

Year ended 31 March 2024/2025 - Annual Report Helping Hands Autism Support Group- Charity registration NIC105722

Objectives and activities

The first purpose of HHASG is to promote the health, welfare, care and education of children and young people that have Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families and carers in the Belfast and North Down area. Children and Young people with ASD and their siblings will be healthier, happier and more confident. The direct benefits are: -Children and young people with ASD are better enabled, prepared, equipped and skilled for life educationally, emotionally and socially

-Children and Young people with ASD will develop skills to fulfil their potential

-Parents are less isolated and have enhanced emotional well being

-Parents learn new skills and knowledge to create a more positive family environment

The second purpose of HHASG is to promote understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder within the wider community and to represent the views of those affected by autism. The direct benefits are:

Develop and understand ASD in the wider community to promote a positive image of ASD which will give communities and ASD families an increase in confidence

Increase knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder in the community to build confidence and capacity with those who are neurotypical.

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year, the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to the beneficiaries.

Achievements and performance

We have been continuing on with our fundraising efforts which included our annual golf charity event, Asda Sit out and the families taking part in sponsored walks etc to help raise funds for our centre. In the first 3 months of 2025 we have been focusing on fundraising towards a new playpark outside our centre, this will continue into the next financial year. We have developed a new proposal for outside area with LCCC Peaceplus programme which we hope will be successful in 2025/2026 to develop a fun area for the children and young people.

We are delighted that our centre is used 7 days a week now, with being open for Birthday party rentals on a Sunday, which is fully booked, we finally have got to fulfil our initial business plan, in ensuring that the centre is used everyday. We would like to focus on day time usage again with the nearby schools, but this is difficult as we also need time for the cleaning process to take place.

We were also supported this year again by Three Guineas Trust that we are so grateful for, this allows us to bring in facilitators and offer parents respite times and trips during the summer break this is an invaluable service to those families with ASD and with complex needs. This year we were able to self employ 8 members of staff over 3 weeks in the summer, plus 3 staff members at night time for a young peoples project.

We are delighted that Children In Need funding was successful in 2023 and we have a confirmed letter of offer for the next 3 years taking us to June 2026. This funding allows us to self employ 2 part time members of staff, one a project and activity coordinator in the youth clubs each week and the other as an outreach worker. We are very grateful for this opportunity and for Children in Need support.

Other support was achieved this year from the Clear Project supported by the PHA, for facilitation of extra programmes including, mindfulness, confidence building, life skills and calming skills, this programme allowed us to provide extra support in the groups each week for October to February.

Lisburn Castlereagh City Council have also continued to support our charity with help with equipment and running costs through the hardship fund and the community services grant, which is always needed to continue to support the children and young people each week. This year they also helped with the costs towards raising awareness during a Twinkle all the way - Sensory Christmas experience we held at the nearby park, we invited all the local schools and businesses to join us and learn something about sensory processing.

Our weekly sessions continue and are now offered 8 times per week, we aim in 2025/2026 to increase our volunteer opportunities and possibly bring in more facilitators to help with weekly programmes, this will give the committee time to focus on other things. We desperately need new outdoor space for the children and young people as they love spending time out there, and its great to get outside too and we hope that SEUPB Peace Plus programme through LCCC will help with this.

Feel Good Friday mums & carers group continues to meet each week, providing activities that support parents through challenging weeks, with the provision of art and crafts, cooking projects, therapies etc. Our plans for this group is to achieve funding for the group to be supported by facilitated programmes and a residential to build confidence and resilience skills, we are grateful this year to avail of funding from National Lottery Awards for All programme for our weekly mum and carers group.

We are also providing facilitated sessions to those young people with high levels of anxiety, who are waiting on appointments with the Health Trust mental health services, we are finding a lot of younger people struggling with their feelings and how to manage them. We also have expanded our services and partnership working with Hanwood Gym and the Tullycarnet Boxing Club to give teenagers some active fitness each weekend.

This year we also have been successful in receiving funding from the RTE Toy Appeal which has allowed us to provide facilitated sessions for those on our waiting list which has been very successful and filled to capacity each week. These sessions are for primary school children who are waiting a diagnosis or have a diagnosis of ASD, parents also get time to chat and gain advice.

2025/2026 Priorities:

- Fundraise for an extra funds needed for the play area outside and gain funding from LCCC Peace to develop a fun and vibrant area.
- Staff and volunteers to feel supported, offer training and expenses to attract more volunteers
- Continue to receive funding for programmes and activities through facilitation but mainly for the running costs of the centre.
- Support the new members of the committee to feel included (3 in total)
- Gain support for a new Friday club when time is free for registered members
- Residential for FGF group
- Aim to full fill each group to capacity.
- Offer training to volunteers each month and keep up to date with Safeguarding
- New policies and update of policy file
- Seek online accounts package
- Keep advertising birthday parties each week to avail of unrestricted income for the centre.
- Support CIN staff /Facilitators to develop new ideas for the programmes and for the young people.
- Seek a new accountant for the charity for charities returns.
- Replace old and tired equipment, also the contents of the centre that are not serving their purpose anymore.
- Gain Feedback from parents about moving forward after CIN funding is complete.