



Connect Hear NI: an innovative Big Lottery Funded project for Hearing Link in Northern Ireland (2017-2021)

Hearing Link in Northern Ireland is delighted to have been recently awarded a 5-year grant by the National Lottery for an innovative peer led project to be delivered across all 5 Health and Social Care Trust areas. The project, known as '**Connect Hear NI**', will offer new ways for adults to participate fully and confidently in life, whether dealing with a new diagnosis or having lived with hearing loss for many years.

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We would like to offer our very sincere thanks to all our dedicated volunteers, partners and supporters who contributed knowledge, time and so many personal insights to this bid, all of which led to this hugely successful outcome

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Background

Hearing Link has had an increasingly active presence in Northern Ireland since 2013 and we are proud during that time to have supported over two hundred local people through our range of specialist rehabilitation and self-management activities. To date we have delivered four of our Intensive Residential Programmes in Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown, and five of our 3-day Self Management Programmes, one in each Health and Social Care Trust area. One participant of our residential programme said that the most valuable aspects of the week were:

'Being able to feel normal again, not feeling anxious, being with people who understand what life is like for me.... helped with my confidence and self esteem. Lifted my depression'

In addition to our more structured courses, we have also delivered numerous talks, workshops, training events and two awareness raising Hear & Now Events, one in Derry and one in Belfast.

Connect Hear NI Project (2017-2021)

Connect Hear NI will help more people reconnect with their families and communities and to embrace experiences they are commonly excluded from. The project will be led and shaped by volunteers, with experience of hearing loss themselves, who will guide activities and ensure they are developed in creative ways that complement existing support and help address current gaps.

A volunteer led Regional Advisory Group/Project Team will be set up to guide all aspects of the Connect Hear NI project. Six local advisory groups will be established, two in the Western HSC Trust area to reflect the geographical spread and one in each of the other HSC Trust areas. These

groups mean we can respond very directly to local needs and priorities, with different emphases in each area to complement existing support and help address identified gaps.

In addition to our usual specialist rehabilitation and self-management programmes, Connect Hear NI will offer peer supported opportunities for people to come together for informal and educational support through all stages of their journey with hearing loss. There are three key themes:

Start Hear – to address the needs of those newly diagnosed with hearing loss or those affected longer term who would benefit from additional support

Meet Hear – encouraging people to come together with peers to share experiences and consider ways of improving access to all aspects of social and community life

Learn Hear – offering training and educational opportunities both in relation to managing hearing loss and helping people engage in meaningful education and employment

Partnership working

We are very grateful for the invaluable support we have received during the first phase of our developments in Northern Ireland. We have truly appreciated the positive relationships with sensory support teams and audiology services which have led to many referrals and allowed us to offer additional support according to individual needs. We have also worked carefully alongside a range of charitable foundations, voluntary organisations and local community groups to ensure we can complement existing supports and services. Our thanks go to everyone who has provided information and guidance, referred individual and families, taken part in our programmes and not least of all to who have provided the moral support needed at many points over the past few years. We now look forward to building on that mutual support through our Connect Hear NI project.

Financial support

Initially, our local activities were supported financially through a generous legacy from a lady who attended one of our early courses in England. However, since then we fully acknowledge and are grateful for the grants we have had from local funders, including the following to date:

- Ulster Garden Villages
- Big Lottery Awards for All
- Lloyds Bank Foundation (now Halifax Foundation)
- Enkalon Foundation
- Lord and Lady Lurgan Trust
- CLEAR Project/Public Health Agency
- Belfast Cathedral Sit Out ('Black Santa')

In addition, we have had great support from local volunteers who have undertaken a range of community fundraising initiatives and we have appreciated wider support from some UK funders. This latest grant from Big Lottery now offers us the very real opportunity to broaden our activities and to connect with even more people affected by hearing loss throughout Northern Ireland.

For more information, please contact Michelle McMaster, Hearing Link Northern Ireland Manager, by email at michelle.mcmaster@hearinglink.org or by telephone/SMS on **07534 563451**.