

**POLISH LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND AFFAIRS
TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT
2021-2022**

NIC107785

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1.Introduction

The Polish Language, Culture, and Affairs is a constituted organisation created by the Polish emigrants. We are registered Charity (NIC107785) and company ltd recognized by Companies House. We do run Polish Saturday school POLCA for children from Polish families or mixed relationships. Our school is to provide an additional Polish education: Polish language, history, geography of Poland, art, and culture. We do have a team of teachers and assistants and several volunteers, including Board members. Polish Saturday school started in 2017 and it is our main project. As an organisation we do support Polish community in Northern Ireland at many different fields. We are also cooperating with the local organisations and bodies, working as a part of multi-cultural Belfast.

2. During covid time

Due covid 19 pandemia we were forced to close our services in March 2020. We were able to reopen in October 2020, with significant help of many people and organisations, including Polish Consulate in Northern Ireland, Harding Memorial Primary, Belfast City Council, Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Wspolnota Polska Foundation. We were also supported voluntarily by many members of the Polish community in Northern Ireland. As almost all other Polish Saturday schools had to work with their pupils online, we were able to work more “traditional” way, with some anti covid regulations adopted by POLCA and accepted by the members of our community and our partner Harding Memorial Primary and Education Authority.

Our work was disrupted by another lockdown in January 2021. We could reopen again in April, and we were able to finish the school year in June with a nearly 90 pupils. Due covid 19 we had to cancel or postpone our usual events and project: Bilingual Belfast (postponed to December), Polish day, Sport Day (multi – ethnical) and other usual school and national celebrations. However, our efforts were appreciated by our community, which resulted in an increase in number of pupils in September 2021, when we were able to provide services for over 150 pupils, led by the team of 16 teachers and a several volunteers. Again, we received a strong support from our partners and several organisations and bodies. We did receive funds from Belfast City Council, Wspolnota Polska foundation and Aid the Poles in the East Foundation (through Polish Teachers Association in Dublin). Thanks to the support of the Polish Consulate in Belfast we were also able to hold a “Bilingual Belfast” event (including bilingualism workshops) and Polish Independence Day.

As the pandemic situation has changed, and the restrictions were gradually lifted we could come back to our usual activity.

3. Year 2021 – 2022

We have started in September 2021 with over 150 pupils. Due covid restrictions and agreement taken between POLCA and our partner Harding Memorial Primary we were obliged to not exceed this number of attending children, to avoid risk of spreading the virus. This unfortunately was the reason

why we could not accept more applicants, however, when the restrictions were lifted, we could bring more young people to our organisation. In September 2022, the number of our pupils reached 170 and we can expect that the next season can be even higher, as the Polish emigrant community is one of the largest in Northern Ireland. Even though many Poles are permanently settled in UK and Ireland and coexisting with the local communities, they are strongly interested to cultivate Polish language, culture, and art. The Polish community want our children to be able speak Polish language and gain an acknowledge about our country of origin, also because many of our families are existing in Poland.

Due the number of the children we had to increase a number of teachers and assistant – it was 20-22 people working for Saturday school. We also allocated several young volunteers – mostly teenagers to every class. Some of these young people attended to POLCA school in the past.

During this year we faced several different nature problems, starting with post-brexite reality and financial difficulties of group of our parents. Another significant matter was an unprovoked Russian aggression to Ukraine, Poland's neighbour, and the country whose history and roots are related to Poland. To show our support to the fighting Ukrainians we have organised on 5th of March 2022 collection for Ukraine, in cooperation with **Polish Consulate** and **Harding Memorial Primary**. We have received a great response not only from Polish community but also from many other Belfast people, among them many residents of Cregagh road area.

In August 2022 we have lost one of our most valuable members. **Jacek Kocoń**, member of the board died after a long battle with cancer. He was a great personality and was always supporting Polish community and our organisation and will be never forgotten by our community.

We have started a new school season in September 2022 with nearly 170 pupils and 22 teachers. The number of our young participants is still growing, and it is possible, that due this situation we would have to expand our activity by opening another unit to provide services for everyone who is happy to join POLCA school.

4. Events and celebrations

Carnival Ball for POLCA children – 12/02/ 2022

A great costume party with several games and competitions organised by the teachers and parents.

Collection for Ukraine – 05/03/2022

A community collection to support Ukraine, organised in cooperation with the Polish Consulate and Harding Memorial Primary, with the great response of the local community. All collected items were delivered to the Polish – Ukrainian border and donated to organisations delivering directly delivering goods to Ukraine.

Polish Heritage Day – 03/05/ 2022

Organised in cooperation of the Polish Consulate, in memory of the first Polish Constitution, also known as Constitution of the 3 May 1791. This is one of the most important national celebrations in Poland. Our children could participate in workshops, games and competitions and learn about Polish history. A separate topic was devoted to the history of Polish Army, fighting in North Africa, Italy, and Great Britain during II World War.

A Family Day - 28/5/2023

An event held by POLCA in Malone Rugby Club – games and competitions for the children and parents including football tournament and art competitions with over 200 participants. This is also commonly known in Poland as a “Childrens Day”. It was organised with support of the Polish Consulate, local Polish businesses and – most important – by the parents of our pupils.

End of School Year -19/06/2022

A ceremony of the end of school year – a great meeting of teachers, children, and parents. Children were awarded for their hard work during this year and the parent could accompany them. The audience could also watch performances prepared by our young members of POLCA Theatre.

3 Years Old Admission Ceremony - 21/10/2022 *

An official ceremony of “acceptance” dedicated to the youngest group in presence of their parents. This ceremony is usually organised once a year in October, to create a bond between the school and new pupils.

Polish Independence Day 11 November – 12/11/2022 *

A celebration in memory of the Independence of Poland, regained on 11/11/ 1918, after 123 years of Russian, Prussian, and Austrian occupation. This day was especially celebrated by our community members. A variety of different activities were provided, including poetry tournament, history workshops and art competitions. A group of our pupils and teachers also visited Milltown Cemetery to commemorate the Polish Military graves.

Christmas in POLCA - 17/12/2022 *

A celebration known also as “Jaselka” – one of the Polish traditions celebrated with Christmas songs and performances created by our pupils, with – of course – Santa’s visit!

*Similar events were organised in 2021

5. POLCA current Board

Chairman – rev David Samuel Armstrong

Reappointed for further term at the Annual General Meeting on 19/11/2022.

Secretary – Aleksander Paprocki

Reappointed for further term at the AGM on 19/11/2022.

Trustee - Mateusz Gawlik

Appointed on 17/09/2022.

Reappointed for further term at the AGM on 19/11/2022.

Trustee – John Cieřlik

Appointed on 4/03/2023.

Changes within the Board:

Trustee – Jacek Kocoń – passed away on 18/08/2022.

Trustee – Przemyslaw Straus – temporary member from 25/08/2022 to 19/08/2022.

6. Grant Providers

During financial year 2021-2022, POLCA was supported by:

Aid the Poles in the East Foundation

Polish Foundation supporting Polish community abroad in cooperation with Polish government.

“Wspolnota Polska” Association

Polish association supporting Polish community abroad in cooperation with Polish government.

“Wspolnota Polska” Association – Rzeszow city unit

A regional unit of Wspolnota Polska, placed in Rzeszow in Poland, supporting projects related to the history and patriotism.

Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council supported POLCA several times, funding our activities, helping to cover part of our expenses during covid 19 pandemia.

Polish Consulate in Belfast

Polish Consulate in Belfast supporting projects dedicated to development of Polish community in Northern Ireland in cooperation with Polish Authorities.

In the past 5 years POLCA was also supported by: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, Volunteer Now, Youth Action, Halifax Foundation and Black Asian Minority Ethnic.

7. Other Projects

As our main project was always Saturday school and our priority especially during covid 19 pandemia was to save existence of the school for the last 2 years we were not able to participate in many projects. As we are gradually developing we can see some opportunities to expand our activity.

In December 2022 we have reopened POLCA Sport Club – project supported by Belfast City Council. We do have a dancing group and “Young Theatre” and a small Art Academy. We are also planning to open a Youth Club – project addressed to the Polish teenagers. As the number of participants is still growing, it is possible that we will need to open another school unit to provide services for more children.

In 2022 POLCA supported – among the other minority ethnic groups - Belfast Inequalities Research 2021-2022. This project was coordinated by Belfast City Council, and was to explore inequalities

experienced by minority ethnics and migrant residents in Belfast. POLCA in this program was represented by one of our members – Barbara Snowarska, and some members of our community were involved in several group's meetings and consultations.

We are certain, that we can do more for our community and our partners in the future, however it depends on our finances and number of people ready to support our organisation.

8.Finances (01/06/2021 – 31/05/2022)

Total incomes: 60818.06

Total expenses: 64454.30

Net profit/loss: -3636.24

All other figures can be found in POLCA Micro-entity Accounts for 31/05/2022.

This report was created by the secretary of the Board.

Aleksander Paprocki

On behalf of the Board

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Paprocki', written over the printed name and role.