

ARTS & DISABILITY FORUM

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the company's Articles of Association, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

The objects for which the charity is established are to:

Provide an organisation led by disabled people to increase opportunities for disabled people to engage with the arts in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, working on a pan-disability basis.

Ancillary to this object, is to provide formal and informal learning opportunities, training information, support, that:

(i) Enhance both the extent and quality of:

- The experience that disabled people have of the arts;
- The work produced by disabled artists;
- The public's experience of art created or presented by disabled artists;
- Arts organisations' understanding of the needs and desires of disabled people (as arts consumers and practitioners);
- Showcase of excellence in art by disabled people
- Collaborative working in pursuit of these aims.

(ii) Promote use of arts by disabled people in support of initiatives aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of disabled people and as approved by the Board.

The charity works collaboratively with arts funders, disabled, neurodiverse and D/deaf artists, arts companies, community groups, equality organisations, ethnic minority groups, LGBTQ groups and the mainstream arts sector, aiming to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities for D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people to participate in arts and culture on their own terms.

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

Achievements and performance

The organisation formerly known as Arts & Disability Forum ((ADF) has successfully rebranded and operates under the new working name of the University of Atypical (UofA).

UofA is a charity led by D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people to empower people of all ages; working collaboratively with artists and arts sector organisations to create positive change. The vision is of a genuinely inclusive artistic environment where D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people can be involved in the arts in any way they choose.

The work of the Charity brings about:

- increased access and representation in arts by D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people;
- enhanced skills for D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people;
- increased well being from social connections; and
- greater societal acceptance and celebration of diversity

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Achievements and performance

During the year to March 2023, we continued to develop our blended delivery methods to engage with participants and audiences online. The legacy and consequences of Covid continued to impact on some programmed activities due to the reticence of many disabled participants and audiences to return to live events as they were considered clinically vulnerable disabled people and still at high risk.

Core practical and financial support was sustained during 2022-23 with **d/Deaf and Disabled Artists Support Funds (DDASF)**: DDASF awarded grants to 20 recipients; to support d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodiverse artists as many continue to experience difficulty to generate income as galleries, theatres, education and outreach events work through the knock on impacts of Covid and cost of living hardship across the sector.

UofA also provided practical training for a team of volunteers engaged in Gallery openings, Digital Horizon Masterclasses and Erasmus+ Programme Diversity Training by Rainbow Project - with a focus on gender and sexual orientation in January 2023; further training for volunteers was offered including Online BSL sessions with Paula Clarke

Bounce Arts Festival in October 2022; programmed events in Belfast Derry City and Strabane District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The festival launch featured guest speakers from ACNI CEO, Roisin McDonagh, Head of Arts Branch at DfC, John Ball, and the Lord Mayor of Belfast. Highlights of the 2022 signature project was the showcasing of work created by D/deaf, Disabled and Neurodiverse artists who were recipients of the Chris Ledger Legacy Awards: Ruth McGinley, Johnny McAlister, Shiro Mayasuma, and Larry MacAree. Larry's exhibition was the main visual arts event at the Bounce 2022. Larry used this as the platform to release his autobiography. Bounce also featured work by former recipients of d/Deaf, Disabled Artists Support Funded by ACNI and DfC. The Venue partner for 2022 was Crescent Arts Centre. Again it was noted the impact of the cost of living crisis and artists' ability to create work to generate income. Alongside cost-of- living impacts on audiences and the sector's ability to generate box office income. Informed strategic pricing of events to be free or donate as affordable.

The annual programme of high quality exhibitions at **Atypical Gallery**; also featured work produced by recipients of DDASF awards. *All these songs are about dying* a series of new works by Stuart Calvin. *'Still Livin'* by Larry McAree a recipient of a Chris Ledger Award and is the first learning disabled artist to receive a major award from University of Atypical. There was an exhibition of work created by Urban Survival Kits workshops participants from Germany, Poland and Northern Ireland. Other exhibitions, outside of the Atypical Gallery included support for Irish artist Sinead O'Donnell with her performance, "Tairsearch" a collaboration between Sinead, Selina Bonelli from England, and Marta Bosowska from Poland. The performance took place in writers square and UofA supported artists on accessibility features for the project video.

Amy Milnes was a recipient of the UofA **Graduate Award**: a package of finance and practical support. Funding to continue arts practice and mentoring by renowned artists.

The extended delivery of the Fy21-22 **BSL class** into this period enabled participants to complete the course. Six of the seven participants completed the course successfully progressing to level one accreditation. Additional rollout of online classes were programmed over 6 weeks for 12 participants as part of core Arts sectoral support.

Digital Horizons funded by the Santander Foundation continued as part of our flagship three year digitalization and finance management support initiative. During the year the Digital Innovation Award went to artist Stuart Robinson. A series of masterclasses were programmed including Porcelain Delaney's launch event at Bounce Arts Festival. Followed by a sequence of innovation activities including Grace Fairleys digital animation. Five new Masterclass submissions were selected for delivery in the finance period 2023/24.

Equality and Access Standards Initiative (EASI). Regarded as the sector's equality, access, and inclusion initiative. During the year a resource database of access providers was developed, alongside disability / access themes workshops for venue participants working to achieve EASI accreditation.

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FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The **Drawing Rooms Project** focuses on older residents of care/nursing homes in Belfast. Workshops facilitated by artists David Dunlop and Paul Moore continued to explore new technologies to assist older people create drawings. Some of aspects of the project were deferred due to issues around live activity and concerns around new covid variants. The project was brought to fruition in 2022 with participants from the NOW group, disabled adults, rather than nursing/ care homes residents as there was still a reticence about engaging in activities where carers continue to be concerned about covid infection levels.

During 2022- 23 EU Programming included **Urban Survival Kits** (as Lead Partner on the EU Erasmus + funded project with four European partners. We hosted five days of workshops at the Crescent Arts centre and Ulster Museum for delegates from Belfast, Germany and Poland with delegates attending online from Croatia and Turkey. The exhibition of work created during the workshops was programmed at Atypical Gallery in August 2022. Succeeded by the finale series of workshops and exhibition programmed for March / April 2023.

Body Shining Project is led by partners in Italy and involving four EU nations. to explore body shaming and bullying experienced by young disabled people. During the year we delivered a series of workshops in Belfast, project staff attended the transnational partnership meeting in Italy.

CRAFT:IN with partners in Croatia. explored commercial opportunities for crafts produced by disabled people This EU Project was completed in 2022.

The UofA **Social Narrative Video** service continue to support disabled audiences access arts venues: by taking a virtual walk through of the venue, offering advice from buying tickets, to using facilities. Using customised captions, voiceover sign language features (Irish and British) to enhance accessibility for a range of potential patrons. During the year we customised a self-funded service for arts venues in Belfast as well as a number of heritage venues across Northern Ireland which were funded by Thrive through funding from National Heritage Lottery Fund.

Newcomer Project: UofA in partnership with QUB and the University of Frazer Valley in British Columbia, Canada on a project involving newcomer / migrant women living in rural areas of Northern Ireland. The photovoice project culminated with exhibitions in Canada and Belfast and Canada in October 2022 at the Canada Room, QUB and at the Atypical Gallery .UofA produced the project documentary and website.

International Residency for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists: UofA working with partners in Germany and England to research a model of best practice for residencies for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists. Artist Stuart Calvin and Flax art studio Manager, Gail Prentice, represented UofA on the research site visit in Berlin. The project is being devised to meet a defined access requirements for many disabled artists who are often excluded from taking part in international residencies. This project continues to explore new approaches to accessibility with partners Coven in Berlin, Videolabs in Brighton, and Flax art studios in Belfast.

Ledger Studio was introduced in 2022 as a new initiative which was much needed as a resource for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences and artists. Moving forward into the next financial period, UofA will focus on the development of Ledger studio as a sectoral resource and can anticipate the potential to augment income generation to support the wider programming and overhead costs.

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Financial review

Strengthening financial position and procedures remain a priority. The charity continues to work closely with GMcG Chartered Accountants on payroll admin and the production of financial statements for the 2022-23 financial year.

Results for the year are set out in detail on pages 8 to 25. The charity returned net income for the year of £17,313 (2022 - net expenditure of £20,660).

At 31 March 2023, the total funds of the charity amounted to £110,146 comprising restricted funds of £48,431 and unrestricted funds of £61,715.

Trustees rely on the unrestricted fund balance; considered to be essential to provide sufficient funds to cover unforeseen costs and fulfill legal obligations of the charity if current levels of income are not maintained.

For 2022-23 the principal funder was the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, with core and programming grants from exchequer and lottery funds, and Belfast City Council, Multi Annual funded programme. Arts Council of Northern Ireland also sustained funding to operate the d/Deaf and Disabled artists Support Fund and small equipment grant from the Health and Safety Capital Programme to assist arts organisations reopen creative spaces safely post Covid period.

There were similar additional support made available to assist cost of living impacts from Santander and Halifax Foundations.

Risk Management

Risk management is addressed within the UofA Risk Management Strategy. The organisation has also established systems to mitigate significant risks to potential business and operational risks which the charity may face. Senior staff supported by Directors continue to review the major risks which the charity faces and believe that maintaining unrestricted reserves at the required levels to finance working capital and continue the charity's activities on a short-term basis, combined with annual review of the controls over key financial systems, will sustain resources for adverse conditions. In the current period of economic turbulence, the directors remain focused on the need to diversify income streams. Exploring additional funding and business opportunities for unrestricted earned income.

Plans for future periods

Moving forward the priority is to develop the blended approach to programme delivery which embeds health and safety measures, with disabled people in mind, which build on access measures put in place during the pandemic. The organisation will continue to focus on generating service revenues generated via Social Narrative Video productions, to augment income and to sustain core artistic programming which will extend reach to those within the community that continue to shield.

Programming budgets will reflect this combination of online and offline activity going forward, with a reduced number of Atypical Gallery shows of longer durations). Bounce Arts festival 2023 will also feature enhanced regional rollout across online and offline platforms.

Staffing updates:

The core staff team will sustain funding relationships, alongside the priority to diversify income streams across public sector contracts, corporate sponsorship, increased trusts and foundation grants. Plans for 2023 include recruiting new posts supported by funding from Belfast City Council Capacity Programme; whilst extending freelance contracts for Administration and Marketing roles to support the development of service income generation.

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Structure, governance and management

The Arts and Disability Forum / University of Atypical (working name) is a company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity. The Charity is established under a memorandum of association which outlines core objectives and power. The charity is governed by a voluntary board of Directors who operate in accordance with the Articles of Association.

Collectively board members are proficient in core governance skills: HR, accountancy, specialist areas of disability arts, marketing and product development, online education methodologies, access consultancy and disability rights.

The board consists of between four and fifteen directors. The Board can pass an ordinary resolution to appoint new Trustees. To address any skills gap the organization continues to liaise with external partners such as Arts and Business to attract new Trustees. Formal recruitment to the board is carried out in accordance with the Articles of Association.

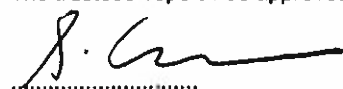
University of Atypical was a recipient of the Good Governance and Leadership award by Volunteer Now/C03 in 2022. During the year the day to day running of the organisation is designated to Chief Executive Damien Coyle. Re-delegation of some core aspects of the former CEO's responsibilities were re-designated to Business Support Manager Edel Murphy. Both senior Manager posts are supported by Chairman Sean Fitzsimmons.

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

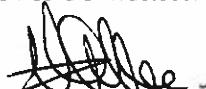
Mr S Fitzsimmons
Ms C Smyth
Ms A E Egner
Ms L C McIlvanna
Ms I Obrolchain Carmody
Ms M C Bacon
Ms T Carlisle
Mr R D Woodcock

The report of the directors has been prepared taking advantage of the small companies' exemption of section 415A of the Companies Act 2006.

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



Mr S Fitzsimmons
Director



Date: 30/11/2023