

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
CHARITIES COMMISSION

Reporting year:

April 2024 – March 2025

Project year:

September 2024 – August 2025

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 significant volunteer time each week to facilitate the project and meet regularly as a team to promote positive relationships and outcomes.

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 2024 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.

Accordion Class re-commenced in our own hall.

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 summary 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 – 52 students.

Enrolment numbers for this class were consistent with the same period last year.

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

Our own annual concert in Armagh Marketplace Theatre

Orchestra supper and social evening in our own hall in October 2024

Performance at Brownlow Castle in November 2024

Presented Fiddle certificates from our June exams at our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2024 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Armagh Orange Hall – Lisnadill concert in March 2025

Accordion and Fiddles jointly performed at an event in Armagh Stables in support of Armagh Rugby Club 150th anniversary in March 2025

Accordion and Fiddles jointly performed at a concert event in support of Kildress Church in March 2025

Our own Concert in The Marketplace Theatre Armagh in April 2025

LCM exams undertaken in June 2025

Highland Theatre and Country Dance;

Highland Dance – 34 students

Enrolment numbers showed a growth this year compared to last.

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 and we will present certificates and recognise the dancers in September 2025

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

Our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2024 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Dancers supported a fundraiser for Markethill Pipe Band at Kilcluney Hall in February 2025

Dancers at Rushmere Shopping Centre in February 2025

Armagh Orange Hall – Lisnadill concert in March 2025

Dancers performed at an Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Council event at Solitude Park Banbridge in March 2025

Our own Concert in The Marketplace Theatre Armagh in April 2025

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 – 22 students

Enrolment saw a significant fall in numbers this year by 9

Building on the previous 2 years numbers and aimed at the 7-16 years age group the enrolment was still 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.

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

Performed a pantomime to around 100 family and friends in Kilcluney Hall. The pantomime was Cinderella with an Ulster Scots twist. The traditional plot was followed but the script was rewritten by our tutor to contain words used throughout the play based on the Ulster Scots language in December 2024

The class appeared on stage at our annual concert in Armagh Theatre in 2025 and performed a couple of emotional Drama pieces based around our 80th Anniversary of WW2 theme for the concert– one by an established author based on evacuees during the second world war and one written and led by Drama students based around a couple due to be married and the future wife receives a telephone call to say her future husband has been killed in action.

Accordion;

Accordion – 7 students

We saw students take LCM exams again in June 2024 returning passes at Grade 2, 4 and Diploma.

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

In support of Enagh Accordion Band Fundraiser in November 2024 in Kilcluney Hall

Accordion and Fiddles jointly performed at an event in Armagh Stables in support of Armagh Rugby Club 150th anniversary in March 2025

Accordion and Fiddles jointly performed at a concert event in support of Kildress Church in March 2025

Following on from the successful County Armagh development project we had 30 accordionists supporting us on stage in Armagh Theatre at our annual concert in April 2025. They were very well received by the audience and went on that night to do a 24 hour marathon fundraising event in St Columba's Church Hall in Portadown

Armagh Show

LCM exams undertaken in June 2025

Choir;

Choir – 21 students

Enrolment numbers for this class were consistent with the same period last year.

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;

In support of Enagh Accordion Band Fundraiser in November 2024 in Kilcluney Hall

The Choir led Bessbrook District Carol Service in December 2024

Our annual Carol service in Kilcluney Orange Hall in December 2024 with 200-300 people in attendance followed by a community supper.

Performed Presbyterian Conference at Armagh Theatre in March 2025

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.

Even though we only receive 75% funding from the Ulster Scots Agency to our project Our management committee met with representatives from the Ulster Scots Agency in March 2025 who were seeking a reduction in our funding by 20% as their budget from the Executive office had not grown. We explained that such a reduction would see our project close. We submitted an unchanged budget application which was approved in late August 2025 just prior to our 2025-2026 project year start. This is an example highlighting commitment to tutors and students in a tight deadline situation which is an outworking difficulty of funding pressures.

Losing 9 of our older students from our Drama class due to education commitments meant we had to cut back hours in this class.

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.

A successful application to the Department of Foreign Affairs – Republic of Ireland Reconciliation Fund for our 2025-2026 project year.

A successful outcome to an application we were working on for 2 years with the National Lottery Sustainable Buildings grant saw us given approval to install new insulation in the roof of our building, new slates and the installation of a 10kw solar system which will help reduce our operating costs and help improve our carbon footprint.

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.

Concert;

The concert in Armagh Marketplace Theatre for April 2025 went ahead this year as planned and is an integral outworking of our funding applications.

It was a sold out event open to the wider community.

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.

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 not increased this year.

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 -55%

Mid Armagh Community Network – 34%

Department of Foreign Affairs – Republic of Ireland – 11%

National Lottery Sustainable Buildings Grant – Roof Insulation, Tiles and Solar Panels

As of 31-03-2025 the following figures are summarised from the draft unaudited financial statement.

Gross Income - £69,555

Total Expenditure - £58,861

Operating Profit - £10,694

Capital and reserves - £45,648

These figures are a snapshot of the position at 31-03-25 which is when we produce our annual accounts. The project for 2024-2025 continued through to end of August 2025.

From enrolment fees we are able to contribute 34% of the budget which is a significant investment back into our own community.

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.