



SHAFTESBURY
COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTRE

Managed by The Lower Ouse Residents Action Group (LORAG)



LORAG
ANNUAL
REPORT
2024-2025
www.lorag.org

CONTENTS

3	Foreword from the chairperson
4	LORAG overview
7	Children and young people
11	Health
14	Community cohesion
19	Treasurer's report

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

During 2024-2025, Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) maintained a cradle to the grave approach in the organisation's delivery of services with a key focus around children, young people and families to deliver holistic support to families with children aged from 2-18 years. Core projects in the areas of children, youth, health and community cohesion operated extremely successfully, achieving key targets in terms of numbers and diversity as well as the quality and effectiveness of the programmes across work teams within LORAG. Throughout 2024-2025, LORAG maintained its aim of delivering community services while implementing the strategic aims of community growth and regeneration.

Throughout this period, Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre opened Monday to Sunday covering 96+ opening hours per week, 355 days per year with an average daily footfall of 800 people. This is a clear indication of LORAG's commitment and ability to deliver quality needs-led services on behalf of the community.

LORAG's delivery helps the Northern Ireland Assembly to deliver key Programme for Government targets and targets for a wide range of other policies such as:

- **Together: Building a United Community strategy**
- **The Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031, with particular reference to Theme one: Promoting mental wellbeing, resilience and good mental health across society**
- **The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030**

I would like to offer a very sincere thank you to all funders whom I trust recognise the return that LORAG provides for both funders and for government. These funders make all the work laid out in this annual report possible.

Final thanks to the 29 staff who delivered the excellent programmes detailed in this report – none of this exemplary work would be possible without you.



LORAG OVERVIEW

Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) continued to deliver and enhance a range of important services to meet its strategic goals of providing health, social, leisure and developmental activities while developing the socio-economic profile of the area. This was achieved across several work areas:

YOUTH PROVISION

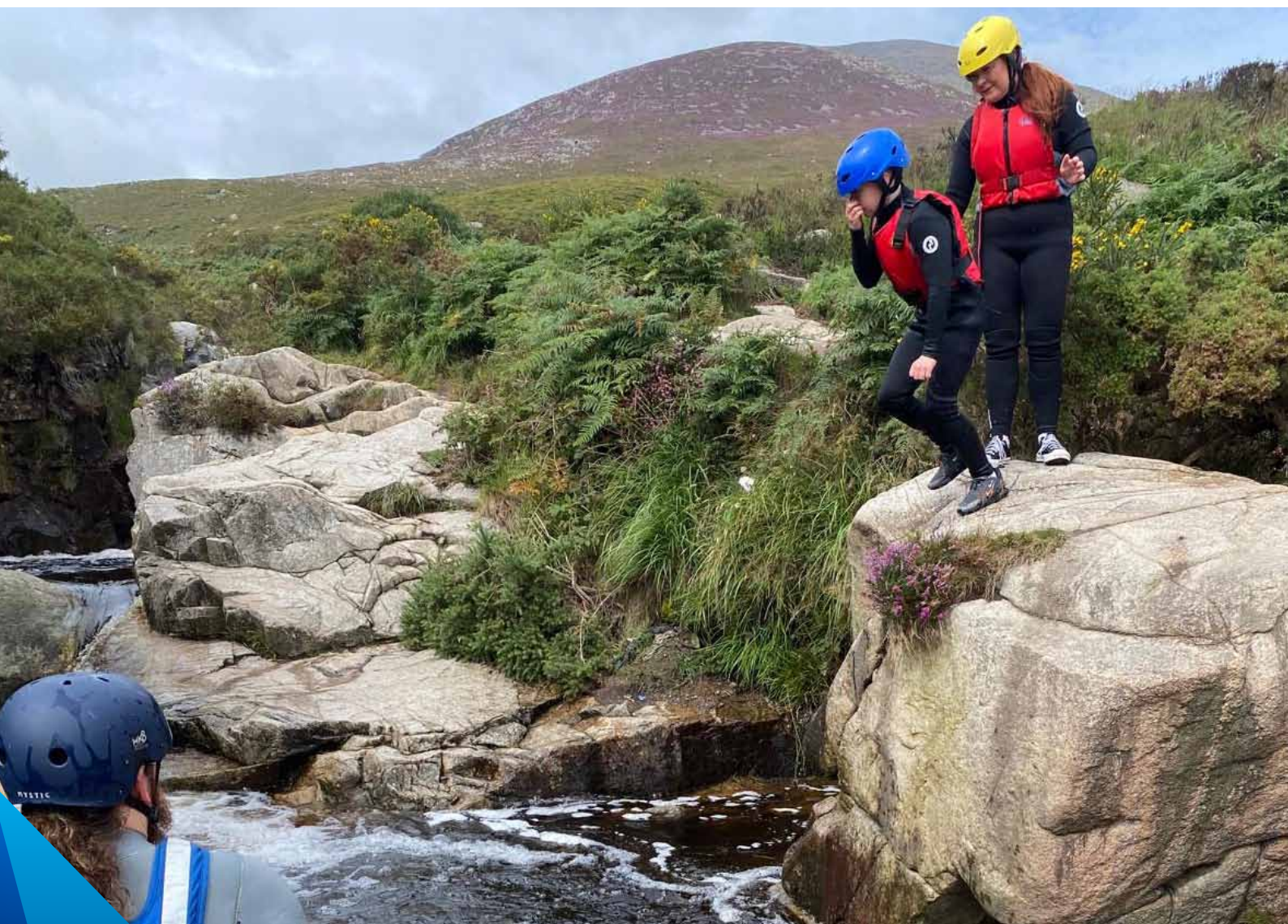
Throughout 2024-2025, LORAG worked to reintroduce Education Authority (EA) services to the community based in St John Vianney Youth Club. LORAG, in partnership with the Parish, Down Conor Diocese and youth partners undertook a plan to reopen the facility. The aim was to establish a New Company (New Com) to support the delivery of youth services. The New Com will eventually act as lead supported by LORAG and the diocese. In the interim, LORAG will oversee the transition.

The plan facilitated the employment of a full time

senior youth worker in charge and a part time youth work assistant, along with programme and running costs until 2026. The youth services recommenced from Shaftesbury Recreation Centre from December 2024 with the plan to reopen the Youth Centre in the St John Vianney building in early April 2025.

As part of the plan, a facility audit was undertaken which identified a range of key capital works. A request was made to Belfast City Council (BCC) and the Department for Communities (DfC) for capital funding to undertake the urgent essential works required to reopen. DfC funding also allowed for delivery of core youth services to provide a safe space for young people to develop their skills, understand relationships and take part in a range of personal development programmes.

Due to funding restrictions, LORAG had to prioritise the delivery of day-to-day youth services over the delivery of support for those not engaging in regular youth service provision, adding to the isolation of those young people not engaged. This will be addressed in 2024-2025 with plans for detached provision being explored'.





HEALTH AND WELLBEING

As a Healthy Living Centre, community health and well-being are at the core of all LORAG projects. During 2024-2025, LORAG delivered bespoke needs-led health programmes, designed to improve community health and wellbeing.

The Healthwise programme provided access to the gym with specialist one-to-one instruction for attendees. LORAG was able to deliver these programmes by creating key partnerships within the Inner South Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) funded the GP referral based Talking Therapies. The LORAG service is very flexible, delivered morning, evenings and weekends.

BHSCT funded LORAG to act as the lead organisation for the South Belfast One Family Support Hub (the Hub), which formed part of the wider Belfast Family Support Hub network.

The Hub is a multi-agency network of statutory, community and voluntary organisations that support families with children aged 0-18 who may benefit from early intervention services. In addition, funding from Belfast City Council enabled the Hub to deliver a vital voucher scheme to support families experiencing financial hardship.

The Hub involved strong partnership working, connecting families to the right support, and measuring the impact of the interventions provided. The Hub is now in its tenth year and continues to go from strength to strength.

LORAG continued to give and receive support from the Healthy Living Alliance (HLA) with LORAG acting as lead partner for Better Days Pain Support programme, co-ordinating delivery of 45 regional pain management programmes through a Health and Social Care contract. LORAG secured a five-year contract with the HLA through the Department of Health's Strategic Planning and Performance Group to co-ordinate this regional programme.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Core development funding continued through the Department for Communities Belfast Regeneration Neighbourhood Renewal programme, supporting LORAG's delivery of children and youth-based services and the wider development of services from Shaftesbury. At key times of school closures, LORAG ran diversionary and themed programmes along with sports camps for children and young people.

Early Years under the Pathways Fund funded a First Start programme delivered from Shaftesbury Recreation Centre for children aged 2-4 years and their families. The programme included crucial engagement with parents throughout the year. This project is in high demand within the area delivering seven plus sessions per week.





CREATING COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

The Creating Cohesive Communities (CCC) project provided a diverse range of programmes supported by funding from The Executive Office (TEO) with additional funding from Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Clanmil Housing Association. These funds enabled LORAG to work with key partners delivering good relations work within the Lower Ormeau, Botanic, Market and Donegall Pass and wider south Belfast areas.

The CCC project has been key in developing the Lockhouse programme delivered from the community garden, poly-tunnel and shed. A core group of volunteers has grown to give life to these important good relations initiatives.

JOHN MURRAY LOCKHOUSE AND BOATHOUSE

LORAG completed a business case on the John Murray Lockhouse project in 2020/21 with a further good relations business case completed and approved by Urban Villages/TEO in 2022. A diverse range of partners and funders have supported the project which aims to develop a Healthy Living hub focusing on emotional wellbeing, a key issue identified during the community consultation.

The building will house a café opening on to the towpath, two large activity rooms for wellbeing activities, cookery facilities and a conference room for groups to meet. It will open onto a community garden and shed where horticulture and boat building will be the focus. LORAG has also furthered the aim to develop onto the water and provide an access point for groups to use



downstream. The community garden and shed element, now completed, have become a hive of activity, particularly for adults who have reported feeling isolated and/or lonely.

The adjacent NI Water old pumping station site was secured by LORAG under a 99 year lease. LORAG aims to construct a boat store and operational base for the future delivery of water sports activities. Design and build plans have been submitted to Planning in Belfast City Council (BCC) for approval.

While planning permission for the wider Lockhouse was agreed in April 2023 and the contractor appointed in 2024, the build programme was delayed due to a disused NI Water storm overflow pipe uncovered along the River Terrace edge of the site. This meant the project had to undertake a major redesign, delaying the build completion until at least 2026. LORAG is grateful for BCC's support with this major project.

The Urban Villages/TEO programme funded a range of programmes aimed at animating and preparing the Lockhouse project for eventual completion. This engagement highlighted many challenges for the project due in part to the fact that Belfast people have lived with their backs to the river. For many, the Lagan is viewed as an unsafe, unclean place, fraught with danger. LORAG linked with Maritime Belfast, becoming members of the Waterfront Tasking Group. A key aim of this group is to ensure that Belfast, through its waterfront and connections, becomes the first Blueway in Ireland. LORAG's Lockhouse offers a unique community led opportunity to become integral to the Ireland Urban Blueway initiative.

FESTIVAL PROGRAMME

The wider Féile na hAbhann programme has become a major attraction with events held in the historic St George's Market. This festival was a partnership with Féile an Phobail and a consortium of south and east Belfast partners. LORAG aims to build on the festival and its successful delivery and to expand over the next few years to create a buzz for the city.

LORAG's plans were adapted throughout the year to best meet the community's need for services while responding to the inflationary cost of fuel/energy, rising food prices and the impact this is having for many within the community.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



CHILDREN'S PROJECT

LORAG's children's project is targeted at children aged 5-11. Throughout 2024-2025, LORAG delivered sessions five days a week. Each of these contained a variety of different opportunities for children to access everything from social and emotional skills to healthy eating workshops. Sessions ran for two hours and the aim was to provide children with a safe, fun space after a day at school.

Sessions were planned so that the children were able to benefit and learn as much as possible during the session. The programme incorporated personal and physical development, literacy, STEM and creative development into all sessions making them interesting and fun for the children.

Each session was based around various themes throughout the year. These made great talking points for children who were eager to see how the room and activities changed to meet the different themes.

As well as the daily sessions, LORAG ran a homework club. This was a highly requested service for children who may struggle to complete their work at home.

LORAG also ran a very successful cookery workshop for children to encourage healthy eating. Children were also encouraged to get involved in food preparation and the making of the food to encourage independence as well as teaching them to be safe in the kitchen.

Throughout 2024-2025, the children's project provided a space in which children were excited and keen to attend. The team within the children's project successfully created that space.

FIRST START

First Start is a programme aimed at children from birth to the age of four.

Throughout 2024-2025, sessions ran for two hours. Within that time, children could access role-play, construction, art activities, outdoor play and every child was given a healthy snack. Sessions were focused on learning through play and the setting offered a range of areas that encouraged children to explore imaginative, creative and messy play.

The First Start programme thrived on empowering families and involving them

in programmes that were beneficial for both children and parents. Throughout the year, several Stay and Play sessions were delivered for parents to come into the setting with their children and see firsthand what their child does each day.

A high level of staff involvement ensured that children felt safe and secure in the setting, whilst promoting independence was also encouraged. Sessions were planned so that all areas of a child's development were met. Children were encouraged to explore all areas of the room.

The First Start programme was a much sought after service. We had high numbers of parents registering their children to attend. The children that come into the First Start programme often go on to attend other services within LORAG such as the afterschool's programme and youth programme in later years. This is a testament to the impact of the First Start programme.

CHILDREN'S PROJECT

CHILDREN'S AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT 2024-2025:

Seven
week summer
scheme for children
aged 5-11 for 80
children

Five
sessions per week
for children ages 5-11
for 60 children

Seven
week sports camp
for children aged 5-11
for 90 children

A total of
230
children attended
activities over the
year

Four
parent engagement
sessions throughout
the year

”

PARENTAL FEEDBACK

‘Thank you for all the cooking lessons, she is enjoying cooking with me, thanks again’

‘My daughter can be extremely anxious when trying new things, but staff reassured her and put her at ease and she relaxed into the workshop amazingly well’.

”

CHILD FEEDBACK

‘I love coming to the club every day. I learn lots and it makes me happy’.

FIRST START

CHILDREN’S AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT 2024-2025:

”

PARENTAL FEEDBACK

‘My son attends the 2 yr programme. I cannot recommend this programme enough; he is speech and language delayed and the benefit he has got out of this programme has been amazing. The staff are so committed to the children and they really help them thrive’.

Three

nursery sessions
per week: 16
children attending
each session

ONE

parent and
toddler session per
week: 10 parents; 10-
12 children

Seven

week summer
scheme: 28 children
attending each
session

Three

2 year sessions per
week: 12 children
attending each
session

38

children attending
sessions weekly
including parent and
toddler



YOUTH HUB

It was a very difficult year for LORAG youth and children's services with the closure of the fulltime Education Authority (EA) funded youth club St John Vianney. This meant LORAG was the only children and young people's provider in the area. For both the youth and children staff teams, the closure of the service left little time for respite.

LORAG's staff teams quickly adapted to being the only provider of children and youth services in the community. The revised activities for the most part took the form of club-based games, arts, sporting activities with a sprinkling of trips. Sessions were packed with participants which placed a strain on staff, resources and facilities. LORAG staff once again stepped up to the challenge presented and went over and above to ensure that all those that sought to be involved were provided with the opportunity.

In the background, LORAG, following a well-attended community public meeting, was tasked to protect and secure both the youth facility and funding that had been available for any future area-based youth service. Led by LORAG, youth providers came together to devise a community action plan that could eventually see the service return. The outgoing parish committee of: St John Vianney, the Down and Connor Diocese, EA Youth Services and Belfast City Council (BCC) are to be commended for their efforts to get the youth club reopened for the spring of 2025.

Following great efforts, the funding was secured from EA to cover staff salaries, programme and running costs. Supported by the parish and the

Youth Work Alliance, a new youth team has been recruited to oversee the reintroduction of services from the setting.

There is still much to be done, the facility needs many repairs, with no heating or hot water just a few of the obstacles to be overcome before services can resume. LORAG in partnership with the Department for Communities, Urban Villages and BCC teams have made progress towards finding the funding to undertake these works.

LORAG would like to take this opportunity to commend all those that have supported these efforts to date, the hard work has been made easy by your collective efforts. On behalf of the families of the Lower Ormeau thank you.



HEALTHY LIVING



GYM

The gym thrived throughout 2024-2025. The new equipment purchased in 2022 – treadmills and skiErg - have been well used. During this period, the gym had:

- **234** members
- **192** gym users
- **42** class participants
- **Ten** classes per week in areas such as strength and tone, express circuit and freestyle pump and core
- Additional classes in pilates, yoga, social sports and Zumba

HEALTHWISE

- **308** referrals were made by health professionals through Healthwise with a 67% completion rate.
- There were two mobility and strength classes
- The walking group met once a week. Trips were both local and regional with 14-16 participants on each walk.
- The gym offered the community a holistic service which has improved the physical and mental wellbeing of young, middle aged and older participants.



TALKING THERAPIES

LORAG's two counsellors delivered six sessions to tier two clients referred from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Clients were offered six sessions either face-to-face, online or over the telephone. During 2024-2025, LORAG delivered:

- **985** one to one counselling sessions with:
- **785** attendees
- **52** appointments were not attended by participants
- **1146** allocated sessions through the year
- delivery rate of **85.95%**

This shows the impact of the Talking Therapies programme which delivered to great capacity.

INNER SOUTH HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE

Throughout 2024-2025, LORAG's Healthy Living Centre was a member of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Panel, Belfast Area Outcomes Group, Belfast Community Planning Partnership and the South Belfast Locality Planning Group. LORAG facilitated workshops to develop a new two year Neighbourhood Renewal action plan.

Through the Forward South Development Fund, LORAG provided funding for food and resources to market kitchen wellbeing. LORAG delivered cook-it programmes which aimed to improve the nutritional awareness of parents within Inner South Belfast. The Healthy Living Centre also led the Inner South Food and Beyond scheme, which supported over 400 households in food poverty alongside three partner organisations. Take 5 was promoted across all health programmes.



”

‘Amazing and fun group, I love meeting new people’.

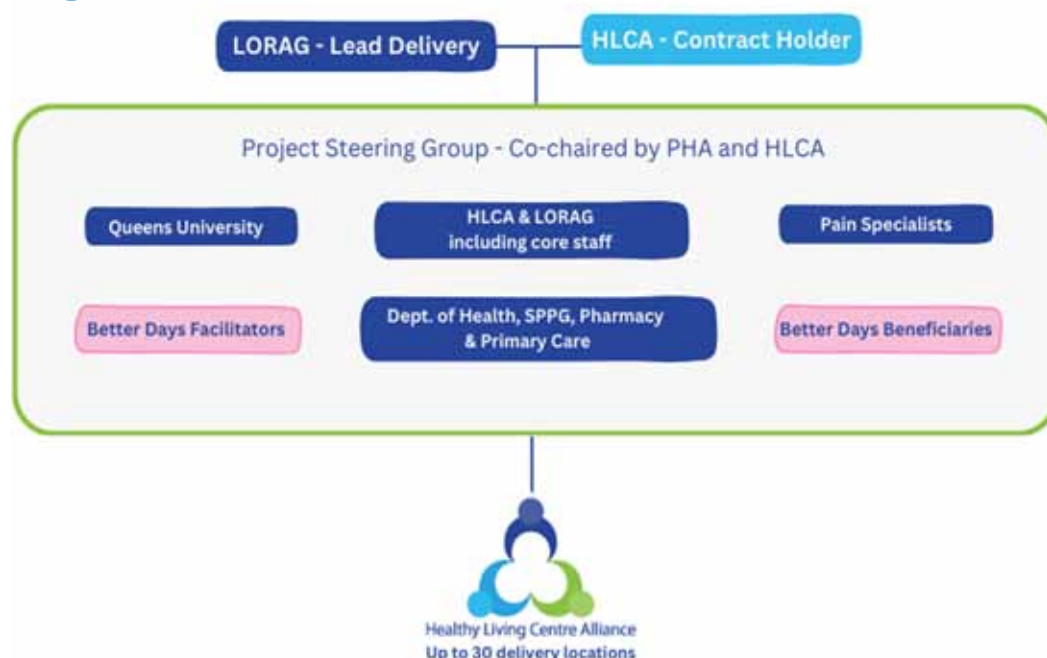
OLDER AND ACTIVE PROGRAMME

Every Thursday between 10.30am and 12.30pm, the Older and Active Group brought people together to socialise and do an activity. Older and Active aimed to improve the quality of life, health and wellbeing within the local and wider community.

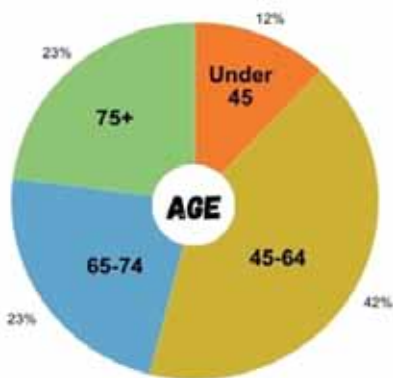
The programme offered a warm and welcome environment that provided a safe space within a socially inclusive programme which offered fun activities which included exercise, bingo, boccia, dance, art and crafts, trips. Older people were served a nutritious, tasty lunch at every session.

- **Group has grown over the years from 4 members to 30 members**
- **Older and Active group has 4 Sessions per month, 48 sessions per year.**

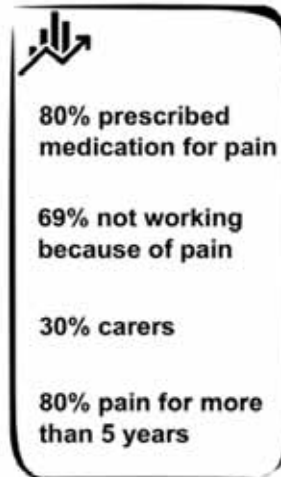
PAIN SUPPORT



- **A co-designed community development approach to living well with long-term pain**
- **Collaborative cross-sectoral project aimed at improving health and wellbeing**
- **for people experiencing chronic pain in Northern Ireland**
- **Regional project delivered across 30 Healthy Living Centres**



2024
SUMMARY



FEEDBACK

motivated support positive acceptance connect understanding balance informative in-control community routine socialise changes less-alone

CASE STUDY:

Age: 46

Conditions/ pain: Functional Neurological Disorder

How did you find out about the programme?
GP practice

'Having been diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder recently (within the last few months) I have had to adjust very quickly to my condition. I have taken part in the Better Days Programme and have been introduced to new ways to approach different aspects of my condition. I found the sessions gave me ideas to try to help with aspects of my condition I find particularly challenging - like for example being able to switch off and be distracted from my pain. I found the 'keeping busy' elements of the programme very helpful and continue to find new hobbies and activities to help my mental health. The friendship and team spirit in the group was a real positive. Everyone all trying to help each other with tips and tools and the willingness to share information was refreshing in a very forward looking way and not in a negative

aspect at all. I have now went on to join other sessions within CRUN and build on friendships formed. I find getting out of the house and active again has really helped my outlook and mood.'

”

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"It is good to be with other people challenged by a life of pain. It is good to share problems and learn of possible solutions. It is good to be able to discuss your pain and its problems and not be judged. It is good to share!"

FAMILY SUPPORT HUB

The South Belfast One Family Support Hub (the Hub) played a vital role in connecting families with the right support services in the local community. Over the period April 24-March 25, the Hub experienced continuous growth in referrals and service delivery which reflected increased awareness of the work of the Hub and the growing needs of local families.

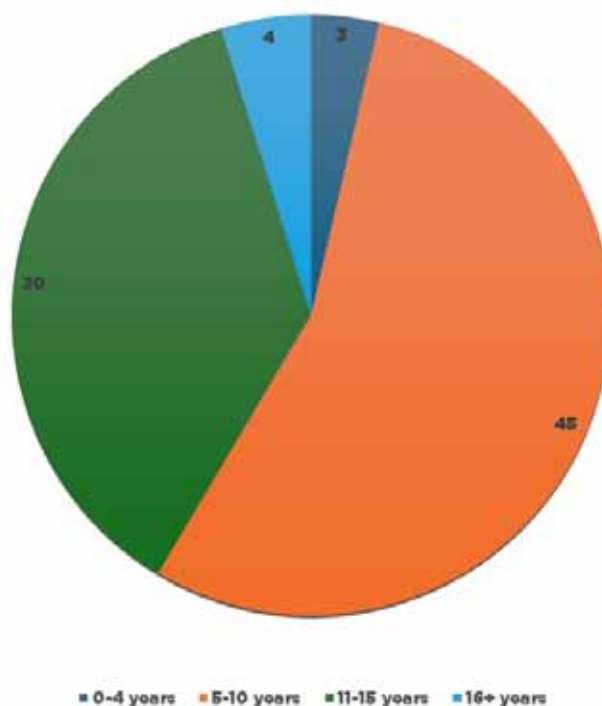
During 24/25, the Hub received a total of 303 referrals against a target baseline of 180 referrals. This represents a 68% increase and clearly demonstrates the demand for the services provided by the Family Support Hub and its member organisations.

- **273 parents were referred to the hub**
- **82 children received support**
- **These referrals generated 453 individual service requests**
- **The Hub successfully facilitated 499 services, exceeding the number of requests**

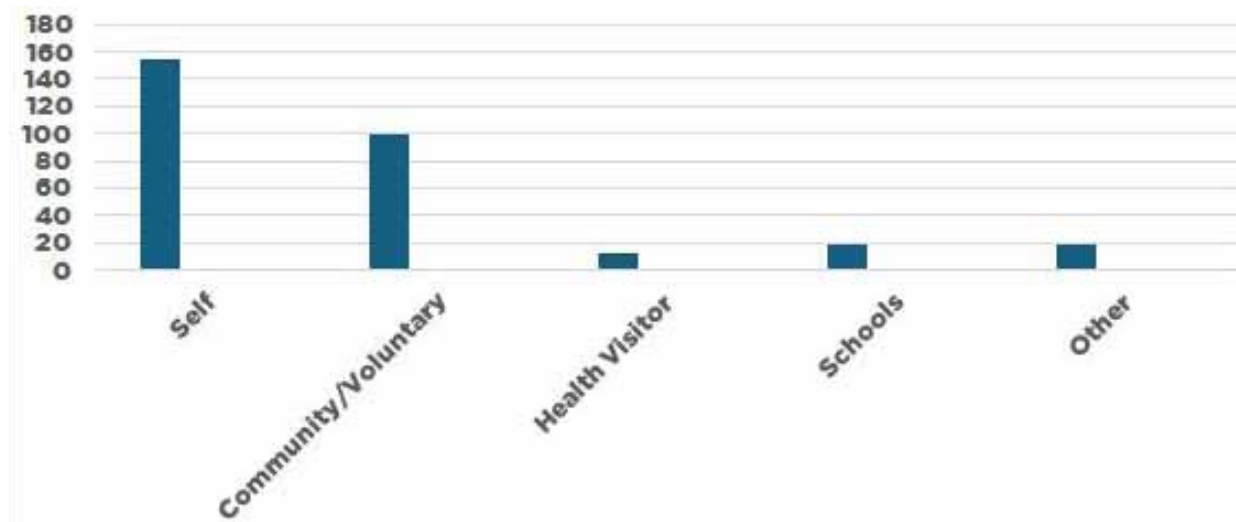
In September 2024, the Hub hosted a coffee morning event that brought together all member organisations. The event provided an opportunity for members to share updates on their current services and initiatives, as well as gaining an overview of the types of referrals being received by the Hub. It also strengthened collaboration and helped build stronger relationships across the network, fostering a more connected and coordinated approach to supporting families.

In December 2024 the Family Support Hub worked with Aquinas Grammar School who generously donated a large number of food hampers. The hampers were made possible through donations from the school's pupils. These hampers were then distributed to many local families, helping them through the Christmas period.

Age range of children receiving support



SOURCE OF REFERRALS



TOP REASONS FOR REFERRAL:

- Parenting support/parent programmes
- Emotional health and wellbeing - adults
- Emotional health and wellbeing - children
- Practical support
- Christmas support
- Housing support

Feedback received from parents highlighted the positive impact of the Hub and the difference it made to their lives. Many parents expressed appreciation for the support, understanding and guidance they received through the Hub and its member organisations. Parents also reported that the Hub was easily accessible and that they felt welcomed and supported without any sense of judgment.

The high number of referrals and the effective coordination of support services demonstrated the Hub's success in meeting the needs of local families. The Hub would like to sincerely thank all partner organisations, staff and volunteers for their dedication and commitment to improving outcomes for families and children in our community.

CREATING COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

The Creating Cohesive Communities (CCC) project provided opportunities to dispel myths, increase understanding and foster a sense of belonging within and between communities. Throughout 2024-2025, CCC built good relations amongst neighbours through the men's and women's good neighbour programme and in the delivery of intercultural festival events.





FESTIVAL PROGRAMME

LORAG's festivals attracted a high number of people who engaged in a wide variety of cultural activities.

FÉILE NA HABHANN

LORAG led the consortium which delivered Féile na hAbhann for the fifth year in 2024 as a waterway celebration festival. The festival showcased the river Lagan and the connecting towpath with over 11,000 people attending what has become an annual event. The festival was family friendly, safe, welcoming and fun for everyone.

- Over 11,000 people attended
- 25 volunteers

HARVEST FESTIVAL

- 300 people attended
- 11 volunteers

WINTER FESTIVAL

- 350 people attended
- 15 volunteers

SPRING FESTIVAL

- 400 people attended
- LORAG ran a water station for 5,000 runners for the CRAIC 10k run on St. Patrick's Day
- 8 volunteers

OTHER FESTIVAL EVENTS

- LORAG hosted Eid Mubarak after Ramadan 2025:
- 150 participants (mostly from the Somalian community)

FESTIVAL OUTCOMES

- Creative opportunities to celebrate seasons, the river Lagan and local artists
- Opportunities to socialise, learn, engage with people from different cultures and have fun for people living in and visiting Inner South Belfast



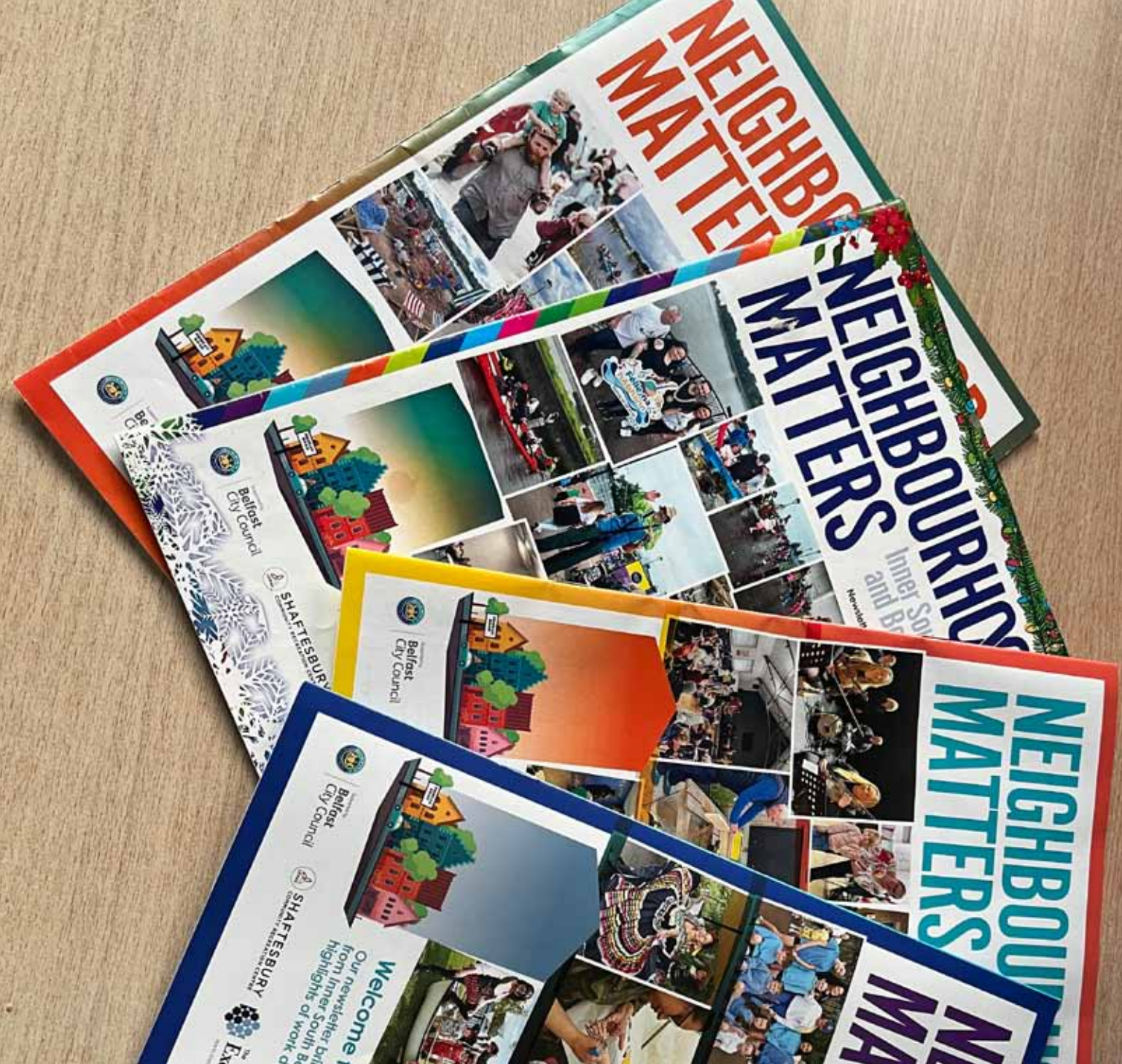
GARDEN AND WOODWORK GROUPS

- 25 participants most of whom are active volunteers

During the monitoring period, gardening participants attended an accredited NCFE course in garden horticulture delivered by the Conservation Volunteers. The course lasted 12 weeks. It was valuable for participants to learn key garden and life skills and to bring them back to the LORAG garden.

OUTCOMES

- New skills developed in DIY and woodwork
- Woodworkers helped to create a more vibrant community by creating colourful planters for local alleyways and charity shops.
- Participants used this as a way of opening up conversation around different cultures for example the flowers that represent the countries across the world.



NEIGHBOURHOOD MATTERS

- Two editions published 2024-2025
- Delivered to over 4,000 homes throughout Lower Ormeau, the Market, Donegall Pass and the Holyland

OUTCOME

- Positive stories from these areas have been celebrated, written up, disseminated and archived

STRATEGIC NETWORKING FORUM

- Nine meetings throughout 2024-2025
- Over 60 groups are engaged with the Forum – statutory groups, voluntary and community groups, local and regional government representatives



TREASURER'S REPORT

Throughout 2024-2025, LORAG secured the necessary funding to implement and develop the vital services laid out in this report. Main funders (over £40,000) this year were:

- **Belfast City Council (capacity): £52,469**
- **Belfast City Council (revenue): £76,984**
- **Belfast City Council (Social Supermarket Support Fund): £44,000**
- **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: £166,896**
- **Department for Communities: £106,415**
- **Education Authority (Belfast region): £50,883**
- **The Executive Office: £44,267**
- **Healthy Living Alliance (pain support): £44,795**
- **Public Health Agency: £87,272**

Belfast City Council's revenue grant for the management of Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre continued with additional funds for capacity building along with a range of small programme grants. This allowed LORAG to offer support to smaller organisations

and fledgling groups seeking support in the delivery of their programmes, governance and development.

Income from the hire of services has allowed LORAG to maintain some financial resources for the replacement, repair and renewal of equipment and increased salaries. However, pressures are rising with current fuel, gas and electricity costs up on the previous year, putting huge financial pressure on the organisation. LORAG is increasingly dependent on the income generated from within to meet additional costs. This year saw an increase in earned income to £183,053, almost 20% of overall operating costs.

Essential to LORAG's efforts to maintain and develop the organisation as a key community development provider has been the organisation's ability to retain staff. LORAG has sought to ensure that staff salaries align with current NJC pay scales, but this has placed considerable pressure on the organisation, with an increase in salaries of £1,290 for 2024-2025 (pro rata for part time salaries). LORAG is also very conscious of the rise in Employer National Insurance Contribution for 2025-2026 and the impact this will have on the charity.

LORAG attributes success in securing funding to the recognition of the organisation's work and the buy in from the local community. I would like to thank staff who work within tight budgets to deliver quality programmes for LORAG participants.

A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE AND A VOICE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group was formed in 1987 to support the residents and community of the Lower Ormeau, and was founded with the following specific objectives:

- Build self-confidence and develop activities to meet the needs of the community
- Improve the educational attainment and health of children, young people and adults in the area
- Support local parents in their parenting role and family cycle
- Increase social interaction, community safety and community involvement to reduce feelings of isolation and improve emotional well being
- Improve the ability of local residents to compete for and obtain training and job opportunities
- Respond to local poverty, health inequalities, housing and environmental issues
- Involve relevant statutory and voluntary agencies and in turn feed the views of local residents to policy makers
- Work in partnership with other local communities to achieve these aims where appropriate.

Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group
Shaftesbury Community & Recreation Centre
97 Balfour Avenue, Belfast BT7 2EW
T: 028 9031 2377

www.lorag.org



Belfast
City Council



Housing
Executive



Public Health
Agency



Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust



Healthy Living Centre Alliance



Department of
Education **early years**



Department for
Social
Development
www.dsdni.gov.uk



The
Executive Office



T:buc
Changing for the better together



T:buc
Central Good
Relations Fund



Urban Alliance
Titus