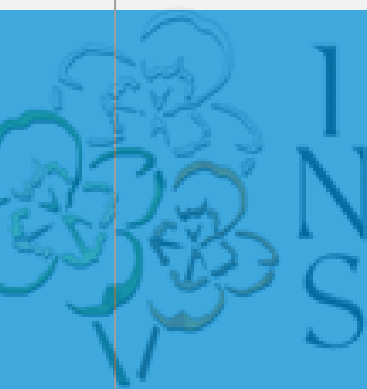


Irish Network Stevenage

Annual Report

Here to Support the Older Community in Stevenage and the Surrounding Areas



Explore More



Welcome From The Board

Over the last 12 months we have seen huge changes. We have moved from operating from one community centre into six neighborhood centres. This has been a fantastic achievement and one that we are very proud of. This means we are able to go into each neighborhood and deliver activities on people's doorsteps. This has led to an increase in our membership and our members being able to access more of our activities. We have continued to focus on health and well-being and social inclusion activities. We deliver approximately 80 activities a month and have a footfall of up to 1,800 members a month. We have listened to our members and brought new activities in, such as beginners line dancing classes, sequence dancing, health and nutrition workshops and our very popular sign language classes.

Under the guidance of our Board of Trustees we have adapted to an ever changing climate and the move into six neighborhood centres shows how responsive we can be. As a board we are constantly looking at new ways to support our members and we know that our best ideas come from them! We continue to advocate for our members whenever we can and keep abreast of national and local statutory changes to ensure our members are receiving the entitlements they are due. We know that we are still in very challenging times within the voluntary sector and we have worked hard to secure our sustainability moving forward into the new financial year. Our volunteers continue to be the key to our success and we are immensely proud of the work they do helping support our fantastic members.



**Attendance
of over
21,500!**

**Board of
Trustees**

**Delivering
at 6
locations!**

**Over 950
Activities!**

Charity Information

Charity Name

Irish Network Stevenage

Date of Inception:

November 2007

Registered Office

Sherma Batson Centre
10-12 Exchange Road
Stevenage
Herts
SG1 1 PZ

Date of Charity Registration

November 2012

Charity Registration Number

1149576

Trustees

Margaret Lyons (Chair)
Heather Morris (Secretary)
Marie King (Treasurer)
Hilda Warwick
Frances Sandford
Brendan Clynch
Louise Donovan
Peter Morris

Bankers

Lloyds TSB
103 Queensway
Stevenage
Herts
SG1 1EA

About Us

Irish Network Stevenage (INS) is a Stevenage based registered charity formed in 2007, this was in direct response to the identified need that the aging Irish community needed more practical support. We have Trustees who bring a vast amount of experience from both the voluntary sector and the corporate world. We are registered with the Charities Commission and governed by a constitution.

After our inception it quickly became apparent that the older community throughout Stevenage was in need of an increased level of support, and we quickly expanded to include all older people in Stevenage and the surrounding area and currently have nearly 500 members. We are focused on helping older people combat social isolation and help them live as independently as possible. All activities are run to achieve this objective and the board made a strategic decision to offer a wide breadth of activities, thereby ensuring there is something for everyone. We are open to all that support our aims and objectives and are delighted that the services we have been providing have encouraged an ever increasing number of older people to ask for help and seek support.

As with all charities we have faced a number of challenges. Including the move from one community centre to six centres throughout the town. This move was achieved in three weeks due to the hard work and dedication of the board, volunteers and staff. This move has enabled us to reach more people and continue with our growth and expansion plans.



Secretarys Report

The Charity Secretary's role is crucial for the smooth operation and compliance of a charity. Ensuring that meetings are well-organised and minuted and legal and regulatory requirements are adhered to enables the board to act confidently in actions undertaken. We do not work isolation, working closely with partners and signposting whenever appropriate enables members to benefit from the wide-ranging support provided to older people within the town.

Maintaining relationships with partners such as Hertfordshire Community Foundation, the National Lottery and the Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities plus many more, has enabled us to access partners who have a vast amount of experience in delivering specific areas of support. Giving us the opportunity to provide a well-rounded and robust support system for our members.

Much of the work goes on behind the scenes, but is very important as it ensures the smooth and efficient running of the charity. As expected there are many statutory policies we follow and we always ensure our members are at the heart of all decisions made. We have a huge responsibility in respect of safeguarding and have robust policies, thereby ensuring any concerns raised to us by members or volunteers are addressed swiftly and referred to the appropriate authority. As a grassroots charity delivering frontline services we are able to deal with issues in real time thereby ensuring a timely response. We are a very vocal advocate of the older community, we are in constant communication with statutory and non statutory bodies, ensuring our members needs and requirements are represented. This has been a huge challenge over the year with an ever changing political landscape, but we are committed to continue this robust approach.





Treasurer's Report



I am pleased to report that the last financial year has mirrored our previous years where we have continued to be in financially healthy position. In 2023 to 2024 there were a number of funds available to help alleviate the impact of the financial cuts to older people and we were very fortunate that we were able to access this fund. This year those grants for older people have not been made available, therefore our members have faced a particularly challenging year.

I am pleased to report that we successfully secured National Lottery funding which has enabled us to continue to heavily subsidise all our activities. During the three months without National Lottery funding we were able to continue our services uninterrupted due to our sustainability policy, which ensures we have funds to continue activities for a limited period without external funding. The hard work of the board has ensured that those funds were available to us when needed. This transfer of funds from a sustainability account to running costs is reflected in our Movement of Funds in the Statement of Financial Activities on page seven.

As mentioned we have received funding from the National Lottery which is four years, and a portion of the income received in this financial year is allocated to fund activities in the next financial year.

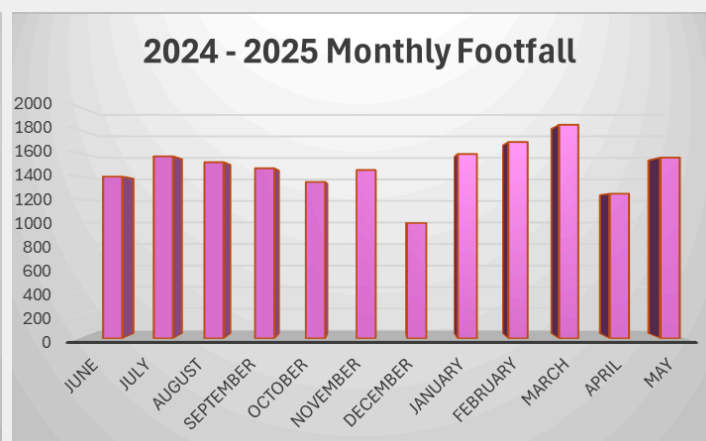
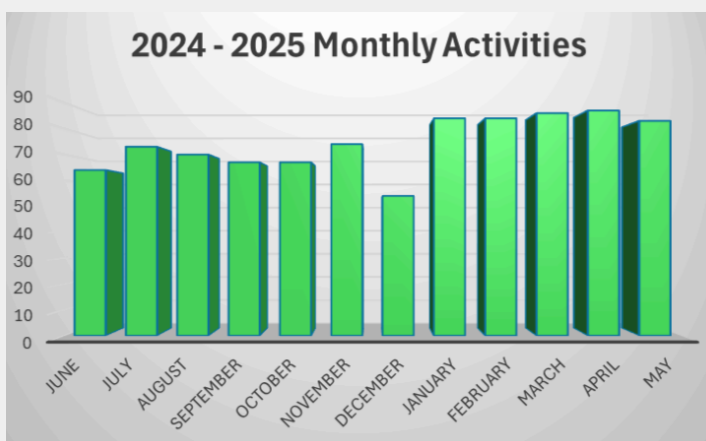


Treasurer's Report cont.

Given the current economic climate we have been focusing on supporting members in Stevenage and the surrounding areas that require additional help, including those that are feeling the effects of the increased cost of living. We ensure all our activities are accessible by all and are provided at a minimal cost. All activities incurs costs and we are very fortunate to have received funding as well as members contributions for events. We are determined to provide excellent quality services and we do this by engaging professional instructors and using high quality refreshments. This does mean that our costs this year have increased by up to 30% but we have not passed that cost on to our members. This is something the board is particularly proud of as it continues to ensure our activities are as accessible as possible. We rely heavily on funding and ensure we obtain a variety of funds from different sources and have received support from 12 different funders this year alone.

Obtaining funding is key to our delivery, and we have worked with some fantastic funders over the last year, including the National Lottery, Hertfordshire Community Foundation, both Stevenage and Hertfordshire Councils and many more. The continuing support we receive from our funders in terms of financial and practical support is immeasurable. This does mean we have to numerous detailed monitoring reports, but good reporting is key to securing future funding and every report we have produced has met the very high standards of our funders.

As you will see in the charts below we continue to offer a large volume of activities throughout the month and these are very well attended. We intentionally offer a variety of activities so there is something for everyone, and everything supports our aim to help address the issue of isolation. We are very fortunate that our events are run by volunteers who organise everything, which is fantastic, as we could not provide this level of service without them. They continue to be the backbone of INS.



Irish Network Stevenage

Statement Of Financial Activities For The Year 2024/2025

		Unrestricted	Restricted	Total 2024/2025			
		£	£	£			
Income							
Grants	TNLCF Funding	£	-	£	75,735	£	75,735
	Hertfordshire Community Foundation	£	-	£	13,374	£	13,374
	HCF Members Bonus	£	-	£	9,140	£	9,140
	Stevenage Borough Council	£	-	£	7,804	£	7,804
	Embassy of Ireland	£	-	£	6,000	£	6,000
	Hertfordshire County Council	£	-	£	2,000	£	2,000
	Chauncy Charity	£	-	£	3,000	£	3,000
	University of Hertfordshire	£	-	£	150	£	150
		£	-	£	117,203	£	117,203
Other Income							
	Income From Events and Activities		0	£	36,547	£	36,547
	Membership & Donations	£	9,741	£	3,630	£	13,371
		£	9,741	£	40,177	£	49,918
Total Income		£	9,741	£	157,380	£	167,121
Expenditure							
	Grants Given	£	-	£	2,950	£	2,950
	Cost of Events	£	1,627	£	64,840	£	66,467
	Salary & Pension Costs	£	-	£	41,807	£	41,807
	Professional Fees	£	2,120	£	2,326	£	4,446
	Office Costs	£	1,158	£	3,198	£	4,356
	Marketing	£	-	£	546	£	546
	Room Hire	£	1,318	£	-	£	1,318
	Volunteer Expenses	£	89	£	4,300	£	4,390
Total Expenditure		£	6,312	£	119,967	£	126,279
	Net Income Resources Before Transfers	£	3,429	£	37,412	£	40,842
	Movement of Funds	£	18,532	-£	18,532	£	0
	Total Fund Brought Forward	£	120,024	£	36,153	£	156,177
Total Funds Carried Forward		£	141,985	£	55,034	£	197,019



Irish Network Stevenage

Balance Sheet as at 31st May 2025

31.05.2025

Current Assets

Bank

£	197,019
£	197,019

Total Assets

Represented By

Unrestricted Funds

General funds

£	2,443
---	-------

Sustainability Reserves

£	63,542
---	--------

Office Reserves

£	76,000
---	--------

£	141,985
---	---------

Restricted Funds

Social Fund

£	21,346
---	--------

HCF-WCC Members Bonus

£	6,250
---	-------

HCF Christmas Club

£	1,434
---	-------

HCF Exercise

£	837
---	-----

TNLCF Funding

£	18,243
---	--------

Tea and Chat

£	-
---	---

Breakfast Club

£	6,924
---	-------

£	55,034
---	--------

Total Funds

£	197,019
---	---------

Declaration

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 ["The Charities Act"] and that an independent examination is needed.

The independent examiner was responsible for examining the accounts under section 145 of The Charities Act, and to follow the procedures laid down in a general directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 1455 (B) of The Charities Act and to state whether particular matters have come to their attention.

The independent examiner has advised no matters have come to their attention which gives them reasonable cause to believe that in, any material respect, the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act and to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act have not been met or to which in their opinion attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Volunteering

As Nelson Mandela said **“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead”.**

Volunteers are the backbone of the charity, all our activities are delivered by our amazing Volunteer Team. They run everything from arranging events, helping with entitlements, booking people in, preparing refreshments and helping in the office. In addition to this we also have some members who kindly step in when we are short on volunteers or just need an extra pair of hands.

We are very much a grassroots community charity, where our members are at the centre of what we do and all volunteers are members as well. Our constitution underpins everything we do, which is to reduce social isolation in any way we can and our volunteers support this. They make everything look so easy but being a volunteer comes with responsibilities, not only do they provide the practical support needed, they are also our “eyes and ears”. Our volunteers have Safeguarding Training and it is their responsibility to report anything they see that may be an issue to the board, they understand that safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility.

We have 28 regular volunteers who last year gave 8,401 hours to INS helping with every aspect, and this represent an annual financial value of over £115,000. This is a huge commitment and demonstrates how vital they are and how much work it takes to run these events and services.



Members Support

The level of support our members need continues to vary and everything we do is underpinned by our values around reducing social isolation and helping our members have the most fulfilled lives they can. We continue to make regular calls and visits to our housebound members. We know that these are so important and many people have called these a “lifeline” for them. This contact with our most vulnerable members, not only helps alleviate the isolation many housebound members feel, it also helps identify any issues and keeps members connected. We continue to make phone calls on behalf of members as required, these are to statutory and non-statutory agencies.

An area that we are particular proud of is the support we provide to our most vulnerable members. This centres around our Friendship Group which was born from a need to have smaller settings where members can sit and have a cup of tea and a chat. This group provides fantastic peer support, especially around challenging periods in members lives. This year they have speakers including the local Police, Age Friendly Hertfordshire and the Fire Brigade. They have also gone on trips with Stepping Out, which is a part of the NHS Social Prescribing Campaign. These trips include visits to stately homes, nature reserves and they have participated in walking football and bowls!

We also work with The Red Shed, which is a fantastic garden based charity that provide support to people living with dementia and their carers. Our members have learnt how to make flower arrangements, cards and lots of other craft and gardening type activities. The aim is to keep our members as engaged as possible and working with partners and offering a variety of activities does exactly that.

Advocating for members is a huge part of what we do. We provide them with a voice and attend many local and national strategy meetings to ensure that the older people in Stevenage are represented. We constantly lobby our councils and our MP to make them aware of the challenges our older people are facing and ensure we are involved in all initial discussions. An example of this is the Government’s reversal in their approach to the removal of the Winter Fuel Payment. We made sure Stevenage older people were represented at every level and it seems our voice and that of our partners were heard!



Financial Support

Supporting the most vulnerable members of our community is the foundations on which we were built. Since we began we have remain committed to ensuring that our members have the best quality of life they can. Everything we do is to address the impacts of social isolation and the ever-increasing cost of living, and we know this is a national problem. AGE UK commissioned a report in January 2025 which found that one in three (34%) older people said they felt less financially secure heading into 2025 compared to 2024 and that nearly half (48%) of older people with a disability have had to cut back on heating and electricity.

The support that we provide is varied and ranges from arranging external support in the form of obtaining aids and adaptations for homes, assisting in obtaining a careline and even supporting members when they make their decision to move from their homes into assisted living homes.

In these challenging times, we know that it can be difficult and we appreciate services are stretched and under resourced. Our job is not to replace statutory services but to enable our members to access all the support that is available.

Many members still struggle to access the financial support that they are entitled to and this is where our fantastic Support Volunteer comes in. Our volunteer has been helping our members claim their entitlements including Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, and Attendance Allowance. Unfortunately it can be a long and arduous process and many older people do not have access to the support needed to obtain these entitlements, but it is important that they get them. Older people often feel reluctant to ask for the help and support that they are entitled to - so we do it for them.

Our volunteer works so hard to obtain these entitlements for our members and in the year 2024 to 2025 she helped them obtain over £360,000 in financial support, with many of these being lifetime awards. This is a staggering amount for one volunteer and once again shows the desperate need for this type of support throughout the town.

Stevenage is a large and vibrant town that provides lots of support to residents from charities, statutory and non statutory organisations but unfortunately in the current crisis we're facing this is not enough and people increasingly rely on support from charities such as ours.

We are mindful that older people often need to live within a very restricted income and times like Christmas can be very worrying due to the increase costs. That is why in 2015 we set up our Christmas Savings Club. This has been a fantastic success with over 200 members saving and has really helped them have a debt and stress free Christmas!



Social Report

Our Social Afternoons and Tea Dances are very well attended and it is great to see so many people on the dance floor! These events give our members an opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones. It is so important to maintain those social connections, but this can be difficult to do without somewhere to go. So we ensure that we provide activities that are accessible to all and supported by welcoming volunteers. Social inclusion is the cornerstone of everything we do, and we believe these activities make a positive impact on our member's lives. In addition to our regular groups such as line dancing, breakfast and lunch clubs, bingo and social afternoons, we have a focus on health and wellbeing. This is a targeted approach in direct response to the issues we identified after the pandemic. We saw a decline in members physical abilities and a reduction in the availability of accessible and reasonably priced physical activity classes, so we offered a suite of health initiatives that have been hugely successful. With over 80 activities being offered each month, we know we have something for everyone. Our day trips are extremely popular and we have to operate a waiting list for many of them. We love visiting our friends at Luton Irish Forum and Milton Keynes Welfare every year!

Our line dancing classes continue to be very popular, and we think this is because we don't take it too seriously! The benefits of dancing are well documented, we know that it helps with strength and balance, co-ordination and increases endorphins (which are known as the "happy hormones") so we know line dancing helps both physically and mentally!

Over the last year we have had lots of special events, including a St Patrick's night dance and lunch, day trips away, our traditional Christmas lunch, and much more. This enables our members to join different types of events and activities, which they thoroughly enjoy.

All our events are run by our volunteers, many of whom have been with us since our inception. They organise everything including setting up the hall, running the kitchen, making and serving refreshments, booking members into activities, leading classes and generally helping our members have a good time. Without our volunteers the events would not happen, we have a fantastic team that we can count on and know that they are committed to making sure our members are supported.



Health and Wellbeing

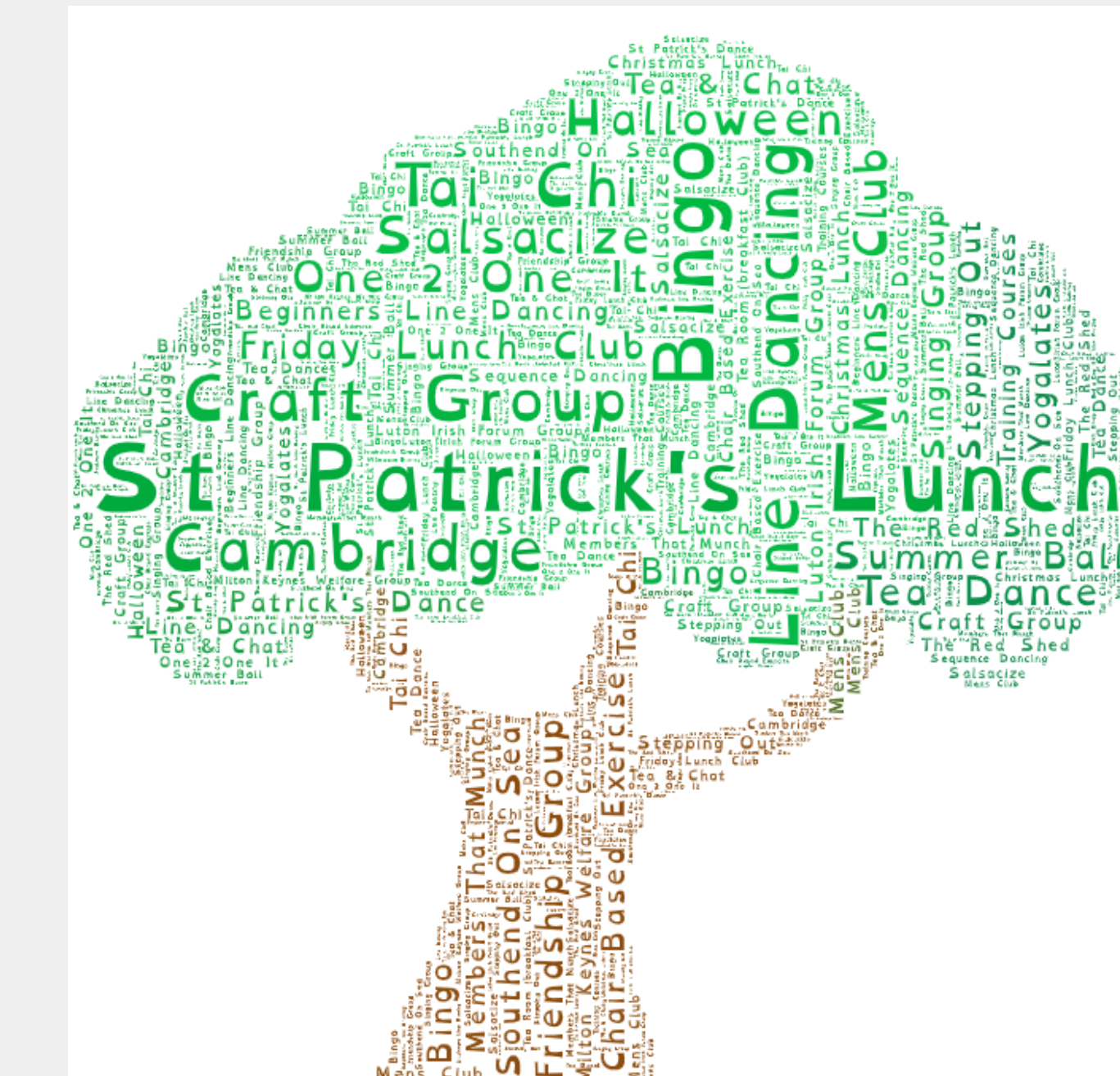
“Exercise is the key not only to physical health but to peace of mind” is a famous quote by Nelson Mandela, and one that we thoroughly agree with. As we moved in to six community centres we were able to increase our reach across the town and encourage even more members to keep fit and active. We have seen first hand the difference this has made, with many members attending a few classes a week for the price of one private class.

You can start the week with a gentle Tai Chi class which helps prevent falls, relieves pain and can improve mood and mental health and even improve sleep patterns. Then on a Tuesday members can attend our Salsacize class, which is our most energetic class and combines dance and exercise. On both Thursdays and Fridays members can attend Yopalates and Chair Based Exercise classes. Add in a couple of line dancing classes as well and we have a full week of exercise for members! With a footfall of over 7,200 attendees over the last year, we see that affordable and accessible exercise is so important. Whilst improving physical and mental health, it also reduces social isolation and increases independence. As a community we become more connected and this fosters healthier, happier, and more resilient members.

Whilst we have had our regular classes we have also run short term “beginner” programmes. Our six week Sequence Dancing programme was a fantastic success and one we hope to repeat, and our six week Beginners Line Dancing was repeated throughout the year.

We will continue to prioritise health and wellbeing and will be looking at providing even more new classes at our fantastic community centres across Stevenage. As a community lead charity we believe that no one should face life in isolation, and we are here to help ensure that never happens to our members.





The Future

The Charity we have grown into has strong foundations, coming from a rich Irish culture known for its strong community bonds, friendship and compassion. We have embraced all of those values and they are woven into everything we do. As we move forward we look forward to welcoming more members and continuing to provide support to all those that need it.



SMALL
ACTS OF
KINDNESS

smallactsofkindness.co.uk
01923 372717



Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**CHAUNCY
CHARITY**



Thank You

Thank you to everyone who plays a part in our success. The volunteers, staff, funders most importantly the members. We had a vision of becoming an all inclusive, wide reaching charity, with its members being at the heart of everything we do, and that's what we have become. Our success is your success!

Contact Us:

Sherma Batson Centre, 10 - 12 Exchange Road, Stevenage SG1 1PZ.

email: info@irishnetworkstevenage.org.uk

Tel: 01438 725400

www.irishnetworkstevenage.org.uk