BELFAST UNEMPLOYED RESOURCE CENTRE

EDUCATION • JOBS • TRAINING
HEALTH • DIGNITY • PEACE

Annual Summary

2020/21

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Forward

Change towards a fair and inclusive **society**

The year has brought a lot of challenges and also opportunities for Government and local responses. The restoration of Stormont provided some hope with the promise of money for health care, improving infrastructure, supporting education and the extension of the welfare mitigation.

COVID continues to dominate the news and the changes in employment patterns look set to be permanent, this includes working from home and hybrid working. This is leading to less offices being needed in city centres and towns, but with the development of local hubs. Although many people have been double vaccinated, new variants permeate and as an organisation this has a huge impact on our response. Online provision continues and tentative, face to face support is being provided. As a response to COVID and it's challenges BURC adopted both a COVID and a Mental Health policy. Support was provided for staff and volunteers through Spectrum Life Employee Assistance Programme an online resource. Our delivery will continue to be blended moving forward.

Our once thriving hospitality sector has suffered the impact of COVID and the uncertainty around opening up again, with a number of people leaving the sector in search of more secure employment. Young people joining the sector need the necessary employability skills support. A number of sectors have had to change the way they work, flexibility and creativity are the key.

If COVID has illustrated anything, it is that money can be found for support services when needed. The profile of people accessing the Welfare system has changed due to COVID, to include the large numbers of people losing their jobs, this trend will be further exacerbated when the furlough scheme comes to an end in September 2021. Families on welfare had a £20 uplift during COVID and now the Government are planning to remove this extra support and it's removal, risks plunging a number of families into even higher levels of poverty. (We continue to support CliffEdgeNI in opposing this.) The use of Food Banks is still at a high level, something that was meant as an emergency response has turned into a weekly lifeline for many. The gap between rich and poor is widening and it's effects are felt fully by the clients and families we work with.

The effects of BREXIT and the protocol still dominate local politics with a feeling in some areas that the collapse of Stormont is a possible/ reasonable response. The government admits that the current protocol has created a situation which no side is happy with and are suggesting renegotiation to agree a new set of protocols. The likelihood is that the EU will reject this proposal. A way forward Is not clear on this issue.

Immigration numbers continue to climb in response to conflict and the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan, after a 20 year war, will lead to an influx of Afghani refugees, through a system similar to the Syrian refugee support system. It's important that we are not only ready to provide support for integration, but that the Government supplies the necessary support, financial and otherwise to supporting organisations

The National Health System is feeling the effects of COVID with the cancellation of many operations and the additional pressure has put more of a strain on an already burdened system. Added to this, a number of NHS staff are leaving their jobs and these numbers are expected to increase. Lack of investment in the NHS in the long term has led to this current crisis, with the unfortunate result that more people are feeling that going private is the only solution. A system which has been hailed as something to be proud of has been decimated over a number of decades.

The education system has dealt with a number of issues throughout COVID, including teaching from home, which highlights the inequalities of access to technology, class division and educational disadvantage. Dealing with no exams, stress on teachers and keeping young people and teachers safe in schools.

All of these issues have an impact on those we work with, Government decisions are felt directly and sometimes harshly. We have to ask ourselves, have the promises of the restored Governmental systems been realised? If not, what can we do about it and how can we best support those impacted by it?

We continue to support individuals, families and groups to express their needs and rights to live safely and fully in Northern Ireland. BURC has had to say a sad farewell to a long serving member of staff, Eileen Millar who worked for the centre for 22 years. We want to take this opportunity to thank her for her commitment and dedication to BURC and wish her well in her future.

BURC would like to take this opportunity to thank those who support our work: The National Lottery community Fund; European funders; Co- operation Ireland ; Dept of Communities; Belfast City Council, the volunteers staff and committee for their tireless work and many others who help us create opportunities and resources.

aims + Objectives

WHO WE ARE

The Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre (BURC) was set up in September 1984 and the premises were opened in 1985.

The Northern Ireland Trade Union Education & Social Centre (NITU) is a charitable organisation operating as Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre (BURC) whose aims and objectives are to provide support, education/ training and facilities to the unemployed and other groups suffering from social and economic disadvantage.

VISION

NITU/BURC aims to be recognised as an innovative provider in effecting change towards a fair and inclusive society.

PURPOSE

To promote equality, through supporting the participation and inclusion of all individuals, groups and communities.

VALUES

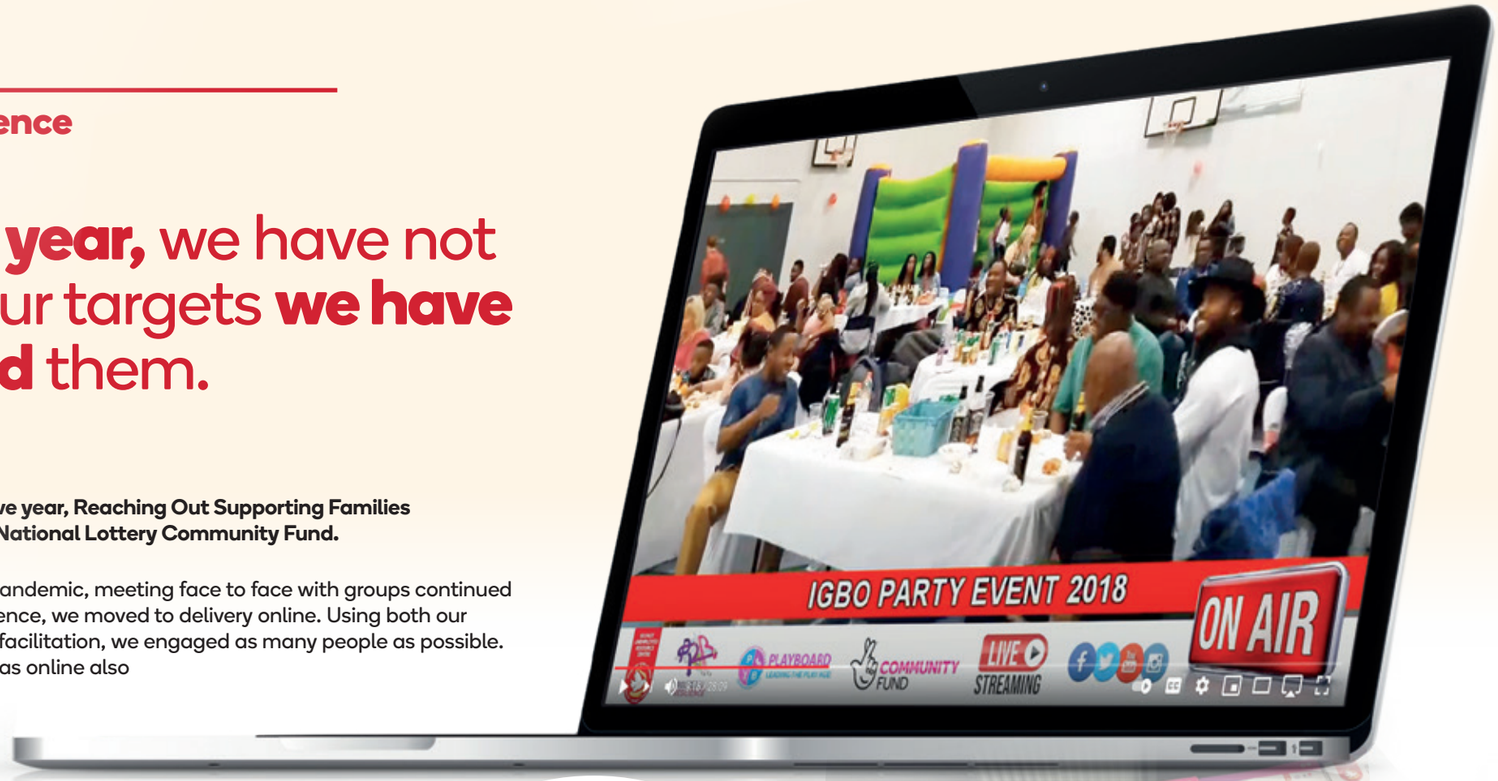
The core values of the organisation are to deliver sustainable activities and services, through a flexible creative approach based on partnership, networking, accountability and leadership.

Routes to Resilience

A difficult year, we have not just met our targets **we have succeeded** them.

This was the fifth year of a five year, Reaching Out Supporting Families programme, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

Due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, meeting face to face with groups continued to be an issue. As a consequence, we moved to delivery online. Using both our YouTube channel and online facilitation, we engaged as many people as possible. Our final celebration event was online also



YouTube resources

Arts and crafts sessions
How to make videos / Christmas decorations.

Photography
Family photo challenge / Christmas and winter photo competition.

Cookery - How to make
Pumpkin soup / Tasty Halloween treats/ Christmas Cookies.

Meditation
Let go of stress anger and pain/ Inner peace relaxation and meditation/ How to relax and meditate the easy way.

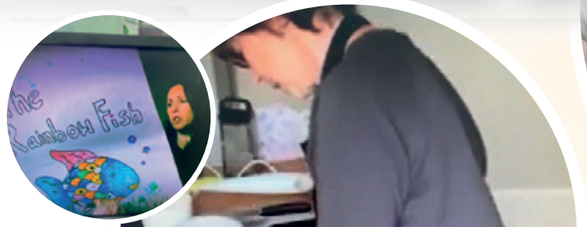
Creative writing
How to write a winter poem.

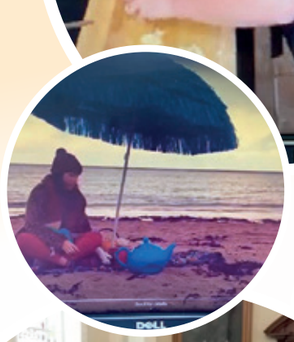
Bedtime stories
Bedtime stories for various ages read by a variety of people.

A couple of competitions were held to further engage families, which included the elements: Arts and Crafts; Photography; cookery and Creative writing.

Online courses
These were attended by youth groups, younger children and parents groups and included:

2 x Photography
2 x Arts and Crafts
2 x Creative writing
3 x Cookery





Final event

An online live stream took place in May 2021 which included live interactions from the two members of staff, videos from across a number of programmes, including music videos created during the programme, a slide show of pictures taken over the five years and a slido quiz on the numbers of people and centres engaged throughout the programme. (see below)

How many **families** in total signed up to the Routes to Resilience programme overall over the five years? **624**

How many **children** in total attended fun and summer activities? **889**

How many different **nationalities** attended Routes to Resilience activities? **32**

How many centres across **Belfast Supported** delivery of the programme? **11**

How many different programmes were run by the **Routes to Resilience** programme? **34**

Thank you

We had to say a sad farewell, at the end of May, to Aiveen Kavanagh, our Family Support worker as her secondment ended and she returned to PlayBoard. We can only offer our huge thanks for everything she did over the five years, and her contribution to the overall programme, she will be missed.

We have received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund for a further two years to leave skills within local communities, this will take the form of Community leadership train the trainer; play training train the trainer; English language training and support for setting up social enterprises. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the fund for their continued support.

Welfare Advice Service

If ever anyone needed to be reminded of the importance of the work of the Independent Advice Services, this is the time. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has caused havoc with employment and the economy, and the Welfare Advice Service has been there to support, inform, advise and represent those who have been affected.

The Advice Service changed significantly, and, of course, the challenge for staff in maintaining frontline services was greater as a result of having to work remotely and to keep interruption to our services at a minimum. We have worked hard to meet the demands of clients and still provide a first class service to every client.

With so many families relying on Social Security Benefits, it is vital local government and councils support the independent advice services throughout Northern Ireland financially.

Advising and supporting the local community

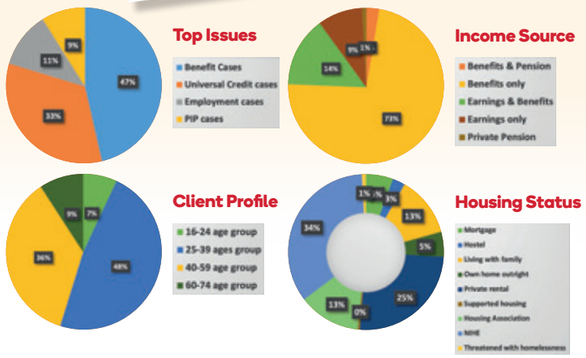
Universal credit is the first major government service in the UK to become "digital by default". This means that the application and most subsequent communication with the department takes place online. This approach has been deeply problematic for many clients in receipt of benefits. Few use broadband internet at home, making it much more difficult to maintain a claim online. Many of our clients are not 'digitally literate' and need assistance to apply for their benefits online. We regularly see how disabled clients and those with long-term health needs, including mental health problems, are being assessed as fit to work despite previously being declared unfit or unable. We continue to support vulnerable clients appeal poor decisions and our success rate of overturning decisions averages 76%.

How we help people

We have supported 230 people to get the advice they need in a way that works for them by either telephony or email. At this point we still haven't got a date we can work towards to meet clients face to face however as soon as it is safe to do so we will let all our clients know through our social media and other platforms.

To speak to an adviser you can either ring the centre on 028 9096 1111 alternatively you can email Joanne.Farrell@burc.org and we will be happy to assist you with your enquiries.

You could be missing entitlements, perhaps you think you will not qualify or the benefits system is too complex, we are on hand to check you are getting the right amount, maximise your entitlements and assist you with making fresh claims.



Outcomes

We have assisted low-income families, individuals new to the benefit system and existing clients to claim entitlements totalling £508740.61 in total financial gains for themselves and their families.

Client Feedback

We ask all our clients to give feedback, this gives us a clear understanding of the work we do well and things we can change to make the service better for the client. 79% of people reported that they felt less stressed, depressed or anxious after using our service. 94% reported a positive experience and said they would recommend us to a friend.

Supporting Organisations

Thank you to the many organisations such as AdviceNI, Housing Rights Service, North Belfast Advice Consortium and the Trussel Trust Food Banks for your continued support throughout the year, supporting the communities of Belfast. Working together enables us to provide a better service for the client and compliments the work we do.

Funder

We would like to thank the Belfast City Council for their continued funding, this has been crucial and without this financial support, we could not continue to provide this support to the people of Belfast and the Central Consortium for the partnership work.

Supported by Belfast City Council

EURES European Employment Services

With the introduction of **BREXIT EURES Cross border** is in it's final year of funding from the European Union.

Due to COVID, opportunities to deliver services directly to clients was lessened. We intend to make up the shortfall in spending in the coming year and have developed extra employability courses.

English for Employability 2020

English for Employability aims to provide migrants in Northern Ireland and the border regions with the sector specific language skills they need to improve employment prospects. The programme is offered to migrants who wish to improve their English to create employment opportunities or those who wish to increase their chances of promotion within their employment.

Migrants living and working, or looking for work within Northern Ireland and border regions, within the following sectors:

The classes which took place fall under the following:

Absolute beginners (x 3)

Volunteer induction and Training

This programmes aims to bring sustainability to English for employment by training volunteers to be able to take sector specific classes across Northern Ireland and the border regions.

Volunteer induction and Training (x 1)

Job Shadowing

No activity took place due to COVID restrictions.

ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language)

The past year has posed challenges **nobody could have foreseen.**

Our ESOL programme had to adapt quickly to the new reality of online living. When lockdown started in mid-March, we had to close our building in Donegall Street and abruptly put a halt to our face-to-face delivery of ESOL classes.

However, that did not stop our staff and volunteers: we contacted all the learners in our database of 200+, we researched resources and materials that were suitable for online teaching and ran a Volunteer Induction and Training session online to train our volunteer tutors. By the end of May, we were running two courses online: Progressors and Conversation.

The transition to online classes was not smooth for everyone. The stark reality of the challenges that some of our learners face in their day-to-day life meant that some of them could not join us. Lack of access to a decent internet connection, to an appropriate device or even to a quiet place, suitable for learning, were problematic especially for our learners seeking asylum, most of whom stopped attending our courses.

On the other hand, learners who had moved to other parts of Northern Ireland, to different countries or even continents, have been able to connect with BURC ESOL again. We currently have learners dotted around Europe and a few in South America too!

Some of our volunteer tutors decided fairly early on that online teaching was not for them, they wanted to be kept up-to-date with our progress and hopefully they will join us when face-to-face delivery resumes. We were, however, lucky enough to recruit 25 new volunteers who have helped in different ways during the year and who are based in different parts of NI.

Our funding from the Department for the Economy and Belfast Met, aimed at providing English language skills to Syrian refugees part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Now the NI Refugee Resettlement Consortium), was renewed for another year and repurposed for the new nature of our delivery.

Thank you to our Department of Communities, we managed to purchase some devices that we loaned to some of our learners to enable them to attend our classes.

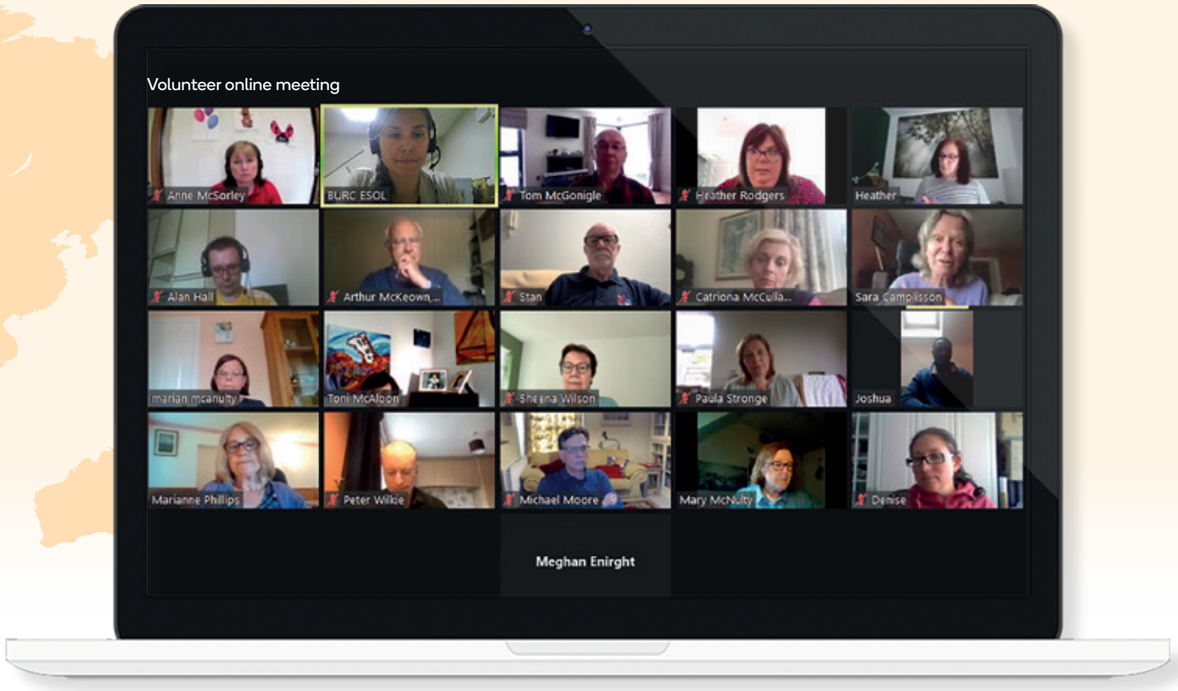
The demand for online learning has skyrocketed during the year, BURC ESOL has been able to grow and adapt, and we are currently running the following courses to meet the different language needs of a growing number of learners:

- **Absolute Beginners**
- **Advanced Beginners**
- **Progressors**
- **Advanced Progressors**
- **Conversation**

Our innovative Volunteer Induction and Training (VIT) programme was offered online to our tutors. It is focused on equipping volunteers on how to teach ESOL online in the community sector and raising awareness of material and techniques used at different levels.

Last summer, we worked in partnership with Queen's University Belfast on a research project conducted by Dr Aisling O'Boyle and Dr Xuezi Han titled Impact of COVID on Community-based English language programmes in NI (ICE). Its aim was to gather evidence on the impact that COVID-19 has had on our students' learning and to estimate the suitability of online ESOL classes. Researchers conducted interviews with a number of learners and volunteer tutors involved with BURC ESOL. As part of the project, three volunteer tutors attended a course on online teaching and delivered a short series of classes for our learners. Findings of this research project were presented last May as part of a series of conferences held by QUB.

Our partnership with QUB did not stop there; Arthur McKeown's TEMIRAS (Teaching English to Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers) course moved online as well. It was a great experience for all involved and a few of its alumni transitioned to become BURC ESOL Volunteer Tutors.



Our positive relationship with other Belfast and NI-based organisations continued virtually. We have been receiving referrals from Extern, Barnardo's, Belfast Trust, Education Authority, Women's Aid, Falls Women's Centre, Building Community Resource Centre and others. Two of our volunteer tutors delivered virtual classes to a cohort of learners in partnership with Migrant Help UK and further delivery is in the planning. We also sit in the committee of Belfast City of Sanctuary

A new collaboration with SOS BUS NI, will soon allow us to start a face-to-face course to pilot the feasibility of in person delivery. Classes will take place in the organisation's premises, which they very kindly offered to us.

A new exciting development was the creation of our very own BURC ESOL app on the Thrive platform Which provides additional support for learners whilst streamlining volunteer training processes through partnership with Thrive.App

We have renewed our memberships to NATECLA, ELT Ireland, NALA and IATEFL. Our volunteer coordinator Claudia Belloni delivered a webinar for NATECLA and two of our volunteer tutors, held presentations at ELT Ireland's online conference.

None of this would have been possible without our tireless, fabulous group of incredibly committed volunteers tutors. Their patience, flexibility and will to experiment and stretch their comfort zone, made our transition to online delivery possible. They are the backbone of BURC ESOL and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude!

Last but not least, our very own Arthur McKeown, who started the ESOL programme in 2015 and whose mentorship and continuous hard work have been instrumental in the development and innovation of the programme, was finally recognised for his prestigious "ESOL SIG Champion" award at IATEFL ESOL SIG pre-conference event this year. Simultaneously, Arthur was also honoured with an MBE for his services to refugees and asylum seekers. We are hugely proud and delighted that his tireless work and undying commitment to the community provision of ESOL classes have been recognised at such a high level.

Access Skills Ireland

Affecting youth such as negative impacts of **social media, bullying, racism, sectarianism...**

Access Skills Ireland is a subsidiary company of the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre and has offices in the Belfast Unemployed Centre and in Pearse Rd, Letterkenny.

In March 2020 we were forced to close due to COVID as all face to face training and education had been suspended by the Irish Government. In August 2020 we were able to resume our programmes.

We are currently delivering a Hospitality Operations Traineeship with Tipperary ETB, which is a 50 week course aimed at Employment Activation. A traineeship also finished in January 2021 and another traineeship is scheduled to begin in September 2021. Tipperary ETB have also contracted us to deliver our Cooking for Dysphasia and Modified Textured Diets Programme through their Skills to Advance funding which is aimed at upskilling people in employment, this innovative course is designed to equip learners with the skills to prepare meals for people with swallowing difficulties. We are also currently subcontracted to deliver Hospitality & Catering courses in Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan & Dublin.

Access Skills Ireland in conjunction with The Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre Cross Border are also delivering programmes through Peace IV such as Youth Leadership, Youth Diversity, Community Leadership and Shared Heritage. These programmes are all being delivered online since August 2020. Participants learn about the similarities and differences of their cultural background to eliminate perceptions. To build a connection between participants the programme will directly address current issues affecting youth such as negative impacts of social media, bullying, racism, sectarianism and discrimination based on class and difference. The Programme aims to build the confidence, personal development and propensity of participants to understand and accept difference.

Access Skills Ireland have been contracted by Ringsend Community Service Forum CLG to deliver three Train the Trainer course to 50 participants. Funding for this programme is to facilitate job growth and stimulate the economy in Dublin's inner city Docklands, at the same time there is funding for parallel training sessions in Yemen aimed at training local people for the rebuilding of their society.

YES - Youth Empowerment Scheme

Exercise is an important part of a **mental health support strategy...**

Due to COVID restrictions we have been unable to meet the YES group face to face. We have continued to provide support through sharing resources on our facebook page.

With the help of Belfast City Council we have been able to support young people in attending the Gym, we recognise that exercise is an important part of a mental health support strategy, particularly in a time of change and isolation, which the last year has seen. We hope to be able to meet with the group face to face in the near future.

MBE - Arthur McKeown

In a year with very few reasons to be cheerful, we were delighted to celebrate when it was announced that Teacher Arthur had officially become Arthur McKeown MBE.

Arthur started the ESOL Programme at BURC in 2015, and through his tireless work and networking skills (aka "schmoozing"), managed to turn what started as a Conversation and Job Club with a handful of volunteers and a few enthusiastic learners, into a structured programme with several courses a week and which has served hundreds of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and has seen tens of volunteer tutors involved.

His dedication and passion in promoting the community provision of ESOL classes have made BURC ESOL possible and his indefatigable work, literally, has changed lives.

Arthur's pioneering work with Absolute Beginners, both face-to-face and online, enabled many learners who started attending "Arthur's classes" with no English at all to progress to formal ESOL classes and to make a living in their new home in Belfast and beyond. His aim has always been to make the city a more welcoming place, and we are thrilled that his effort has been recognised as such high level.

He's been a generous and selfless mentor to us in BURC and to our volunteers in the BURC ESOL programme. He is never too busy to offer his help and share is encyclopaedic knowledge. His personal TEFL/ESL library is now housed in the ESOL building in Donegall Street for the volunteers to peruse. We will never be able to thank him enough.

This recognition is the ultimate proof that, as he would put it, "we must be doing something right!".

Arthur most certainly is, and we are privileged to work alongside him!

"we must be doing something right!"

John Hewitt

One year on and The John Hewitt is still wading its way through the **pressures of operating during a pandemic.**

There is no doubt that the hospitality industry has suffered a severe blow from the impact of Covid-19. Even though we are up and operating again, the heavy restrictions still being imposed on us continue to have a devastating impact on business. However The John Hewitt, staying true to form, understands these restrictions and continues to adhere to every one of them because the safety of its staff and customers is always paramount.

Unfortunately a large number of staff has moved on while we were closed during lockdown. Most of these members of staff had been with us for a many years. We would like to wish them the very best of luck in their futures and thank every one of them for their years of dedication to the bar. We now have to look to replenishing our workforce. This has difficulties in itself, with such a current shortage of hospitality workers available, but it gives The John Hewitt a chance to show a whole new group of people how it is, and always has been, dedicated to upholding the rights of its workers and showing them that you can work in hospitality without being mistreated. Which, we think, is more important now than it is has ever been.

However things are beginning to look brighter. The beer garden is now more weather proof and has had a full summer of use. Many people now preferring our outside space and it reaches capacity very quickly each day. Which goes to show the investment made in creating it was not only a good decision for the future of The John Hewitt but a very timely one also. Restrictions also seem to lifting which we very much welcome. Although they are lifting slowly we are confident they will be lifted fully in time for us to see out the remainder of this year as strongly as we did back in 2019.

BELFAST UNEMPLOYED RESOURCE CENTRE

EDUCATION • JOBS • TRAINING
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Committee and Staff Members

Committee Members - Northern Ireland Trade Union Education and Social Centre
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre.

Mr Joe Bowers – Chairperson
Mr Kevin Doherty – Vice Chair
Mr Brendan Mackin - Secretary
Mr. P. Mackel - Treasurer
Ms Anne Molloy - Member
Mr Arthur Mc Keown - Member
Ms. Mary Gray - Member

Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre – Staff

Aisling Cartmill – Routes to Resilience Co-ordinator
Adele Moore – Finance Manager
Joanne Farrell – Welfare Advice
Claudia Belloni –Co-ordinator ESOL

Access Skill Ireland

Neil Gallagher – Manager

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