



depending on the type of loneliness people are experiencing.



## Annual Report

Engage with Age

April 2021-March 2022

*An outdoor crafting workshop on the first day Covid-19 regulations permitted outdoor gatherings.*



# Structure, Governance and Management

## Background to Engage with Age:

Engage with Age (EWA) was established as a charity and a company limited by guarantee in November 2000. EWA is a community development organisation with the vision of a society which respects, values and listens to older people.

Engage with Age's mission is to enable older people in Belfast to live happier, healthier and more connected lives.

Engage with Age seeks to enable sustainable benefits for older people and the community. It operates multi-agency partnerships to ensure joined-up and collaborative working. Partnerships are active from a governance level down to operational and daily activities.



## Governance and Management:

Engage with Age is governed by a Board of Trustees that meets quarterly. Trustees come from a range of older people's and community organisations, older people's forums, as well as individuals from the business, public sector and individual older people. The Board is supported by a Finance and Operations Sub-Group that meets six times per year, and a Governance Committee that supports the role and responsibilities of Trustees and Director.

The management of Engage with Age formally reports to the Board and the Finance and Operations Committee, and has delegated responsibility for delivering the company's programme of work at an operational level. The staff team is composed of a Director, Operations Manager, and Development Officers that deliver the company's programmes. Engage with Age has sub-contracted to an external accountancy company to undertake its finance administration and engages a number of other service providers.



# Objectives and Activities

As described in the Articles and Memorandum of Association, Engage objects ('Objects') are to promote the health, wellbeing, interests and alleviate loneliness, isolation and exclusion of older people living in Northern Ireland (the area of benefit) without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, caring responsibilities, race, or political, religious, or other opinions by associating together the said inhabitants, local authorities, public agencies and voluntary and other organisations in a common effort to relieve poverty, preserve and protect health, advance education with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said beneficiaries.

## Values:

Our Values guide us in our work and our relationships. They guide our behaviour, our attitudes, the decisions we make and what we expect from one another. Engage with Age values are based on community development principles. We put older people at the centre of all that we do, believing in self-determination and the right to make their own choices.

Our values are:

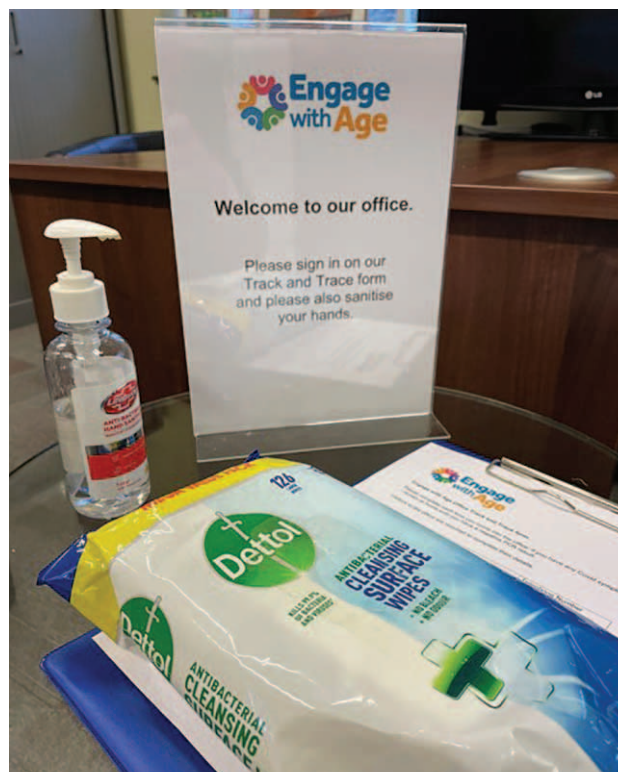
- Being older people-led.
- Empowering older people.
- Treating everyone with respect.
- Working closely with other organisations.
- Carrying out our work to the highest standards, with transparency.
- Ensuring everyone has the right to take part in stimulating activities and have fun.

We are committed to working in partnership, believing in the strength of the contribution of many agencies, people and volunteers to make a real difference.

## Strategic Planning:

Engage with Age is implementing a strategic plan covering the period of April 2020 – March 2023 which reflects the above vision and mission, the methods of working and the objectives of the company.

***Engage with Age ensured staff, volunteers and participants stayed safe throughout the year!***



# Achievements and Performance

The April 2021 - March 2022 year was the second year of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The virus continued to surge throughout the year within communities, developing into different strains. The need for older people to be safe and maintain social distance at various times during the year was coupled with mixed feelings from older people towards meeting up in groups during the times when it was safe to do so. The recurring question throughout this period concerning the end of the Pandemic was "are we there yet"? Engage with Age adapted admirably to the uncertainty of this period taking opportunities to engage at every possible opportunity.

## Year Two of the Engage with Age Strategic Plan 2020-2023

It is worth noting that the new Strategic Plan 2022-23 was written just before the Covid-19 Pandemic began, so the delivery of the plan has included significant variations. A review of the achievements of the goals of the Strategic Plan highlights significant progress and some changed priorities due to Covid-19.

*As Covid-19 restrictions relaxed group meetings and in person trainings took place.*



## Supporting Older People's Groups and Forums

Winter 2020/21 saw a surge in Covid cases, and by the start of this reporting year, public health guidance still restricted group meetings. Online activities continued throughout the period. In May 2021 EWA re-started outdoor socially distanced meetings, which saw outdoor crafting sessions, health promotion and walking groups. By June 2021 indoor group activities were permitted. EWA developed Covid-19 safe processes and policies for meetings and safety, and in Autumn 2021 these guidelines were cascaded to groups across the city, via Age Friendly Belfast and Age Partnership Belfast. Though EWA suspended indoor activities again in January and February 2022 due to the Omicron Covid variant, in person group engagement recommenced in March 2022.

South and East Belfast group activity was consistent, when possible, with capacity building support, funding of activities, and referring new individuals into groups in East and South Belfast. Relationships with BAME communities developed during the previous year were developed this year in person, particularly with the Chinese communities and Indian community. The year rounded off with leadership training.

A November 2021 survey of almost 100 older people's groups in East and South Belfast highlighted that one third of groups felt they were

operating well, one third were experiencing difficulties, and one third were experiencing crisis. In March 2022 EWA targeted seven groups in South and East Belfast for capacity building and support, providing workshops and activities, and continued this support into the next year.

The Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (G6) and the South Belfast Lifestyle Forum continued to meet online and in person throughout this period. The Belfast East Seniors Forum kept active through phone contact and distanced initiatives including Christmas and Easter gift making for members. By Autumn 2021 all forums were meeting in person again, with consistently good attendances, and increased membership for the Belfast East Seniors Forum. The Forums continued to address the impact of Covid-19 isolation on older people and promote the needs of older people to health sector and service providers.

Strategic plan priorities addressed during this period include enabling the establishment of older people's groups, implementing skills development, leadership training, building relationships with partners, and addressing succession in groups. Covid recovery remains an issue for groups. EWA's plans for expansion has pivoted as the Pandemic shifted priorities and stimulated growth into new activities and programs.



**Training and forum support took place throughout the year.**



**Activities took place while strictly following health guidance to ensure everyone stayed safe.**



## Addressing the Impact of Isolation and Loneliness on Older People

During this period, Engage with Age sought to stabilize existing groups and support new referrals of older people experiencing isolation and loneliness. The PAL Project has been the main vehicle for combating loneliness with older people. While some groups have ceased to meet because of Covid-19, others continued, and new groups emerged including walking groups, book groups, and the family history group. The T'Ai Chi group resumed under a new tutor, and the KIT and Dance Groups increased in size. Online activities including Chocolate Bingo and the Pub Quiz without a Pub continued. Approximately 150 people were engaging on a weekly or fortnightly basis, experiencing long-term benefit.

The Telephone Befriending service continued to grow, with new Befrienders recruited and trained, and new referrals. It is worth noting that the service has been at capacity with a waiting list of individuals receiving fortnightly calls. 100 older people are engaged in this service.

Both programmes developed Dementia Friendly support for people living with dementia and carers, with two new Dementia Friendly activity groups and Dementia Friendly Telephone Befriending. These programmes were effective, though due to the nature of the dementia, attendance levels fluctuate and there is continued need to refine services.

At the end of the year EWA produced the "Finding Their Feet" research report on the impact and learning from the PAL Project. Findings highlighted the emergence of new and successful methodologies, high rates of success in making long-term change, and the production of information videos on how to help. One participant said: "the door [to Engage with Age] opened and it was like another world, a brilliant world to live in..."

*The Befriending service thrived, activity groups reassembled in person, and EWA published research.*



## Promoting Good Physical and Mental Health

Health improvement programmes continued to operate in South and East Belfast with target levels of activity routinely exceeded. In East Belfast there was strong performance in walking programmes and physical activity. In South Belfast Tea Dances at Home and exercise programmes were popular. Copies of "The Tasty Times", a new newsletter, were sent to over 400 people by post and email, with nutritional information targeting men, and mindfulness and T'Ai Chi activities took place in community centres in South and East Belfast. Falls prevention classes took place in person for the first time since the Pandemic.

In person summer activities took place through the South Belfast programme, which saw a range of skill building sessions and mental health programmes. A highlight of this program was the cookery lessons accompanying the publication of EWA's own Healthy Eating Cook Book.

Evaluations highlighted high percentages of participants citing significant improvements in mental health and sleep, all participants in physical activities stating they exercise more on their own, and participants in IT training experiencing greater competency.

Strategic programme progress continued with older people engaging in positive physical and mental health activity, work on digital and creative skills, and intergenerational work.



*A range of in person and socially distanced activities took place, with participant safety always a priority.*





## Supporting the Voice of Older People to Influence Matters that Affect Them

The older people's forums engaged with decision makers highlighting their needs, particularly in the areas of access to health services, transport, access to mental health services, and the impact of Covid-19.

Ad hoc consultations continued through the Consultation Group, and EWA facilitated contributions to research from Queen's University and Ulster University. The Words Alive Group in South Belfast presented their "Your Story and Mine" exhibition in libraries in Belfast as well as at Belfast City Hall, telling the story of the older people they interviewed in care homes, accompanied by photographs by photographer Bernie Brown. EWA produced Dementia Friendly East Belfast's online interactive dementia training to 100 people, Facebook Live crafts and talks sessions, and the ongoing production of the monthly What's On Guide. The Dementia Friendly "Festival of Windows" shop window exhibition presented artworks made by people living with dementia, facilitated by Anna O'Kane. It took place in 25 businesses across East Belfast for the EastSide Arts Festival. The PAL Gazette newspaper continued monthly production reaching at least 2,000 readers, with an average of eight contributions from older people per edition, including a new "Have Your Say" column from the G6 forum.



*Engage with Age continued to promote the voice of older people through advocacy and also activities with the wider community.*

## Developing an Evaluation Framework

A stated priority for this 2020-2023 Strategic Plan was the development of an Evaluation Framework. Again, with the pressures of Covid-19 it wasn't possible to engage

evaluation in the ways envisaged, however, significant consultation and surveying enabled Engage with Age to adjust services and consider the effectiveness of its work.

## Developing the Governance and Operation of Engage with Age

The ongoing business of governing and managing Engage with Age continued throughout the reporting period. Funders agreed to adjusted contract delivery and every contract and funding agreement was fulfilled. Engage with Age did not avail of the job retention/ "furlough" scheme, and all staff worked throughout. Communications promoting our services increased significantly.

The work of the Board of Trustees governing the corporate development of Engage with Age was furthered through the Governance and the Finance and Operations sub-committees, regular board meetings, and ongoing contact with staff. By the end of the reporting period EWA undertook a skills audit of board needs and a successful Trustee recruitment drive was well underway.

## Summary

While the first year of Covid-19 was turbulent, the 2021/22 year was a period of ongoing uncertainty. Though this significantly frustrated planning and delivery, the Engage with Age staff displayed great resilience and ingenuity, and the many older people that make this work possible showed their appetite to live happier, healthier, and more connected lives.

*Engage with Age continued to reach out to harder to reach groups such as the BAME communities in Belfast.*





## Engage with Age Board of Trustees

Anne Greenan  
Jonathan Hegan, to November 2021  
Gillian McEvoy  
Nick Menhinick  
Tony Barclay  
Leigh Greer  
Robert Hagan  
Sinead Hyndman  
Francis Hughes

## Staff

Eamon Quinn, Director  
Patricia Barrett, Operations Manager  
Laurence Wright, Development Officer  
John McCandless, Development Officer  
Cathy Chambers, Development Officer

## Contractors

Tony Clarke Finance, Finance Management  
MayWe, Social Media Management  
Sarah Gordon, Befriending Service  
Caleb Armitage, PAL Project Groups  
Jeff Robinson, Public Relations





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