

Chairman' Remarks

Welcome to the 14th Annual General Meeting of The Link Family & Community Centre. The AGM is an important opportunity for all those associated with and/or interested in The Link to get together, to hear what has been achieved and to make a contribution to our plans for the future. It is a pleasure to present my report and to review another successful year of programmes and activities carried out by the staff of The Link, both paid and voluntary.

In this, our first full year in the new Lamont building, which has made a wonderful difference to our working environment and to The Link's impact within the town, we have remained committed to our core purpose of being an active, Christian presence in the community.

Some of the highlights of this past year:

The MARC Project won The Befriending Project Recognition Award in Northern Ireland's Mentoring and Befriending Recognition Awards 2010.

The award, which was presented by Robin Newton, MLA, Junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, are a part of a national campaign, called 'Supporting Life's Journeys', to celebrate and support the many individuals and organisations who help to address poverty and social exclusion through mentoring and befriending.



Steve Matthews, Chief Executive of the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation, which organised the awards, said: 'we had huge numbers of entries to the awards, with many people and projects being nominated by members of the public. It was really difficult for the judges to choose between so many diverse examples of excellence, so we really would like to congratulate the winners; they are incredibly special to have got one of these awards.'

The Link also received recognition by achieving the 'Investing in Volunteers' award.

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations that involve volunteers in their work, and it is unique in that it is the only standard that focuses on volunteers. It is based on four areas of volunteer management; planning for volunteer involvement, recruiting volunteers, selecting and matching volunteers and supporting and retaining volunteers. To achieve the standard, organisations have to demonstrate they are using good practices in ten different areas such as fair recruitment

procedures, properly resourced programmes, policies and procedures in place, adequate induction and support.



The achievement of this prestigious charter mark will provide a benchmark for The Link against which we can measure our performance, identify gaps, further develop our work, and promote the immense contribution volunteers make to the services we provide.

I view the achievement of both these awards as an endorsement of our work.

We feel strongly that part of The Link's role is to stimulate and challenge thought around specific issues relating to community development. To this end we have recently worked in partnership with East Down Rural Community Network and Peninsula Healthy living to produce a Consultation on inter-church and church/community relationships on the Ards Peninsula and with North Down YMCA and the Churches Community Work Alliance in Bangor. In both places steering

groups made up of local interested people are taking the recommendations forward, with the support, knowledge and expertise of staff from The Link supporting them.

We were delighted that the Mayor of Newtownards, Councillor David Smyth selected The Link as his charity for the year, culminating in a very special 'Gala Performance for Ards', which took place in the Ulster Hall, Belfast on 9th April 2011. Father Martin O' Hagan, who serves on the Management Committee of The Link, and Diane Holt, Director of The Link were amongst the soloists who took part.

This was an opportunity to show the variety of talent right across the community in Ards, from a variety of perspectives and we are delighted that so many children and adults took part. It was an uplifting and inspirational evening for all who participated - and a logistical challenge in all sorts of ways - 206 people to get there, accommodate, feed, rehearse and encourage to perform. Londonderry Primary, St. Finians Primary, Movilla High School and Regent House as well as Ards Choral gave fantastic performances. Linda Bryans compared the evening. Funds raised from the concert will bring a very welcome boost to our finances.

As ever, funding continues to be a critical issue for the organisation, and reliance year by year on funding grants from external bodies, which are never

guaranteed, makes forward planning extremely difficult and adds considerable pressure to the work of the staff. In terms of funding, with the current economic climate having a knock-on effect on other funding bodies, a critical period for the sector is ahead of us. It is something that the Management Committee is acutely aware of. To ensure that we are best placed to meet the challenges that lie ahead we have commenced a root and branch review of the infrastructure of The Link. In addition, we shall continue to explore all funding opportunities and to implement strategies to try and address all funding gaps identified.

I am confident that the Management Committee and the staff will rise to meet the challenges presented by the exceptionally difficult funding environment in which we must operate and that they will continue to manage and develop the business of The Link in the best interests of all stakeholders.

It is a rather overworked cliché to say 'our staff is the most valuable resource we have' yet this is most certainly true for The Link. The Management Committee is tremendously proud of all the staff and volunteers associated with The Link and I would like to thank them all for the significant contribution they make in delivering and implementing our strategic objectives throughout the year. The Director, Diane Holt and her team of dedicated and committed staff and volunteers always display a 'can do' attitude to their work and,

in my view, provide the Management Committee with excellence in corporate management.

I would also like to thank all members of the Management Committee for their hard work and effort over the year. You make an invaluable contribution to The Link. I know this represents a substantial commitment of your time to attend Management Committee meetings and at times, sub-committee meetings, but your support is vital if The Link is to continue to prosper and grow. Looking forward to the year ahead, I hope we can encourage new people to take up committee vacancies.

Lastly, but definitely not least, I would like to thank all those who support our work financially. As well as government funders, Trusts and Foundations a number of churches in the town support us as mission, and we have a number of generous people who individually donate to The Link. Your support enables us to fulfill our mission to stimulate, deliver, support and link community development action that values and develops the potential of all people, as an expression of God's love.