



2020
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

BIRMINGHAM IRISH ASSOCIATION

Since the birth of the Irish diaspora in Birmingham, we have been there in both troubled and the good times. We can safely say that the last 12 months have not been a time for celebration. It was a time of desperation where our services were needed now more than ever.

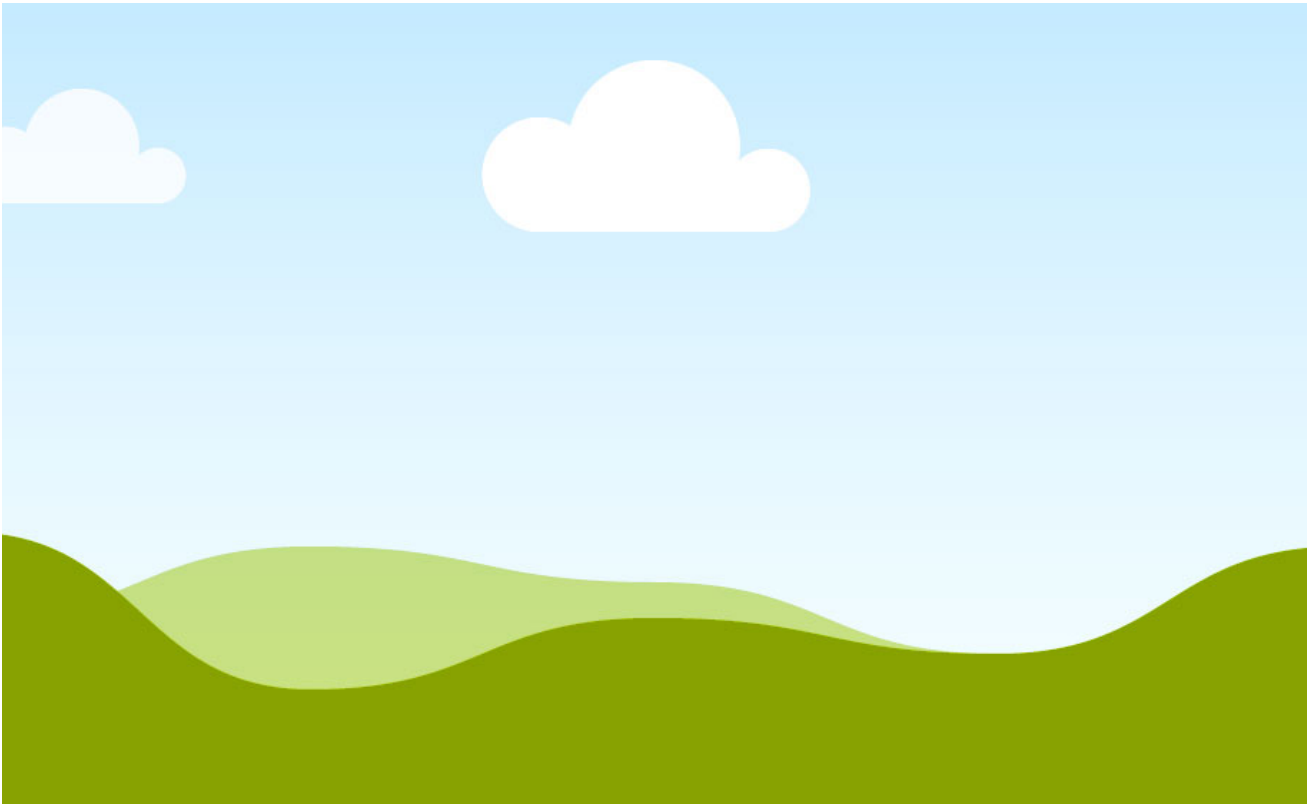
Since the beginning of the Association over 60 years ago, we have been proud to offer bespoke, client centred care, which is as unique as the individual themselves. When social restrictions were put in place, we were only enabled to open our main services in an intermittent fashion, but this also enabled us to create new services that catered specifically to the new needs of our community.

Our wonderful team of staff all pulled together to ensure that the care our community needed was managed extraordinarily, so we could provide this essential care to as many individuals and families as we possibly could. In this report, we will elaborate on how specifically, each service has helped our community as a whole and for specific individuals during this incredibly challenging period.

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60
years
celebrating over 60 years
of helping the community



COMMUNICATIONS AND REFERRALS



BIRMINGHAM IRISH ASSOCIATION

We provide a bespoke service that's as unique as the diaspora themselves, our staff teams collaborate together on a client-by-client basis, to ensure the needs of every member of the Birmingham Irish community are looked after, as if they were our own family.

To show our work in more detail, we will elaborate on the specific ways in which we have been providing essential care throughout the past 12 months.

TELEPHONE HELPLINE COMMUNICATIONS

When news of the pandemic first reached us in early March 2020, we anticipated just how much this could affect those already in need of help. We therefore launched our telephone helpline soon after, so that all who needed our help could reach us rapidly, and we could also understand the needs of our community more clearly which would allow us to continue to adjust our services accordingly. It has been our most useful tool in updating our services and ensuring they are meeting the needs of our community.

GP ALERTLINE COMMUNICATIONS

Through working with countless GP surgeries across our city, we have been able to spread news of our services to support as many people as possible who would benefit.

TELEPHONE HELPLINE COMMUNICATIONS

We are delighted to say that throughout the pandemic, our growing social media platforms enabled us to guide our online community in the right direction, through sharing credible updates surrounding the pandemic, as well as news of crucial new services, both of our own, and of those in the community who we trust.

Throughout March 2020, it dawned on us all that face to face conversation would no longer be a main method of communication, and this was soon reflected by a soaring number of followers on our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms. As a welfare charity that aims to provide outstanding levels of support to our communities, we understand that to provide this, effective communication is vital. We are delighted that, throughout the entire course of the pandemic, our social media channels enabled us to quickly spread legitimate facts surrounding the pandemic, news of Government Guidelines and crucial services of ours and those we trust within the community, so that our city can be navigated through this emergency as safely and with as little distress as possible.

EXTENDED COVID-19 PROJECTS AND SERVICES

COMMUNITY FOOD BANK

Since March 2020, our Association have been working within a partnership with our friends, the Warwickshire GAA, to form an extended community initiative, 'Clubs Together', where members of the community affected by the pandemic can access a food bank. Through this service, we have been able to provide a crucial lifeline to those who struggled to find basic essentials in their local supermarkets, those who have been living in financial pressure and those who were self-isolating with no loved arounds around to help.

Through this particular initiative, we met many individuals who needed our help because of the most unique of circumstances, one of which was Graham. Sadly, Graham's only daughter, Denise, lived on the outskirts of London with her husband and children, and with no relations based in Birmingham, he was having trouble accessing basic necessities in his local supermarket at the beginning of the pandemic because of those stockpiling supplies. After receiving a call from Denise, we were able to deliver weekly bags of shopping and offer comfort to Graham in this challenging period, as well as peace of mind to Denise.



"I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO EXPLAIN HOW MUCH YOUR HELP HAS MEANT TO OUR FAMILY DURING THE PANDEMIC. AS A FAMILY LIVING IN LONDON, WE PHYSICALLY COULD NOT BE THERE IN BIRMINGHAM AND MY DAD, BEING PROUD AND LIVING BY HIMSELF, WOULD NEVER HAVE REACHED OUT FOR HELP HIMSELF."

PRESCRIPTION COLLECTION SERVICE

Through our helpline service, we soon realised of a need for a prescription collection service as self-isolation meant that many couldn't venture to their local pharmacies and were therefore struggling to manage chronic health conditions. In April 2020, this service was launched and has helped countless families since.

Countless people in our city have been able to benefit from this crucial service, however, for one particular family we have supported for many years, this has been most beneficial. In 2019, we met a wonderful lady named Bridget, who became a regular visitor to our Dementia Centre sessions at our St. Anne's location. Along with dementia, Bridget also lives with a chronic lung illness, and depends on her daily dose of medicines to cope day to day. Usual circumstances before the pandemic would allow Bridget's daughter, Nicola, to care for her mum daily, but increasingly heavier plates to spin such as homeworking and home-schooling, it was becoming increasingly tougher for Nicola to provide the level of care she felt her mum deserves. We were more than happy to step in in any way we could and this helped the family immensely.

"WITHOUT THE WONDERFUL STAFF FROM THE BIRMINGHAM IRISH ASSOCIATION, I DON'T HOW WE WOULD HAVE MANAGED AS A FAMILY THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD. NO TASK IS TOO LARGE FOR THEM, AND I CAN'T TELL THEM HOW GRATEFUL I AM THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO MANAGE AND DELIVER MY MUM'S PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS. THEY'VE BEEN ANGELS TO US ALL AND I CAN'T THANK THEM ENOUGH."



TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

Times such as these have made the numbers of individuals feeling lonely in our city soar to new heights and affect more demographics than ever before. Therefore, we felt that offering a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear and friendly voice to all those in our community who would like this, a wonderful way to serve our city. Since its launch in April 2020, it has made a big difference to hundreds of lives across our city.

Isolation can be an incredibly lonely time for most people, especially when living alone. However, for Frank, whose wife, Julia, had recently passed due to cancer, it had been especially upsetting. Frank and Julia were close neighbours to the daughter of one of our regular dementia clients, Christie. After hearing the news of Julia's passing in late 2019, Christie's daughter, Mary, had been looking out for Frank especially, however when social distancing measures were put in place, she felt that Frank would really appreciate having someone regularly to talk to, as he was really struggling to come to terms with what had happened. After a call from Mary, we paired Frank with one of our lovely volunteers, and since then, they have become dear friends and meet regularly.



““KNOWING THAT SOMEONE WAS THERE FOR ME, AND CARED ABOUT HOW I WAS FEELING MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO ME THIS YEAR. EVERY WEEK I LOOKED FORWARD TO MY CONVERSATIONS AND IT SAW ME THROUGH A HORRIBLY PAINFUL PART OF MY LIFE. HE IS A DEAR FRIEND TO ME NOW AND I CAN'T THANK HIM ENOUGH.”

DIGITAL CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES

During our first lockdown period, we were made aware of just how unsettling self-isolation can be in our digital era for those who do not own or have fluency in technology. To make this experience more comfortable, we launched a service that allowed us to loan tablets packed with entertainment content along with support, for those feeling most lonely and isolated in our city.

As Marianne is well-loved member of our elderly Tuesday Club, and her daughter, Lucy, often picked her up to drop her home, we knew the Bartnett family rather well. During the pandemic however, Marianne, was sorely missing her friends at the Tuesday Club as regular meet ups sadly had to be cancelled, but to help her in touch with friends and family in a more intimate way, we were able to lend one of our digital tablets. Marianne was most excited when we explained how we could help and loved showing her new skills to her family through video chat. We have also heard that Marianne has been tutoring her friends on how to keep in touch via video calling, which we feel is just wonderful.



“I COULDN’T BELIEVE IT WHEN MY MUM’S LITTLE FACE POPPED UP ON MY FACETIME! THIS WHOLE EXPERIENCE HAS GIVEN SO MUCH PEACE OF MIND TO MYSELF, AS VIDEO-CALLING IS JUST SO MUCH NICER THAN A NORMAL PHONE CONVERSATION. MUM’S EVEN BEEN TELLING THE KIDS ABOUT GOOD GAMES TO DOWNLOAD AND WHAT WE CAN WE WATCH THAT NIGHT ON THE TELLY! HONESTLY, IT’S MADE THIS EXPERIENCE SO MUCH EASIER FOR US ALL, WE CAN’T BEGIN TO THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR YOUR HELP.”

MEALS & LUNCHES FOR THE HOMELESS

Due to the danger of social contact, many welfare organisations in our city supporting those without a home tragically had to close, leaving those most vulnerable in our city without vital support, nutrition and guidance. Throughout the pandemic, we offered help to those struggling through a lunch service, where individuals could safely pick up a hot or cold meal, three times per week from our collection point, St Anne's Parish Church Hall in Digbeth.

There have been many individuals living on the streets who have benefited greatly from this service, but the person who visited, and spoke to us most regularly was Greg. Throughout the last five years, Greg had been living in Birmingham with nowhere to go, as sadly, he lost his job due to chronic illness and couldn't find another. Before learning of our services, he used to visit a well known organisation who helped those without a home in the centre of the city, who initially offered temporary housing within a hotel during the lockdown period, but as restrictions eased during the summer of 2020, he was no longer able to stay and his mental health began even more of a downward spiral. Luckily, news of our services reached Greg soon after he moved from the hotel, and we were able to provide a hot nutritious meal and refer him to our good friends, Tabor House, who provide shelter in the floors above our offices. When we see Greg regularly, he tells us of how he is feeling much better, and how he is aiming of turning his life around with the help of Tabor House and through other unique referrals to organisations within the city.

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR OPENING UP AND GIVING US LUNCH, THE ORGANISATIONS THAT WE USUALLY GO TO WON'T OPEN UP FOR US NOW, AND IT'S NOT FAIR AS WE REALLY NEED HELP."



HOT MEAL DELIVERY SERVICE

As the pandemic forced countless family dynamics and carer roles within the family into turmoil due to social distancing, we learned from our clients of the hundreds that are unable to cook for themselves, due to numerous reasons. Therefore, we created a hot meal delivery service, delivering to over 100 meals per week to those in the community.

Throughout the past eighteen months, there have been many across our city who have needed our help through our hot meal delivery service, one being Margaret. At the beginning of April 2020, our staff received a call from Margaret's daughter in law, Sarah, who was seeking help as current restrictions meant that caring for Margaret in her usual way was proving difficult. When we explained that we were planning to launch a regular hot meal delivery service across the city, she was delighted and signed up straight away. Since then, we've been delivering weekly meals to Margaret and we always look forward to catching up with her on the doorstep.

"YOU WERE THERE FOR US AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME, MY MOTHER IN LAW JUST LOVES THE MEALS YOU SEND, AND SHE'S LOOKED FORWARD TO THE LOVELY LITTLE CONVERSATIONS WHEN YOUR STAFF DELIVER. THANK YOU SO MUCH."





BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

With over 114,000 deaths recorded so far in relation to COVID-19, there has been incredible struggle felt this year physically within our communities. But what of the emotional turmoil of those millions of families left in the wake of their loved ones passing, all whilst still navigating themselves and other members of the family through a global pandemic? As an Association, we wanted to do everything we could to help those in these debilitating circumstances by offering truly human bereavement services that take our clients as individuals with their own unique feelings, needs and circumstances with suggestions and referral services unique to those individual and family needs.

“I SIMPLY CANNOT EXPLAIN HOW MUCH THIS SERVICE IS VALUED, BY MYSELF AND SO MANY OTHERS IN THIS HOUR OF NEED. YOU ARE DOING WONDERFUL THINGS, GOD BLESS YOU ALL.”

Throughout the past eighteen months, the virus has torn through innumerable families in our city, leaving grieving individuals in its wake. As a team, we have been there to comfort and guide those struggling to come to terms, and one family in particular who we have helped in this way are the Collins. It was through a call on our helpline where we first met Judith Collins, mother of two young children, Katie and Michael, and wife to postman, David. We received the call from Judith initially to enquire about hot meal deliveries to Judith’s father, however, as with all COVID cases, circumstances began to change very quickly, and sadly, David was taken into hospital due to a very severe COVID-19 infection. David tragically passed after two weeks in intensive care, and of course, things have been incredibly hard for Judith, Michael and Katie. We were so relieved that we were able to be for the family in this most excruciating period, and through talking with a specialised member of staff and unique referrals, we have helped to make this terrible time, just that little bit more comforting for the family.



SUPPORT FOR TRAVELLERS

For many years, we have offered high quality support and gained trust of the travelling community, which we are incredibly proud of. It's safe to say, that the specific kind of help travellers require, has made them particularly vulnerable this year, as keeping up to date with medical updates and Government Guidelines has been crucial in navigating the best course of action during the pandemic. To ensure that we kept all our Traveller families as safe as possible, we offered unique support for this community, by verbally sharing Government advice and making sure that all families understood the services offered that can help unique family circumstances.

With the travelling community being potentially very vulnerable throughout the course of the pandemic, we wanted to ensure that all knew that advice and guidance were offered to any family of travelling background at all times in our city. In one specific way, we were able to help one family that we have been very close to over the years, the Murphys. For many years, we have helped the Murphy family in many different ways, as they were regular visitors to our main office for assistance with passport applications and other important documents. Throughout the pandemic however, we were able to help the Murphy family in a very particular way, as they were adamant that they were to all have their COVID vaccinations as soon as allowed, but as they were not fluent and active in television/media communications, they were not sure when the right time would be to apply. Throughout 2021, we guided the family and arranged appointments so that, now, all 6 members of the family are vaccinated and safe from harm's way.

**"YOU ARE TRULY WONDERFUL, ANGELS
REALLY, AS I DON'T KNOW WHO ELSE I
WOULD HAVE TURNED TO TO KEEP THEM
ALL SAFE. THANK YOU SO MUCH."**

SUPPORT FOR CARERS

Throughout our city, and across the UK, the barring of social contact has left usual family routines in relation to care into chaos and struggle. This has also catapulted many family members into the role of carer within the family, and with additional responsibilities to manage such as childcare and working life, this can have a significant impact upon the mental health of the individual. Through our telephone helpline, we discovered that many in our community experiencing this were feeling incredibly alone, and we felt that a safe space online would be a great way to share advice, support and guidance, from both our staff and others in the same situation. We have been offering this service since April 2020 and have helped hundreds in our community in the process.

At the very start of the pandemic, we received a call from a wonderful lady named Lucy. She had recently assumed the role of carer to her eighty-year-old mother, and wanted to take on the role to ensure that her unique needs were properly met in this worrying time, but she also had a demanding career and two children to look after in the midst. Balancing all these plates alongside the ever changing and uncertain circumstances of the pandemic was undoubtedly taking its toll on Lucy's mental health, and so we recommended our Carer's Support Group, so that she was able to speak to those in a very similar position, to ask for advice and guidance and so she would feel much less alone. Due to this, Lucy was able to navigate her way through the pandemic and lead her family safely to where we are now. We are so glad we able to help Lucy and her family in these tricky times.



“I WAS REALLY AT A BAD PLACE MENTALLY AND NEEDED THIS HELP SO MUCH WHEN IT WAS KINDLY MENTIONED BY STAFF. IT’S GIVEN ME A PLACE TO TALK THROUGH HOW I CAN CARE FOR MY MOTHER IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE, WHILST ALSO MAKING SURE THAT I CAN LOOK AFTER MY CHILDREN, AND BE THERE FOR MY HUSBAND AT THIS DIFFICULT TIME. YOU’VE GIVEN A SENSE OF CALMNESS BACK TO MY LIFE, AND FOR THIS I WILL ALWAYS BE THANKFUL.”

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES

The unique circumstances of the pandemic has brought with it a myriad of problems that are unique to every family themselves, and therefore, only a bespoke solution will do. Through our wonderful Family Support Team, we have been offering support and guidance to families throughout our city, where all family members can be involved with talking through and unravelling problems together so that, with our team, a solution can be found and if helpful, referrals can be made to our own services and those we trust within our community.

Throughout the past eighteen months, our Family Support Team were on hand to help all those in local schools who were finding all the changes made by the pandemic especially tough, but it was during May 2020 that we first met the McDonald family. The three McDonald children, Emily, Maya and Edward were all attending the secondary school that our Family Support Team were based, but with three different bubbles to adjust to, and with no family around to support with childcare and homeschooling, their mother and NHS nurse, Kate, was finding things incredibly tricky when balancing home and working life. Together with our Family Support Team, we found that the children were also finding things incredibly tough as their family dynamic was dramatically different to pre-pandemic, and the younger children were finding things tricky to understand. Together with our Family Support Team, the family were able to use talking therapies to work through misunderstandings and communication problems and we were also able to offer support in relation to funding applications and school support, to offer unique solutions and peace of mind to Kate, and many other parents in her position at the school. We were so glad to be able to provide this help to so many in our community, as it's very often that families are forced into incredibly challenging circumstances in times such as these.



“I’M NOT SURE HOW WE WOULD HAVE FACED THIS YEAR WITHOUT YOU. WE NOW UNDERSTAND JUST HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO TALK THROUGH PROBLEMS TOGETHER AS A FAMILY, NO MATTER HOW HARD IT MIGHT BE AND NO MATTER HOW DIFFICULT THINGS ARE. WE HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH AS A FAMILY AND I, WE, CAN’T THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR THAT. YOU HAVE GIVEN US BACK OUR HAPPINESS.”

ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

878



Almost 900 vulnerable families helped

1,345



Over 1,000 helpline calls received

41



Over 40 traveller families supported

38



Almost 40 new carers supported

694



Almost 700 befriending calls made

91



Over 90 prescriptions collected and delivered

47



Almost 50 regular clients entertained through our tablet library service

1,096



Over 1,000 food bags collected from our food bank

2,218



Over 2,200 cold lunches collected

2,115



Over 2,000 hot meals delivered



Throughout the past twelve months, we have swiftly adapted to the rapidly changing advice and circumstances given to us by our Government and respond to the needs of our community in an incredibly efficient way. Doing so has enabled us to consistently give incredibly effective and relevant care of an outstanding quality to every family and individual across our city who have needed our help. Without the unwavering support from our funders and community, it would be truly impossible to reach numbers such as these and serve our community as we have done for many years, therefore we thank you so much and are so grateful for your support and generosity.

These figures would also cease to exist without the commitment and collaboration of our dedicated teams and volunteers, as without their warmth, kindness and strength, it would be impossible to serve as many of our community as we have done, and with the highest level of bespoke care and warmth that so many expect of us. Our team are a credit to our Association and our city, and we are truly thankful for your hard work.



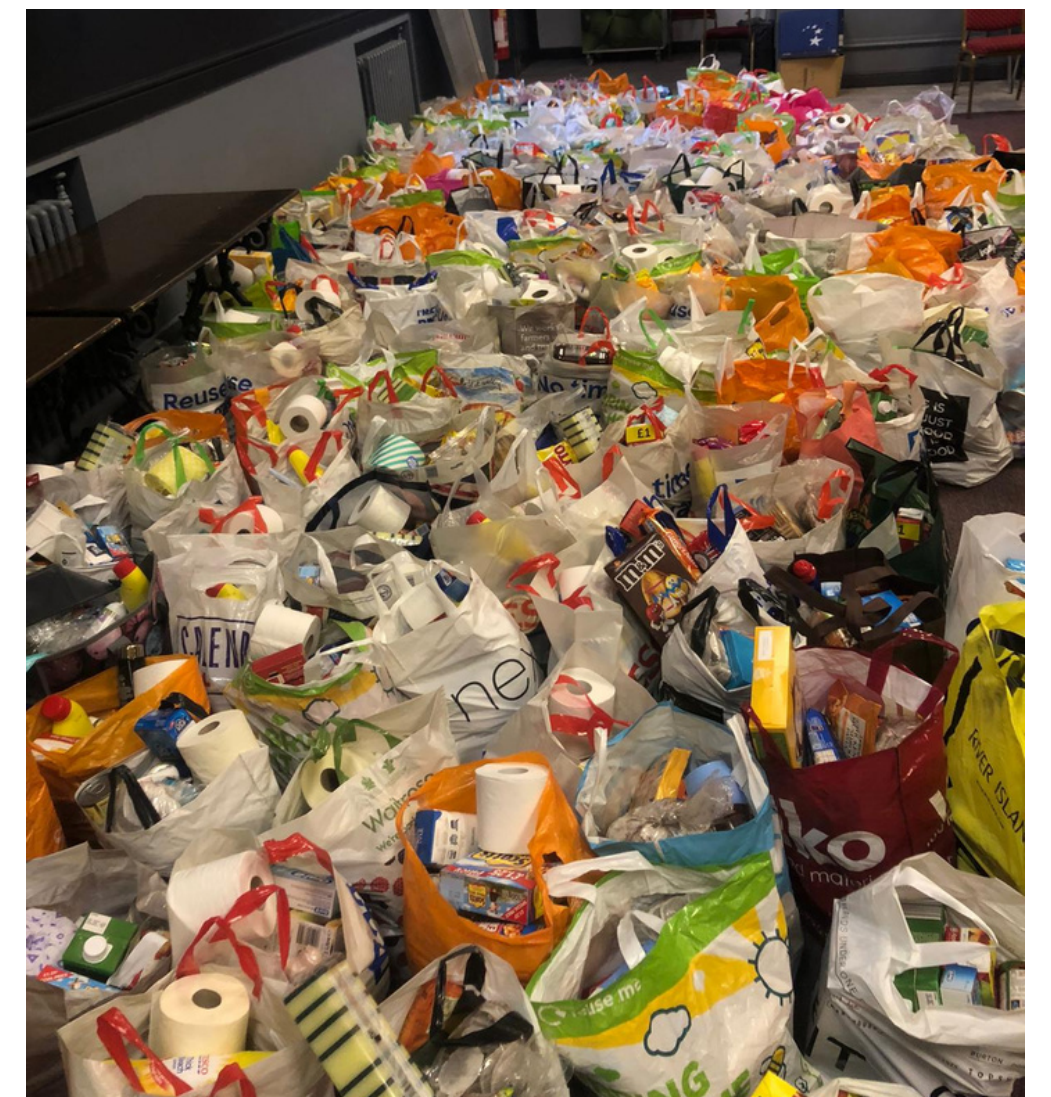
FUNDING AND FINANCES

Due to the help of our wonderful supporters, funders, friends and donators, we have been able to build upon the growth we made last year, and once again made a surplus on our finances, enabling us to maintain the health of our reserves.

During the year under review, our total incoming resources amounted to £1,040,386, with £82,349 (2020: £87,605) of that from voluntary income from our generous donators and £936,281 (of which £404,703 was COVID specific) from grants and contracts from our funders.

Those who have kindly funded our work are as follows:

Archbishop Illesley
Birmingham City Council
National Lottery
The Big Lottery Community Fund
Charities Aid Foundation
Birinus
BBC Children In Need
Irish Embassy
Ireland Funds Grant
Irish Youth Foundation
Lloyds Bank Foundation
National Lottery Community Fund
NHS Solihull
TLC Lottery
Veolia
Warwickshire GAA



PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- Continue to communicate with our community to ensure all needs are being met surrounding the ongoing pandemic situation
- Continue to give ongoing support to all families and individuals helped through the pandemic.
- To continue to help in breaking the cycle for homelessness in our city.
- To assist in the revival of Irish Cultural and Heritage events and educational opportunities in our city, when safe to do so.
- To reopen our main services once again when safe to do so, so we are able to support additionally in our original methods.
- To ensure that funding secured meets the needs of those who depend on our services in our community.
- To do our utmost to aid and combat the rise in mental health challenges for those in our city of all ages.
- To continue to collaborate with like-minded organisations in the West Midlands to support, engage and offer unique opportunities.
- To continue to be flexible and centre all services around the ever-changing needs of our Birmingham Irish Community.

