

**AUTISM SUPPORT
KILKEEL**

Annual Report

For the year ended 31st December 2023

Registered Office: 204 Carrigenagh Road, Kilkeel, Co Down. BT34 4QA
Charity No: NIC102894



Annual Report for the year ended December 31st 2023

Report of the trustees for the year ending 31 December 2023. The trustees are pleased to present their annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ending 31 December 2023. The financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006, the Memorandum and Articles of Association, 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) (as amended for accounting periods commencing from 1 January 2019).

Governance and internal control

The trustees are responsible for selecting and recruiting suitable trustees to hold office at the Annual General Meeting. The number of trustees shall be not less than three but is not subject to any maximum.

A retiring trustee is eligible for re-election, and there is no limit on the number of times a trustee may be re-elected.

The minimum age for a trustee is 18 years, but there is no upper age limit imposed on trustees. The Trustees from among their number appoint a chairperson.

New trustees are inducted through a process of briefings by the Chairman and other members of the committee and they are provided with key information relating to the charity's governance and operation.

The board of trustees meets approximately 12 times. None of the trustees received remuneration or other benefit from their work with the charity this financial year.

During this challenging Year, I would like to thank the trustees for their dedicated efforts in Governing the charity.

Monthly Meetings

The monthly coffee mornings and evening meetings organized by our charity offer a valuable opportunity for parents to connect, share experiences, and access resources that can help them navigate parenthood. These gatherings not only foster a sense of belonging but also serve as a platform for disseminating important information and strategies for coping with the demands of raising children.

By maintaining regular contact, our charity ensures that parents have a consistent and reliable source of support, which can be incredibly beneficial for their well-being and the well-being of their families. It's through these consistent and caring initiatives that we as a charity can make a significant impact on individual lives and the well-being of the community as a whole.

THERAPIES

Swimming Buddies NI

The initiative to offer 1:1 water safety sessions with Swimming Buddies NI presented a valuable opportunity for our children aged 4 to 15 to learn essential swimming and safety skills. Swimming Buddies NI, known for their tailored approach, matches each child with a coach to ensure personalized attention, catering to the unique needs of each swimmer.

This program is particularly beneficial as it not only teaches children how to swim but also instils vital water safety knowledge and survival techniques, which are crucial skills for life. With experienced coaches who specialize in supporting neurodivergent children and those with additional support needs, the sessions are designed to be inclusive and adaptable.

The serene environment with dimmed lights provides a sensory-friendly atmosphere, conducive to learning. This week-long program, which ran from the 3rd to the 7th of July, was an excellent way for children to gain confidence in the water, learn important life-saving skills, and enjoy the camaraderie of swimming with peers.

"Absolutely amazing week thank you so much to everyone involved 🧡 Callum had a brilliant time and learnt so much from Pauline who was fabulous with him and taught him lots of little tips and tricks and has given him so much more confidence and skill in his swimming 🏊🌞" Dani

Equine Therapy

Equine therapy programs have shown remarkable benefits in various developmental areas for children and adolescents. The sessions we conducted, starting on the 4th of May and the 13th of July, each spanning six weeks, have provided 30 children, aged between 4 to 17, with a unique opportunity to grow and learn.

Through interaction with horses, participants can develop emotional regulation, social skills, and a sense of responsibility. It's inspiring to hear about the success of such programs, which not only bring joy and learning to our children but also foster a deep connection between humans and animals. The positive impact of these experiences often resonates well beyond the therapy sessions, contributing to the participants' overall well-being and development.

"Thank you so much to ASK for facilitating this. Joe has just loved his sessions. The difference in his sitting and core strength from week 1 and now is just brilliant. His understanding too - when I tell him we are going horse riding he goes to the horse ornament in my mum's hall and touches it 😊🥰" Elizabeth

Music Therapy

The music therapy sessions conducted by Shane Harvey over the summer have been a resounding success! Spanning across July and August, these sessions included both one-on-one and group interactions, catering to a diverse age group of children from 4 to 15 years old.

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The structure of the program, with its careful balance between individual attention and group dynamics, allowed for a tailored approach that met the unique needs of each participant. The overwhelmingly positive feedback is a testament to the power of music as a therapeutic tool, fostering not only emotional and social development but also bringing joy and a sense of community to all involved

"Ezra was a little nervous at the beginning, not knowing what to expect. He really enjoyed the group session, fun & lots of big smiles 😊 Shane has a lovely gentle way with the children! Look forward to the next few weeks 🙌🎸🎵 Thanks for this opportunity! ❤️"
Joy

"Shane was totally amazing the interaction and attention he was able to get from Aron brought tears to my eyes this is a very talented gifted passionate fella whom we are very lucky to get to ASK 💙🙌" Pauline

Physiotherapy

Due to the lack of services, especially Occupational Therapy, and the success of our Pilot scheme last year we conducted six weeks of physiotherapy with Ashleigh Campbell from the 17th January to the 21st February. These sessions were primarily for the children within our group who struggle to master higher level motor skills such as ball skills, skipping, and riding a bike, as these skills impact the child's overall participation in peer and community activities, which subsequently affect their overall development.

Six of our children took part in one-to-one, one hour physiotherapy sessions, ranging in age from 4 years to 6 years. A parent or Guardian was required to participate in sessions and a home exercise program (3x15 mins per week at home) was provided to maximise the benefits of Physiotherapy intervention in between the sessions This therapy was heavily subsidised by the group.

Positive Psychology Youth Program

The positive psychology youth program, facilitated by Ashling Kearney from Coach Approach, is a commendable initiative that ran for six weeks, focusing on the well-being and development of our young siblings. Such programs are pivotal in fostering resilience, self-efficacy, and a growth mindset, which are essential for the holistic development of our siblings. The full funding of this program underscores the value we placed on investing in the mental and emotional health of our young siblings, ensuring they have the resources and support to thrive in various aspects of life

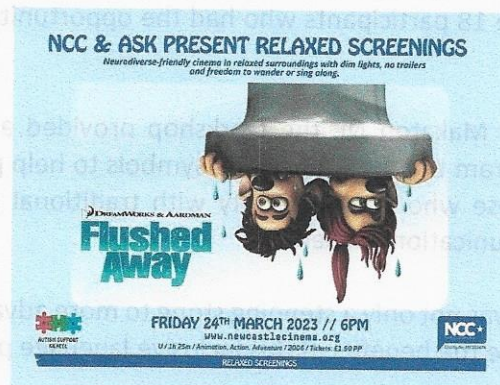
The sessions ran for six weeks, starting on the 7th March. Ashling from Coach Approach facilitated the sessions and focused on topics such as Stress & Anxiety, Self Esteem & self-Image, and the impact of social media. Our positive psychology youth program was made up of 6 teenage girls and 2 boys, ranging in age from 13-18.

NCC Relaxed Screenings

Our relaxed screenings are a wonderful initiative that provide an inclusive cinema experience for young people with additional needs. By working in collaboration with Newcastle Community Cinema (NCC) we can offer these screenings at a reduced ticket price of £1.50, making it more accessible for families and caregivers to enjoy films in a comfortable environment.

Our relaxed screenings are typically held in a sensory-friendly setting, where the lights are dimmed, the volume is lowered, and audience members are free to move around, making noise, or take breaks if needed. This thoughtful approach not only respects the sensory preferences of individuals but also fosters a sense of community and belonging, as attendees can share the experience without the stress of traditional cinema etiquette.

Our first screening of 2023 was of the movie "Flushed Away" on Friday 4th March at 6pm. We had 33 families in attendance.



At special times of the years i.e., Easter and Christmas we like to turn the screenings into grander events and hold red carpet screenings, with the Easter Bunny giving out Easter Eggs and Father Christmas giving out selection Boxes.

FITNESS FOR ALL

In November we implemented a pilot "Fitness for All" scheme specifically tailored for teenagers with additional needs within our group. This program had a significant positive impact on their physical and mental well-being.

Over the course of six weeks, participants experienced a variety of benefits, including improved motor skills, enhanced social interaction, and increased self-esteem. We gathered feedback from the participants and their caregivers to refine the program and to ensure it met the unique needs of each individual.

The success of our pilot scheme would serve as a model for similar programs, potentially leading to wider implementation and benefiting a larger community.

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PITTER PATTER CHITTER CHATTER WALKS

Initiating our 'Pitter Patter Chitter Walks' in May was a wonderful way to encourage members to engage in light exercise while fostering social connections. These low-impact walks were designed to be accessible to all members, providing an opportunity for everyone to benefit from gentle physical activity.

The walks also offered a platform for members to converse and connect with one another, promoting a sense of community and well-being. Such initiatives are important as they contribute to both the physical and social health of participants, creating a supportive and active environment.

Workshops

The Makaton taster workshop held on Thursday, 23rd March, was an engaging and informative session for the 18 participants who had the opportunity to delve into the world of Makaton.

Facilitated by Carrie from Makaton NI, the workshop provided a general introduction to Makaton, a language program that uses signs and symbols to help people communicate. It's particularly useful for those who have difficulty with traditional spoken language due to disabilities or other communication barriers.

This introductory session was not only a stepping stone to more advanced Makaton levels but also a chance to experience the benefits of this inclusive language program firsthand.



Participants learnt basic signs and symbols that could be used in everyday communication, receive their certificates, helpful handouts, and gained insights into further Makaton training opportunities.

We facilitated a free Zoom workshop on Thursday 27th April with Clare Canale of Red Robin Therapy giving participants an excellent opportunity to learn more about sensory processing basics and how they can influence our children's daily experiences. Whether you are a parent, educator, or healthcare professional, gaining insight into sensory processing can be incredibly beneficial.

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This workshop covered the basics of sensory processing, the different types of sensory issues, and practical strategies to help our support our children with sensory processing challenges. Engaging in such educational sessions can enhance one's ability to effectively support those with sensory processing needs in various settings.

Group Events

During the year we held various events for our children with additional needs, siblings, parents and grandparents.

On Friday the 6th January we kicked off the year with a FREE Bounce Party in Infinity Adventure Park. The evening was a great success, we had 30 parents and 37 children in attendance.

Our evening in Infinity Adventure Park was so successful we ran it again in February with over 40 children in attendance. The event was fully funded.

On Saturday the 25th February and Thursday the 2nd March we organised a mindfulness and spa day event for our mums, facilitated by Ashling Kearney from Coach Approach in the Slieve Donard Hotel, combining the calming practice of mindfulness with the luxurious experience of a spa morning.

Participants learnt how to integrate mindfulness into their daily lives, leading to improved well-being and stress management. It's was a much-needed opportunity for our Mums to pause, engage in self-reflection, and enjoy a much-deserved break from their daily routines

When there is a child with special needs in the family, siblings often get less attention. To assist the parents in our group to spend special time with their siblings we held our Siblings Only event at Formula Karting in Newry on the 7th April. In total we had 12 parents and 19 siblings race the night away.

We ran numerous events over the Easter Holiday comprising of a Trampoline Party in Infinity Adventure Park on the 11th April, a relaxed screening of "Peter Rabbit 2" at Newcastle Community Centre on the 13th April.

Friday the 14th April brought a fun packed day at the Gamekeepers Lodge Equestrian & Activity Centre. 17 of our siblings enjoyed a morning of paint balling and 30 of our children with additional needs enjoyed a trek through the Mourne Mountains.

During the summer months we considered the needs of our teenager with additional needs, especially those who find large crowds overwhelming. On Monday the 29th of May and Tuesday, the 1st August we organised a small group of our teenagers to attend the Craigavon ski and Golf Centre to participate in snow tubing, providing them with a quieter and less crowded experience. It was essential to us to choose a venue that understood our requirements and offered a controlled environment.

Our night of Burger & Bowls on the 10th June at Sheepsbridge Bowling, offered our dad's an excellent opportunity to meet up with other people and socialize, which had positive impact on their physical well-being and playing in teams provided them with an opportunity to mix with other dads in similar situations, socialize, and helped to reduce stress and depression.

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This event was fully funded and transport was also provided.

"That's so much for organising. Micky has a great time and was lovely to meet the other dad's 😊". Emma

"It was a fantastic night thanks so much for organising!!! But you're going to have to get me better bowlers for the next one it was too easy!!! "Michael

The "Ladies Who Lunch" event on the 24th of June was a wonderful opportunity to provide a well-deserved treat for the mums in our group. Such events offer a chance for relaxation, socialization, and mutual support among mums who share similar experiences and challenges.

It was an opportunity to enjoy a pleasant atmosphere, with a delightful meal, where our dedicated caregivers could unwind and connect with others who understand their unique journey. Additionally, these gatherings can serve as a platform for sharing resources, advice, and encouragement, further strengthening the community's support network.

Our free BBQ event for parents held on the 29th June was a wonderful way to offer a relaxing environment for connection and camaraderie. Such events not only provide a casual setting for parents to unwind but also foster a sense of community and support among individuals who share similar experiences and challenges.

July saw a month filled with fun activities, on the 1st our Teenager enjoyed a night of Lazer Tag, food and bowling. Our younger members enjoyed a morning of sensory play at Cheeky Monkeys on the 3rd. On the 7th the whole family could enjoy an evening of bouncing at the Infinity Adventure Park. On 8th we held our Sensory Saturday Newry Street Unite, this event was facilitated by Gail from "The Big White Coach" who specialises in sensor experiences, creative activities and messy play to support a healthier wellbeing and learning opportunities. Because of the complex needs of the children the large group was divided into smaller groups depending on the individual needs of each child.

On August the 6th we held a Pet and Play day for the whole family in Fort Evergreen, the 10th was our Teddy Bears picnic with Wee Bugs and Beasties, where our children had the opportunity to build their own teddy bear! Sunday the 20th was our relaxed screening of Luca.

On Tuesday the 15th August we held a twilight cruise with Carlingford Lough Cruises providing our parents with a relaxing experience enabling them to enjoy the beautiful twilight skies whilst catching the fireworks across the Lough from Warrenpoint.

The serene waters of the bay, coupled with the beautiful backdrop of the Mourne Mountains and the Cooley Peninsula, provided a perfect setting for our evening of tranquillity and companionship. The cruise offered much-needed respite and a chance to connect with others sharing similar experiences.

Many children with autism love to jump and bounce. It's a particularly enjoyable repetitive behaviour that can provide both soothing and stimulating sensory input. Over the summer months we provided our younger children with complex needs the opportunity to schedule a free hour on a Bouncy Castle in our ASK Sensory Garden. This was to allow individual families

who may not be able to attend group events due to their child's sensory needs to avail of an activity.

We had scheduled 4 days in July, offering 12 slots on each day but the 21st and 29th were cancelled due to heavy rain. The 4 days in August went ahead as planned.

This event was hugely popular with both kids and adults alike with families using the bouncy castle to make family memory's and provide sensory stimulation for their children.

Thank you ASK! Took about 50mins for brogan to go on the bouncy castle but we got there in the end. So, he had a great time with his brother and mummy had a great time to




  Stephanie

Our Halloween party at Infinity Adventure Park scheduled for 2nd November was **cancelled** due to heavy flooding in the Newry, Mourne and Down area.

In November we had the amazing opportunity to work Phillip from Flickernet. We ran a Woodland Coding event where each of the participants received a small circuit board call a Micro: Bit Each child learnt how to program their Micro: Bit as a communicator with five individual words of their choosing. The children were then able to the Micro: Bits home.

Our Christmas celebrations began a little early on the 26th November with a Christmas experience at Mount Panther Farm Park. Over 77 children and 69 adults attended this event. Our members received a photo with Santa, Hot cocoa and cookies and participated in various Christmas crafts.

"Thanks for organising this...it was a truly magical experience. Joey was in awe!"  Diane

"Honestly one of the best Santa experiences we've been to. Such a great way to start of the Christmas season. Thanks again so much for organising it really was amazing!!"   
Lauren

Our Christmas celebrations continue with an amazing night in the Kilmorey Arms Hotel on Saturday the 9th December for our parents, Christmas dinner followed with entertainment by "The Mad Hatters". 32 parents attended the event and paid full price for their tickets as the consensus was that funds should be kept for therapies and events for the children.

Our Christmas celebrations concluded with a relaxed screening of "Dr Seuss The Grinch" on Sunday the 17th December, followed with a visit from Santa Clause, and a fantastic Christmas party in Infinity Adventure Park which was enjoyed by 62 of our children accompanied by 48 parents on 29th December. This was a fully funded party at no cost to the families. A buffet tea was provided along with tea and coffee. Everyone had a fantastic time and went home tired but happy!

ASK ANNUAL FAMILY FUN DAY

On Saturday the 26th August we held our annual Family Fun Day at the Ballyvea Hub from 12 noon to 2pm. It was a great success with over 69 families in attendance. The funday was fully funded.

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Entertainment provided on the day was 2 large bouncy castles, a Fire Engine, Balloon Modelling, Wee Bugs and Beasties, Exploris on Tour, the big White Coach and Alex Alexander of DJ Entertainment was our DJ for the day. Food provided on the day by Kevin McCulla's Chipvan.

All SEN children and their siblings got to enjoy a Kids meal and Ice cream cone. These were accessed via tokens given out on entry. A raffle was held on the day with prizes donated by local businesses, the money raised from the raffle help to fund this fantastic memorable day.

Autism Support Kilkeel Centre

In the year to December 31st, 2023, due to the increase in therapies provided, the return of our monthly parent's meetings, providing workshops and running our Positive Psychology Youth Program the centre has been heavily utilised.

The centre has been well maintained by the usual volunteers. Thanks to our members involved in this activity.

Centre Improvement Feasibility Study

We got our Sensory Garden completed and it was wonderful to see so many of our families make great use of this in the year 2023.

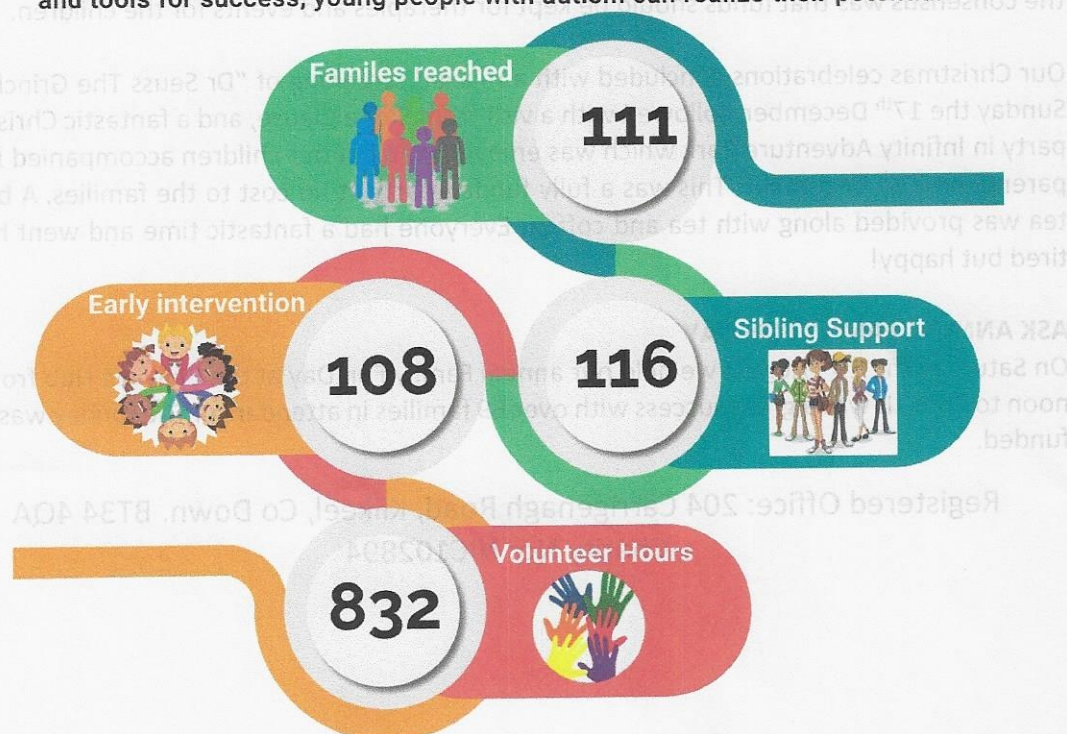
Membership

On December 31st, 2023 membership of the private group was 123; the group has accepted 22 new families, from Kilkeel, Rostrevor, Warrenpoint, Hilltown, Ballymartin, Kilcoo Newcastle, in the past year, and we extend a very warm welcome to them. Membership of our public group reached the amazing figure of 854 members.



IMPACT REPORT 2023

Growth and change do not happen overnight but with the right support, care and tools for success, young people with autism can realize their potential



In 2023, our charity has played a pivotal role in supporting families, particularly through interventions for children with additional needs.

Autism Support Kilkeel (ASK) is a community-driven charity that offers a range of support services and therapies to individuals with autism and their families. With a focus on enhancing the quality of life, ASK provides access to various therapies that cater to the needs of individuals on the autism spectrum.

These may include equine therapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, and sensory integration therapy, all aimed at supporting social inclusion and the potential for employment and access to other facilities.

Additionally, ASK organizes fully inclusive events, creating opportunities for social engagement and community participation. Our commitment to raising awareness and supporting families is evident through our active presence and the resources we offer to the community.

Financial Review

Financial Performance

Financial Performance in the year to December 2023 has resulted in a surplus of expenditure over income of £15,739.78

Income

Income receipts for the year totalled £54,6434.25. The year to December 31st, 2023 included a Power NI Heating Grant of £600, Screwfix Direct Grant of £5,000, Jessie Fund Grant of £1,500, Tesco Blue Token Scheme of £1,000, Asda Foundation Grant of £1,000, AIB Grant of £2,500, John Moore Foundation Grant of £3,000, TechSoup Grant of £400 and the Big Lottery Grant of £9,620. Amazon donations of £89.94, and the reminder income was made up of members of the community running fundraisers for the charity.

The group's income is generally healthy but we are concerned about a shortfall in cash donations in the future as more people turned to contactless payment amid fears over the use of cash during the pandemic.

Fundraising Income for the year to December 2023 was £5,610.91 compared to £2,475.52 to the same date last year. The committee recognises that due to the global pandemic it has been a challenging external environment for fundraising. Over the past year we have had to review our strategies, invest in new approaches and respond to changes in data protection legislation.

Donation income has remained mainly the same; incoming donations totalled £7097.51 compared to £7,674.26 last year.

Other income was generated through parents' contributions for events and therapies provided by the group which totalled £9,878.35.

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There are so many people that have helped us raise money, donated or sponsored us to name individually but as a group we are extremely thankful and grateful for all their support, as someone once said ***"it takes a village to raise a child"*** this is never truer than when you have a child with special needs.

Expenditure

Expenditure for the year totalled £38,894.47 an increase on the previous year £23,865.01. This was mainly due to bespoke therapies for the children with complex needs and events provided.

During 2023 we found ourselves in the privileged position to be able to give back to our community. We were able to donate to two local causes. Giving back is about contributing what you can and making a positive impact on the lives of others. Together, we can create a more compassionate and thriving society.

Administrative & General was lower for the year to December 31st, 2023 (£1,625.84) than the year December 31st, 2022 (£2,063.73). This expenditure is due to bank fees for our Current account and Annual Fees on our Credit card account. Committee expenses of Access NI checks and uniforms provided. Stationary. ASK Lanyards. ASK business cards and ASK thank you cards.

ASK Centre development expenditure for the year to December 31st, 2023 was £60 compared to £93.99 in the previous year.

Fundraising Expenditure was £883.74 at the date of this report. This is a decrease on December 2022 figure of £1,300. This decrease is due to local companies providing complementary spot prizes and vouchers.

It is fair to say that 2023 was again a difficult year for our group we were very worried about having to reduce our services and one our biggest fears was managing limited funds whilst providing what we hope is life enhancing opportunities for the families identified. Our aim is continuing the outreach to more families in 2024

Managing charity funds effectively is becoming increasingly important as membership grows.

For membership retention and growth, strategies that enhance the membership experience and engage donors can be beneficial. It's also helpful to develop a community of dedicated members and use membership dues to raise funds, as members can assist with organizational tasks, planning, fundraising, referrals, and network building.

It's vital we stay informed about the latest regulations and best practices for financial management in the charitable sector to alleviate concerns about managing funds with an increasing membership base.

Stock

As of December 31st, 2023, the group held a stock of Sensory Equipment valued at £1,000, Go Talk Devices at £537.20 and Weenet Tracking Devices with a value of £623.

Gifts and support of Kind

In assessing the finances and assets of the group it must be noted that the chairperson gave a great deal of support in kind. Many purchases are made and the payment never claimed back: for example, printing, stationery and postage costs, have all been paid for by the chairperson but the cost not claimed despite such a claim being perfectly legitimate.

Members give generously of their time; with the many hours given to preparing and delivering talks, days out, residential breaks, and managing the group, without this its growth and success could not be achieved.

The chairperson wishes to place on record their recognition of and gratitude for all these contributions.

Funds materially in Deficit

As of December 31st, 2023, the group had no funds in material deficit

Financial Management and Reserves Policies

The group has a Financial Management Policy which meets the requirements of the Charities Act 2011, the Charity Commission guidelines "Internal Financial Controls for Charities" and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice (Revised 2005)

The general Fund is unrestricted and is used for the day –to-day operation of the group.

The group operates with an unrestricted reserve at a level set by the trustees; currently this is £30,000 which equated to approximately 12 months running costs. The reserve is held to allow the Group to offset fluctuations in income receipts and to provide for contingencies.

Reserves are held without any exposure to the stock market.

As of December 31st, 2023, the General Fund had a balance £51,830.29 (compared to £36,090.51 at the same time last year).

While the current unrestricted fund level is above the reserve, we feel it is prudent in the current economic climate; maintaining a substantial reserve will better allow the group to meet the funding challenges which the wider economic situation may impose. We also note that securing external funding is becoming increasingly difficult as sponsor and grant making bodies are forced to address their own funding issues.

Approved and adopted by a meeting of the Executive Committee on May 15th, 2023 and signed on their behalf.



Olive Donnan
Chairperson

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