



Harmony Community Trust

Annual Report 2023

www.glebehouseni.org

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2023: a year of challenges, resilience and fresh hope

As I write this in June 2024, at Harmony Community Trust we look back on a year in which we dealt with a financial challenge that was unprecedented in our 48-year history. The response of the charity and the growing number of very active friends and volunteers has not just kept Glebe House running but brought in abundant energy, good will and fresh ideas that demonstrate the potential of the place and of the Glebe House community to continue to make people's lives better. Throughout 2023, and the rest of the 2023-24 financial year, HCT continued to deliver a vibrant programme of work at Glebe House, promoting community relations, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, creativity and fun for children, young people and adults, enabling them to come together and overcome the barriers put up by poverty, disadvantage, social exclusion, rural isolation and sectarian divisions.

2023 began brightly at Glebe House, with business and fun as usual in our programmes for children, young people and adults. We had our first post-pandemic residentials and in March we officially opened the Seedbed gardening and environment project. The new Strangford and District Men's Shed made their home in an unused building on our site. Having significantly strengthened our Council of Management in 2022 we were well placed to plan for the Trust's second half-century.

Whenever we have done a SWOT analysis as part of our corporate planning, in recent years the list of threats has included the public expenditure landscape, and we have been working to set HCT on a more sustainable financial footing where we would be less dependent on project- and programme-funding from statutory sources. This particular threat materialised in spring 2023 when Westminster withheld a significant part of the NI budget as part of its efforts to restore the NI Executive. The Executive's budget for supporting the work of the voluntary and community sector was cut significantly and as a direct result we lost funding of more than £100k which we would have had from the Central Good Relations Fund for 2023/24 and other sources. The first indication of the possibility of this loss came in early April, with confirmation coming gradually over the following months. This major loss of funding impacted the Trust's ability to raise or draw down funds from other sources. From a break-even position at the start of April we were soon using our overdraft facility to meet running costs.

Whilst the Trust's assets meant there was no risk of insolvency, by the summer the threat of becoming cash-insolvent was very real. Much of the Trust's work in the summer and autumn was focused on dealing with this situation.

At Glebe House we have been blessed to have a team of staff with extraordinary empathy, skills, creativity, energy, kindness and dedication to making Glebe House a life-enhancing and fun experience for all the children, young people and adults who take part in our programmes. Making our staff redundant was almost unthinkable, and whilst we initiated the redundancy process in the spring, we held off completing it for as long as we could. The loss

of all of our staff was without doubt the saddest and most difficult milestone in the story of Glebe House.

This was a hard decision to reach, but to ensure the future sustainability of the organisation we were forced to enter a period where outgoings have been cut to a minimum while the value of some of our assets was realised. Now that this process has been completed HCT retains a site of approximately 8 acres together with our residential centre, offices, meeting rooms and a conference facility and is moving forward in 2024-5 supported by cash reserves.

Fresh life

The programme updates in this Annual Report capture something of the buzz around Glebe House. While we are not yet in a position to resume our programmes for children and young people, our adult programmes, which are now all volunteer-led, are as busy as ever.

In recent years HCT has been devoting particular efforts to making Glebe House more of an asset for the local community. A common perception locally has been that Glebe House is a residential centre for children and young people from elsewhere. We have made progress in changing this perception and making Glebe House a more welcoming space for local people.

In the autumn and the run-up to Christmas a number of very dedicated, creative and energetic volunteers devised, planned and delivered a series of programmes for adults, which as well as continuing to fulfil HCT's mission and celebrating Glebe House, generated income for the charity. The wreath-making classes were so successful that additional sessions were organised.

We cut the ribbon on the Seedbed project on 11 March 2023 and since then the Seedbed site – which is expanding – has been a hive of activity.

In November we started a Singing Circle which has now meets every Wednesday.

Towards the end of 2023 a former member of our staff proposed a baby and toddler group. *Tots 'n' Teenies* now meets every week.

One of the most encouraging features of the past year has been seeing how many people are coming through the gateway of Glebe House for the first time and are coming back.

Having the Men's Shed as tenants has strengthened our ties with the local community.

During 2023 we continued to host a Ukrainian family in our cottage.

Some words of appreciation

First, my personal, heartfelt thanks go yet again to my fellow members of HCT Council of Management for their huge, selfless and sustained contribution to the work and the future of HCT and Glebe House, not least in their response to the financial situation that we faced. In particular the very substantial additional and urgent work done by HCT Company Secretary

Judith Thompson and our Treasurer David Boyd has been critical in bringing the charity through to a position where we are planning future programmes at Glebe House.

Two members of HCT Council of Management stood down in 2023. Sharon Heaney has given four decades of service to HCT and Glebe House, as a hands-on volunteer, as a trustee of the charity and as Chair of the Programme Committee. Bill Osborne, who joined the Trust in 2022, provided invaluable advice which helped us to manage the financial difficulties that arose.

It is of course invidious to single out individuals for thanks, and the Trust is indebted to a great many people who supported us during a very challenging year. However, I do want to publicly thank a number of individuals.

First, the staff whom we lost during the year: Andrew, Caroline, Colin, Michelle, Naomi, Patrick and Tara, for their dedication, their understanding and their good will.

Ann Barker, as volunteer and Volunteer Coordinator, has put in unstinting energy, creativity and countless hours, both into the development of the Seedbed and the invention, planning and delivery of new programmes and activities, including fundraising quizzes, to generate much-needed income.

Deirdre Trew, volunteer, has worked beavered away in the background doing the kind of necessary administrative and financial drudgery that most people prefer not to have to think about.

In early 2024 we convened a group of volunteers to draw up and execute a strategic plan for preparing funding applications that will enable us to rebuild and develop our programmes. A great deal of talent, expertise, experience, time, energy, care and patient attention to detail has gone into this work.

A number of individuals have made personal financial donations to help Glebe House. These donations have helped to keep us in business.

The HCT / Glebe House website and social media presence had become dated, cluttered and confusing and a fresh start was needed. We have had a great deal of pro bono help from professionals. We are indebted to Moya Fitzpatrick of Moya Fitzpatrick Marketing, to Tor Dennison of Aztra Design for the website design, to Conor McNally of Design and Display, and to Christine Mackenzie for designing our new logos. In addition to the fruits of their work on the website and social media, we have a bright new welcoming sign at the entrance to Glebe House.

Our thanks to Brian McIlroy and Sara Camplisson, whose English language tutoring at Glebe House helped a number of Ukrainian refugees living in the area. Brian also helped us to raise funds from the sale of Rory McIlroy golf club head covers.

A number of funders have helped us to deal with the financial difficulties, including the Community Relations Council and the Community Foundation NI. We are grateful for their understanding and the flexibility that they have afforded us. Funding from the Ireland Funds in 2023 helped us to manage the necessary changes and keep our doors open.

For financial and other support for the development of the Seedbed we are grateful to Community Foundation NI (Axa Parks), PowerNI, the Department for Infrastructure, and Cooperative Alternatives, in particular Tiziana O'Hara and Dr Jonny Hanson.

Our thanks go to The Executive Office; the Department of Health; the Public Health Agency (funding from the CLEAR programme); the Department for Communities; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, for their funding and support in 2023.

We appreciate very much the support we have had from elected representatives from all five major parties. At Newry, Mourne and Down District Council a motion in support of HCT was carried unanimously. At a difficult time it was heartening to see the strength of cross-community support for Glebe House and appreciation of the value of what we do.

Looking to the future

The response of people near and far to the financial jolt of 2023 has not only shown us that Glebe House is cherished by many but has also renewed and strengthened our understanding of the potential for the future.

We have convened a group of talented volunteers, with an impressive collective skill-set, to prepare funding applications.

As I have said in previous Annual Reports, the need for what Glebe House can uniquely offer is increasing. The growing inequalities in our society, with the impacts on health and well-being, are an affront to human decency. Public services are being cut and opportunities are falling away. Community divisions look as deep as ever, and problems associated with rural isolation, especially for older people, continue to grow.

Our core mission is as valid as ever and is more pressing. We continue to work towards a peaceful, fair, inclusive society that respects diversity; a society that values each person's humanity, dignity, aspirations and needs; one in which people challenge sectarian, national, ethnic or social stereotypes, and challenge disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion; a society in which each person can be an agent of positive change in their own life and the lives of others. We will continue to provide a shared, safe environment where people of all ages can come together, work, play and develop relationships. We will continue to provide opportunities for meaningful and effective voluntary service.

The foundations of Glebe House since 1975 have been respect, compassion, faith in people, and hope. The big lesson from 2023 is to be seen in the responses of so many people who share those values and who believe that Glebe House can continue to be a force for good in people's lives. We have an extraordinary group of trustees and other volunteers who are working tirelessly to keep making that mission a reality.

Seamus Camplisson
Chair, Harmony Community Trust
June 2024

Programme reports

Programme delivery continued, and indeed increased, throughout 2023-24 due to the dedication and commitment of HCT volunteers, including members of our Council of Management, and our strong relationships with service users.

Harmony Community Trust Council of Management remains, as it always has been, ultimately responsible and accountable for the good governance and financial probity of HCT and for the delivery of our services. During the year Council appointed Ann Barker, an experienced manager, as Volunteer Coordinator to provide day-to-day project management and supervision of programme activities on a pro bono basis. The Volunteer Coordinator is given support and direction by a member of our Council of Management with senior management experience, Judith Thompson. Project evaluation is overseen on a pro bono basis by an experienced senior researcher and statistician, and project finances are maintained by an experienced volunteer administrator and overseen by our Treasurer who is a Chartered Accountant. These roles and responsibilities ensure high quality in all aspects of the programme despite the absence of a director.

There have been some adjustments to our programmes, but enhanced service user and volunteer input have enabled an increase in the number of participants and of the workshops and events we deliver. We believe that the programmes that we deliver remain both very valuable and also highly related to local needs. NISRA deprivation data show that the Strangford area experiences a high level of deprivation on the *Access to Services* domain – which is likely to be associated with high levels of isolation. When combined with an ageing demographic, rural isolation and a community in which the legacy of conflict still impacts, particularly on those who lived through it, the services we provide are life-changing. We are therefore, through our Council and our wider team of volunteers, continuing to provide a shared space and venue which tackles issues related to interfaces and contested and non-shared spaces in both urban and rural settings. Our outcomes continue to be greater understanding between people from varied backgrounds; increased knowledge of different cultural and political traditions; confidence to engage in and celebrate peace building and diversity; developing longer-term partnerships; increased community volunteering; improved health and wellbeing and a sense of shared, diverse community.

Adult Programme

Our adult programme, including the Seedbed project, has delivered more than 150 sessions since July 2023 with an average attendance of 11 people. It is attended by around 60 mainly older people from both rural and urban settings where there is limited opportunity for social and educational interaction and relevant and positive cross-community engagement. Many people of this generation lived through the conflict and some have been impacted in ways that affect their health and wellbeing.

A group of volunteers led a consultation with service users in October 2023 and revised and developed our adult programmes to be delivered by volunteers. From October 2023 to March 2024 we continued to work with adults, predominantly older people from both rural and urban settings, who have limited opportunities for social and educational interaction and relevant and positive cross-community engagement. On a daily basis a variety of physical and

creative activities are taking place at Glebe House, from Chi Me to the Singing Circle, local history and culture, study visits and crafts. The programmes are fun and interactive and promote social inclusion through the mediums of sport, food, art, teambuilding and creative workshops. They promote emotional wellbeing and help participants make connections with each other and across communities, as well as providing opportunities for volunteering and leadership.

Children and Young People's Programme

Our young people's programme, which we paused in September 2023, engaged 16 young people in 18 sessions and two residential. These were cross-community engagements for young people from the 20% most deprived wards/SOAs in Newry, Mourne and Down and Ards and North Down council areas, where the segregated nature of housing and schooling has meant that hardline political expression continues and is supported or at least seen as a normal part of everyday life.

The programme supported young people who did not find it easy, for a variety of complex reasons, to fit in well with mainstream youth and community programmes. Since September 2023, without a youth worker, we have not been able to provide the consistency of communication that is needed with these young people and with parents, carers and professionals and have therefore suspended the HCT children and youth programme. With the help of year two of core funding from the Community Relations Council and other grants we plan to resume our youth programme in 2024/25.

The Seedbed community gardening and environment project

After months of planning including community engagement, in March 2023 we opened the Seedbed, a community gardening and environment project using some of our land at Glebe House. The idea came from a participant in the Glebe House Adult Programme and was developed with initial financial and other support from Cooperative Alternatives through the Cultivating Community Farming programme. We are grateful also to Axa Parks, PowerNI, the Community Foundation NI and the Department for Infrastructure for their financial support for the Seedbed.

We launched the Seedbed in November 2022, started off in January 2023 with a workshop at Glebe House on biodiversity, and opened it officially for growing on 11 March.

The purpose of the Seedbed is to afford opportunities for people to reconnect with the process of growing food and flowers; develop sustainable systems; nurture our land and enhance biodiversity in Lecale.

Our intentions with the Seedbed were to build a welcoming, creative and exciting social gardening space where people will reconnect to nature and each other, and to open our land to people, neighbours and communities for food- and flower-growing, nature conservation and friendships.

That vision is now a reality. We have a thriving Seedbed community with members coming together at least weekly and coming and going the rest of the time during daylight hours. The progress in the first 15 months has been inspirational and we are only beginning to understand the potential in the Seedbed to enhance other programmes at Glebe House and to enrich the lives of the members and the local community.

The Seedbed is bringing together a diverse group of people to volunteer and learn from and about each other. The engagement of refugees from Syria in this project has enriched everyone's experience and learning. This was captured in a feature broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in October 2023.

Tots'n' Teenies - our new programme for toddlers, babies and their families

In February 2024 we opened *Tots 'n' Teenies*, a volunteer-led project is designed to provide a welcoming, safe, satisfying, exciting and inclusive play experience for babies, children under school age and their parents and carers, in the beautiful rural setting that is Glebe House. The project is also intended to promote the use of Glebe House as a community asset among families in the Kilclief/Lecale/Downpatrick area.

Sessions are held each Thursday morning. To date almost 30 families have registered and average weekly attendance has been 11 families.

Facilitated by the project leaders, at the first sessions the parents and carers generated a list of activities for the children. As well as crafts and outdoor and educational activities to stimulate young minds, the participants identified messy play and sensory experiences as especially valuable. Participants felt that this was not available to them locally. Messy play has become the most popular activity, even with the smallest, and with the parents and carers. Given young children's instinct to explore new things by putting them in their mouths, the messy play materials are all edible and the results are edible.

The project is designed to be inclusive of children and adults with disabilities, and a number of our participants to date have disabilities. The Harry Corscadden Building at Glebe House, where the indoor activities take place, and the immediate surrounding area within the Glebe House property, are fully accessible, with no steps or stairs.

Summary Statement of Financial Activities

Year ending 31 March 2023

		2023	Restated
		£	2022
			£
Incoming resources			
Generated funds			
Voluntary income	*	56,153	41,958
Activities for generating funds		673	718
Charitable activities			
Core grants	*	23,621	53,494
Programme activities	*	135,536	116,756
Other income		-	-
Total incoming resources		<u>215,983</u>	<u>212,926</u>
Resources expended			
Cost of generating voluntary income		3,424	2,647
Charitable activities	*	264,443	210,894
Governance costs		4,600	4,600
Total resources expended		<u>272,467</u>	<u>205,422</u>
Net outgoing resources for the year		(56,484)	7,504
Funds brought forward		<u>417,425</u>	<u>409,921</u>
Total funds carried forward		<u>360,491</u>	<u>417,425</u>

* includes restricted fund income of £18,323, £23,621 and £128,741 and costs £164,862

BALANCE SHEET

31 March 2023

		2023	Restated
		£	2022
			£
Fixed assets		619,635	615,514
Current assets - Debtors and cash at bank and in hand		36,785	79,076
Creditors falling due within one year		<u>(55,341)</u>	<u>(37,026)</u>
Net current (liabilities) assets		<u>(18,556)</u>	<u>42,050</u>
Creditors falling due after one year		-	-
Net assets		<u>601,080</u>	<u>657,564</u>
Reserves			
Unrestricted funds – general funds		320,818	383,125
revaluation reserve		240,139	240,139
Restricted funds		40,123	34,300
TOTAL FUNDS		<u>601,080</u>	<u>404,706</u>

Figures extracted from the audited accounts.

Honorary Treasurer's Report

The balance sheet reflects the revaluation of the property to be carried at market valuation rather than cost, resulting in the restatement of 2022 figures.

The net outgoing resources reflect the increased staffing costs of the investment in a director. In the following year, rather than achieving increased income from this investment, government funding was substantially reduced resulting in the decision to make all staff redundant in the autumn. Adult programmes have been continued with the substantial support of volunteers. 8 acres of unused land have been sold which has enabled the clearance of bank overdraft indebtedness and creation of a small cash reserve going forward. Funding applications are in process to enable normal programme activity to return.

People at Harmony Community Trust, 2023

Staff at Glebe House	HCT Council of Management
Andrew McCracken, Director, until end of September 2023	Seamus Camplisson, Chair
Tara Crilly, Programme Worker, Children and Youth, until end of September 2023	David Boyd, Hon. Treasurer
Colin McKinty, Development Worker, Adult Programme, until end of September 2023	Judith Thompson, Company Secretary
Naomi McNally, Programme Worker, Children, until August 2023	Sharon Heaney, until January 2024
Caroline McAlea, Cleaner, until end of September 2023	Garvin Loughrin
Michelle McDowell, Administrator and sessional worker on Children and Youth Programme, until July 2023	Janice McDonald
Patrick O'Neill, Cook, until November 2023	Gavin Morgan
—————	Bill Osborne, until November 2023
Ann Barker, Volunteer Coordinator, pro bono	Maureen Ridgway
	Rob Sterrett
	Paul Thompson