



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Irish Network Stevenage



2024 Annual General Report

Registered Address:
Sherma Batson Centre, 10 - 12 Exchange Road
Stevenage, Herts
SG1 1PZ

Tel: 01438 725400

Email: info@irishnetworkstevenage.org.uk

Website: www.irishnetworkstevenage.org.uk



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 9 Trustees, who bring a wealth of experience from both the voluntary and the business sectors. This board is supported by a Project Manager and Social Activities Coordinator.

After its inception INS quickly grew as it became apparent that the needs of many older people across the town were similar to the needs of our Irish Elders, many who were suffering from social isolation and lack of support, so INS evolved to provide support to all older people from all communities in Stevenage and the surrounding areas.

INS is focused on helping older people to combat social isolation and to live independently in their own homes for as long as is practical. This is achieved through a variety of activities, support services and practical interventions. INS is open to all that support our aims and objectives. 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. This last year has seen an increase in members and attendance and the wide range of activities we offer means there is something for everyone. We are so proud of what we have achieved and the support we can offer.

As with all charities we have had our share of challenges, specifically with the reduction in funding available and our members are still facing a cost of living crisis which means many need more support than ever, and the reduction in availability of local support has made this a difficult year for many.

Once again, we would like to thank our 28 amazing volunteers, we would not be able to do what we do without them! They support on all our activities and are instrumental in shaping our services, they are the foundation on which INS stands.



TRUSTEES

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

REGISTERED OFFICE

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

ACCOUNTANT

Susan Murphy

BANKERS

Lloyds TSB
Town Square
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

GOVERNANCE

The charities' overarching theme is to reduce isolation amongst older people and promote social inclusion. Trustee meetings are held once a month with the Project Manager in attendance. Trustees bring forward suggestions from members and volunteers for open discussion and decide on the strategic direction for the Charity. Members suggest what events to run, support we could 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

In the last 12 months we have seen a huge increase in membership, and this has been fantastic! So, welcome



to all our new members! We are also having higher attendance at our activities and many members are coming to three or four events a week.

Over the last 12 months we have continued to focus our efforts on fitness and social engagement by bringing in more exercise classes and more social activities. We now deliver over 70 activities a month and have a monthly footfall of up to 1,800 members.

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. One of those ways is by starting to offer evening social activities. The hope is that this will increase over the coming months. So for those interested in a night of entertainment and music, do keep an eye on our monthly newsletters.

As a Board we are constantly looking for new ways



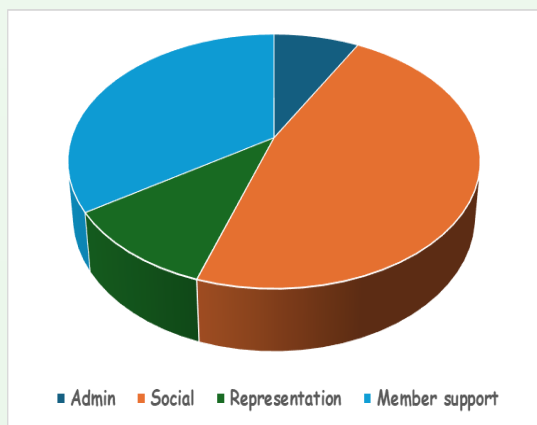
to support our members and we monitor local and national challenges and how this could impact them. As we have seen over the last few years, the

local and national picture changes very rapidly and we need to respond very quickly, putting new provisions in place and establishing fact from fiction. We are able to do this because our volunteers are versatile and are happy to help whenever needed. As a local charity we have very strong partnerships throughout the town. We signpost where appropriate and receive many referrals from statutory and non statutory organisations. We are proud of the reputation we have and continue to build on this.

VOLUNTEER HOURS



Our volunteers are the reason why we can do so much. The chart below shows the volunteer hours split over the various areas we have. We have 28 committed volunteers who last year gave 8415 hours to INS helping with every aspect. This averages over 165 hours per week! This demonstrates how vital they are and how much work it takes to run these events and services. Volunteers are the “eyes and ears” of INS, not only do they run events they also let us know if additional support is needed or if anything needs addressing. We operate an “open door” policy so our volunteers can come and speak to us about anything, at any time.



SECRETARY'S REPORT



Since becoming INS Secretary in 2010, I have seen the charity grow from strength to strength and it makes me proud to be part of this. As the leading older persons charity in Ste-

venage, we are at the forefront of making positive improvements to the lives of older people.

Working closely with our partners and signposting whenever this is appropriate, we have built a large network of partners that can support our members in many different ways. With the current challenges our members face, such as the continuing cost of living crisis and the strain on statutory and non-statutory services, we know partnership working is vital. Our continuing relationship with partners such as Hertfordshire Community Foundation, Stevenage Borough Council, The Red Shed, Stepping Out, Chauncy Charity, and Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities, has enabled us to provide our members 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.

A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure we have good governance and policies. We continually review our processes and procedures to ensure we are up to date with the ever-changing recommendations and legislation. As a charity delivering front-line services, we pride ourselves on our ability to quickly respond to our members' requirements and this is evident in the growth of the charity in the last financial year.

TREASURERS REPORT

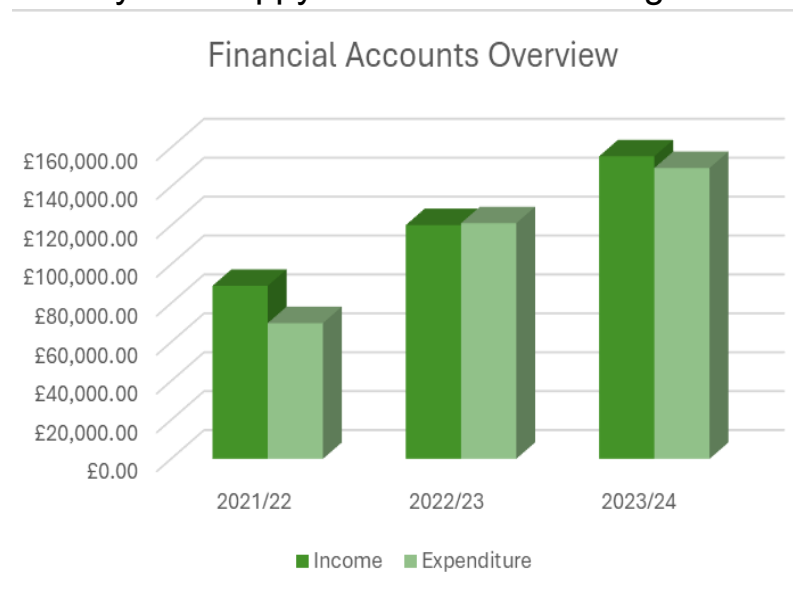
The 2023 – 2024 financial year has mirrored our previous years where we have continued to be in a healthy financial position, despite many challenges. Costs have continued to increase over the last 12 months and we have worked very hard to keep our expenditure down. This has been very challenging and our volunteers have been fantastic at trying to source cheaper supplies whilst maintaining quality.

In December 2023 we reached the end of our Big Lottery funding which helped subsidise many different events and activities we ran throughout the year. Receiving funding like this not only helped us provide support, it was also a huge endorsement of the work that we do. At the end of the funding we had to complete an extensive report which included details of our expenditure and this was very well received by the Lottery. This report confirmed that we had exceeded all aspects of the project objectives and deliverables, thereby enabling us to apply for additional funding from them, which was successful and came into effect in March 2024. This has given us some much needed financial security.

In addition to the Lottery we have also worked with seven different funders to support our activities and this means we operate a specific financial monitoring systems for each funder. At the end of each fund we produce a progress report detailing what we have accomplished with the funding and a financial report showing what the fund was spent on. Every funder has approved our reports and they are happy that we are meeting the requirements of each fund, which is a testament to how the project was run and how we have identified and matched a need within our community.

On the following pages we have the Financial Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 May 2024. The income for the year was £155,553 and the expenditure was £149,530. Our funds being brought forward are £156,177. Of this £119,732 is designated funds that have been restricted for specific projects, £36,153 is restricted funds provided by external funders and £292.00 is an unrestricted amount.

As you will see from the graph presented, we continue to operate at a financial secure level, with our income and expenditure being very similar. As a charity we continue to grow the amount of activities we deliver and the amount members we have, the increase in income and expenditure reflects this. This is a very healthy 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 2023/2024

		Unrestricted	Restricted	Total 2023/2024
		£	£	£
Income				
Grants	TNLCF Funding	£ -	£ 65,319	£ 65,319
	Herts Sports Partnership	£ -	£ 3,250	£ 3,250
	Bedwell Community HSF	£ -	£ 1,087	£ 1,087
	Stevenage Borough Council	£ -	£ 5,500	£ 5,500
	Hertfordshire Community Foundation	£ -	£ 4,525	£ 4,525
	HCF Members Bonus	£ -	£ 8,975	£ 8,975
	Chauncy Charity	£ -	£ 2,500	£ 2,500
		£ -	£ 91,156	£ 91,156
Other Income				
	Income From Events and Activities		£ 54,858	£ 54,858
	Membership & Donations	£ 6,674	£ 2,865	£ 9,539
		£ 6,674	£ 57,724	£ 64,397
Total Income		£ 6,674	£ 148,880	£ 155,553
Expenditure				
	Grants Given	£ -	£ 7,024	£ 7,024
	Cost of Events	£ 8,663	£ 75,317	£ 83,980
	Salary & Pension Costs	£ 462	£ 39,736	£ 40,199
	Professional Fees	£ 4,730	£ 2,523	£ 7,253
	Office Costs	£ 557	£ 2,153	£ 2,710
	Marketing		£ 1,562	£ 1,562
	Room Hire	£ 1,476	£ 2,616	£ 4,092
	Volunteer Expenses	£ 726	£ 1,984	£ 2,710
Total Expenditure		£ 16,613	£ 132,916	£ 149,530
Net Income Resources Before Transfers		-£ 9,940	£ 15,963	£ 6,023
Movement of Funds		-£ 39,000	£ 39,000	£ -
Total Fund Brought Forward		£ 131,835	£ 18,319	£ 150,154
Total Funds Carried Forward		£ 82,895	£ 73,282	£ 156,177

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Irish Network Stevenage

Balance Sheet as at 31st May 2024

Current Assets					
	Bank			£	160,552
Current Liabilities					
	HCF-WCC Members Bonus payments due			£	4,375
Total Assets				£	156,177
Represented By					
	Unrestricted Funds			£	292
	Sustainability Reserves			£	43,732
	Office Reserves			£	76,000
				£	120,024
	Restricted Funds				
	Social Fund			£	13,321
	HCF Christmas Club			£	2,741
	TNLCF Funding			£	15,375
	Tea and Chat			£	103
	Breakfast Club			£	4,613
				£	36,153
Total Funds				£	156,177

MEMBER SUPPORT

Since our inception back in 2007, we have remained committed to supporting our most vulnerable members, ensuring we help them enjoy their lives to the fullest. As a charity our focus is on helping those most in need, and we have never wavered from that. The level of support needed by our members continues to rise and we have seen an increase in the issues caused by social isolation and the cost of living crisis. Due to the pandemic we had to stop our visits to



hospitals, care homes and residential homes, but we have now restarted visits to the housebound, but on a very small scale. We continue with our welfare calls and our volunteers signpost whenever needed. Some members just want to hear a friendly voice, but some need more practical support. We have arranged external support in the form of carelines, advocacy and even supported moves to assisted living homes. We know statutory services are under a huge amount of pressure, and we help wherever we can.



One of the groups we are most proud of is our Friendship Group, it's a small group of our more vulnerable members who meet each month, in a small friendly environment. This group offers so much peer support and being with people who have the same struggles has enabled members to feel less isolated.

The group is so popular it always has a waiting list, and that is a testament to the fantastic volunteers that run this group.

The group regularly visit The Red Shed, which is a local charity that support people living with dementia and their carers, they often make floral displays and garden ornaments and just generally enjoy a beautiful outdoor space.

Stepping Out is a fantastic organisation that is funded through Social Prescribing and they have taken a number of our members on some lovely trips to places like Hatfield House and Forte Hall, which they thoroughly enjoyed. We are so grateful for such a fantastic partner. We know the Member Support we provide is so valuable and it is all about supporting each other especially when circumstances change.



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

by 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 members 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 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 70 activities being offered each month, we know we have something for everyone.

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 most vulnerable members are supported.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT



As with previous year we have seen an increase in the financial pressure that older people are facing. AGE UK report that “more than 1 in 5 older people are already reducing or stopping spending on medications or specialist foods or expect to do so in the coming months, and 1 in 7 are skipping meals or expect to do so. The cost of living crisis has made everyday purchases much more expensive

and many older people living on low and modest incomes are finding it impossible to cope.” Here at the INS, we see how this impacts people’s mental health as well as their physical health and we try and help in any way we can.

One of the issues members have is that they 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. She can help our members through this process and advocates on their behalf. She also keeps up to date with any new support that is available, signposts to other organisations where this is appropriate. Our volunteer has said that the main thing that concerns our members is the increase in food costs. This has led to members cancelling their TV packages and reducing their shopping to keep their bills as low as possible, which can have a negative impact on their quality of life and health.

Our volunteer has been helping our members claim many different types of entitlements including: Housing Benefit, Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Blue Badge, Passport, Bus Pass and Carers Allowance. In addition to this she has helped people obtain aids and adaptations to their home to make them safer and their lives easier. She has also provided support with the difficult process of transitioning to alternative living accommodation. Over the last year our volunteer has helped 157 people claim their entitlements, which is a 290% increase from last year. Those members received £427,751 in annual benefits this year, which is a 309% increase from last year. In addition to this she has also helped people reduce their insurance costs, challenge benefit decisions and arrange health assessment. 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 196 savers save over £100,000 which was a great help at Christmas. Helping promote a healthy savings habit helps take some of the stress from people.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING



Last year we increased our focus more on the health and wellbeing of our members and this has been a huge success. Some of our members go to three classes a week and comment on how their wellbeing has improved. With a footfall of around 7000 over the year, we can see how popular these classes are. The NHS state “Mental and emotional health, physical health and a healthy lifestyle all contribute to an individual’s health and wellbeing” and we have adopted this as our approach to our Health and Wellbeing project. When looking at a new activity we ask

“does it improve our members health and/or wellbeing?” and then we progress from there. Our Tai Chi class is a great way to start the week. Tai Chi is known to help prevent falls, relieves pain and can improve mood and mental health and even improve sleep patterns, it is also great for helping with a positive mindset.

Our Chair Based Exercise classes address overall fitness level and our instructor focuses on areas of weakness such as balance and standing up from a seated position. In our Yopalates we focus on flexibility, posture and breathing. These classes improve our members physical and mental health, and the Instructor deliberately keeps the class small so she can give individual attention when needed. Our Salsacize class is our most energetic class and is one that we try and encourage members to move to when they have attended our Chair Based classes for a while and increased their physical activity. This is based on the individuals abilities and own personal aims.

In addition to these physical activities we also run groups specifically encouraging social engagement in a relaxed and friendly environment. Our Thursday Tea and Chat is a



friendly supportive group where people can take time out and chat with other members and volunteers, and this can help people feel less isolated and more included in their local community. We recently added a Breakfast Club which does the same but also provides members with a free nourishing breakfast, which has been supported by Stevenage Borough Council, and we are very grateful for this.

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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