



Irish Network Stevenage



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service



ANNUAL REVIEW

Celebrating friendship, wellbeing and
community



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





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CHAIRS REPORT

Over the past year, Irish Network Stevenage has continued to grow and evolve, strengthening our commitment to supporting older people across Stevenage and the surrounding areas.

One of our greatest achievements has been building on our presence within the community by delivering activities across eight neighbourhood centres. By bringing services closer to where people live, we have made it easier for members to access activities, stay connected and remain active within their local communities. This approach has helped us welcome new members while continuing to support those who have been with us for many years.

Throughout the year we have remained focused on improving health and wellbeing, reducing social isolation and creating opportunities for older people to enjoy fulfilling and independent lives. Our programme now offers a wide range of activities, from exercise and dance classes to educational workshops, social groups and day trips, ensuring there is something for everyone regardless of ability or experience.

Our members continues to shape everything we do. Their ideas and feedback have helped us introduce new activities and develop services that respond directly to local need. We remain committed to providing opportunities that reflect their needs.

We were very pleased to welcome Ann Geraghty as a Co-opted member to the Board of Trustees, bringing a wealth of experience in local care and support provision. The Board has continued to guide the charity through an ever-changing environment, ensuring we remain financially sustainable while maintaining the high-quality services our members deserve. Working closely with local and national organisations we have ensured our members have access to the information, support and entitlements available to them.

As we look ahead, we remain ambitious for the future. We will continue to help older people live more connected lives. Together, we will continue to build a welcoming community where everyone feels valued, supported and included.



ABOUT US

Irish Network Stevenage (INS) is a registered charity established in 2007 in response to the growing need for practical support for the older Irish community living in Stevenage. As the charity developed, it became clear that many older people across the town, regardless of background, were experiencing similar challenges, particularly loneliness, social isolation and difficulty accessing services.

Today, we proudly welcome everyone who shares our vision of creating a more connected and supportive community. With over 530 members, we provide opportunities for older people throughout Stevenage and the surrounding areas to remain active, independent and socially engaged.

Our mission is simple: to improve quality of life by reducing social isolation and promoting health, wellbeing and independence. We achieve this through a wide range of social, recreational and wellbeing activities, alongside practical support. Every service we deliver is designed to help our members remain connected, confident and able to participate fully within their communities.

The charity is led by an experienced Board of Trustees whose knowledge spans both the voluntary and corporate sectors. As a registered charity governed by the Charity Commission and our Constitution, we are committed to delivering services with integrity, transparency and accountability.

The move to multiple venues has been one of our most significant achievements. It reflects our ability to adapt to changing circumstances while remaining focused on the needs of our members. Thanks to the dedication of our Trustees, staff and volunteers, the transition was completed successfully and has provided a strong foundation for future growth.

As we continue to develop, our commitment remains unchanged. We will always place our members at the heart of everything we do, listening to their views, responding to changing needs and working with partners to ensure older people receive the support, friendship and opportunities they deserve.





CHARITY OVERVIEW

Trustees

Margaret Lyons (Chair)
Marie King (Treasurer)
Louise Donovan (Secretary)
Hilda Warwick
Frances Sandford
Brendan Clynych
Bridget Ann Geraghty (Co-Opted)

Registered Office

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

Charity Registration Number

1149576

Date of Inception

November 2007

Date of Charity Registration

November 2012

Bankers

Lloyds TSB
Town Square
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

Accountant

Susan Murphy



A group of diverse older people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are smiling and standing together outdoors. They are dressed in casual summer attire like hats, jackets, and t-shirts. The background shows a paved area and some greenery.

WORKING TOGETHER BEHIND THE SCENES

This year we have continued to grow in both our services and the support we provide to older people across Stevenage and the surrounding areas.

Good governance remains at the heart of our charity, ensuring we operate effectively, meet our legal and regulatory responsibilities, and these strong foundations continue to support our growth and future development.

Our volunteers continue to work together to help deliver all our activities and our greatest strength. We also work closely with local charities, community organisations and statutory agencies, to ensure we can signpost members to specialist services and provide more comprehensive support than any one organisation could deliver alone. We are incredibly grateful to Hertfordshire Community Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund, Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities, Stevenage Borough Councillors, Herts Sports Partnership and our many valued partners for their continued funding, guidance and collaboration.

Safeguarding continues to be everyone's responsibility. We are committed to providing a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment, with robust policies, regular training and clear procedures to protect our members, volunteers and staff. We also keep all of our policies under regular review to ensure they reflect current legislation and best practice.

Alongside delivering services, we continue to be a strong voice for older people by working with local authorities, health partners and voluntary organisations to ensure our members' experiences help shape local services and future planning.

We also work hard to challenge the perception of ageing. Getting older is something to be celebrated (lets face it the alternative is not great!) Having the time to focus on yourself, trying things that you have never tried before, reconnecting with lost friends or making new ones. It's all there if you want it. We ran a very successful Social Media campaign called "Age is just a number" and posted lots of photos of older people breaking those negative stereotypes, which was great fun and really helped changed perceptions.

As we look ahead, we are focused on strengthening our partnerships, increasing our volunteer bank and continuing to advocate for our members, regardless of the external challenges. Together, we will continue supporting older people to have the most enjoyable life that they can, and to live independently, confidently and with dignity.

A photograph of three women smiling in a community setting. The woman on the left is wearing a red top and a gold watch. The woman in the center is wearing a dark top and glasses. The woman on the right is wearing a purple top and glasses. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Friendship and social connection remain at the heart of everything we do. We believe that no one should face later life alone, and every activity we organise is designed to bring people together, build confidence and create lasting friendships.

Throughout the year, our members have enjoyed a wide variety of social events, clubs and community activities, providing opportunities to meet new people, reconnect with old friends and become part of a welcoming and supportive community. Whether attending a tea dance, enjoying lunch with friends, joining a craft session or taking part in one of our popular day trips, every activity helps reduce loneliness and improves wellbeing.

Our regular social afternoons continue to be among our most popular events. Filled with music, dancing, conversation and laughter, they provide a relaxed environment where members can unwind, enjoy themselves and create new memories. Many lasting friendships have been formed through these gatherings, demonstrating just how important social opportunities are in later life.

Our programme of day trips has also continued to grow in popularity. These outings are about far more than where we go, they provide companionship, confidence and shared experiences that strengthen friendships and create treasured memories. Throughout the year we have celebrated many special occasions together, including St Patrick's Day and our St Patrick's Dance, Summer Ball, Halloween Dance and our traditional Christmas celebrations. These occasions are always highlights of the calendar, bringing together members, volunteers and families to celebrate the wonderful community we have built together.

Our Friendship Group continues to play a particularly important role in supporting members who may be experiencing loneliness or significant life changes. Meeting in smaller, informal groups allows members to build supportive relationships, share experiences and enjoy the reassurance of knowing they are never alone.

Everything we do is made possible through the incredible commitment of our volunteers, with their warmth, enthusiasm and dedication.

As we look ahead, we will continue to develop new opportunities that encourage friendship, reduce isolation and strengthen our community. We remain committed to creating welcoming spaces where every member feels valued, connected and supported.



PROMOTING WELLBEING

Helping our members stay healthy, active and independent continues to be one of our highest priorities. We know having a good life is about more than physical fitness, it is about confidence, connection, independence and enjoying life to the fullest.

Throughout the year we have continued to expand our programme of affordable and accessible health and wellbeing activities across our eight community venues. By bringing classes closer to where people live, we have made it easier for members to stay active, meet new people and enjoy regular exercise in a welcoming and supportive environment.

Our wide range of classes ensures there is something suitable for everyone, regardless of age, ability or previous experience. From the gentle movements of Tai Chi to the energy of Salsacize, from Exercise and Fitness to Yoga and our popular Line Dancing classes, members have embraced every opportunity to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. Our Line Dancing alone has had attendance of over 3,500 throughout the year, so we think we will be ready for Strictly Come Dancing soon!

These activities help improve strength, balance and mobility, reduce the risk of falls and encourage greater independence. Just as importantly, they provide opportunities for social interaction, helping to reduce loneliness while supporting positive mental health.

We introduced our 6 week beginner line dancing programme and this proved so popular, we did it again and again! It's never too late to learn a new skill or discover a new hobby. Many now attend several classes each week, enjoying the physical and social benefits that regular participation brings. Friendships have flourished, confidence has grown and many members tell us that these activities have become an important part of their weekly routine.

As demand continues to increase, we remain committed to developing our health and wellbeing programme, introducing new activities and working with local partners to ensure older people can continue to live healthier, happier and more independent lives. We believe that staying active is not simply about adding years to life – it is about adding life to those years.

"Every dumbbell lifted, every dance enjoyed and every smile shared helps build a healthier, happier community."





VOLUNTEERS – THE HEART OF INS

Our volunteers generosity, compassion and commitment make it possible for us to deliver the wide range of activities, services and support that our members enjoy throughout the year.

From preparing refreshments and welcoming members, to organising activities and providing practical support, our volunteers are involved in every aspect of the charity's work.

What makes our volunteer team so special is that all of them are members themselves. They understand first-hand the importance of friendship, community and belonging. Their kindness helps create an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and included.

Our volunteers are a listening ear, often offering reassurance, encouragement in a non-judgemental way. They are frequently the first to notice when someone may need additional support and play an important role in helping us safeguard the wellbeing of our members. Through tailored ongoing safeguarding training and a strong culture of care, volunteers help ensure that concerns are identified quickly and support is provided.

During the past year, our dedicated volunteer team contributed **3,004** hours of service which represents an estimated economic and social value of contribution of **£97,000 per year**. This figure is calculated using the Governments Economic and Social Value report. While these figures demonstrate the scale of their commitment, they cannot measure the friendships formed, the reduction in isolation, confidence restored or the countless acts of kindness shown every day.

Our volunteers work enable us to reach more people, provide more activities and respond to the changing needs of our community. They are our ambassadors, helping us create welcoming spaces where older people can remain active, connected and supported.

We extend our sincere thanks to every volunteer. Your time, compassion and dedication make an immeasurable difference, and we simply could not achieve what we do without you. You are the heart of Irish Network Stevenage, and your contribution is deeply appreciated.



TREASURERS REPORT

I am pleased to present the Treasurer's Report for the 2025–2026 financial year and to confirm that Irish Network Stevenage remains in a strong and stable financial position.

Despite the continuing pressures facing the voluntary sector and the wider economic challenges affecting many charities, we have maintained our financial resilience while continuing to invest in the services and activities that matter most to our members.

This has been another year in which we have worked hard to secure external funding from a wide range of sources, securing over **£121,000** in funding and grants, which is a huge achievement for a charity of our size in this financial climate. This has enabled us to keep activity costs affordable, ensuring that financial circumstances are never a barrier to participation. We recognise that many older people continue to face rising living costs, and the Board remains committed to keeping our activities accessible to everyone.

We are delighted to have continued support from The National Lottery Community Fund alongside many other funders, local authorities and community partners. Their investment allows us to continue to deliver our extensive programme.

Prudent financial planning has remained a key priority throughout the year. The Board continues to maintain appropriate financial reserves, ensuring the charity can continue to operate effectively during periods when grant income may fluctuate.

Like many organisations, we have experienced increased operating costs during the year, including venue hire, transport, refreshments and activity delivery, with an overall increase in costs of over 30% this year alone. Wherever possible, we have absorbed these increases rather than passing them on to our members. We believe this investment is vital in helping older people remain socially connected and active, particularly at a time when many are living on fixed incomes.



TREASURERS REPORT

Delivering high-quality activities requires significant resources, and we remain committed to providing experienced instructors, welcoming venues and enjoyable events that offer real value to our members. We are very much a local charity, supporting local people. We buy locally wherever possible, work with instructors who are small, local and independent. And we continue to support local charities that have the same community focus that we do, including supporting their fundraising endeavours wherever possible.

Our funding comes from a diverse range of sources, helping to strengthen the charity's financial sustainability and reduce reliance on any single income stream. We are grateful to every organisation, business and individual who has supported us during the year, whether through grant funding, donations or practical assistance.

Strong financial management also means maintaining the confidence of our funders. Throughout the year we have completed detailed monitoring and evaluation reports, demonstrating not only how funding has been spent but, more importantly, the positive difference it has made to the lives of our members. These reports continue to receive positive feedback and help secure future funding in our services.

As you will see throughout this Annual Report, the charity continues to offer a wide range of activities and services, all aimed at reducing isolation. None of this would be possible without the commitment of our volunteers, whose contribution represents an invaluable investment in the charity and the wider community.

Looking ahead, we remain financially well placed to continue supporting our members while responding to new opportunities and emerging challenges. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our funders, volunteers, members and staff for their continued trust, commitment and support. Together, we are ensuring that Irish Network Stevenage remains a strong, sustainable charity that continues to enrich the lives of older people throughout our community.

Our Financial Statements are on the following pages, but please do contact the office if you have any questions. The full set of accounts will be uploaded to the Charities Commission following the AGM.

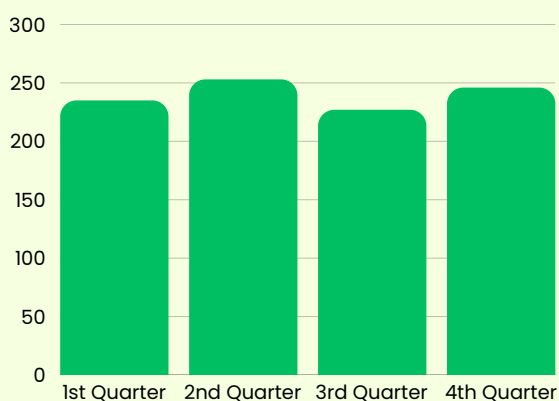


FINANCIAL STATEMENT

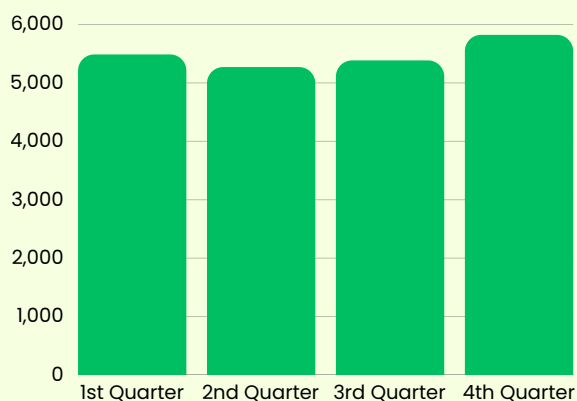
Statement Of Financial Activities For The Year 2025/2026

		Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2025/2026 £
Income				
Grants	TNLCF Funding	£ -	£ 78,765	£ 78,765
	Hertfordshire Community Foundation	£ -	£ 980	£ 980
	Sport England	£ -	£ 14,856	£ 14,856
	HCF Members Bonus	£ -	£ 8,360	£ 8,360
	Stevenage Borough Council	£ -	£ 7,700	£ 7,700
	Government of Ireland	£ -	£ 9,000	£ 9,000
	Hertfordshire County Council	£ -	£ 500	£ 500
	Chauncy Charity	£ -	£ 6,665	£ 6,665
	University of Hertfordshire	£ -	£ -	£ -
		£ -	£ 126,826	£ 126,826
Other Income				
Income From Events and Activities		35,819	£ 7	£ 35,826
Membership & Donations		£ 15,887	£ -	£ 15,887
		£ 51,706	£ 7	£ 51,713
Total Income		£ 51,706	£ 126,833	£ 178,539
Expenditure				
Grants Given		£ -	£ 11,300	£ 11,300
Cost of Events		£ 2,716	£ 46,761	£ 49,477
Salary & Pension Costs		£ 3,437	£ 40,076	£ 43,513
Professional Fees		£ 1,360	£ 902	£ 2,262
Office Costs		£ 425	£ 3,331	£ 3,756
Marketing		£ -	£ 392	£ 392
Room Hire		£ -	£ 21,723	£ 21,723
Volunteer Expenses		£ 585	£ 3,089	£ 3,673
Total Expenditure		£ 8,523	£ 127,574	£ 136,096
Net Income Resources Before Transfers		£ 43,183	-£ 741	£ 42,442
Movement of Funds		-£ 521	£ 521	£ -
Total Fund Brought Forward		£ 141,985	£ 55,034	£ 197,019
Total Funds Carried Forward		£ 184,648	£ 54,813	£ 239,461

Monthly Activities 2025 -2026



Monthly Footfall 2025 -2026



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Balance Sheet as at 31st May 2026	
	31.05.2026
Current Assets	
Bank	£ 239,461
Total Assets	£ 239,461
Represented By	
Unrestricted Funds	
General funds	£ 7,957
Sustainability Reserves	£ 100,692
Office Reserves	£ 76,000
	£ 184,648
Restricted Funds	
Chauncy (Tai Chi)	£ 3,026
Social Fund	£ 7,044
HCF-WCC Members Bonus	£ -
HCF Christmas Club	£ 6,281
HCF Exercise	£ -
HCF Training	£ 242
SBC	£ 15
Sport England	£ 11,531
TNLCF Funding	£ 21,553
Tea and Chat	£ 5,120
Breakfast Club	
	£ 54,813
Total Funds	£ 239,461
Approved by the trustees on <u>5-8-26</u> and signed on its behalf by:	
Signature <u>M. Lyons</u>	Name <u>MARGARET LYONS</u>
Signature <u>Marie King</u>	Name <u>MARIE KING</u>
Approved by the independent examiner on <u>4-8-26</u>	
Signature <u>S. Hudson</u>	Name <u>S. HUDSON</u>





HELPING PEOPLE ACCESS FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Supporting the most vulnerable members of our community has always been at the heart of everything we do. Since our charity was established, we have remained committed to helping our members live as independently, confidently, and comfortably as possible. One of the ways we do this is to help people access their entitlements. Obtaining additional support can be the difference between thriving and surviving.

We see every day that older people are so impacted by the negative dialogue around cost of living, access to support services and whether they will be able to afford the lifestyle that they want (and deserve). We actively seek out the correct information and make that available to our members.

We know that public services are under increasing pressure. Our role is not to replace statutory services, but to help our members access the support they are entitled to and ensure they don't face these challenges alone.

The support we provide is tailored to each individual's needs. Whether it's helping someone access adaptations for their home, obtaining a Blue Badge, or negotiating new utility contracts, we're there every step of the way.

We help members claim entitlements such as Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, and Attendance Allowance. During the last year, this incredible work secured more than **£375,000** in financial support for our members, many of the entitlements were lifetime awards. This has made a lasting difference to the lives of many older people and highlights the vital importance of this service within our community.

We also run our successful Wednesday Christmas club which enables members and their families to save small amounts of money every week in preparation for Christmas. In 2025, 230 members and their families saved over **£130,000** through the club which is a huge achievement. This has enabled savers to focus on Christmas without the worrying about the financial burden it brings.



Overcoming Challenges

We know we will continue to face external pressures, with the closing of community venues and the reduction in support to the sector, but we are committed to increasing our programme of activities. We will explore new health and wellbeing initiatives, funding opportunities, and increase our partnership connections to enable us to do this.. There will always be challenges, but we have proven our resilience in the most troubling times, with the support of our members, volunteers and partners. We will continue to explore opportunities whilst maintaining our professional and personal integrity. As a small local charity we actively choose to support our local partners, knowing that they have challenges to, and we continue to do so in every way we can.

Looking to the Future

As we reflect on another successful year, we also look ahead with optimism and ambition. The needs of older people continue to evolve, and Irish Network Stevenage remains the largest grassroots older persons charity in Stevenage and we are committed to growing and adapting our services to ensure we continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of our members.

Our vision is simple: to create a community where every older person feels valued, connected and supported. We will continue to build on the strong foundations established over the past year, developing new opportunities that promote friendship, improve wellbeing and reduce loneliness across Stevenage and the surrounding areas.

We also recognise that our volunteers are the foundation of our success. During the coming year, we hope to welcome new volunteers into our growing team, while continuing to support and value those who already give so generously of their time. Their commitment allows us to reach more people, provide more activities and strengthen the sense of community that defines Irish Network Stevenage.



THANK YOU

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to everyone who plays a part in making our charity what it is today. To our dedicated volunteers, committed staff, generous funders, valued partners, and, most importantly, our wonderful members, we thank you. Your support, kindness, and belief in our work make everything we achieve possible.

From the beginning, we had a vision of creating an inclusive charity that reaches as many people as possible, with our members at the heart of every decision we make. We are proud to say that this vision has become a reality. Every hour volunteered, every donation, and every word of encouragement helps us continue to support those who need us most. Together, we have built a stronger, more connected community where older people feel valued, supported, and heard.

Our achievements belong to all of us. Thank you for being part of our journey and for helping us make such a meaningful difference. Our success is truly your success, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

Peggy, Marie, Louise, Hilda, Frances, Brendan and Ann



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