



Our teens from 'The Patch' welcome you to our Spring 2016 Edition

Sólás Insider

'A special needs charity supporting children with additional needs & autism across NI'

The Patch opens for business

The Patch officially launched in January 2016. We had our first group of young people in from Glenveagh school and they now attend every week. Feedback from the school and the teens themselves has been overwhelmingly encouraging- they've really enjoyed learning new skills on growing plants using aquaponics and generally look forward to coming to Sólás each week. During each session we monitor our plants, complete a progress log on the iPad and visit the community garden on Donegall Pass. We also fit in some relaxation time playing games and listening to music on the iPad in our 'chill out space'. The specialist growing equipment was donated and installed by volunteers from Belfast Indoor Gardening and the amazing wall art in the chill out space was painted by volunteer Stephen.

The Patch staff Grace and Kathryn work alongside the teens when they're onsite to develop their training. All this hard work seems to be paying off as our first crop of chillies are going to be ready soon and we hope to turn them into delicious bottled sauce! The long term goal is to increase employability and provide these young people with skills they can replicate in other environments such as home and work placements. Lack of post-school opportunities for this group is a particular issue Sólás aims to address.

Please 'like' us on [facebook.com/solas.patch](https://www.facebook.com/solas.patch)



My View

by Grace Clydesdale (The Patch Co-ordinator)

Having worked for Sólás for nearly two years I recently became Coordinator of The Patch programme. This past few months have been busy preparing for the pilot & getting everything ready including entirely furnishing the chill out space! It has been amazing to see the young people really enjoying their time with Sólás and to observe their skills improving week by week. I've met a range of incredible people since beginning the Patch including the pupils and staff from Glenveagh and the Conservation volunteers Noreen and Maz at the community garden on Donegall Pass. The two Pauls & the rest of the staff from the Belfast Indoor Gardening shop have also been really helpful with maintaining the aquaponics equipment and providing their knowledge on growing chillies! I have really enjoyed taking on this new challenge and look forward to growing this project further.

'Buns in the oven' at the Kidz Den

by Sarah O'Donnell, Co-ordinator

We've been keeping busy at the Kidz Support Den this past term and it's been lovely to welcome a few new children to the programme, bringing our numbers up to 40. It hasn't been all hard work though as Easter gave us the ideal opportunity to experiment with our baking skills and make some delicious Easter buns. Finally, it is with great excitement that I announce that my husband and I are expecting our first baby in May! I will begin my maternity leave on the 28th April. Current volunteer Anna Weed will take over my responsibilities for the remainder of the next term- I know I leave the Den in good hands!



Work Experience for University and School Students

My View

(Christine Spencer, QUB)

During my Psychology degree at Queen's, I realised the value of gaining practical experience in an educational setting. Two years ago I was given the opportunity to volunteer in the Kidz Den where I was able to work with children on a one-to-one basis. This really allows you to get to know the child you're working with and to get a sense of the progress that they are making each week. It is so encouraging to see the children gaining increased confidence in their own ability. Children learn at different rates, and sometimes all it takes is getting a little bit of extra time with a personal tutor in order for a child to grasp a new concept. One of the best things about volunteering with Sólás is that we are regularly offered training and personal development opportunities including: Working with children with Dyslexia, Safeguarding and Child Protection Training, along with Maths Recovery Workshops. I can only describe my experience of volunteering in the Kidz Den as thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile. It is such an honour to have been given this opportunity.



My Week with Sólás

(Emer Lavery, Aquinas Grammar School)

I was lucky enough to partake in a week's work experience with Sólás in March. At the thought of coming to Sólás it was very easy for nerves to get the better of me but all of the staff were very welcoming and I was quickly put at ease. During my week there I was given the opportunity to spend a bit of time helping out in many of the different services Sólás offers. My favourite parts of the week were in the afterschool club for young children who have autism and helping with the Kidz Den homework club. As a lower-sixth student, the thought of having to choose my future courses and career always terrified me; I could never really decide what it was that I really wanted to do. However all of my worries have been cleared up after the amazing week that I had and I now feel much more confident going forward. I have been completely blown away by all the hard work and dedication of the Sólás team and by all they offer to the children that use their facilities and am very thankful that I was allowed to be a part of it.

'my favourite parts of the week were in the afterschool club for children who have autism and helping with the Kidz Den homework club'

Does Back On Track really make a difference?

by Michelle Reid (Senco, St Paul's)

As joint SENCO, along with my colleague Maria Stewart, we have worked in St. Paul's Primary School in West Belfast for the last sixteen years. We were informed about Sólás by our Vice Principal towards the end of June last year. I got in contact with Anne Cahill the co-ordinator of the Back on Track programme and a meeting was set up for the new academic year in early October. The programme provides support for pupils at stage 1/2 of the Code of Practice, identifying children who would benefit from additional support in Literacy or Numeracy and/or other areas of weakness.

After consultation with Anne, and our teachers, it was decided that we would select pupils from the Primary Two classes who would be eligible to receive this early intervention initiative. Soon after Mary Kennedy, Sólás Volunteer Retired Teacher, who was previously a retired principal, timetabled to come in each Tuesday morning. That was five months ago and the progress made by the pupils selected has been fantastic. Mary is so dedicated and ensures every minute of each half hour session is action packed with learning opportunities. Her optimism and professionalism shine through and are a lesson to us all, indeed she has agreed to allow our teachers to observe lessons in order that they may change and improve practice in their own classrooms. Our pupils are so eager to participate in the lessons and this individual learning scaffold has meant they have carried skills and progression back into their classwork. Teachers and parents are delighted with the progress that has been made in this short timeframe. We are extremely grateful to Mary, Anne and Sólás for the difference they have made to the pupils in our school and look forward to working with them in the year ahead. We would be delighted to welcome additional Sólás Volunteer Teachers to our school as the 1:1 support really does make a difference!

“Mary agreed to allow our teachers to observe lessons in order that they may change and improve practice in their own classrooms”

A Tribute to Eilish Doran (R.I.P)



Sólás Back on Track Volunteer Teacher, Eilish

Sadly one of our longest serving Back on Track volunteers was laid to rest on 8th March, following a heart-warming ceremony which celebrated all of her talents and the various strands of her rich and varied life.

Eilish was a true lady, a great laugh and a fantastic teacher, mentor and 'second mummy' to all of the children she patiently read with and encouraged in her role as volunteer. She worked with children from Scoil an Droichid, during her 'Back on Track' volunteering post, and truly loved to be amongst the children. She was always young at heart and there is no doubting that any child who passed through her hands will forever hold warm and loving memories of the times they spent with Eilish. She has, without doubt, left her mark and will be sadly missed by all the team here at Sólás. Last June, Eilish wrote:

“thank you for letting me be part of Sólás. I love the work, it is so rewarding and I really do not know what I would do without it. God bless all!”

Our sympathies to her children, grandchildren and wider family and friends at this time of sad loss.

Cpl SPONSORS 'BACK ON TRACK'



Many thanks to Áine Brolly CEO of Cpl Resources Plc who recently committed £1,500 towards helping Sólás roll out its 'Back on Track' Programme. The cheque was gratefully accepted by Sólás longest serving Back on Track Volunteer Anne Mooney along with Co-ordinator Anne Cahill and MD Joan Henderson.

It's a 'mixed bag' for Champ Youth

It's been full steam ahead at our youth club this term with visits from Wheelworks, who ran music technology and 3D animation workshops, along with Disability Sport, who put our fitness levels to the test with a variety of invigorating sporting activities! Marta Dyczkowska, a parent and Art Student, also facilitated arts and crafts sessions whilst our baking nights allowed our budding young chefs to produce their own rocky road and chocolate krispie buns! A trip to Colin Glen Forest Park is our next adventure so watch this space to see what we get up to!

Ross tells us all



PROFILE

NAME: Ross Duff

AGE: 12

ATTENDS: Champ Youth

What do you like about our youth club?

I like that there are people my age there that I can mess around with and do fun stuff with.

What activities have you enjoyed most?

Well, there's two really. The one I enjoyed the most was the trampolining because it's fun jumping about and talking to everyone. I also really liked the arts and crafts sessions because I got to sit down and do Jumping clay, which is what I'm used to doing at home.

What effect has this youth club had on you?

I didn't like other youth clubs because I didn't enjoy them or like the big numbers, but this club is different. It's a smaller group and there's other people here that I like. I also enjoy going because it gets me out of the house and gives me something to do. I'd like if it was on more days.

What do you think of the staff and volunteers who run youth club?

Being completely honest, some of the kindest individuals I've ever met. You're doing a really good job.

What has been your highlight so far?

Meeting new friends that I can have a great laugh. And the Rocky Road we made that looked like Ireland!

I'm available for autographs after this interview.....

Parent Group News

Our parents programme continues to offer advice, support and a listening ear to parents of children with autism and developmental disorders. Our next 8-week programme will run across May and June as follows:

Tuesdays 10.30am to 12.00pm
at Sólás offices, CRI Building

To register your space call 028 9024 7600 or email joan@solasbt7.com

Schedule May – June 2016

WEEK 1	Tuning in to your child's developmental needs
WEEK 2	Tuning in to your child's developmental needs Part II
WEEK 3	Parent and child relationships, having fun together
WEEK 4	Makaton
WEEK 5	Sleep Deprivation and Diet
WEEK 6	Visuals to use at home
WEEK 7	Mindfulness, looking after me the carer
WEEK 8	Mindfulness, looking after me the carer Part II

Kids Corner

This edition's page goes to Oliver who joined our ASD After-schools programme in September 2015. Oliver loves playing in club, setting up the club 'restaurant' and playing with the farm animals (he particularly loves the cows... Moo!). Oliver also enjoys going for walks to the local park, watching the road sweepers and the buses heading into town and exploring to see what he can find. Let's see what Oliver's day in club looks like....

You can see me at the back of the bus where I came to club dressed as Kylo Ren (the bad guy from Star Wars: The Force Awakens) for World Book Day.

We went for a walk to the park. At the park I spotted my favourite logo ... The Belfast City Council badge! I even got my photo beside their van!



Back in club I had a yummy snack with my friends, Buzz Lightyear and Mr Incredible and my other friends, listened to a story and played with some trains.

On the way back home from the park, I spotted some big pink buses heading into Belfast City Centre.

....and after all that adventure I was tired and ready for home!

Big smiles as 2016 summer scheme approaches



“most families love to have the summer break coming up – no school, no routine, loads of trips. But for me, I absolutely dread it. As a family we have to move into ‘survival mode’, knowing that without school, my child (with autism) is completely out of routine, agitated, difficult to entertain and generally causing havoc in the home. The Big Smile summer scheme has been a lifeline to our family over the past few summers. It is a safe place where the children are happy, cared for and entertained, and they come home every day absolutely exhausted.... Which means that the whole family are much more likely to get a night’s sleep!”

‘Sólás has been a lifeline to our family’

Last year’s scheme was fantastic and we’re hoping that this year’s will be even better! In 2015 we ran for three weeks across three venues each week. Almost 30 children took part, with each child having a designated support worker. We took in horse-riding, trampolining, arts & crafts, play therapy, Pets As Therapy (PAT), trips to the zoo, Funtastic, the farm, Scouts centre... the list is long! This year we are planning a four week programme in the hope to accommodate more children. The programme promises to be packed full of activities and fun. As with last year, we will be offering child spaces to families currently registered with our after-school club, before opening the scheme to the wider public. The price is £50 per week per child. The remainder of the cost is met by Sólás fundraising.

**BIG THANKS
for financial
support
towards our
ASD
Programmes**



Sólás was again fortunate enough to receive a donation from the ‘Black Santa’ sit-out at St Anne’s Cathedral. Our Managing Director, Joan Henderson, was presented with a cheque by comedian John Linehan (better known as his alter ego May McFettridge!) at the cathedral’s annual Good Samaritan service on 7th February, 2016.



GMB Union in Hollywood carried out a number of fund raisers, for Sólás, over the past year and presented a cheque for over £2,000 towards Sólás ASD Programmes at the International Women’s Day Conference on the 8th March, 2016.

URGENTLY NEEDED

Summer Club Volunteers

AND

Mini-bus Drivers

As in previous years, we can't run our summer scheme without help and we have always been very fortunate to have great volunteers, enabling 1:1 support for every child on the programme.

This year we need at least 84 volunteers to work directly with the children and a small team of volunteer minibus drivers to transport the children to and from activities.

If you are interested in helping out with this year's programme and can commit to at least one full week (see dates opposite) then please complete the relevant application form at the following link:

www.solasbt7.com/#!/big-smile-summer/copa

For further information contact kathryn@solasbt7.com or call 02890 247600 and ask for Joan Henderson or Kathryn Degnan



2016

SUMMER SCHEME

DATES

WEEK 1	4th - 8th July
WEEK 2	8th - 22nd July
WEEK 3	1st - 5th August
WEEK 4	8th - 12th August

Closing date is Friday 13th May 2016

VOLUNTEERS MUST

Be aged 16+ for the Summer Scheme and 25+ for Mini bus Driver

Have a mature attitude

Be able to take direction

Be interested in and/or have experience of working with children with additional needs

"I would recommend volunteering with the summer scheme to someone who has lots of enthusiasm and is interested in working with young kids... I gained lots of new experiences... it was loads of fun and I got to meet loads of cool people and loads of friendly kids... my favourite part of the week was horse-riding, as it was great to see the kids interacting with each other and with the animals."

(Sian – Summer Scheme Volunteer)



Running For Sólás

Two teams of staff and volunteers, from across Sólás programmes, plan to run in this year's Belfast City Marathon relay event on Monday 2nd May. 100% of the money raised will go directly towards our work with children.

If you would like to make a contribution, no matter how small, you can do so on our 'Just Giving' page at <http://bit.ly/IQUEmsu> or via our sponsorship forms available at Sólás Head Office and in all of our clubs. We would be delighted to have your support. Event Organiser, Anna Devlin said:

"The training has started, the countdown has begun and we're all looking forward to a great day which will help us raise vital funds for our kids projects"

Retired Teachers Needed

across Northern Ireland and Dundalk

Sólás Back on Track Programme is currently providing invaluable 1:1 educational support to approximately 500 children in primary schools across N.I. Next year, we hope more children will benefit from this support which, without the commitment and support of volunteer retired teachers, would NOT be possible!

If you could commit to 3 hours each week and would like to find out how you could help, please contact Anne Cahill on 02890 247600 (if calling from ROI dial 00442890 247600) or email anne@solasbt7.com

Thank-You!

Contact Us

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Belfast, BT7 1DT



Search 'Solas Autism' and 'Solas Education'



02890 247600



www.solasbt7.com



Improving sleep pattern for kids with autism

It is wise to eliminate television (and computers) for one to two hours before bedtime, as the shows children enjoy are often over-stimulating. If your child is worried about missing an episode of their favourite TV programme you can always record it or watch on a 'catchup' player at a different time.

If a bath or shower is an evening activity, follow with five minutes of a towel "rub-down," being sure to use downward strokes in the direction the hair grows. A rub-down with lotion may be used to add to the length of this activity. Pressure touch is calming. After the child is in bed, a back-rub may also be soothing. Again, be sure to start with the neck and go down to the base of the spine. Use slow, rhythmic strokes; when one hand is at the base on the spine, start at the back of the neck with the other hand.

Rough or rowdy play should be eliminated for one to two hours before bedtime; no tickling, wrestling, etc. Quiet activities such as drawing, looking at books, or playing with puzzles or construction sets are more suitable activities for a period before bed.

More tips in our next edition

....and finally

We would encourage you to contribute to our next edition of the Sólás Newsletter! You can send in your articles, pictures, the children's stories, artwork, any tips you might want to share or other suggestions you have. We would love to hear from you, so please get in touch!

