,461	(204,168)	-	7,019	5,000
Total Funds	<u>373,853</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>206,307</u>	<u>534,880</u>	<u>(318,996)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>796,044</u>	<u>890,163</u>

**16. RECONCILIATION OF OPERATING PROFIT TO NET CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES**

	2023	2022
	£	£
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	(94,119)	(56,588)
Depreciation	47,558	45,831
Movement in stocks	(2,347)	(2,582)
Movement in debtors	(27,347)	70,800
Movement in creditors	(165,499)	(33,101)
(Gain)/Loss on investments	-	(171)
(Profit)/Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets	-	-
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities	<u>(241,754)</u>	<u>24,189</u>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

**17. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS**

	Opening Balance £	Income £	Expenditure £	Net Movement in Funds 2022 £	Transfers between Funds £	Prior year Adjustment £	2023 £	2022 £
Unrestricted Funds	885,163	344,355	(440,493)	(96,138)	-	-	789,025	885,163
Restricted Funds	5,000	1,364,536	(1,362,517)	2,019	-		7,019	5,000
	<b>890,163</b>	<b>1,708,891</b>	<b>(1,803,010)</b>	<b>(94,119)</b>	<b>-</b>		<b>796,044</b>	<b>890,163</b>

**STEPPING STONES NI**  
**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023**

<b>18. UNRESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2022	885,163	946,251
Incoming resources for the year	344,355	577,483
Resources expended for the year	(440,493)	(622,378)
Transfer between funds	-	(16,193)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2023	<u>789,025</u>	<u>885,163</u>

<b>19. RESTRICTED INCOME FUNDS</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at 1st April 2022	5,000	500
Incoming resources for the year	1,364,536	973,295
Resources expended for the year	(1,362,517)	(984,988)
Transfer between funds	-	16,193
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31st March 2023	<u>7,019</u>	<u>5,000</u>

**20. DESIGNATED FUNDS**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds set aside by the trustees out of unrestricted funds for specific future purposes.

**21. LEGAL STATUS**

Stepping Stones NI is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up.

Stepping Stones NI is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, Charity Number 100727. Date of registration 9th December 2014.

Stepping Stones NI is a recognised Charity within the definition of Section 360(3) Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 by the Commissioners of the HM Revenue & Customs.