

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
CHARITIES COMMISSION

Reporting year:

April 2023 – March 2024

Project year:

September 2023 – August 2024

Organisation address:

Mid Armagh Community Network
27b Main Street
Markethill
County Armagh
BT60 1PH

Charity number:

NIC103742

Company Registration Number:

NI054732

Governance:

Mid Armagh Community Network is governed and constituted by its Articles of Association 2016 revision.

Trustees:

C. Clarke
H. Singleton
L. Harrison
S. McKelvey
D. Alexander

The Trustees have served for many years and bring particular skills and life experience to the role. They each give volunteer time each week to facilitate the project.

Continuity / succession planning contacts;

C. Clarke cjhclarke@hotmail.co.uk
H. Singleton hilary-singleton@hotmail.co.uk
L. Harrison lynnharison171@hotmail.co.uk
S. McKelvey sharon_mckelvey@hotmail.co.uk
D. Alexander daalexander@live.co.uk

Foreward:

Weekly classes commenced in September 2023 following an online registration process for returning students. We held an enrolment evening for new students and parents following an advertisement page in the Armagh Gazette, on our Facebook page and community leafleting to come along and find out more about our organisation and the services we provide and to familiarise them with our organisation, our aims and objectives and make them aware of our safeguarding policy.

We partnered with Markethill Courthouse to deliver the Dance class again this year.

Fiddle tuition and orchestra practice continued in our own hall.

We partnered with Kilcluney Orange Hall to deliver the Drama class again this year.

Ulster Scots Choir re-commenced in our own hall.

Following a positive assessment of the Accordion pilot class we commenced this as a formal class.

Public Benefit Report:

Purposes:

Mid Armagh Community Network is an Ulster Scots themed cultural community group set up to build on the rich cultural history in and around the town of Markethill. Our purposes; To promote and preserve Ulster Scots heritage, cultural traditions and arts to the benefits of those individuals and the wider public who access our facilities and services and who self-identify as Ulster Scots.

Activity in support of purposes:

All our classes take place within Markethill in a safe and welcoming environment consistent with our purposes. Our activities are in line with the objects/purposes and geographical area as represented in our governing document.

Our public activity supports our objectives and included within the activity category outlined below

In furtherance of these purposes our Trustees planned and created the structure of the program, applied for funding, advertised classes, took enrolments and employed tutors to teach;

Fiddle;

Fiddle – 54 students

We had a number of older students who were unable to return this year due to higher education commitment this year which had a direct impact on numbers.

Summary of activities for this year saw the Fiddle Orchestra attend public events at;

Our own annual concert in Armagh Marketplace Theatre

Performed on stage in support of Mavemacullen Band Coronation Day

Playing at a private function in Marlacoo Orange Hall

Played at Mullaglass Presbyterian Church

Organised our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2023 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Bessbrook Orange Hall – Burns night

Played at Ballylane Reformed Presbyterian Church Social evening

Played at Tassagh Silver Band accordion Concert.

The Orchestra held an awards night in February where certificates and awards were presented which ranged from Grade 2, Grade 4, Grade 8 and Scottish Traditional Diploma following the exams undertaken in the previous July adjudicated by a Scottish examiner within the London College of Music.

Slightly outside of the reporting year but consistent with our Project year, we held exams in Scottish Traditional Fiddle again under the auspices of the London College of Music in June 2024. We had 28 students passing Grades 2 – 8 exams and significantly a further 14 passing at Diploma level. We had one student this year who passed the LLCM Diploma.

Highland Theatre and Country Dance;

Highland Dance – 29 students

Dance numbers were again consistent this year.

Highland dance tuition was delivered in three classes- Junior, Intermediate and Advanced- according to ability. Classes covered tuition towards UK Dance Alliance Examinations, both physical and theoretical, and included dancers learning Scottish Traditional dances, such as the Fling and Sword Dance, and also the more balletic National dances, such as the Flora. The tutor also taught dancers a range of specially choreographed dances, based on Highland steps and set to contemporary Scottish music.

All dance forms were enjoyed by the pupils who were also taught the history of each dance and were provided with an overview of the history of Scottish Highland Dancing. Dancers were entered for UK Dance Alliance examinations in a range of grades appropriate to their ability with a 100% success rate for our dance school.

Summary of activities for this year saw the Dancers attend public events at;

The Orange District Coronation Concert in Mullabrack Church Parish Hall

Our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2023 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Switching on the Lights at Markethill Christmas event organised by ABC Council.

Several smaller local venues but highly significant in terms of confidence building re public performance as regards our younger students.

Our own annual concert in Armagh Marketplace Theatre

Although slightly outside of this reporting year but essentially part of and consistent with our Project year it is worth mentioning a significant June 2024 event where dancers held a formal presentation evening in Parliament Buildings. A total of 56 awards were presented with 29 Dancers taking exams. The awarding authority was the UK Dance Alliance and awards ranged from Intro for our Junior dancers, through to Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for our more senior dancers. Awards covered both Highland and National dances. Dancers also received awards in theory of Highland dance. One dancer received her Professional Teacher's Certificate, having undertaken both a practical dance exam and written theory paper. Around 200 people in the invited audience consisting mostly of family and friends

who made the journey from Markethill enjoyed a wider program of performances from dancers, fiddlers and choir as part of the awards presentation event followed by a supper.

It is very much worth mentioning the volunteer support we have been given at weekly classes. Having come up through the ranks of dancing within MACN themselves and progressed through the grades to attain teacher level, 3-4 of our senior dancers are now giving encouragement to younger dancers as they progress. This is particularly significant as these young teachers who could be off doing something else are choosing to help, support and impart cultural traditions to the next generation.

Drama;

Drama – 31 students

Building on the previous 2 years numbers and aimed at the 7-16 years age group the enrolment was encouraging within the wider cultural context.

Weekly classes build on stagecraft and the improvement of speaking in public and the promotion of confidence.

A few members of this class felt confident enough given the training they had received within this class entered independently in the Portadown Speech Festival and came away with certificates based on Ulster Scots poetry.

The class appeared on stage at our annual concert in Armagh Theatre and performed a play based on the Ulster Scots story and travels in America in period costume.

Accordion;

Accordion – 5 students

Having only introduced this class last year we saw students take LCM exams this year which was a fantastic achievement. Although slightly out of our reporting year but consistent with our project year and for the first time, 3 of our students took London College of Music Exams returning passes at Grade 2, 4 and Second Diploma.

Summary of activities for this year saw the Accordions attend public events at;

Bessbrook Orange Hall – Burns night organised by Bessbrook Crimson Arrow Band.

Played at Ballylane Reformed Presbyterian Church Social evening

Played at Tassagh Silver Band accordion Concert

The tutor who had embarked on a networking project to create a County Armagh Developmental accordion band made up from members of different accordion bands took around 20 members to participate in the Ulster Accordion Bands concert hosted by St. Columba's Church in Portadown. They were very well received.

Following on from this development project we had 40 accordionists supporting us on stage in Armagh Theatre at our annual concert. They were very well received by the audience.

Choir;

Choir – 19 students

Whilst our classes such as fiddle, drama and dance have a greater number of younger people this class was aimed at adults to encourage people to come together with like purpose in a community based situation and reduce social rural isolation.

Summary of activities for this year saw the Choir attend public events at;

Our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2023 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Bessbrook Orange Hall – Burns night organised by Bessbrook Crimson Arrow Band.

Played at Ballylane Reformed Presbyterian Church Social evening with a songbook based on Scottish Traditional songs and Hymns

Presented Scottish Traditional songs on the steps in the Great Hall in Parliament Buildings in support of the Dancers Awards presentation evening.

At our own annual concert in The Marketplace Theatre – Armagh.

Statement and summary in support of the Public Benefit statement submitted:

We believe, given the above that we have fulfilled our outlined public benefit in terms of

1. To promote to the benefit of the inhabitants
2. To advance education
3. To promote and preserve Ulster Scots heritage, cultural traditions and arts
4. To provide facilities in the interests of.

Private Benefit;

There was no private benefit flowing inconsistent to our purposes.

Difficulties;

Maintaining funding support on a year to year basis is particularly difficult as we cannot give students any guarantees of the continuity they require to build on exam successes for the following year. Having funding for just one year and only 75% maximum funding available from the Ulster Scots Agency.

Without funding secured from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Rural Enterprise Fund our project would have closed in August 2023

Structural red tape putting increased responsibility on maintaining volunteer support.

Successes;

Managing to get enough grant funding to run our project this year ensuring continuity to those students hoping to build on both what they have learned and exam success from the previous project.

Getting Arts Council funding from the REAP program following a successful application process after the ACNI had closed all their own funding streams due to uncertainty of funding from government.

Our students learned new skills, gained confidence, were aware of the part they were playing within the wider cultural context, exam results were achieved and new friendships were made

Increased public awareness of the Ulster-Scots tradition through our performances and online presence

We promoted our public activity through our Facebook page.

When we started our Accordion Class as a pilot program with a view to developing it to the point where we would have students beginning exams we were pleased to see that vision achieved this year.

It was also encouraging to see that through the development journey of this class that we have been a catalyst for change with the development of The County Armagh Accordion Band, blending members from different bands and playing both traditional and contemporary upbeat music.

Concert;

The concert in Armagh Marketplace Theatre for April 2024 went ahead this year as planned and is an integral outworking of our funding applications.

Promoted as 'Haul yer wheest' in the theatre program, it was a sold out event open to the wider community.

Whilst a number of these ticket sales were related to new numbers driven by the Accordion Development Band we had around 150 people on stage coming directly from our own 'stable' in terms of tuition in Markethill and being able to put on a variety concert with Dancers, Musicians and Drama and to have this number on stage celebrating Ulster Scots cultural arts which is not replicated anywhere else in Northern Ireland is something special.

Mitigation of Harm;

Our Safeguarding policy which we communicate out and complete refresher training is our primary mechanism in support to mitigation of harm.

Using Access NI checks is a further mechanism used in the mitigation of harm.

Having identified in a previous assessment that the original stairs in our hall, coupled with the numbers using them had the potential for accident, the project to replace them and build new stairs supported by the Department for Communities was completed and signed off by council planning in April.

Summary;

MACN have contributed to the advancement of community confidence in Markethill by those parts of its project outlined. It is part of the community contributing to the quality of life and the reduction of rural social isolation through its many activities.

By contributing a significant proportion of the overall budget in real terms highlights the importance MACN place on this project and the difficulty obtaining funding from other sources.

We have had another very successful year all things considered promoting our music and heritage and encouraging continued exam success.

Without having funding to maintain a part time project administrator we would not be able to run this project.

Financial;

Given the rises in the cost of living class fees were increased this year to offset our contribution of the budget.

Adult enrolment - £20 – Single payment

Child enrolment - £15 – Single payment

2nd and subsequent child - £7.50 – Single payment

Class Fee Adult - £6.00 weekly per class

Class Fee Child – £4.00 weekly per class

Thanks to the subsidy funding contributes class fees are still able to be kept at a rate which would be considerably less than private tuition to enable a pathway into the arts for those students from a low income background.

Project part funded by:

Ulster Scots Agency

Mid Armagh Community Network

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

With our stairs project supported by The Department for Communities.

As of 31-03-2024 the following figures are summarised from the draft unaudited financial statement.

Gross Income - £64,184

Total Expenditure - £59,571

Operating Profit - £4,613

Capital and reserves - £34,954

These figures are a snapshot of the position at 31-03-24 which is when we produce our annual accounts. The project for 2023-2024 continued through to end of August 2024.

Acknowledgement;

The Trustees in preparation of this have had regard to the Commission's Public benefit requirement statutory guidance.

Auditors:

Shriver Price and Company
Newry

Insurers:

Gallagher

Bankers:

Danske Bank

Signed on behalf of MACN

Conrad Clarke
Chairman.