

Black Santa – Making a difference – 2018/19

A snapshot of the work of some of the 220 charities funded by the 2018 Black Santa Sit-out at St Anne's Cathedral, and how the grant will make a difference. Grants were presented at the Good Samaritans Service in Belfast Cathedral on February 3 2019.

Guide Dogs NI (Belfast)



Every hour in the UK someone loses their sight. In Northern Ireland, more than 50,000 are living with sight loss, many of whom never leave home along. Half of these people battle depression.

Guide Dogs NI tries to ensure that when someone loses their sight, they do not lose their freedom, independence and confidence as well.

Each guide dog costs £56,000 over their lifetime. The dog's owner pays 50p towards this. It costs over £1 million to run services each year, and the charity relies overwhelmingly on public donations. A spokesperson said. "We are so grateful for any grant."

Diane Marks and her guide dog Morris, pictured above with Dean Stephen Forde, special guest Lynda Bryans, and other charity representatives, attended the Good Samaritans Service on February 3 2019 to collect the cheque for Guide Dogs NI.

Oxygen Therapy Centre (Larne)

The Centre provides high dose oxygen therapy (100 per cent medical oxygen) delivered in a pressurised chamber and electromagnetic therapy to aid and improve quality of life for people suffering long term debilitating neurological, and physical conditions including cerebral palsy, multiply sclerosis, stroke, emphysema, Parkinson's and other illnesses.

The procedure is non-invasive, and there is no age limit to those who can benefit (youngest to benefit is 11 months, the oldest is over 90). "People are living a better quality of life due to improved health benefits from treatment," the charity says. The Oxygen Therapy Centre has become a place where individuals can meet and share their high and lows among others in similar circumstances. "This is therapy in itself," the charity says.

The Centre has been going for 25 years. In 2017 it helped 153 clients and provided 2,678 treatments. The Black Santa grant will ease the burden of fundraising on volunteers by assisting with ongoing running costs which are very high.

Jubilee Sailing Trust



Two specially designed ships, Lord Nelson and Tenacious (square riggers) are the only tall ships in the world where every aspect of shipboard life is accessible to all.

Special features include speaking compasses to enable visually impaired crew to navigate, joystick assisted steering for those with mobility issues at the helm and fixing points to help wheelchair users get around the ship when at sea.

Volunteers can climb the mast; set the sails; helm the ship; learn navigation skills; cook in the galley. The grant will support the work of the charity, with three people from Northern Ireland benefiting each year.

Two of those who benefited from funding support from the Black Santa Sit-out in 2017 were Ross McKee and Matthew Davis from Co Down. They signed on as crew on STS Lord Nelson for a 10 day experience at sea - Southampton to Belfast by way of Cork - undertaking Leadership at Sea experience under eagle eye of the Captain.

Matthew, 21, is the son of the Revd Colin Davis, rector of Carrowdore & Millisle, and has been wheelchair bound from the age of 14. A former pupil of Mitchell House School, he now attends SE College of Further and Higher Education along with his younger cousin Ross, who accompanied Matthew on the sailing as his buddy.



Joan Thompson, representative of the Jubilee Sailing Trust, said: "The ship, with 10 permanent crew, signs on 40 crew each voyage - 20 with a physical disability and 20 able bodied who buddy the former."

As you can see from the photographs, Matthew really enjoyed his sailing experience, made possible thanks to the people who supported the Black Santa Appeal.

Home for Good

In Northern Ireland there are more than 3,000 children in care. Around 78 per cent are in foster care, but some spend their childhood in children's homes or secure residential units. Most children are in care because they have suffered abuse or neglect. All have experienced trauma of loss and separation. Some children can have five or six different foster placements before starting primary school - "That is not God's idea of family," says the charity Home for Good.

Since 2016, in Northern Ireland, Home for Good has been working to inspire Christians to consider fostering or adopting and walk them through the process. The charity equips churches to welcome and support families that foster or adopt. Volunteer Champions play a key part in keeping vulnerable children on the agenda of their churches, and offer support to families considering or already fostering or adopting.

In 2019 Home for Good will recruit and support network of 32 Champions; train volunteers to respond to contacts via enquiry line; establish three peer support groups for families; see five churches sign up as Home for Good churches; see 40 churches across denominations take part in Adoption Sunday, with three hosting a meal for people interested in fostering / adoption, and the six session Foundations course.

Mae Murray Foundation

The Mae Murray Foundation, based in Larne, aims to promote a society where everyone is able to take part, being valued and respected as equal members of the community. The charity was founded by its chairperson Alix Crawford as a result of her own experience of social exclusion following the birth of her daughter in 1999.

“Our work to date is creating real change, as projects and design are driven by people experiencing unmet need first-hand,” said the charity

Projects include creating NI’s first inclusive beach, introducing NI’s first and only wheelchair surfboard, creating inclusive community play hubs with free hire of specialist equipment; teenage social project, a family project and the introduction of the first Bugzi loan scheme in.

The charity prioritises young people’s mental health and quality of life for carers and family unit.

The Foundation owns the only sit-down surf board in Northern Ireland, and the Black Santa funding will be used to fund instructors, allowing wheelchair users to go surfing.

Feedback from a family: “This equipment allowed our son to enjoy the beach just like any other child. He screamed laughing as the waves crashed around him. Looking forward to many more surf days.”

SWEDES (South West Enabling Deaf Encouraging Sign)

SWEDES aims to support people with hearing related issues, alleviating social and rural isolation through education, recreation and leisure time activities. The charity also aims to raise public awareness about equality and social exclusion.

Activities in 2017 included games night, talks by PSNI, a sign language night for friends and family, and a picnic at Lough Erne. The 2017 Sit-out funded a visit to the Ulster American Folk Park.

The grant from 2018 Black Santa Appeal will fund a trip to Titanic Belfast including transport and a meal. “This ...will give a boost of confidence to our group members who are normally socially and rurally isolated,” the charity stated.

Breatheasy Roe Valley

A new charity set-up in 2017, Breatheasy struggled to establish itself due to ill-health of members, but relaunched in May 2018 with assistance from the British Lung Foundation.

The group is a support group for people with chronic chest disease and their relatives and carers. A place to chat, meet others, enjoy gentle exercise and hear from guest speakers. The charity needs funding support as members not well enough to fundraise.

The Black Santa grant will help fund room hire and activities.

Lisburn Outlook



This organisation aims to help people who are blind and partially sighted, living in Lisburn area, by organising cultural, social and recreational events. It also offers advocacy and support and promotes better integration into society.

Lisburn Outlook works to make public facilities accessible. Trips have included Folk Park, Lyric Theatre, sporting events. Activities include tandem cycling, walking groups, social evenings. Activities can be limited due to lack of trained, sighted volunteers.

The charity's aim this year is to recruit and train additional 10 volunteers and improve skills of existing volunteers. Around 30 blind or partially sighted people benefit from this charity.

Brain Injury Matters

This is a Belfast-based charity which provides services and activities for people of all ages living with a brain injury. The charity helps improve quality of life through one-to-one and group interventions, including arts and crafts, interactive games, tailored exercise programmes, exercise, music therapy and horticulture.

The Black Santa grant will help fund a 16-week arts and enterprise workshop that will support 10 young people and adults. Topics will include managing a budget, marketing and selling to the public.

They will be taught various art making techniques and experiment with themes before creating products for sale. They will also receiving training to encourage further development to enable them to seek employment.

No More Traffik



Established in 2012, No More Traffik is committed to stopping modern slavery and human trafficking.

Achievements: In past three years, trained 1,000 PSNI officers in understanding more about Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking; trained frontline professionals on how to spot signs and report concerns; engaged many different faith groups and have created resources for faith groups; delivered training to university students; partnered with homeless organisation to develop training resource for professionals working within the homeless sector; produced a traffic free fashion resource to help people think about where they buy their clothing; developed the Freedom Football project to raise awareness in the football community (match day awareness raising at Irish League grounds).

The charity has 70+ volunteers. The Black Santa grant will help with running costs including production of resources.

No More Traffik's representative Pete Kernoghan, second from left in picture, joined the Good Samaritans photocall before the service on February 3.

Silver Threads

A grant from Black Santa will allow Silver Threads in Antrim to run up to three bus trips a year for its members, two of whom are over 90-years-old.

A number have severe disabilities and don't like going out at night, so the group arranges to collect them in cars for meetings. The cross community group organises a programme,

decided by members, which includes activities like tea dances, Beetle Drives and visiting speakers. The group hopes the funding will help them attract and support more members.

Rosie's Trust



Rosie's Trust enables people and pets to stay together at difficult times, for example, during terminal illness, cancer treatment or older people with a disability. "We understand the bond between pet and owner and, in order to preserve this, pick up the practicalities of looking after a pet when the owner is unable to," the charity states.

Pain, fatigue, money compromise ability to look after pet and sometimes feel the only option is to give them up. "This predicament causes stress, guilt and even grief at a time when the owner needs stability, when their world is seismically shifting and facing new challenges."

The charity's network of volunteers undertakes tasks including walking dogs, emptying cat litter trays, vet appointments and short term fostering.

Rosie's Trust is currently supporting 40 people in Northern Ireland. It has 130+ volunteers and makes 200+ visits a week. Black Santa funding will allow the charity to update website and produce literature to promote its work of the charity, which is a free service. The grant will also boost the animal welfare fund which helps beneficiaries struggling to pay vets bills due to changed financial circumstances. *Judging by the pictures, the work of Rosie's Trust clearly brings smiles to those who benefit from its support.*



Fighting Words

Fighting Words is a Creative Writing Centre based in east Belfast which runs creative writing workshops for children and young people, youth and school groups from across Northern Ireland.

Trained volunteer mentors engage with and inspire the young writers to develop their self-expression and self-esteem. Launched in March 2015, the charity prioritises children from disadvantaged communities, and runs innovative projects for young people with autism.

This cross community organisations has a sister organisation, Fighting Words Dublin. Fighting Words Belfast has 250 trained mentors. The Black Santa grant will fund travel costs for volunteer mentors to assist in more workshops and help provide them more personal development training, eg working with autism.

Feedback: *“It wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be and it was funnier than I thought it would be. I learned that I am actually a good writer.”* Nathan, age 11, Oct 2016.

Over the Hill Music Collective



This is a unique project for older musicians and people who love music. Provides space for freedom of expression, a place to build confidence and community. The project is run and managed by its members, who come together to learn about the music industry through peer mentoring and support. Sessions include publishing, copyright, songwriting, marketing and training.

The charity wants to encourage more people to attend, and organise day time sessions for people who are retired or out of work. It needs support to pay for professional mentors and room and equipment hire



Project works with people in late stage dementia in north and west Belfast, and wants to train more musicians to work with these older groups.

Judging by the photos, it looks like making music is a lot of fun!

We are Made for More

Founded in June 2018, We are Made for More aims to support young people as they struggle with their identity, a crisis which can lead to serious mental health issues.

The charity states that one in five young people in Northern Ireland suffers a serious mental health issue, 22 per cent of 14-year-old girls self-harm and NI has the highest suicide rate and self-harm rate in the UK. "Young people search for their identity in sex, drugs and alcohol. This leads them further into despair as they don't find the answers they need," the charity stated.

We are Made for More aims to equip young people with the knowledge and understanding that there is value in their identity and the choices they make. The charity achieves this through workshops in schools for young people aged 10-18, focused on the programme '5 steps to better mental health.'

The grant will help the project deliver to all schools in south and east Belfast, regardless of each school's access to funding. Workshops will be built around the NI Curriculum. The charity will also use social media to connect with young people to share videos and posts to educate and promote healthier minds.

East Belfast Community Counselling Centre

The charity works primarily with people experiencing poor mental health and suicidal thoughts. It is based in an interface area of high social deprivation, and is currently working with many people impacted by Welfare Reform. The Centre sees 160 people per week. The grant will be used for therapy equipment and books for counselling rooms.

Simon Community

Every year the Simon Community cares for and supports 3,000 people

It offers 369 warm beds every night; three specialist young people's projects providing accommodation for 57 young people; families' accommodation for up to 24 families; specialist help for mental health and drug and alcohol addiction.

The Black Santa grant will be used for welcome packs with basic foods and toiletries for new clients, to provide expert support for mental health and addictions; emergency food, clothing and winter fuel - £500 would pay security deposit on a home, helping break the cycle of homelessness.



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