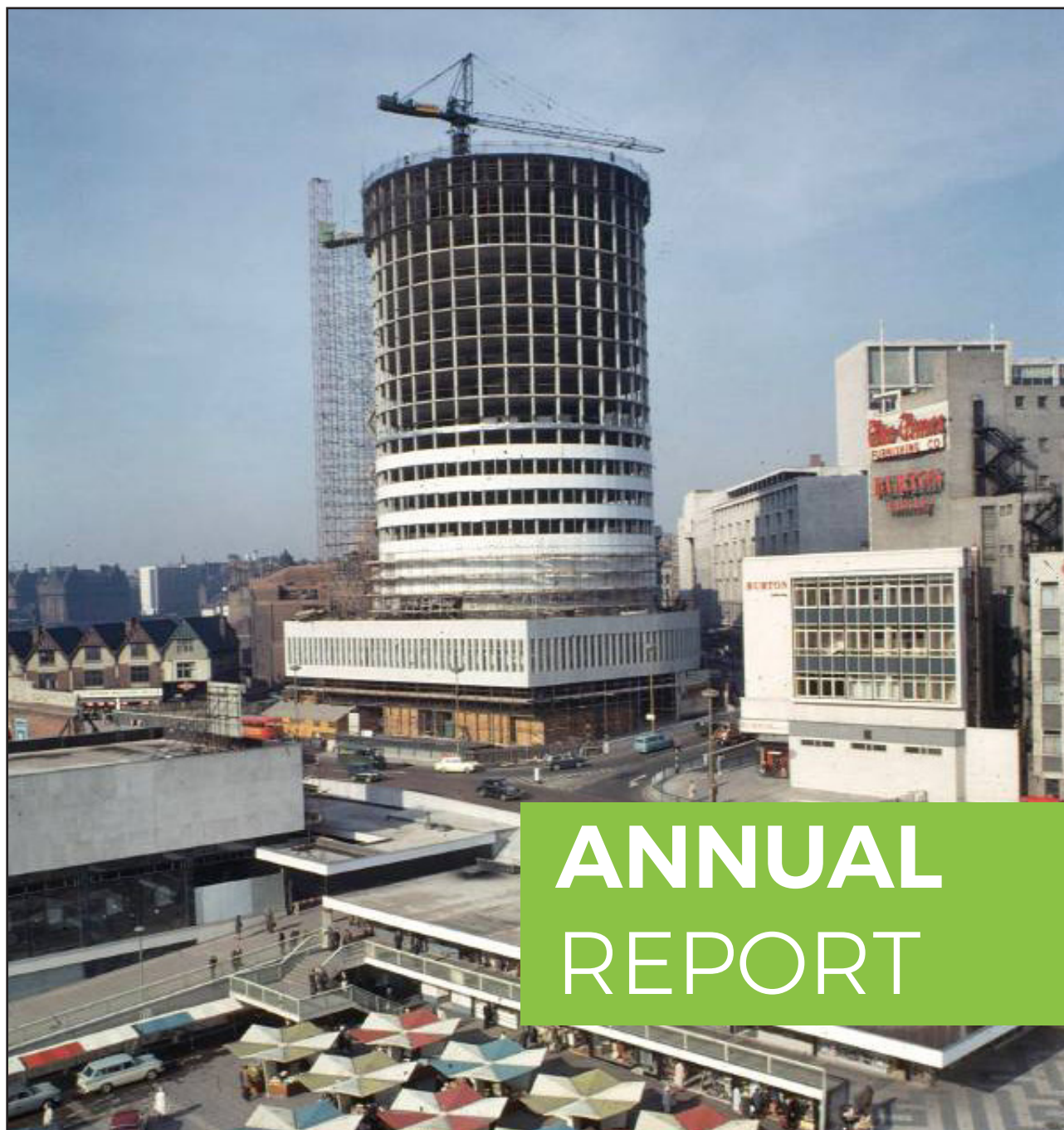




**Birmingham Irish**  
ASSOCIATION

[birminghamirish.org.uk](http://birminghamirish.org.uk)



# ANNUAL REPORT



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# What have we been up to?

“Through our organisational values Accessibility, Commitment, Ethics and Partnerships we benefit the Irish Community by providing a fit for purpose organisation that has adapted to the changing needs of the Diaspora”

Family Support - Providing support to young children and their families with issues such as bullying, selfesteem, lack of confidence, isolation, welfare, debt, housing issues and family relationships.

Social Inclusion - Providing an opportunity for clients to take part in stimulating activities, social interaction, and access to advice and personal support aimed at alleviating loneliness, social isolation and depression and dementia care.

Primary Care - Supporting older adults who may be suffering from physical and mental health problems and are having difficulty in engaging with statutory services with the aim of improving their quality of life and personal wellbeing.

Bereavement Project - Volunteers trained in bereavement and helping others get back on their feet following a loss through friendship and support.

Befriending Project - Providing a friend and confident maybe to those isolated in the community or fellow countrymen arriving from Ireland looking for a support network to establish themselves.

Volunteer Project - A vital service for the organisation complementing the staff team and welcoming clients through the front reception, looking up a hot meal or teaching people how to surf the net!

Culture and Heritage - Promoting Irish culture and heritage in Birmingham and developing activities that enhance Irish identity and a vibrant active community.



Information and Advice Project - A service aimed at providing help on a wide range of issues from applying for Irish passports, seeking accommodation, booking flights, tracing family members to advice with debt and Welfare benefits.

Oral History Project - Telling the story of the men and women who contributed to building the infrastructure of Birmingham.



# Statement from the CEO Maurice Malone

"We are proud to be celebrating 60 years of work with and for the Irish community in Birmingham.

Understanding changes within the community and reaching those who have been here for many years as well as those who have recently arrived."

Every year we take time to reflect on our achievements, learn from what we have done, plan for the future and in particular set the direction for the coming year. Each time we do this we are struck by how much is achieved and just how much we owe to the community who inspire us, our partners who support us, our funders who enable us and our community in all its vibrancy, diversity and energy. In this report we aim to capture just some of the work we have done in partnership with our members over the last 12 months.

We are proud to be celebrating 60 years of work with and for the Irish community in Birmingham. Understanding changes within the community and reaching those who have been here for many years as well as those who have recently arrived; providing information and guidance on opportunities and possibilities; building new projects with and amongst the community; exploring new ways of working and encouraging active engagement with those in public life.

Our focus as always remains to serve those most in need in our community and to develop and deliver services that meet the ever changing needs of our clients.







# Statement from the Chair

## Pat Reihill

"I was initially interested in ensuring that the needs of those both from and with an affiliation to Ireland were not lost and that services reflected these important considerations.

I have been fortunate to be the chair since 2012 and have had the pleasure and privilege to work with an exceptionally dedicated board and a staff team who bring a passion and an indomitable spirit to everything they do."

Last year was an important year for Ireland and the Irish. The county rightly celebrated and commemorated the events of 1916 and the sense of national pride was palpable. I had the good fortune to be in Dublin on Eater Sunday and be part of a very large crowd assembled along O'Connell St. It was a fitting and moving tribute and one that articulated the achievements that came during the following 100 years and a real sense of national self-confidence. For those living outside of Ireland or who have a sense of Irish heritage there were many opportunities to mark this event. In Birmingham we took part in a dramatic re-telling of the events of 100 years ago which was very well received by people of all ages and attended by over 200 people at a performance in South and City College.

Turning our thoughts to this century the past year has been dominated on the wider stage by the Brexit referendum. We were delighted to welcome the Minister for the Diaspora Jimmy Deenihan and the Irish Ambassador, Dan Mulhall to talk to an enthusiastic audience about what this might mean for Ireland and the relationship with Britain.

These past years have for all organisations in the not for profit sector been extremely challenging as we continue to find imaginative ways to provide services with ever reducing resources. These challenges are visible daily at our own front door where the chilling winds of ongoing financial stringency continue to bite deep. In such circumstances it would not be unreasonable to see a dip in morale, or a creeping sense of defeatism.



(Left to Right): BIA CEO Maurice Malone, Ambassador Dan Mulhall, Minister Jimmy Deenihan and BIA Staff.

It is all the more remarkable that all connected with the Birmingham Irish Association have simply got on with the job of finding ever more creative and ingenious ways to provide services to people in need.

One, if not the stand out achievement of the previous twelve months has been the launch of our dementia service. As our population, those that came to this country in the fifties and sixties, become ever older, there comes with it for some the onset of a marked decline in their cognitive functioning. It is important to keep perspective when talking of dementia and to recognise that with care and proper support individuals' lives can continue to be enriched.

# Statement from the Chair Continued

We became aware that whilst there were a number of services locally that dealt with dementia, there was nothing that catered for the specific cultural needs of those from the Irish community.

With this in mind and aware of a considerable need from discussions, from amongst others carers we set out to plan such a service. I always welcome the opportunity to drop in on this service and see and experience the caring compassionate service that has been created. The visual representation of an Irish home setting captures the mood and avoids the cliché.



Dementia Activities in St Annes.

"For the first time ever I want to use this report to appeal to the community at large to support us in our vital work.

We need to explore ways to tap into this generosity to ensure important services on our own door step which make a real difference continue to be delivered."

This service has gone from strength to strength and has quite rightly had favourable comment from all who are aware of it. I want to say a special thank you to our team of dedicated volunteers and staff. We look forward to expanding this service when resources and funds allow.

I would also like to thank our funders this past year, the Irish Government Emigrant Support Programme, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and Solihull Cross City CCG, Heritage Lottery Fund, Ireland Fund of Great Britain and of course the generosity of our own community whose donations help to support the valuable work we do.

Providing a quality service costs and for the first time ever I want to use this report to appeal to the community at large to support us in our vital work. The Irish are rightly celebrated the world over for their generosity and regularly punch well above their weight in assisting those in need.

We need to explore ways to tap into this generosity to ensure important services on our own door step which make a real difference continue to be delivered.



# Health and Care: Martin's Story

We support older adults experiencing issues with their health via an outreach service. The project targets elders who may be suffering from physical and mental health problems and are having difficulty in engaging with statutory services.

Martin was an elderly Irish gentleman living in a council property. He had become threatening to his elderly next door neighbour, as a result, the police, housing and social services became involved. He was difficult to engage with due to this threatening behaviour, he also had issues with alcohol and memory problems. It was clear that there was no straightforward way to deal with his situation.

I wrote to Martin notifying him of a home visit, but this failed. I eventually managed to gain access to the property with a colleague, where we found things were very chaotic and it was evident that he was something of a hoarder.



Martin found it difficult to tell me how he was coping. He was unable to tell me anything about his family or support network, and he had little information regarding bills or any documents that might give me an insight into how he was managing financially. He would often carry large sums of money out in public, and he had constant issues losing his electricity key; so there was often no light or heat in the property.

He also had a much loved dog, which had a large tumour. Often on visits I would find he was out walking the dog and had put unsuitable locks and padlocks on the front door, so I would have to return several times at different times of the day.

I eventually managed to engage with Martin, and worked with his surgery to get him to appointments. This was hit and miss as he wouldn't remember if I was coming, but thankfully the surgery was flexible. Martin was diagnosed with dementia.

I managed to talk Martin into letting the RSPCA take the dog for investigation. The dog was found to have an operable tumour, which needed to be treated. This was very upsetting for Martin as he and the dog went everywhere together, and I knew it was likely that he would forget where the dog had gone.

I went with a colleague to collect Martin's dog after the operation. I have a real fear of dogs so it was necessary to have some support! I had kept Martin up to date on his dog's progress, but when we came to return the dog, Martin was nowhere to be seen. We eventually found him in one of the pubs he frequents, where he told me his dog had been stolen. When I took his dog out of my car there was a truly happy reunion!

I came across an old store calendar from a place near to where Martin said he had come from, and managed to place an enquiry through the store resulting in finding his brother, sister and niece. They were all glad to hear about him, and I managed to get his brother to speak to him on the phone which was good for both of them.

I arranged for Martin's property to be cleared, so that a care package could be put in place for him. He was eating properly, medication was regular and personal care was maintained. A key safe was fitted to ensure everyone had the best chance of gaining access, and I made an arrangement to leave an agreed sum in the key safe for weekly shopping. We managed Martin's cash from a safe in the office; I would give him enough to last a few days at a time and he would come to the office when he needed more.

# Martin's Story Continued

Eventually it became clear that the care package wasn't working. The team would arrive when Martin wasn't in, and despite my instructions, one of the carers had given him the electricity key and he had lost it. This had happened a week previous but I was not informed, and to make matters worse this was during winter time.

I was in the process of getting Martin into a residential home where he could have a flat of his own, but it was not due to happen for a week or so, however after discussing (pleading) with the manager, she agreed that Martin could move in right away. The home took over managing his finances and care, and he settled in well.

6 months later however, the home was being closed down for refurbishment. All residents had to move out, and while Martin's social worker did her best to find somewhere suitable for him, he was eventually rushed into a home outside of the area he knew. Everything was alien to him, there was no time for a proper assessment and the new staff were not prepared for the behaviour he would exhibit. Martin's behaviour deteriorated and he attempted to escape multiple times. It was clear this wasn't the right place for him and his behaviour was frightening other elderly residents.

Martin eventually went missing overnight, and it was decided he should be sectioned under the mental health act, which was very upsetting. He was taken to hospital, and sadly separated from his dog.



I found a kind surgery who agreed to check over his dog for free. They found that the dog was in surprisingly good health. The care home had initially agreed to look after the dog while I found him a permanent home, but the people there had become so fond of him that they decided to keep him!

His sister in law came to visit him from Ireland, to get a clear insight into how he is. His brother had initially wanted Martin to return home, but it was clear that they would struggle to cope, as his physical care needs are such that he would need specialist care that isn't available close to where they live.

Martin remained in hospital for about 6 months. Although he couldn't remember who I was when I went to visit, it was clear that he was happy to see me. He eventually moved to another residential home, where to my knowledge he remains now.

Martin is much more settled now.



# Family Support

"Our mission is to keep the children we work with in school and on track to complete education. We want to remove the barriers to learning,"

We provide a family support and learning mentor service to children and families within a local secondary school setting. Referrals are received from members of the school pastoral team which includes Heads of House, Pupil Support, attendance officer, school nurse and school social worker.

Preventive support is given to families, addressing issues at an early stage before they escalate. Parents are supported to access housing, welfare benefits, healthcare, debt advice, education/ training and to improve parenting skills. In addition to the school, we work alongside agencies from the statutory and voluntary sector to achieve positive outcomes.



We work individually with children and young people in school providing support with attendance, behaviour, emotional issues, anxiety, transition from primary to secondary school and bereavement. Working closely with the school, our aim is to remove barriers to learning and enable children to achieve their full potential.

# Family Support Case Study

"I encouraged her to talk to family and close friends about her feelings and engage in activities she enjoyed. She identified a creative way of remembering and celebrating the life of her grandparent which she found comforting."

Joanne was referred for mentoring in school because she was struggling to cope with the recent death of her grandparent. She was self-harming, feeling angry and her school attendance had decreased.

As she declined support from her GP and other agencies, her parents became increasingly concerned. Using a combination of exercises and discussion we looked at ways of exploring her feelings and developing a circle of those people in her life who she felt would support her particularly during difficult times.



We identified some of the triggers for this behaviour and the alternative activities she could engage in during times of stress and sadness. I encouraged her to talk to family and close friends about her feelings and engage in activities she enjoyed. She identified a creative way of remembering and celebrating the life of her grandparent which she found comforting.

Her attendance improved as her friendships and the stability of school became important to her. At the end of our sessions she was no longer self-harming as she had discovered healthier ways of coping with her emotions and although sad at the loss of her grandparent, was feeling more positive about the future.

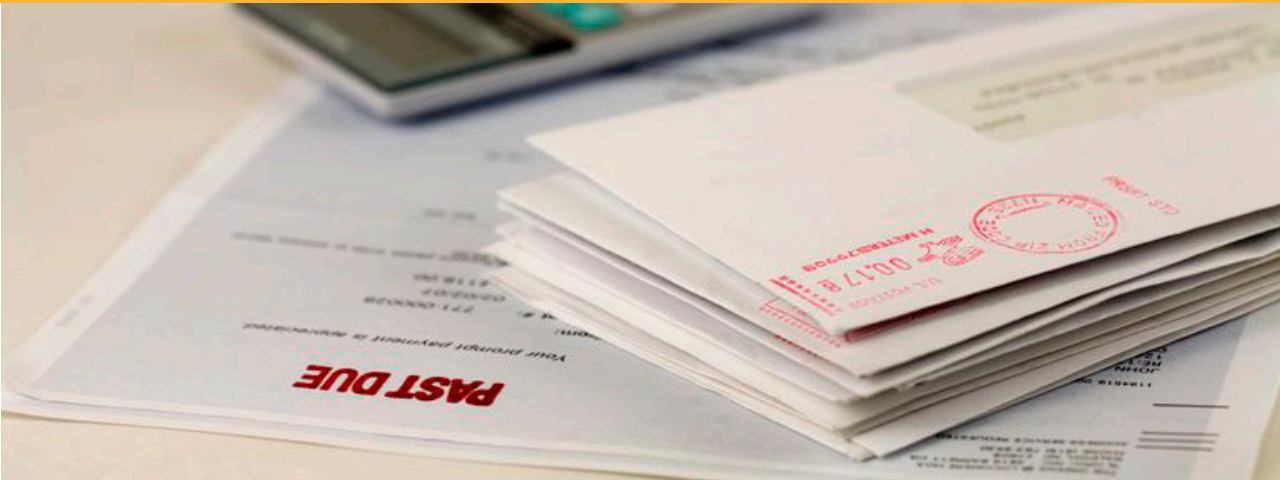


# Housing & Benefits

We provide welfare and support advice on an appointment basis. We also operate a Housing & Benefits surgery every Thursday in Balsal Heath.

Our benefits and welfare advice includes:

- Full entitlement claims
- Benefit applications
- Benefit appeals
- PIP, ESA,
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
- Supporting people
- Sitting in on benefit tribunals
- Service Reports
- Debt Advice
- Organising food parcels
- Working with social workers
- Providing information to people coming over or going back to Ireland
- Opening or accessing bank accounts in Ireland
- Land disputes, wills and family arguments



Some notable cases include:

In December we provided support and information to a young woman who had fled domestic violence in Ireland with her child, making a benefits check, a referral to the local family centre and the local organisation who supplied Christmas presents.

In the past three months we have had three young couples from Dublin requiring assistance, two of whom we were obliged to help repatriate. The third couple would not return to Ireland for fear of violence, even though it could take several months for their National Insurance numbers and benefits to be arranged. It is likely that alcohol/drugs played their part in each scenario.

We have had four older clients request assistance with registering on the new Birmingham City Council housing list. This process requires a level of computer literacy that is beyond people who do not use IT on a daily basis.

# Culture and Heritage

“Our heritage work including art based and literary projects ensures that Irish culture and heritage in Birmingham continues to thrive and develop”



Our objective is to meet the cultural and heritage needs of the first, second and subsequent generations of Irish in Birmingham

We have promoted Irish culture and heritage in Birmingham through developing our own activities and events, or by cross promoting activities organised by associate groups. Over the last year we have worked on a number of projects across the community, and also with schools.

Our school work includes creating the Dan Mulhall poetry competition and launching the pen-pals scheme, where pupils from Birmingham and Ireland write letters to each other.



We organised a hugely successful Irish culture and Heritage project, called “We Built This City”. This exhibition launched in April 2017 with the Irish Ambassador to the UK Dan Mulhall and the Lord Mayor of Birmingham in attendance. The project was built over 14 months of research and collaboration, with help from volunteers and the Irish community. The project focused on the rich legacy that the Irish have given to the City of Birmingham and aimed to increase the knowledge of this contribution.

Two workshops were delivered through ‘The Friends of the Museum’ - a charity that support the museum. The project co-ordinator gave a talk on the history of the Irish in Birmingham and the thinking behind the exhibition. One workshop featured a guided tour of the Exhibition with the other a Q&A on the genesis of the project.

We had recorded 35 oral histories of the Irish in Birmingham, and the production of the newspaper has ensured that around other 20 memories have been captured and transcribed for the project archive.

The success of the media campaign has mean the project has gathered massive amounts of memorabilia for the archive, particularly pleasing as it became obvious that there was almost nothing in the Birmingham Museums collection relating to Irish heritage in the city. These provided a firm foundation for the content of the 100 DVDs produced and 8000 newspapers printed and distributed to Birmingham Libraries, local history groups and the wider community.



# Social Inclusion

Our dementia centre is based at St Anne's and provides care for elderly Irish clients suffering from dementia. We have a dedicated van to pick up and drop off clients from their homes and we take them to the centre for 4 ½ hours a day. This gives the client's family or carers a much needed break.

Our team of fully trained staff and volunteers provide a home cooked meal and everyone is encouraged to take part in a range of activities from Arts, Crafts, Keep Fit and Bingo to Film club and singing. We provide a 3 course meal for the clients.

We hold a number of activities at the dementia centre to improve physical and mental wellbeing and stimulation. This includes Irish film club, dancing, sing-alongs, the parachute game, the price is right. We have bands and dancers that will come in and perform, and people bring their pets in. We often cook bread with our clients.

Our physical activities include seated exercise, supported exercise (using a chair as a support), free standing cardio, massage therapy, relaxation techniques, tai chi, hoopla and games such as darts, bowling and bowls. We also have sing-alongs, the beetle game, memory lane and other activities to help clients with memory issues, alzheimers and dementia.

Our Dementia Centres offer a warm and friendly environment for people and their families living with Dementia.



We run preventative activities such as fall prevention, hand eye coordination, reflexes and home skills projects for cooking, cleaning and washing.

We also run 12 placements across the city which are open to clients of all backgrounds, who are 55 and over. We provide activities and support similar to the dementia centre, including seated exercise, cardio, parachute games.

We engage clients who may have a number of physical and mental health issues including osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, arthritis, dementia, autism, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's.

The project encourages our service users to improve their quality of life and personal wellbeing.

# Befriending & Bereavement

"Volunteers trained in bereavement counselling can help others get back on their feet through friendship and support."

## Bereavement Project

When we lose someone close to us it can be an overwhelming and devastating experience. We all cope with grief in our own way. One thing is clear, there is no 'right or normal' way to grieve the loss of someone.

There can be many things that affect the way we experience loss and at times it can be useful to seek help.

**Personal Support:** By talking confidentially to someone who is not directly involved with your loss and is trained to listen and offer support to help you understand what you are going through.

**Practical Support:** Advice and guidance with finances, benefits and funeral arrangements.

We offer a friendly and impartial service, offering support to clients in their time of loss. We have volunteers trained in bereavement to help others get back on their feet following a loss through friendship and support.

## We can provide:

- One to one Support
- Free and confidential service from bereavement support counsellors
- Advice and guidance on funeral arrangements, finances and benefits
- Repatriation advice
- Support to everyone over the age of 18

## Befriending Project

We provide a friend and confidant to those isolated in the community or fellow country men/women arriving from Ireland looking for a support network to establish themselves.





# Building on our Success

With the continued support from our funders and community we plan to carry on delivering the vital services to the clients we have served for many years.



**OVER 16,573 PHONE CALLS RECEIVED**



**OVER 14,951 ATTANDEES AT DROP IN CENTRES AND ACTIVITY CLUBS**



**OVER 9,921 MEALS PROVIDED THROUGH DROP IN CENTRES & SOCIAL CLUBS**



**13,682 CLIENTS ATTENDED THE ELDERS CLUB**

**242 FAMILIES**

Nearly 242 families and young children supported through the Family Support Project

**990 PEOPLE**

Approaching 990 people addressed their health needs through the Primary Care Project

**5,520 CLIENTS**

Over 5,520 clients accessed advice and support services through front office team

**1,485 CLIENTS**

1,485 clients received support with Debt and Welfare benefit related issues

**4,730 VISITORS**

We had over 4,730 visitors to the office looking for help with passport applications or visiting the shop

**232 PEOPLE**

The Bereavement and Befriending Service helped well over 232 people with their own personal issues



# Future Plans

Birmingham Irish Association will strengthen its role as a specialist support provider that delivers culturally competent services to those with an Irish primary or mixed heritage.

**We will continue to provide service user centred support services through the provision of an enhanced menu of advice, information and support services for our target user groups that will enable individuals to achieve greater independence, improve the overall quality of their lives and utilise the community for the benefit of others.**

**Our Future Plans:**

Continue to engage with the wider community, including second and subsequent Irish generations, to ensure that service realignment and development meets the needs of the widest constituent group. We will broaden the range and accessibility of our services through research, bench marking and best practice methodology.

Establish services within the community aimed at tackling mental health issues, specifically in relation to depression, loneliness and dementia, and develop a range of community based resources including a Dementia Café incorporating a Telephone help and advice line and support to friends and families of those suffering with Dementia.

Develop and implement a marketing strategy to raise the profile of Birmingham Irish Association, establishing the agency as a leading provider of support services in Birmingham and the region.

Create compelling ‘case studies’ to promote the work of the charity to encourage regular giving and create a positive outlook.  
Recognise that our success is dependent on a highly motivated and effective staff team, and offer opportunities for professional and personal development.

Strengthen service user involvement to ensure that users of the service have active participation within the organisation and work collaboratively with others to meet the needs of those we serve.



Maintain existing and develop new partnerships for the benefit of Birmingham Irish Association’s constituent groups and investigate the opportunities of increased collaborative working with like-minded organisations both locally and nationally.

Develop partnerships or collaborative working to respond to the changing landscape of health and social care.

Ensure the charity has sufficient funding in place for those we serve and maximise the number of income opportunities to help sustain the charity and increase levels of unrestricted income.

Provide a wide range of cultural, community, sport and heritage projects, which foster a vibrant sense of Irish community and identity, and develop heritage and community activities that promote Ireland’s identity and maintain a vibrant Irish community.

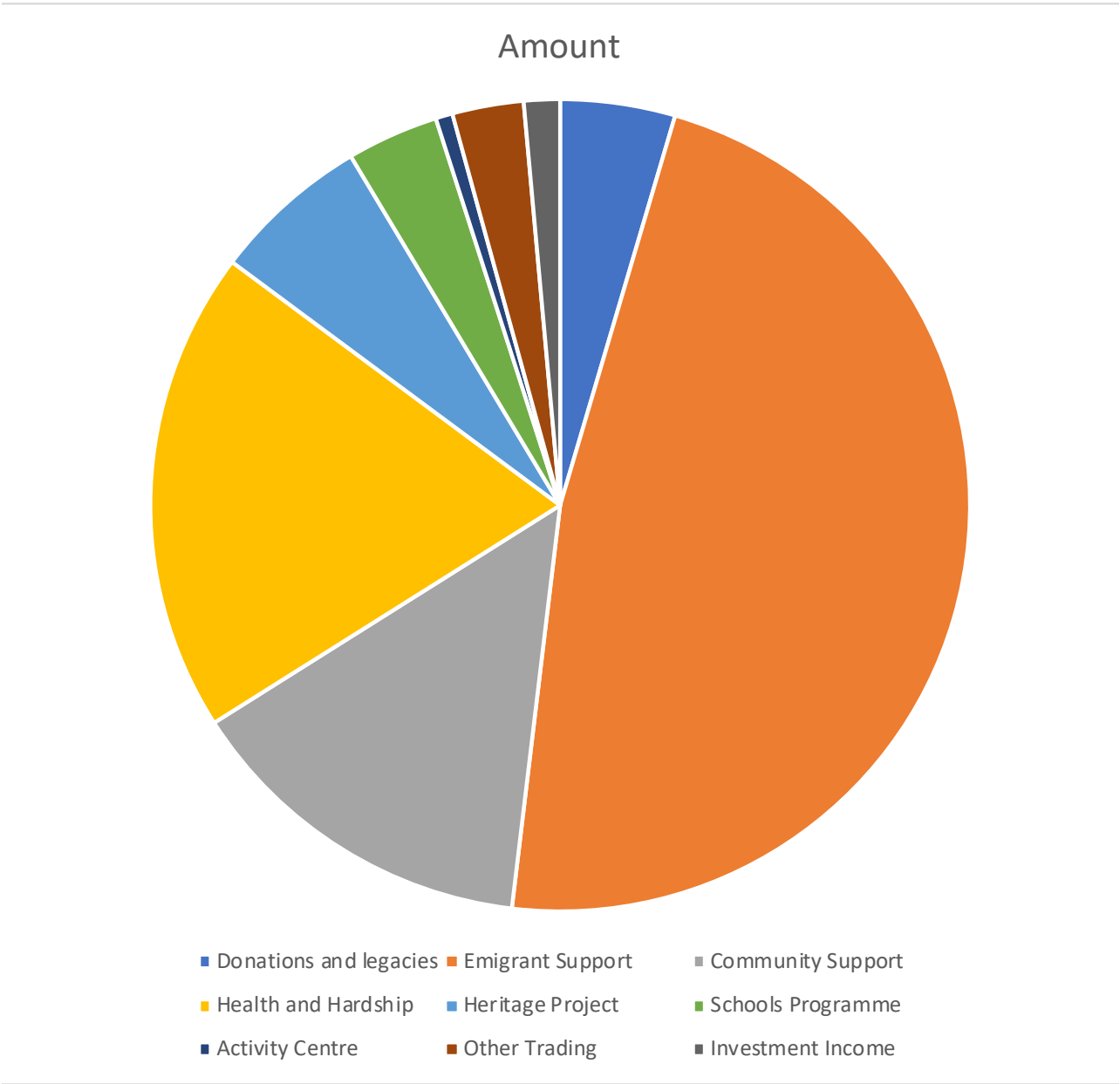
Celebrate, maintain and strengthen the links between community groups in the city and further afield and support affiliate groups with advertising, workshops, publicity, promotion, events and funding opportunities.

Develop relationships with the press and media to actively promote Birmingham Irish Association, and utilise fully the power of social media to inform, celebrate and increase the profile of the organisation and the wider Irish community.



# Finances

- Irish in Birmingham’s principal funding sources for the year are as follows:
- Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs Trade Emigrant Support Programme
  - Birmingham City Council (Adults and Communities)
  - Birmingham CrossCity CCG
  - Birmingham South Central CCG
  - Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG
  - Ireland Fund of Great Britain
  - Birmingham Secondary Schools Family Support Project
  - Heritage Lottery Fund





Visit [birminghamirish.org.uk](http://birminghamirish.org.uk) for more info