

Young at Heart Bessbrook Annual Report 2025-2026

Charity no. NIC 110335



Note from Mrs Phil Morrow (*Chairperson*)

Dear members

As always, it is a pleasure to see so many smiling faces on a Monday morning and to see people taking the opportunity to interact with others during exercise and over refreshments. We are indebted to the efforts of so many people within the group such as the people who plan and organise outings, those who set out the hall and prepare the food and tidy up at the end of the morning. We also appreciate the contribution of gifts for raffles and quizzes for fund raising. We are fortunate also to have such a good working relationship with the Church who lease out the hall for use by the Walking and Craft Group members and the “Keep Fit for Seniors” group. Everyone plays their part and we are grateful for their input, which makes the Young at Heart Bessbrook such a successful group.

We currently have a healthy membership with 65 people on the register. The group photo is evidence of a good regular attendance on the Monday morning sessions.



As you know our organisation is governed by our constitution which sets out the following main aim and objectives.

1. AIM

The aim of the group/organisation is to relieve those in need by providing a social outlet and a programme of social, educational & recreational activities within a safe and secure environment for people aged 50 & over in the local Bessbrook and surrounding areas.

2. OBJECTIVES

The group/organisation will be guided by the following objectives:

- a. To encourage older people to remain active by encouraging participation on a wide range of activities.
- b. Promote the welfare of its members.
- c. Organise services and activities for the welfare and well being of its members.
- d. To serve as a centre for information for those bodies in the welfare of its members
- e. To focus attention on the needs of and services available for members, by promoting or helping to promote, research, conferences, exhibitions, lectures and training courses.
- f. To bring together representation of local voluntary agencies, statutory bodies and individuals in furtherance of the above objective.

This report highlights the various activities throughout the year that demonstrate that we have been following our aim and objectives.

General statistics

Since the start of April 2025 we have continued to keep many of our members active and undertaken 41 walks up until the end of March 2026. The locations are listed in the table.

Walk location	Frequency
Bessbrook Derrymore Demesne	20
Dromantine	3
Newry Canal tow path	12
Bessbrook village	2
Gosford Forest Park	1
Newcastle Promenade	1
Castlewellan Forest Park	1
Greenway Victoria Lock	1
Total	41

The walk leaders have conducted risk assessments for all walk routes and the findings of those assessments are related to walk members in a pre-walk brief. Safety is treated as paramount and risk assessments are updated on a regular basis.

Many of our members give such positive feedback on how they enjoy the opportunity to get out and about in the countryside of Armagh and Down Counties with other like-minded members and enjoy the chat in the hall after the walk and also during the walks.

Breaks through the year

The table gives an indication of the various breaks through the year when the club do not meet on a Monday morning.

Breaks	No. Weeks
Christmas	2
Summer holiday	2
Funeral resulting in cancellation	1

Easter and Holy week (Hall not available)	2
Seminar week Talk and Chat	1
Total	8

Knitting & Craft Group

At the same time walks were taking place some members of the Knitting & Craft group also met in the hall and enjoyed the friendship and sharing of their knitting and craft knowledge and skills and to have a chance to meet and make friends with other like-minded people in a safe setting.

The membership of the Craft group has grown significantly over the past year. We owe this to the positive reports offered by so many members of the group.



Members of the craft group with their craft work on display

Each Monday the ladies look forward to chatting and sharing news of the week and passing on different skills that they have acquired over the years and willing to share with others in the group. Throughout the year women in the group have knitted baby wear gifted to the Maternity unit of the local hospital (Daisy Hill).

Core Strength and Balance

Since return from “covid 19 lock down” it has also been local practice to conduct a 15 minute “Core Strength and Balance exercise” prior to commencing walking. The programme is run by Mervyn Briggs & Robert Megarity and is well attended. Some of the craft group members also participate.



Members of the walking group in Church Hall undertaking core strength and balance exercise warm up

Outings

Thanks to members fund raising and grant aid from the John Moore Foundation we have been able to deliver a number of planned outings so far. Each trip has been much appreciated.

Trip 1

Overnight stay in Killyhevlin Hotel and visit to Castle Coole house and Belleek pottery. The overnight stay was paid for by member contribution whilst YAHB funded the cost of transportation, and entry fees into venues and some light refreshments.



YAHB members disembarking for pottery tour



Members relaxing on Enniskillen & Belleek outing

Trip 2 Walk and Picnic in the Gosford Forest Park

A total of 22 members attended the Gosford Forest Park Walk and picnic. We were fortunate to have a warm sunny day and to take advantage of the facilities on site. Some non-walking members of the group also attended the event.



Walking group in Gosford Forest Park car park

The forest is ideal for walkers as there are a range of paths at different inclines to suit everyone's ability. Naturally walk leaders conduct risk assessments in advance and explain the various hazards walkers might encounter. The group operate three activity levels to suit fast, medium and slow walkers.

Walk and picnic at Victoria Lock and Greenway

A new walk opportunity was identified by walk leaders in the newly created Greenway link between Victoria Lock Gates Newry and Omeath. Following a 40 minute walk members enjoyed a cup of tea/coffee and biscuits in the picnic area at the lock gates.



YAH members having a walk followed by picnic at Victoria Lock gates park

Trip to Newcastle and Castlewellan Forest Park

A total of 51 members attended the event and again weather was kind and walkers were able to undertake a walk of the promenade in Newcastle and visit the local parks and shops. The visit to Newcastle was followed by a visit and walk in the grounds of Castlewellan Forest Park. The event ended with an enjoyable meal in the Kilmorey Arms Hotel Kilkeel which was part funded by member contributions.

Members of the craft group also came along on the trip and benefited from the fresh sea breeze. A pleasant change from the rural setting of Bessbrook and surrounding district.



A selection of view from Castlewellan and members at Kilmorey Arms Hotel

Trip 3

Three day tour in Donegal with 2 night stay in Shandon Hotel Dunfanaghy. The trip to Donegal lasted 3 days with tours of the local national park Glen Veagh, its Gardens and Castle and also a trip through the scenic mountains to a local fishing town.



Some of the hardier members walking on the beach below Shandon Hotel Donegal



Some members enjoying musical entertainment

Entertainment was also provided in the Hotel on the second night by a group called "Tuscany".

Trip 4

Walk along the Tow path at Poyntzpass followed by tea and scones at the Penny University Coffee House. There was a good attendance of walkers and non walkers.



Some knitting group members outside the café at Poyntzpass.

Sunflower Seed for Bees & Butterflies

Many thanks to John Irwin for supplying sunflower seeds to be planted by members as part of their continuing effort that was “kick started” in previous years by Amy McFarlane in the AgeNI Seeds for Bees project.



Photo of Sunflower grown by Mr. J Cunningham

Thanks to John Irwin and Barbara Watson for providing fruit to members from their orchards at Mullaglass. This year we enjoyed the delights of sweet apples, pears and damsons. The activity also served as a fund raiser for the group.



Produce cultured and collected by YAHB members for benefit of others

Commissioner for Older People in N.Ireland(COPNI) Photographic Competition

Many thanks to our member Mr John Ellison who submitted photos to the COPNI photographic competition. An example of one of the photos is reproduced below.



Derramore Demesne Bessbrook photo submitted

Plants for YAHB members

Mr Jim McKnight with his wide knowledge of gardening also grew plants for sale as a fund raiser for the group



Jim McKnight in his garden and some plants grown for members

Jam and preserves

A number of the female members of the Young at Heart Bessbrook group have been active this summer preparing a range of jams, marmalade and preserves in an effort to raise funds for the group. We are very appreciative of their efforts in raising much needed funds for YAHB.

Keep Fit for seniors

Members of YAHB are also offered the opportunity of participating in a planned seated “Keep Fit for Seniors” programme that is conducted on a Friday morning between 10 and 11 am. in the Church Hall. The programme is kindly funded by the Public Health Agency Clear Project which covers the cost of hire of the hall, fitness trainer fees and light fruit and water refreshments on the day. There are between 20 to 30 regular attendees of this event and there is great positive feedback on the benefits.



Members of the YAHB Friday “Seniors Keep Fit Group”

Chat and Connect Information Day

This event was organised and funded through Southern Age Well NI Denise McBride and Newry, Mourne, Banbridge and Down Council on 7th April 2025 in cooperation with YAHB. The event was held on the Monday morning session of the group in the Church Hall. Pupils from St. Paul’s School Camlough helped with service of food supplied by the Southern Age well NI and Newry Council partnership. The food was excellent and well received. The chair noted that a letter was sent to the Principal of the school congratulating them on their help and support on the day and an offer to make a contribution to the school’s

chosen charity. The chosen charity was Air Ambulance. A £100 gift raised by members personal voluntary contributions was forwarded to the principal.



Photo of stall attendants and visitors to the event

Financial Status

As mentioned earlier the trips and a wide range of our activities are funded with help from the John Moore Foundation who gave us a £2940 grant, personal contributions of members and fund raising activities.

Much of the money as outlined in the table has been allocated against specific projects e.g.

How we raise funds for Young at Heart Bessbrook

In order to ensure our sustainability the members of Young at Heart Bessbrook work on a voluntary basis at all levels within the group. Necessary funding is sourced as follows.

- Registration fees for current membership of 65 members (£10 per member annually)
- Monday morning dues (£3 per member attending)(average attendance 40)
- Internal raffles usually held at Christmas
- Bring and buy sales

- Application to grant funding organisations e.g. John Moore Foundation., Public Health Agency Clear Project.
- Home made Jam and preserves sales to members
- Books/paperback novels lending to members. £2 per loan
- Fireside quiz and similar
- Joint partnership with William & Hilary McKelvey raising money through provision of tea/coffee and pastry at the open garden event. (Horticultural Society event).
- Sales of plants provided by Mr J McKnight and Mr. J Irwin.

The group strongly relies on support from members, their immediate family and friends to raise the necessary funds and we are very grateful for their continued support throughout the year.

Other Activities

Talks delivered to Young at Heart members

The following talks were delivered to members in the course of the year

Provider	Subject	Person	Date
Public Health & Well Being team	Bend don't break	Mr.B Treanor	24/11/2025
PSNI	Scams in NI	Mr.Tom Jameson	8/12/2025
NM&D Citizen advice	Advice for seniors	P O'Hanlon A Burns	2/2/ 2026

- **Bend don't break.** Mr. Barry Treanor a Social worker for the past 25 years spoke to members of YAHB on the importance of getting out and about. The talk covered aspects of bereavement, depression loneliness and isolation and commended the group for the work that it does in the local community. Mr. Treanor also reflected on steps towards resilience and highlighted some personal skills to help cope with stresses in daily life.

The group were informed of “Box Breathing”, “Catch, Pause, Challenge, & Change”.

- **Scams in Northern Ireland.** Mr Tom Jameson PSNI Crime Prevention Officer delivered a very interesting talk on Scams in Northern Ireland. Tom emphasized that the public should be aware that Scams are crimes involving fraud and theft and PSNI were working to raise awareness of the nature of such crimes. It was indicated that often the scams involved loss of money through the medium of internet, telephone or emails. Mr Jameson indicated that there were 4 key red flags that the public could use to identify a scam.
 - **S. SOUNDS** too good to be true
 - **C. CONTACT** (Communication Context). You did not initiate the contact, the Scammer contacted you.
 - **A.ASKS.** Personal information is sought by the scammer. If they are who they say they represent then the personal information will already be with that organisation.
 - **M. MONEY.** Most scams will conclude business by seeking access to your money held in bank accounts or Credit Card details. The scam often involve asking you to do something with your money.

Mr Jameson concluded his talk by advising members to visit the website “Scamwiseni” on Facebook and gain access to the publication “Little Book of Big Scams”

PSNI in partnership with the local Council also issued a number of battery powered “TV simulators” to be used in the home when it is vacant; as a deterrent to potential burglars. There were not enough to go around but promises were made to bring more on the next visit.

- **Community Advice (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council)**

Mrs P O’Hanlon visited YAHB on 2nd February 2026 and gave a very informative outline of her work in the Newry and Down districts. Based in Ballybot house Newry Mrs O’Hanlon advised that the service operates a 3 day in the week face

to face meetings and the other two days are dedicated to giving advice over the phone. The services outlined in the talk included

- Benefits checks, independent living and related issues
- Housing matters
- Debt and money advice
- Employment issues
- Consumer advice

The key contact number is 03003030306 and the relevant web page for further information “advicenmd.com”

Environmental Sustainability

We are committed to minimizing our carbon footprint by:

- Coordinated Transport: Efforts are made in the walking group on an ongoing basis to ensure the effective organizing of car-pooling to reduce individual vehicle use.
- Waste Reduction: We endeavor to apply a "No Single-Use Plastic" policy by utilizing ceramic mugs and compostable materials used in the break sessions each Monday.
- Circular Economy: Focusing on "upcycling" in craft sessions to teach sustainable habits. Members are encouraged to think with environmental sustainability in mind.
- Local Sourcing: We always prioritize Newry/Bessbrook-based suppliers to reduce delivery miles.

Training

This year YAHB undertook two training initiatives

1. A First Aid training programme was delivered by Mr. M Rocks in February 2026 where the following 14 members received training;

Mrs. P Morrow	Mrs. F McMillen	Mr. J McMillen
Mr. R Megarity	Mr. J McCoy	Mrs. A McCoy
Mrs. H Paul	Mrs. M Teggart	Mrs. B Watson
Mr. M Briggs	Mrs. E Briggs	Mrs. C Patterson
Mrs H McKelvey	Mrs. G Moorehead	

2. Adult Safeguarding. Three lead safeguarding members attended training offered by Southern Trust. Mrs P Morrow, Mrs F McMillen and Mrs R Megarity attended the training.

We are grateful for members who volunteered to undertake the training thus ensuring compliance with our core policies and commitments.

Christmas party at Canal Court Newry

This year the Christmas party took place in the Canal Court Hotel Newry on 10th December 2025. The event was very well attended with 85% of the members attending. After the beautiful meal and internal raffle was held to raise funds for YAHB. Over £300 was raised. Mrs. Frances McMillen and Mrs Angela Rooney organised the draw of winning tickets.

Prize winners are shown on the pictures below. Mrs. Jean Johnstone on left and Mrs. & Mr. Robert Megarity on the right. The draw was followed by music from the 70's and 80's and members danced to the music and song.



Members receiving prizes at Christmas party

A number of members were encouraged by the entertainer to get up on the dance floor and take part in some dance activities.



Seniors on the dance floor at Canal Court Hotel Christmas party

Fund raising

As always the YAHB committee wish to secure sufficient funds to ensure the future of YAH Walking and Craft Group. In consequence the committee planned the following fund raising events and welcomed the continued support of YAHB members and friends.

Open Garden event

This year William and Hilary McKelvey opened their garden to members of the public as part of their involvement with the Horticultural society in Northern Ireland. YAH members supported the event and helped with catering to raise funds for the group. We extend our thanks to William and Hilary and also to The Town Hall Bessbrook Committee for facilitating use of their hall for catering for visitors to the gardens.



Members enjoying the day out and also helping with the catering

Survey

The committee at YAHB devised a short snap shot survey form to help gather information on how best to serve our members. We believe that it is important that the members have an opportunity to have their say on the running of the group which is totally voluntary. The survey has shown that over all our members are very satisfied with the activities organised throughout the year and complimentary of those involved with the organisation and administration of YAHB.

Conclusion

We at Young at Heart believe that the opportunity for members to meet on a regular basis helps offset the adverse and critical effects of rural exclusion, isolation and loneliness and gives our members a positive start to the week ahead. We like to keep members informed of health and welfare matters and at the same time show members how they can improve their ability in everyday tasks by performing some simple but effective exercises. Even if members do not participate in all the activities the YAHB group is a great place to have a cup of tea and enjoy a little social interaction within a very safe setting. By providing a regular meeting point, we build a support network that extends beyond our weekly meetings. This strengthens the community's social fabric by ensuring our senior residents—who are often the most at risk of loneliness—remain active, visible, and valued participants in local life

We are confident that activities and events improve the mental health and wellbeing of our members and help to bring people together and reduce social isolation and foster a sense of community. Through attending YAHB organized events people have been able to make new contacts and build connections with other groups; they are kept informed and have their say in the local community. Through attendance of the fitness for seniors training members have benefited in improvements in mental and physical wellbeing.

The following are some comments from surveys regarding Young at Heart Bessbrook;

- Brilliant
- Excellent
- Thanks to the exercise programme I am able to do many tasks that would not be possible at my age. Mentally and physically feel good.
- Terrific
- Excellent way of both exercising and socialising

- Look forward to my exercise. Great club
- I feel the exercise programme is important for older people to keep strength and movement. Also working with other people of a similar age.
- Very helpful. Gives a boost to fitness and energy levels
- I think an exercise programme is very important for seniors to help with strength and balance as they are more prone to falls and fractures. It is especially good to exercise in a group as there is encouragement and some laughs which you wouldn't have if exercising at home alone.
- Excellent programme. After having a bad virus its good to have a programme to get me back to more energy again and feeling good.
- Very beneficial. Improves mobility. Increases social interaction
- Excellent
- Great
- Brilliant for mental health and company and plenty of chat with other people
- I believe that the programme helps both physically and mentally. Exercising in a group helps motivation and a feeling of well being. Its fun.
- In my opinion this YAH programme helps me to maintain the above values
- Excellent idea. Keeps older people mobile and feeling better about themselves
- I would strongly recommend them. They make me feel stronger. Good for getting us out. We enjoy them.
- They are very useful and we enjoy them
- I enjoy exercising in a group setting. It is beneficial to me both physically and emotionally. Very worthwhile and much appreciated.
- I feel that when we get on in years its so easy to stay at home rather than go to a group setting, and enjoy both the exercise and the banter under a qualified teacher.
- Great and should be done by all.
- Overall I look forward to the Friday morning sessions. Good to meet people and see them laughing and having fun. Great opportunity for seniors
- The exercise group is such a great opportunity for me to engage in a structured workout which is of great benefit to me in terms of my physical fitness. Meeting with my fellow seniors has enabled me not only to make new friends but to talk and laugh. The fruit provided is exceptional and has encouraged me to buy and eat more. A well organised activity for older people. Thank you.