

**The Bridge Association
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)**

**Directors' Report
For the year ended 31 March 2024**

The Directors present their annual report together with the audited financial statements of the Company for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The Directors confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements of the charitable Company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the charitable Company's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102).

Since the Company qualifies as small under section 382 of the Companies Act 2006, the Strategic Report required of medium and large companies under the Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report) Regulations 2013 has been omitted.

Objectives and activities

a. Policies and objectives

We have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities.

Through the wide range of occupational training programmes carried out by the Company, The Bridge Association endeavours to provide relief and rehabilitation for Learning Disabilities for mentally and physically disabled persons.

Achievements and Performance

a. Review of activities

The Bridge Association has continued to raise levels of confidence, basic social/living skills, numeracy, literacy and IT skills for each trainee. In the year 2023/24 the total number of trainees was 41 (2022/23: 39), all of whom gained a number of units within the City & Guilds/NVQ structures. The Association has developed a Social Programme which covers rights and equality, online safety around digital devices and social media, anti-social behaviour and person centred care planning for each trainee. We were successful in gaining funding from ARC (Association for Real Change) for the period 2024 to 2027 for our programme of activities and courses for trainees and staff – food hygiene, manual handling, mental health awareness, stress management, mindset and movement and health and well being.

The Association has continued to be a provider stakeholder within the Learning Disability strategy, benchmarked as forward thinking, innovative and meeting best practice with all Health and Social Care Trusts.

As all Direct Payment agreements are at the correct hourly rate, Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCCT) has fully implemented the annual percentage increase from 1 April 2023, and has not restricted the amount of placements that they could request on a year to year basis.

The Association has continued to directly ring fence the equivalent of 5 full time and 5 two-day Direct Payment places for the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (SEHSCCT) during 2023/24 and we are on target to fill any remaining ring fenced placements in 2024/25.

The Association has continued to develop, with the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSCCT), the three strands of funding within the SDS programme i.e. Direct Payments from the Trainees, Care Management payments on behalf of the Trainees and Direct Trust payments for placements. The Association has directly ring fenced the equivalent of 2 full time and 3 two-day Direct Payment places for their future needs in 2024/25.

The Association has been working closely with the Education Boards and other Social Care Trusts to highlight that the Training Unit is open to all clients with a Learning disability to purchase a place directly using Direct Payments. The Association has developed a six week taster programme for all pupils within the school transition period (16-18 years of age). This programme is currently being offered through Riverside School, Parkview School and, from 2025, Castle Tower School.

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**Directors' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024**

Achievements and Performance (continued)

During the year the Association has continued to develop, secure and enhance Bridge Quirky Emporium Social Enterprise in order to promote and provide up-cycling, crafting and retail training in a real setting for all the trainees attending the training unit. Bridge Quirky Emporium has gone from strength to strength.

The dedicated What's App groups where we share all relevant training unit and government information are working well. We maintained full GDPR compliance in relation to these. Our Facebook pages for Bridge and Quirky are updated with our activities on a weekly basis to inform the community about the Association and what we do.

The Association's Trainee Committee is fully functional and working closely with the Senior Management Team on the trainees' aspirations, training requirements, input into the development of the new training unit, fundraising and social activities. Reports from the Committee are presented to the Board for further discussion.

The Association has developed a Learning Disability Football Team in partnership with Hillsborough Boys Club. The team have successfully competed in the George Best Community Cup winning the Cup and taking part in the IFA Foundation Disability League, which they won in 2023.

The Association has also developed a trainee choir (The Quirky Choir) which takes part in a range of activities to promote the Association in the community. The Association won a 'Spirit of Christmas 2023 – Reason for the Season' award from Antrim & Newtownabbey Council based on The Quirky Choir and Quirky Emporium. The choir will be performing in several local care homes and in Castle Mall Shopping Centre in the 2024 Christmas season.

Financial review

a. Going concern

Given the continued support of the Health & Social Care Trusts and their acknowledgement of the valuable work by the charity in providing high quality training and rehabilitation, the directors are confident in the future of the Association and consider the going concern basis for the preparation of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 to be appropriate.

b. Reserves policy

It is the Association's policy to try to maintain unrestricted reserves equivalent to 3 months revenue expenditure in order to a) cover short term fluctuations in funding and b) ensure an orderly rundown of the organisation should future funding be unobtainable. Whilst at year end, this amounted to less than one month due to the investment of cash resources in progressing plans for the new training unit, the directors keep the reserves position under regular review.

Structure, governance and management

a. Constitution

The Bridge Association is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (charity no. NIC107046).

b. Methods of appointment or election of Directors

The management of the Company is the responsibility of the Directors who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the Memorandum of Association.

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**Directors' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024**

Structure, governance and management (continued)

c. Pay policy for senior staff

The Joint Managing Directors, who are also Trustees, receive remuneration at a level set by the Board. This remuneration is fully disclosed in these financial statements.

d. Organisational structure and decision making

Day to day decision making is undertaken by the Executive Directors, Mrs J Barnes and Mr D Edmont, with regular reporting to the Board. Decisions on strategy, policy and material capital expenditure are taken by the full Board.

Plans for future periods

An Open Week will continue to be held each year to showcase the work of the Association and with the aim of achieving a placement level of 51 and with a further 5 on a waiting list in order to ensure the future stability of the training unit.

In July 2024 our Hug-a-Mug Ability Café opened in Castle Mall, Antrim and has been successful in providing both a service to the community and valuable training experience for the trainees. We also want to promote the Café as a Safe Space and part of the Loneliness Network.

Ground works began on the new Training Unit/Community Hub site in October 2024, the project having gone to tender on a phased build basis. The land and property will be owned and managed by the charity as the Board feel this will continue to secure its future stability and not be dependent on leases or landlords. We will continue developing our working relationships with all the funding bodies in order to access the necessary grant/funding aid towards completion of this new Training Unit/Community Hub.

Statement of Directors' responsibilities

The Directors (who are also the directors of the Company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial . Under company law, the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Company and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently,
- observe the methods and principles of the Charities SORP (FRS 102);
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards (FRS 102) have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Company will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the Company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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**Directors' Report (continued)
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Disclosure of information to auditors

Each of the persons who are Directors at the time when this Directors' Report is approved has confirmed that:

- so far as that Director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditors are unaware, and
- that Director has taken all the steps that ought to have been taken as a Director in order to be aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors

The auditors, Sumer AuditCo NI Limited, have indicated their willingness to continue in office and a motion to propose their re-appointment will be put to the AGM.

Approved by order of the members of the board of Directors and signed on their behalf by:



D Edmont
Joint Managing Director



J Barries
Joint Managing Director

Date: 13 December 2024