



We see everyone's potential

Strategic Framework

2024 - 2028



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Foreword

Over the last 25 years we have delivered our services and social enterprises with passion and determination to advance the talents, skills, attainments, and employability of people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties and barriers to learning. We are proud that we have contributed towards being part of societal changes that have advanced diversity, inclusion and employability for people with disabilities, since our inception in 1998.

As we recover from the COVID 19 pandemic and the effect of Brexit on the funding landscape the needs of people with a disability in Northern Ireland are of paramount importance. There is more demand for funding and sustaining the vital services that provide the support to ensure employability, skills development, and a bright future.

In developing our strategic plan for the years ahead Stepping Stones NI will build on the work of the last 25 years working with our clients, trainees and their families to ensure that we offer the best service, which is person centred to meet their needs, supported by a team who embrace the values of the organisation.

We will work together, listen to what our people have told us to create better and more holistic services and social enterprises with support from our dedicated professional team focusing on the needs and aspirations of our clients and trainees. We are vision and mission focused, and we will continue to create and transform our services so that our people will continue to learn, grow and thrive in the communities in which we operate in Northern Ireland, exploring other opportunities for the future in the European Union.

Michael Scott Chair

Paula Jennings CO



A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of a collection of colorful circles and squares in shades of pink, orange, yellow, blue, and green, arranged in a curved, flowing pattern.

In 2023 we celebrated the 25 anniversary of Stepping Stones NI

Who We Are

Stepping Stones NI is a leading disability charity in Northern Ireland that delivers local services to people with a learning disability, neurodiverse and barriers to learning. We have been working with our people and their families as well as employers, schools and the business community for over 25 years.

Back in 1996 in Lisburn Co Antrim a group of driven and passionate parents, carers and business people worked with the health trust to establish Stepping Stones NI. The aim was to provide meaningful training to people with a learning disability so that they had greater opportunities for employment. We opened our services with a café and picture framing social enterprise in January 1998 and for the last 25 years we have been advancing the employability skills and inclusion of people with a learning disability, learning difficulties, Autism and barriers to learning ever since. With our range of training and employment provision, youth services and our social enterprises Stepping Stones NI can support people in their journey towards a life more fulfilled.

We have links with lots of employers and see the real and lasting benefit of our trainees achieving new skills, work placements and paid jobs.

We know that with the right support people who experience barriers to learning and employment can get a job that they enjoy and stay in that job. We support people ensuring the best future through the quality services we offer.

Our work could not be achieved without the support of our funders. We are grateful for the support from all our funders including the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust supporting placements for people with learning disabilities in our social enterprises. In April 2023 we were successful in our bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with our partners Triangle Housing Association, The Appleby Trust, Access to Employment Ltd and Compass Advocacy Network to establish the Prosper programme which will deliver a range of opportunities for people who are economically inactive to gain new skills, qualifications, and employment.

What we do

Stepping Stones NI supports and empowers people with a learning disability, Autism, and barriers to learning to live their best lives. We do this in true partnership with our trainees and clients, their families and carers and are supported by South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, our Health professionals, and our employers from the business community.

As an organisation we only want the best for the people who engage with us and to deliver quality services and social enterprises across the organisation to ensure employability, wellbeing, and inclusion.

We do this through:

Youth Service:

Engaging with young people who are neurodiverse aged 16-24 who are not in any form of training or employment through a range of activities, skills development, and employability.

Training and Skills:

Offering training and outreach training to people in attainment of qualifications, accreditation, CV writing and interview preparation.

Employment Service:

Providing employment support to people with barriers to learning to include people with a learning disability, Autism and learning difficulty. Employment Officers provide the mentoring support to help people to gain employment with more community participation and in partnership with employers and the business community.

Social Enterprise:

Social enterprises provide the practical working environment for people with a learning disability to develop the vocational skills to advance their skills towards employment.

Stepping Stones NI is proud to have our 3 award winning cafes across the organisation: The Courtyard Café, 2nd Avenue Café and The Gatelodge Café as well as Pink Elephant Cards that specialises in bespoke wedding stationery/greeting cards and Stepping Stones Picture Framing

Health and Wellbeing:

In 2023 we took the lease at Navigation House to develop a horticulture and wellbeing centre for people with a learning disability and young people with barriers to learning specifically.

The services at Stepping Stones NI ensure that people have the support and opportunity to develop their skills, realise their talents, try new things, attain accredited qualifications, live as active citizens through increased inclusion in their community, find employment and be the best they possibly can be.





Our Strategy 2024 – 2028

Our strategic focus for the next 5 years (2024 -2028) is to channel a more holistic approach to the delivery of our services and to seize every opportunity for our clients and trainees. We passionately believe that people with disabilities should have access to every opportunity that leads to a life more fulfilled.

Stepping Stones NI recognizes that the organisation is navigating through the most challenging times in its history and in a rapidly changing world.

In particular the protracted uncertainty over post-Brexit funding and replacement programmes have had and will continue to pose funding difficulties post March 2025 to ensure that people will have every opportunity to thrive in their lives. Through our leadership will continue to lobby and work as a sector with local government departments, local political representatives and the UK government to ensure continuing funding streams to sustain our service delivery into the future. We will keep our focus in diversifying our income streams towards continuous annual sustainability.

We see Social Enterprise delivery through existing and new ventures as fundamental in delivering our strategy to ensure social impact, income generation and our services that advance the skills, employability and wellbeing will need continuing funding to ensure that people with disabilities have vital services to ensure equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland society.



Our Vision

A socially enriched world where every individual can take proud steps towards a life fulfilled

Our Purpose

To nurture the potential of people with a disability to thrive in a socially inclusive society.



Our Values & Behaviours

Stepping Stones NI believes that at its heart are its values that drive service delivery and practices through our people. From the bottom up to the top down, we expect all our staff, volunteers and our Trustees to live by our values every day and refer to them when making our decisions and how we work.



Our Values

Respect: We respect everyone's right to a life more fulfilled and respect each other in the process

Inspire: We inspire employers and the wider community to see disability differently

Empowering: We empower each other to make a positive impact on the world and in the organisation, we work

Our Values drive our behaviours and govern our actions. They are at the heart of our Culture and define who we are, and how we present ourselves every day.

Our Behaviours

Driven: We are driven, seizing every opportunity to create better lives

Honest: We are honest and always do the right thing

Positively Charged: We are positively charged and passionate to make things possible.

Nurturing: We Nurture all our People to be their best

Quality focused: We are quality focused, to always ensure the highest standard.

Our Culture

**People and Purpose
are at the centre of
everything that we do.**

Through our culture our values
will be instilled throughout the
organisation, making a positive
difference to people's lives.

**Our team will work with
purpose and passion to
go the extra mile for our
people.**



Our Strategic Priorities

1. Quality:

Strive for excellence and the highest standard in all that we do

2. Team:

Attracting and developing a team of well skilled, confident, and professional people

3. Social Enterprise:

Build on and expand social enterprises to grow our income always mindful of our Stepping Stones NI purpose.

4. Employment, Training and Youth Services and wellbeing:

Develop and deliver employment and training services to find jobs for people to prosper and live well.

5. Technology:

Embrace technology to drive quality, performance and innovation.

6. Sustainability:

Develop a more sustainable and responsible business model and financial sustainability with purpose at this core.

Aims & Objectives

1. Quality

AIM

Strive for excellence and the highest standard in all that we do

OBJECTIVES

1. Deliver high quality services with input from the people who use them
2. Embed quality standards into our service delivery
3. Invest in organisational resource to ensure high impact and standards
4. Create highest standard in social enterprise products which are commercial

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- ISO quality standard
- ETI quality standard
- Compliance with funders
- Revisit Investors in People

2. TEAM

AIM

Attracting and developing a team of skilled, confident, and professional people that only want the best for our People. Ensure resilience and continuity by proactive succession planning.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop a team that live by our values, demonstrate reflecting behaviours and culture that always puts the person at the centre and encourage them to be the best they can be
2. Ensure that the Stepping Stones NI team have the tools and training to be the best and professional at their work.
3. Further develop our leadership and management skills to ensure good governance and flexible organisation.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Staff satisfaction surveys
- Staff retention
- Staff achieving set targets.
- Development of services and social enterprises
- Board performance/Code of Good Governance
- Training, development develop and maintain a Training Needs Analysis, and Training & Development Plans and Matrices

Aims & Objectives

3. Social Enterprise

AIM

Build on and expand social enterprises to grow our income always mindful of our Stepping Stones NI purpose.

OBJECTIVES

1. Deliver and further develop our existing social enterprise delivery across the organisation to grow income generation from ideas generated.
2. Focus on development of new opportunities at Navigation House with a new café investment and income generation coupled with social impact and sustainability.
3. Focus on customer satisfaction and promotion of social enterprise to maximize income generation and market position.
4. Ensure the delivery of purpose and training for people with learning disabilities.
5. Increase the footfall and income from customers for Stepping Stones NI products/ services.
6. Expand the range of commercial activities and products, in light of changing demands, needs, opportunity and social value.
7. Ensure the standard of Stepping Stones NI work and products by developing and maintaining appropriate quality standards and procedures.
8. Effectively market and promote service to ensure market position, brand awareness, disability awareness etc.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Sales (£)
- Net sales
- Sales against budget across all social enterprises
- % increase in sales
- % increase in number of customers
- Number of new social enterprise
- Level of customer satisfaction
- New café at Navigation House
- New workshops and income generation at Navigation House

4. Employment, Training, Youth and Well Being Services

AIM

Develop and deliver employment and training services to find jobs for people to prosper and live well.

OBJECTIVES

1. Enable people to progress to employment and encourage greater inclusive participation in society and their community.
2. Focus on the well-being of our people and teams across the organisation in the development of our policies, programmes, and services.
3. Continuously improve the assessment, monitoring and review of learning and employment programmes to advance the skills and opportunity for people.
4. Increase our collaboration with premier employers across Northern Ireland for employment for our people.

5. Explore the opportunity of services in ROI for development, European Projects and development of partnerships for future opportunities.

6. Effectively market and promote service to ensure market position, brand awareness, disability awareness etc.

7. To deliver services that align to Government Strategies and Programme for Government in relation to skills development, employment and health and wellbeing.

8. Secure continuous sustainable income and contracts to deliver.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Number of people participating in programmes
- % of people attending with a learning disability
- Number of people with a learning disability supported by employment service
- Number of people gaining employment
- Number of training academies delivered.
- Number of strategic partners/premier employers engaged.
- Satisfaction level of participants engaging in programmes
- Satisfaction level of parents/carers
- Satisfaction level from employers
- Number of health and wellbeing activities

5. Technology & Innovation

AIM

Embrace technology and innovation to drive quality and performance .

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase & optimise the use of technology to improve our services, our systems and process delivery.
2. Explore expansion beyond Northern Ireland in relation to employability services and opportunities for people with a disability.
3. Expand social enterprise opportunities for income generation and opportunities for people with a disability.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Development of an CRM system
- Explore developing employability services beyond NI
- Explore Peace Plus funding and European funded projects for specific projects with European partners
- Set up new café at Navigation House
- Explore other E tender opportunities with social value.

Aims & Objectives

6. Sustainability

AIM

Develop a more sustainable and responsible business model and financial sustainability for the organisation putting with purpose and people at this core.

OBJECTIVES

1. Create an ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) Strategy
2. Secure continuing funding for services and diversification of funding
3. Maximize income generation through our social enterprises and etenders

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

Successful funding bids to secure funding for delivery of services.

Increased income generation and sales through social enterprise meeting annual targets and budgets

Contact us

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📘 We Are Stepping Stones NI

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We see everyone's potential