



Chair's Report for 2023

This has been a very busy first year as Chair of Borders Children's Charity, as we have continued the work begun during the last couple of years to modernise our systems and future-proof the charity's operations for the digital age. I wonder what the farmer's wives who first started it in 1965 would say if they could be a fly on the wall now? As we welcome new members, who bring fresh energy, skills and experience, keeping forward momentum in the charity during their 5-year tenure, it is vital that the baton is handed over effectively.

We have begun updating all our documentation and are in the process of switching our IT systems to meet all those needs. SoConnect, headed by Campbell Fraser, is very generously providing IT support through this process and we are grateful to Strive Digital who continue to support our website. This is a huge amount of work but very much necessary to ensure the charity meets its regulatory requirements, while remaining able to attract new committee members and continue to appeal to both benefactors and the professionals who act on behalf of the local children and young people we help.

I have felt very fortunate to have fantastic support from the committee, who recognise the need to stay current. There is great strength and depth in our membership through the relevant skills, experience and energy they bring. It should not be forgotten that we are all volunteers – this charity would not exist without the generosity of those prepared to give their time. We were able to recruit 4 new members – Wendy Copeland, Linda Runciman, Susan Dow, Jemma Wood, all of whom have hit the ground running and are already making a difference. We said farewell to Jenny Linehan, outgoing Chair, and Kirsty Baird, outgoing secretary, who were very experienced with the charity having joined before covid; we thank them sincerely for their contributions. We also were pleased to have Christine Currie as a member for several months, and very much appreciate her kind words in support upon retiring.

Given such a lot of change, all the office bearers will stay in-post for another year - Penny Hardie as Treasurer, Vicki Wauchope as Requests Officer and Nancy Anderson as Secretary. We have felt as a committee that it is better for the charity to have the continuity and for us to be able to carry on the process of improvement.

A lot of progress has been made already. The request process has been carefully updated, with some revisions to the online form and guidelines aimed at ensuring the whole process goes smoothly, from gathering appropriate information first time, to confirmation of payments, to keep to a minimum the time demanded of office bearers. There is a brilliant

system in place between the Requests Officer and the Treasurer which is now documented and will be so much easier to hand over when the time comes.

The Treasurer's Report goes into detail of where our funding has come from and so I will simply say here that we are truly grateful to all those who donate – the variety of sources shows the regard in which this charity is held locally and every donation given makes a difference, no matter how large or small. Penny H has introduced a more comprehensive monthly report, which has helped us to keep a good sense of where the funds are going. Together with Vicki, noting request numbers, this flagged an increase in the number of requests for school trip funding. We decided as a committee to have a policy of a cap per child because of this, but to monitor the situation and use our discretion as always – one of the strengths of being able to assess each individual request. Penny H has also been successful in gathering funds through grant applications and has set up a new collaboration with The Rooney Foundation in regard to sharing the often high cost of special needs equipment. Grant funding remains key in providing funds to match requests. We have ended the year with a small surplus, showing good governance in our spending. Chris Jackson, our previous treasurer, has gone above and beyond in continuing to support Penny H in the background as needed, but we finally wish him farewell and thanks at this AGM.

The charity has purchased a laptop to support the secretary role, as it relies on IT capability. We continue to keep our expenses to an absolute minimum, in line with the charity's philosophy, but felt it was important to enable members to fulfil their roles.

Jane Keir led the creation of a communications plan, which covers all aspects, internal and external, and a sub-committee will continue to develop this, dividing the work between the members. Our messaging as a charity is in the process of being updated in line with modern practice, across all our platforms. We have also been privileged to work on marketing with Gareth Anderson of Create Future, through their philanthropic scheme, who guided us through how we communicate with potential donors. This not only gave us valuable insights for the charity but also time to discuss the charity more informally – especially good for newer members. Thank you, Gareth! Our first newsletter of recent years was sent to supporters & referrers in January and our leaflet has been updated. IT is being put into place to support future communications and a comprehensive review and update of our GDPR policies and procedures has been completed.

Committee members have also been busy raising funds and awareness of the charity at a local level - Vicki Wauchope organised a quiz night in Yetholm, the Heartland Market in Galashiels raised funds through a raffle provided by stall holders on our behalf, which we manned and on International Children's Day a team from BCC set up stall in Galashiels branch of Asda. There were so many kind and interested people wanting to know, help, and learn about the work of our charity. Thank you to Asda for their support and help on the day and also for the use of their Community Room for meetings. We also got involved with the local high school's Youth Philanthropy Initiative, speaking to groups of children by zoom and in-person across the Borders. A team from Galashiels High School reached the final and committee members attended the Showcase. It was interesting to hear that the young people had recognised how lucky they were in their home lives and encouraging that they asked for more ways they could help. Through liaison with Scottish Borders Council, and in

view of a healthy bank balance for the charity but ever-decreasing government funding, we decided this year to make grant awards to 3 carefully selected Easter Holiday Activities programmes. These were Borders Youth Theatre, Newcastleton & District Community Trust Activity Programme and Live Borders free places for activity camps. With financial barriers removed this allowed more children the opportunity to participate in a range of activities they gained significantly from.

Over the year, we have seen time and time again how important it is that we are known as a local charity, run by local volunteers who freely donate their time, energy and commitment, in gaining the financial support we need to exist, whether it be from local businesses, or individuals. I am immensely proud to have played my part in its journey, along with all the rest of the committee, who have worked exceptionally hard, and am excited to continue as Chair in the next year, helping those children & young people who need it the most.

Penny Stratford

11th June 2024