



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Irish Network Stevenage



2023 Annual General Report

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TRUSTEES

- Luke Donovan
- Margaret Lyons (Vice Chair)
- Heather Morris (Secretary)
- Marie King (Treasurer)
- Hilda Warwick
- Frances Sandford
- Brendan Clynch

REGISTERED OFFICE

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

ACCOUNTANT

Menzies LLP

BANKERS

Lloyds TSB
Town Square
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

INTRODUCTION

Irish Network Stevenage (INS) is a Stevenage based registered Charity and was formed in late 2007 in response to the identified need that the level of support required by an ageing Irish population was increasing. It is governed by 7 Trustees which include service users and supported by a Project Manager and Social Activities Coordinator.

After its inception INS quickly grew as it became apparent that the needs of the elder Irish were the same as many older people throughout Stevenage, and INS evolved to provide support to all older people in Stevenage and the surrounding areas. Our Constitution reflects our aims which are focused on helping older people to combat social isolation and to live independently in their own homes for as long as is practical. INS is open to all that support our aims and objectives and we are delighted that the services we have been providing has encouraged a vast amount of older people to approach us and ask for our help and support.

As a direct response to Covid and the devastating impact this had on our community we revised our activities to ensure that we offered a huge range of events that provided health and wellbeing support to our members. We understood that we needed to offer a diverse suite of activities to reach those most affected by lockdown, and this proved to be a great success. But 2022/2023 saw a huge increase in the cost of living which no one was prepared for and we needed to increase our member's support very quickly, to ensure all our members were receiving the support they needed.

Through this report you will see the amazing work our volunteers have been doing over the last 12 months, ensuring that all our members are supported in every way. With 28 volunteers leading on all our activities, INS is very much a volunteer led Charity and it's the volunteers that help shape the services and support we deliver.

GOVERNANCE

Trustee meetings are held once a month with the Project Manager in attendance. Various representatives from voluntary and statutory organisations are invited to attend the latter part of the meeting if required. Trustees bring forward suggestions from members and volunteers for open discussion and decide on the strategic direction for the Charity. Members decide what events to run, support we provide and what trips to have and what support the community needs.

Trustees are nominated a minimum of 14 days prior to the AGM and are elected by members at the AGM, which is held no more than 15 months after the previous meeting. Acting Trustees are elected by the Committee as required through the year and all Trustees stand down at each AGM. As a registered Charity, INS has a Constitution and operates within the recommendations of the Charities Commission and all processes and procedures are designed accordingly. All activities and events are designed to support the aims of reducing social isolation among older people.

WELCOME FROM THE BOARD

Throughout the last 12 months the board and volunteers have worked tirelessly



to try and reverse the devastating impact Covid and its restrictions had on all of us. We did this by increasing the range of activities, and we focused our efforts on fitness and social engagement by bringing in more exercise classes and more social activities. We now deliver 60 different activities a month and have a monthly footfall of up to 1000 people.

We have seen our membership increase every month and the attendance at our events is the highest it has ever been. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our volunteers, they run all our activities and support our members in many different ways. Through this report you will read about the amount of fantastic support they provide and how key they are to the success of INS.

Under the guidance of our board of Trustees we have ensured that we are a charity that has adapted to the changing needs of our members and responded to local and national challenges. This last 12 months



have been particularly challenging, and it seems we are still dealing with aftermath of Covid and the cost of living crisis. This has only highlighted the need for small local charities like INS, that are quick to respond to emerging challenges.

VOLUNTEER HOURS



The chart below shows the volunteer hours split over the various functions we have. We have 28 committed volunteers who last year gave 7644 hours to INS helping with every aspect. This is a huge commitment and demonstrates how vital they are and how much work it takes to run these events and services. These projects are key to supporting our ethos of helping people live as independently as possible by supporting people in their homes and addressing issues of social isolation and loneliness which lead to depression and disengagement.



SECRETARY'S REPORT

I became the Secretary for the INS in 2010, and from the beginning I knew that I was joining an organisation that was passionate about supporting older people in Ste-



venage to be as active and as independent as they could. It has been a privileged to be part of INS's growth and help develop it into a Charity that has become an important part in the lives of the older residents in Stevenage and their families.

Over the last 12 months we have responded to local and national pressures, ensuring that we continue to deliver services and activities that the members want and need. The landscape has changed since before the pandemic and I am proud to say that we adjusted our services accordingly. We have focused a lot of our our resources on encouraging those members most impacted by the pandemic to reengage with us. We have also had to deal with a cost of living crisis, which has had a huge impact on many of our members. As a small charity we were quick to respond and provided lots practical support to our members in terms of entitlements and emergency financial support.

Even though we faced our own financial challenges, we have maintained a high level of service and have increased our support and this is due to the hard work of the board and our volunteers.

Our success is down to our volunteers and I am sure you would have seen many of them running our various events. They make it all look so easy but I can assure you that they all work very hard! I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank them for their support and dedication.

TREASURERS REPORT

We have worked hard throughout 2022-2023 to ensure INS remains in healthy financial position. We have worked with 8 different funds and each one has their own specific requirements for recording financial transactions. When each fund is finished we have to produce both a progress report detailing what we have accomplished with the funds and a financial report showing what the fund was spent on. Every funder has approved our progress and they are happy that we are meeting the requirements of each fund and spending it in accordance with the project remit.

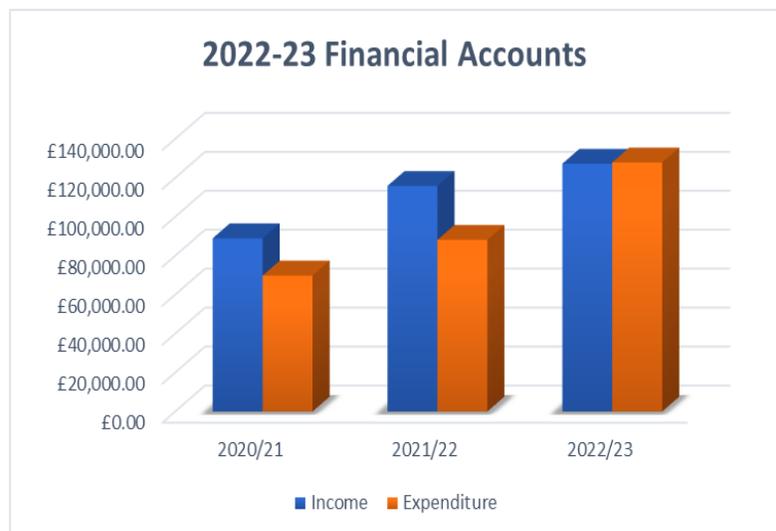
We are very fortunate to be well supported by funders which enables us to keep our participation charges to a minimum, even though the costs of running activities has drastically increased over the last 12 months.

Every payment we make is authorised by two people and every year we have our accounts reviewed by an independent Accountant and then presented to the Charities Commission.

As Treasurer I am always thinking 3 years in advance and it is my role to make sure that we are not only financial secure for this year but that we are not making any financial decisions that would affect our sustainability, both in terms of what we spend and what we receive. We have always used previous financial years to help forecast trends for the future years, but due the erratic financial circumstances during the Covid pandemic we have not been able to do this. Lockdown had forced us to cancel face to face events and whilst we have local and national support funds it did mean that we could not use the trends from previous years trends to help predict the future financial landscape.

On the following pages we have the Financial Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 May 2023 . The income for the year was £120,181 and the expenditure was £121,539. Our funds being brought forward to are £150,154. Of this £122,837 is designated funds, that have been restricted for specific projects. £8,998 is an unrestricted amount, which enables us to invest in new services and events.

As you will see from the graph presented, over the previous two we have ensured our income is higher than our expenditure which keeps us in a healthy financial position. But in the last 12 months due to the increase in cost of living and the aftermath of restrictions, has meant that our income and expenditure is very similar. This is still a very health position and means we can continue to provide the currently level of support moving into the new financial year.



FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

IRISH NETWORK STEVENAGE

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MAY 2023

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted fund £	2023 Total funds £	2022 Total funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM					
Donations and legacies		9,956	82,395	92,351	93,872
Other trading activities	2	27,830	-	27,830	21,986
Total		<u>37,786</u>	<u>82,395</u>	<u>120,181</u>	<u>115,858</u>
EXPENDITURE ON					
Raising funds		9,293	112,246	121,539	88,149
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)		<u>28,493</u>	<u>(29,851)</u>	<u>(1,358)</u>	<u>27,709</u>
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS					
Total funds brought forward		103,342	48,170	151,512	123,803
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD		<u>131,835</u>	<u>18,319</u>	<u>150,154</u>	<u>151,512</u>

The notes form part of these financial statements

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

IRISH NETWORK STEVENAGE

BALANCE SHEET 31ST MAY 2023

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted fund £	2023 Total funds £	2022 Total funds £
CURRENT ASSETS					
Cash at bank		131,835	25,270	157,105	157,837
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	5	-	(6,951)	(6,951)	(6,325)
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>131,835</u>	<u>18,319</u>	<u>150,154</u>	<u>151,512</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		131,835	18,319	150,154	151,512
NET ASSETS		<u><u>131,835</u></u>	<u><u>18,319</u></u>	<u><u>150,154</u></u>	<u><u>151,512</u></u>
FUNDS	6				
Unrestricted funds:					
General fund				8,998	10,548
Designated fund				<u>122,837</u>	<u>92,794</u>
				<u>131,835</u>	<u>103,342</u>
Restricted funds				<u>18,319</u>	<u>48,170</u>
TOTAL FUNDS				<u><u>150,154</u></u>	<u><u>151,512</u></u>

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees and authorised for issue on 6-9-23 and were signed on its behalf by:

M Lyons S.
M Lyons - Trustee

MEMBERS SUPPORT

Over the last 12 months we have found that the level of support needed by our members have increased but also changed in terms of the type of support. Since lockdown we have seen a dramatic increase in the issues caused by social isolation and then we had the cost of living crisis, so people had a huge financial worry as well.

As a direct response we increased the phone calls we made to members and in the last 12 months we made over 8,100 calls.

We knew that these were so important during lockdown, but they continued to be and many people have called these a “lifeline” for them. Many people are still restricting themselves in terms of social engagements and many of our older members have become frailer. We decided to make the calls a permanent support service as some members needed this; it helped identify any issues and also kept members connected. We also continue to make phone calls on behalf of members as required, these are to statutory and non-statutory agencies.

Our very popular Friendship Group is one we are particularly proud of, it’s a small group of our more vulnerable members who meet each month, as it is such a small intimate little group, people feel they can interact more and our members support each other in a fantastic way; peer support is something we have always encouraged.



It’s a lovely supportive group and if anyone has any concerns we find a solution and are able to speak to many different organisations that can help. Getting the right person to help can be a minefield. Our volunteer, Marie, is another mind of information who is so knowledgeable about filling in forms & knowing exactly what to do and who to go to. We also take members to the Red Shed which is a lovely local gardening group supporting people living with dementia and their carers.

We also joined Stepping Out on some lovely trips to places like Capel Manor and Ashridge Forest, which our members thoroughly enjoyed. We know the Member Support we provide is so valuable and it is all about supporting each other especially when circumstances change. We love running these groups and long may we continue.



SOCIAL REPORT



The social engagement side of the INS is so important and we focus on offering a variety of activities and events, so there is something for everyone. Our social afternoons continue to be popular and we have different musicians each month. The Tea Dances are very well attended and it is great to see so many people on the dance floor, we are so lucky to have the

fantastic Dave Kaye entertain us. These afternoons are a great way of making friends and catching up with ones we don't get to see so often anymore. Afternoons like these enable some of our more vulnerable members to start to interact socially again and gives carers a welcome break from their caring responsibilities. These activities make a positive impact on our members lives by enabling them to interact on different levels with different activities and the attendance is continuing to grow.

Our line dancing classes are also popular and we have an average of 30 per class. It's great fun and we don't take it too seriously! But as with everything we do, we look at the benefits of the activity and we know that line dancing helps with strength and balance, coordination and is good for your heart.

Our new Sing-a-long with Dave is such good fun. Members of all abilities go along and have a great sing-along! Our Friday lunch club is a lovely way to end the week. We provide fresh food all made to order and it gives everyone an opportunity to sit down and relax with new friends and old.

All our events are run by our volunteers, many of whom have been with us since our inception 16 years ago. They organise everything including setting up the hall, running the kitchen, serving refreshments, preparing cakes and sandwiches and generally helping our members have a good time. Our volunteers run all our events on a limited budget which enables us to keep any participation charges to a minimum. 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 most vulnerable members are supported. They are also the "eyes and ears" of INS and let us know of any issues that members may have.





OFFICE REPORT

The administration involved in running a charity like INS is very involved. We have a duty of care to all our members, and we take this very seriously. We report any issues that we have and actively engage with all local and national organisations that support older people.

We adhere to lots of legislation including safeguarding, health and safety data protection and much more.

We also have to report to all our funders telling them how we have spent any funding and what help we are providing, and this does involve a lot of monitoring .

The voluntary sector has suffered from lots of cuts and it is important that we show the work we do so those we work with can help us support our members.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

2022-2023 saw an increase in the cost of utility bills and cost of living which has had a huge impact on some of our members. We have seen how so many members are struggling financially when they don't need to, many people do not know what they are entitled to, or are worried about completing the forms and dealing with agencies.

But we are fortunate to have a fantastic volunteer that is very knowledgeable and understands how daunting these forms can be, they can be long and can be rather complex, they can also take a huge amount of time to complete. This is where our volunteer has been helping, giving both emotional and practical support. She has been helping our members claim their entitlement including: Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance Blue Badge, Carers Allowance. In addition to this she has also helped people access the government support funds for increased utility cost and obtained supermarket vouchers for those that need the additional help. All this support helps members to live independently, ensuring they are safe in their home and obtaining the statutory benefit and home support they are entitled to.

Over the last year our volunteer has helped 54 people claim over £138,378 in annual benefits for our members and obtained £12,500 in food vouchers. In addition to this she has also helped people obtain Blue Badges, reduce their insurance costs, challenge benefit decisions, arrange health assessments and assisted with the paperwork surrounding bereavement.

We also run a Christmas Saving Club to help people save for Christmas all year, it reduces the stress and worry about the most expensive time of the year and helps people stay debt free. We had 187 savers save over £94,000 which was a great help at Christmas. Helping promote a healthy savings habit helps take some of the stress from people.

PARTNERS



Working closely with our partners makes us a stronger more diverse Charity with access to many different organisations that we can call upon. Through these partnerships we all benefit from the experience and resources of others.

Our continuing relationship with partners such as Herts County Council, Stevenage Borough Council, Stevenage Community Trust, The Red Shed, Stepping Out, Chauncy Charity, Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities and the local churches, has grown and provided us with the resources and services needed to support our members and we in turn support those organisations to help them achieve their aims. Our partnership with Herts Sports Partnership has been fantastic, and they have provided financial and practical support to our Health and Wellbeing project. We continue to partner with local providers wherever possible.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We made a strategic decision to increase focus more on the health and wellbeing of our members. We know how important this is to someone's general feeling of happiness and we are still dealing with the aftermath of the lockdown restrictions. So we introduced a new Tai Chi class, it helps prevent falls, relieves pain and can improve mood and mental health and even improve sleep patterns, it's a great way to start the week.

We also ran Ballroom classes which were great fun and are looking at replacing them with some Sequence Dancing, it's such an enjoyable way of keeping the mind and body active. Our Salsacize class is a combination of salsa and exercise and really gets the heart racing! It's an energetic dance class and members love it. It

is also great for bone and joint health and is a lovely social activity. Our Yogalates classes are popular and members have seen



a huge increase in their flexibility and balance. The Chair Based exercise class is so popular we may need to put on another class! The class is designed so members can work to their own ability and can do the exercise standing or seated and every week members tell us how much better they feel after taking the class.. This is exactly what our health and wellbeing programme is about.

We also have a Thursday Tea and Chat, which started as a direct response to the heating crisis, and it quickly became a friendly supportive group where people can take time out of their lives and sit with our volunteers and just be supported. A cup of tea and a listening ear can help people feel less isolated and more included in their local community.

OUR THANKS

INS would like to thank the following organisations for all their support



CHAUNCY CHARITY



W.J. ROWE LTD
QUALITY FISH & CHIPS



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