

Newry Felons Association



Cumann na Meirleach An Lúir

Annual Trustees Report to NI Charity Commission for the year ended 31st March 2025

Newry Felons / CumannnaMeirleach An Lúir was established in the Newry, County Down area as a support group for ex-prisoners from the Newry and Mourne area.

After the Good Friday Agreement and the release of political prisoners, there was an obvious need for an organisation/group to help assist these men and women to re-integrate into the community in a meaningful way and to help them re-adjust to their new lives.

They found themselves unable to gain meaningful employment, some were unable to return to their families and there was a feeling of disconnect after long periods away from society. This resulted in some, deterioration in their mental health and the danger of them falling into poverty and the consequences of that.

We started out with the intention of improving the lives of these ex-prisoners in any way we could and our service has developed according to their needs whilst still meeting the Public Benefit requirements and our aims and purposes.

Public Benefit

Our organisation meets the public benefit requirement by having the following purposes:

- **To relieve poverty among ex-prisoners and their families (our principle beneficiary target group) by providing free welfare rights advice and assistance in Newry and surrounding areas.**

The direct benefits flowing from relief of poverty include:

- a) Potential income increase by providing accurate current information on benefits and entitlements to ensure that all available benefits have been received.
- b) To give assistance to access those benefits.
- c) Improvement of living standards and quality of life
- d) Reduced stress and worry and improved outlook

This is on-going and assistance is provided as and when required through advisors.

- **Advance education through the provision of free training and educational courses and development programmes for ex-prisoners and their families.**

The direct benefits flowing from providing free training and educational courses and development programmes include:

- a) Enhanced education and understanding to enhance employment capacity
- b) Increased skills and knowledge base
- c) Improved and/or enhanced employability and economic prospects through the advancement of career and employment opportunities
- d) Reduced stress and worry and improved outlook
- e) Increased levels of employment

We have run programmes on gardening and workshops on mental health and well-being. These are always well-attended and although many of our clients are now of retirement age, some are doing part-time jobs, not through necessity but because they choose to, to maintain their mental health and well-being.

- **Improve quality of health of the republican ex-prisoner community and their families by providing or assist in providing counselling and emotional support services and the provision of free programmes, events and activities.**

The direct benefits flowing from the provision of programmes, events and activities are:

- Improved mental health and emotional well-being
- Reduced anxieties and a reduced sense of social isolation and disconnection
- Increased awareness of health issues and healthy living
- Enhanced confidence, self-esteem and improved outlook
- Enhanced personal development
- Increased skills and knowledge

Having regard to the Commission's Public Benefit requirement, Newry Felons have developed over the years and their provision of services and activities have developed also. We were gifted a large piece of community ground at Barcroft which is now a vibrant Men's Shed. Our targeted group was originally ex-prisoners and by extension their families. The community garden which is open daily is run mainly by ex-prisoners and their families but has also attracted retired men who find companionship and comradeship in the garden.



We have everything from growing vegetables to hens and chickens running around. It is a little piece of the countryside in the city and has become very popular with visitors to the nearby Community Centre dropping by.

We have also developed a workshop where we make things from wood, including benches and tables and houses for wheelie bins.

We have made mud kitchens for schools which have proved very popular for younger children and a number of local schools have requested them for their playgrounds.

We have made great connections with schools in the local area who visit our garden as 'school visits'. They learn about growing vegetables in our vegetable garden and flowers.



In the Spring time we do hanging baskets and make little wishing wells which are in great demand. That keeps the men busy during that season but they are made with love and care.

The trips we provide to the ex-prisoners and their families alleviate the mundane routine of normal life. We have had a few this year and usually with an educational element to them. For example, we took 40 participants to the play “The Murder of Wolfe Tone” in Tí Chulainn Cultural Centre (story giving an alternative narrative around the assassination of a leading figure in early Irish politics). We have attended a number of visitor centres throughout the country, for example, the Free Derry Museum.

Accounts

Our Receipts and Payments account showed a deficit this year of £ 4,006 compared with a deficit last year of £ 353. This has arisen due to the purchase for additional covered space for the garden in the form of temporary mobile units.

We received substantial donation in the 2025 year from Stephen’s Green Trust (£ 12,995). There will be and is no adverse effect on the Charity delivering on its objectives.

We have no debts or creditors.

Our four trustees have been the same and have served throughout the year. They are:

1. Frank Johnston (Chair)
2. Kevin Henry
3. Eamon Murphy
4. Lewis Watson

This Report was compiled and approved on 11th September 2025.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:



Frank Johnston (Chair)

Eamon Murphy