



# Sandy Row Homework Project

Business and Organisational Development Plan 2013

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## Executive Summary

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Based in the Sandy Row Community Centre in South Belfast, the Sandy Row Homework Project works with Primary 1 (age 4-5) to Primary 7 (age 10-11) pupils from Sandy Row and the neighbouring 'Greater Village' area of Donegall Road. Students who come to the Homework Project variously attend Blythefield Primary School, Donegall Road Primary School, Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Fane Street Primary School and Creggah Primary School.

The Homework Project, with a total membership of 45 students is open four afternoons per week during the school year to provide homework help, one-to-one/small group tuition and a thriving numeracy program for approximately 15 pupils. The Homework Project also offers summer and holiday schemes to help students catch-up, reach ahead, and most importantly retain and maintain learning gains over those periods when school is not in session. In a community of endemic educational underachievement, participation in the Homework Project assists students in developing positive and aspirational attitudes towards education and confidence in their educational development. Using volunteer tutors from Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast and beyond, the Homework Project has been a leader in developing community partnerships that provide pupils with high-quality assistance and role models for scholastic success. Regardless of which educational path students who have participated in the Homework Project ultimately pursue, students who actively engage with our programs move on with the key skills and learning strategies needed to succeed at school and attitudes which will help them be positive contributors to the community.

Those staffing the project over the course of the last twenty years have consistently identified basic literacy and numeracy as major areas of concern. It has also been clear that in the communities with which the Homework Project most closely works a combination of socio-economic forces and the lasting legacy of 'the Troubles' have had a negative effect on both community cohesion and, subsequently, attitudes towards education. Both the parents and the young people that the Homework Project works with tend to be low in confidence, self-esteem and aspiration. There tends to be little interest in education in these communities with no real sense of the value or worth of education. The tutors with the project regularly encounter pupils who are outright resistant to learning, and enticing pupils to complete homework fully, make use of reference materials, or even read a book is often a serious challenge. In order to face these challenges, the Homework Project has over time introduced additional services such as one-to-one tuition in mathematics and English, reading recovery, and reading groups for P6/P7 pupils. Over time one-to-one tuition has developed into a full numeracy program, which has become one of the project's greatest successes, with at least six pupils who have participated going on to university, with the first two such pupils graduating in 2012.

## Community Context

The success of the Homework Project needs to be considered in view of the community context in which it works. Sandy Row is located within Shaftsbury Ward, in the top 5% most disadvantaged wards in Northern Ireland according to the most recent (2010) multiple deprivation data available from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.<sup>1</sup> Located in Blackstaff Ward, the Village is within the 10% most deprived communities in Northern Ireland, though there is a strong case to be made that within the ward the Village represents a significant concentration of deprivation. As part of the government's 2003 'People and Place' strategy Sandy Row and the Greater Village were identified as neighbourhoods in significant need of renewal as part of the South West Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area.<sup>2</sup>

According to 2011 census data available for Shaftsbury Ward (which also includes Donegall Pass and the Markets), of a total working-age population of 5725, 39.3% were classed as economically inactive with a third of those classed as 'economically inactive - long-term sick and disabled'. Of the 60.7% of those economically active, 9.7% were unemployed.<sup>3</sup> Though it is important to focus on possibilities for the future of communities like Sandy Row, it is also difficult to ignore the legacy of the Troubles in the community, which has for decades served as a stronghold of the Loyalist paramilitary movement.

These statistics indicate that there is a high concentration of poverty in Sandy Row and the Village which can be considered to underpin a range of individual and social problems including: poor physical and mental health, the normalisation of a culture of joblessness, disconnection from the informal networks which are key to obtaining employment, problems with literacy and numeracy, high rates of teen pregnancy, and, most significant for the work done by the Sandy Row Homework Project, a community acceptance of educational underachievement.<sup>4</sup> Most crudely, the scale and intensity of deprivation in these communities manifests itself in a life expectancy six years below the national average.<sup>5</sup> These problems are also obvious at a more abstract level in lowered individual and community confidence and broader social alienation.<sup>6</sup> As the recent flag protests have illustrated, there is a strong undercurrent of social disaffection within working-class Loyalist communities in Northern Ireland at present, though these problems have much deeper roots. Numerous government and public interest body investigations have highlighted the range, complexity and intensity of deprivation

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<sup>1</sup> Belfast Youth Services, "South Belfast Area Plan, 2013-2016," Northern Ireland Education & Library Boards' Youth Services (2013): 29.

<sup>2</sup> South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, "Action Plan 2011-2015," Department for Social Development, South Belfast Partnership Board and South West Neighbourhood Renewal (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, "Economic Activity: KS601NI (administrative geographies)." Census Data (2011). Available 01/13: <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/PivotGrid.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, "Action Plan 2011-2015," 3. Broader examinations of the link between various social problems and economic inequality in advanced industrial nations can be found in: Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Toronto: Penguin, 2010); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, "Action Plan 2011-2015," 17.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Sayer, *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

related problems in Sandy Row and similar communities through a multiplicity of micro and macro level research and policy documents.<sup>7</sup>

In communities like Sandy Row, educational underachievement becomes both an effect of multiple sources of deprivation and a cause. In communities where education is 'under-valued and under-appreciated,'<sup>8</sup> low expectations of achievement lead to low rates of qualifications attainment. During the period 1997-2002, the most recent period for which Sandy Row-specific data is available, out of 100 school leavers from the community, only 5% obtained two or more A levels or above (in any subject) and a stark 13% obtained five GCSE passes or more (compared with figures of 36.3% and 57.4% respectively for Northern Ireland as a whole for the same period).<sup>9</sup> More recent data for the South West Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area (Sandy Row and Donegall Pass) indicates that there may have been some improvement over the last decade with 16.8% of pupils achieving two or more A-levels.<sup>10</sup> Issues with basic literacy and numeracy among adults have also been identified.<sup>11</sup>

A lack of formal qualifications severely restricts the range of employment opportunities, which can be pursued by members of the communities with which we work. There are numerous sources of employment within walking distance from Sandy Row and the Village, however if local people are not suitably qualified for these posts they cannot take advantage of our geographic position.<sup>12</sup> It has been illustrated that in times of economic downturn, such as the global recession that we have been living in since 2008, it is those with the lowest levels of qualifications who become most vulnerable to job losses and prolonged unemployment<sup>13</sup> as new graduates and the newly unemployed with formal qualifications occupy positions for which they would previously have been considered overqualified.<sup>14</sup> That the recession is occurring alongside a broader transition within industrialised countries to a 'knowledge-based' economy means that those without formal qualifications risk being left even further behind. But beyond difficulties in employment, issues with basic literacy and numeracy have a severe impact on the daily lives of those affected. Not only does it make playing an active role in children's education difficult, but it also acts as a barrier to full and active participation in civic life and the formal political process.

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<sup>7</sup> Addressing the Needs of Working Class Protestant Communities Taskforce, "Sandy Row Project Team Final Report," Department of Social Development (2004); Belfast Youth Services, "South Belfast Area Plan, 2013-2016"; Dawn Purvis and the Working Group on Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class, "Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action" (2011); Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, "Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010," Department of Finance and Personnel (2010); South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, Action Plan 2011-2015"; The Sandy Row Community Forum, " 'Revitalise': A Neighbourhood Sustainability Plan Sandy Row," Department for Social Development, Sandy Row Community Forum, Belfast City Council, The European Union's European Regional Development Fund.

<sup>8</sup> Dawn Purvis and the Working Group on Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class, "Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class," 11.

<sup>9</sup> Addressing the Needs of Working Class Protestant Communities Taskforce, "Sandy Row Project Team Final Report," 31.

<sup>10</sup> Compared to a Northern Ireland average of 46.1%. (South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, "Action Plan 2011-2015," 13.)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 11.

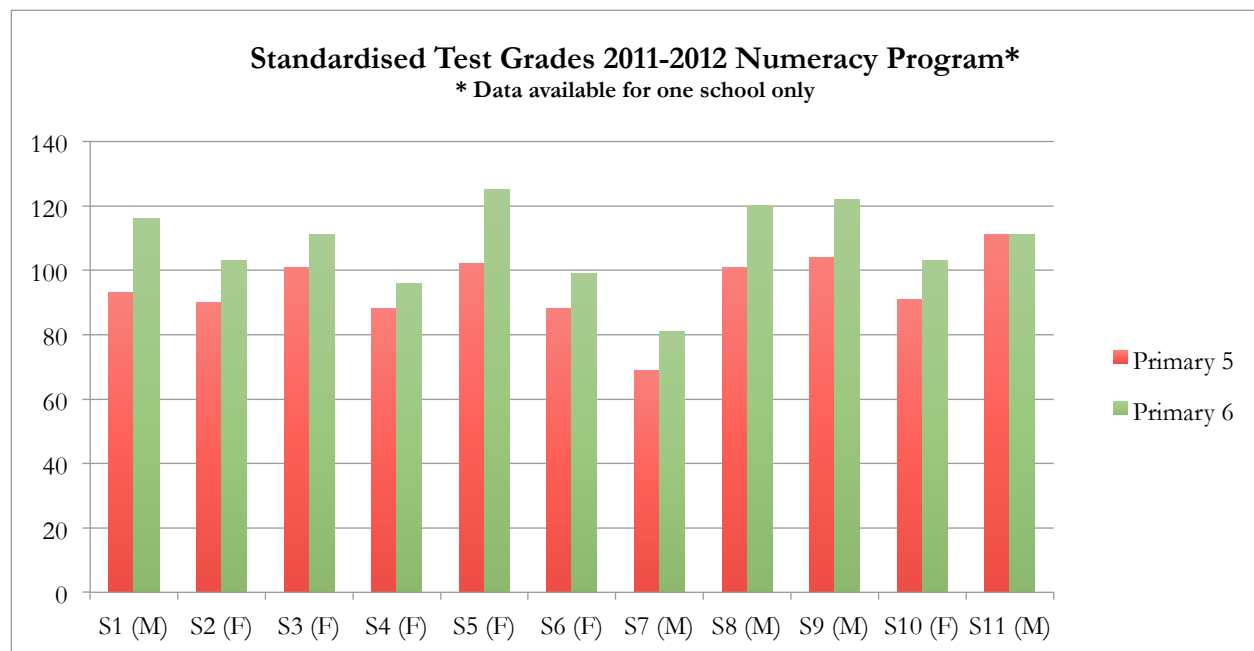
<sup>13</sup> Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Brynin, "Overqualification in employment," *Work, employment and society* 16, no 4(2002): 643.

The Sandy Row Homework Project is committed to ensuring basic literacy and numeracy among the young people that we work with not only to improve their educational (and eventual employment) prospects, but to ensure that the next generation of local youth are equipped to make the kinds of positive community and civic contributions that will lead to a strong and vibrant Northern Ireland.

## Highlights

- Numeracy program
  - Since the introduction of the numeracy program a number of years ago, we have been able to track the advancement of at least six former Homework Project members to the university level, with two graduating in 2012.
  - According to data made available by one of our key primary school partners, among the eleven students participating in the 2011-2012 P6/P7 Numeracy Program, there has been an average increase in standardised test performance of 14 points in mathematics, with approximately 20% making gains of 20 points or more. Though similar data is not available for pupils attending other partner primary schools, we are confident that this is an accurate reflection of the kinds of gains made by all participants in the Numeracy Program.



- Educational confidence
  - According to 2011-2012 parent evaluations 80% of parents cited that they had seen an improvement in the educational confidence of their children. While in some cases this improvement was specifically related to mathematics, the majority of parents reported increased confidence across all subjects. In communities where educational underachievement is normalised and self-confidence in academic abilities is very low, this is a major accomplishment and a key stepping stone on the path to elevating pupil aspirations.

- Partnership Development
  - Over the past few years, the Homework Project has been able to build and sustain successful community and school partnerships with: Blythefield Primary School, Donegall Road Primary School, Queen's University Belfast, Sandy Row Community Forum, and Stranmillis University College.
  - The Homework Project was the recipient of a 2012 'Community and Education Partnership Award' in recognition of the success of its partnerships with Blythefield Primary School and Stranmillis University College.
  - 70% of pupils attending the Homework Project arrive via a referral from their local school. This is indicative of the high premium placed on the programs and services offered by the Homework Project by local primary schools.

## Objectives 2013-2015

- Introduce a formal Literacy Program
- Increase number of pupils attending the Homework Project on a regular basis from Primary 3 –5
- Increase the number of places on the Numeracy Program to 20
- Recruit new volunteers, particularly for the February – June period, to increase the amount of one-on-one tuition provided
  - Leverage partnerships with Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast to ensure a steady and reliable flow of young volunteers
- Explore new possibilities in our partnership with Stranmillis University College to incorporate volunteer tutoring as a recognised part of students' teaching practice.

## Mission Statement

*To increase aspiration, build educational confidence and develop the key skills needed for the success of local pupils in school and beyond.*

## Description of the Homework Project

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The Sandy Row Homework Project was established in 1993 in response to a request from a group of local parents for a tutor-led facility to support pupils with their homework assignments. Beginning life as a one afternoon per week initiative, over the years this has increased to four afternoons weekly, allowing the project to provide small group and one-on-one support for a much greater number of pupils. This growth was made possible through the financial support of Children in Need who have provided an operating grant since 2007, though this funding is set to expire in June 2013. Currently the Homework Project has a regular membership of 45 pupils with an average daily attendance of 9-12 pupils.

## Legal Entity

The Sandy Row Homework Project is a non-profit community group organised and operating under the umbrella of the Sandy Row Community Forum.

## **Location & Resources**

The Sandy Row Homework Project is located in the Sandy Row Community Centre at 75 Sandy Row. The Community Centre is a bright space, located along the main street running through the community. It is located a short walk from Blythefield Primary School and less than a mile from Donegall Road Primary School.

The Homework Project operates out of two adjoining spaces on the Community Centre's second floor. The main room can accommodate up to 15 pupils at a time (plus tutors), while the adjoining space can accommodate an additional two pupils (plus tutor).

The Homework Project has built up its own small reference library of reference and reading books that can assist pupils in developing their reading skills, completing homework assignments and writing research projects. Students have also access to a computer with internet access for research purposes. These are invaluable resources, especially in light of the closure of the Sandy Row library several years ago and the financial limitations on many local families that place these types of resources out of the reach of a number of our pupils.

## **Hours of Operation**

School Term:

Monday – Thursday, 2pm – 5pm

Primary 1/Primary 2: 2pm – 3pm

Primary 3/Primary 4/Primary 5: 3pm – 4pm

Primary 5/Primary 6: 3:30pm – 4:45pm

Holidays:

Reduced schedule

## **Management**

The Homework Project is managed by the Tutor Co-ordinator, a retired secondary school teacher, who also works as a hands-on tutor within the Project. His salary is covered by the Children in Need Grant and is administered by the Development Manager of the Sandy Row Community Forum. The Tutor Co-ordinator is responsible for overseeing all of the operations of the Project, with much care and attention paid to maintaining communication with both the parents and primary schools of children involved in order to track progress and achievement. Careful monitoring of pupil development at individual and cohort levels allows the Tutor Co-ordinator and individual tutors to adapt their approaches to best fit the educational needs and learning styles of pupils. The Tutor Co-ordinator is also responsible for fostering links with community partners, including Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast, and training tutors.

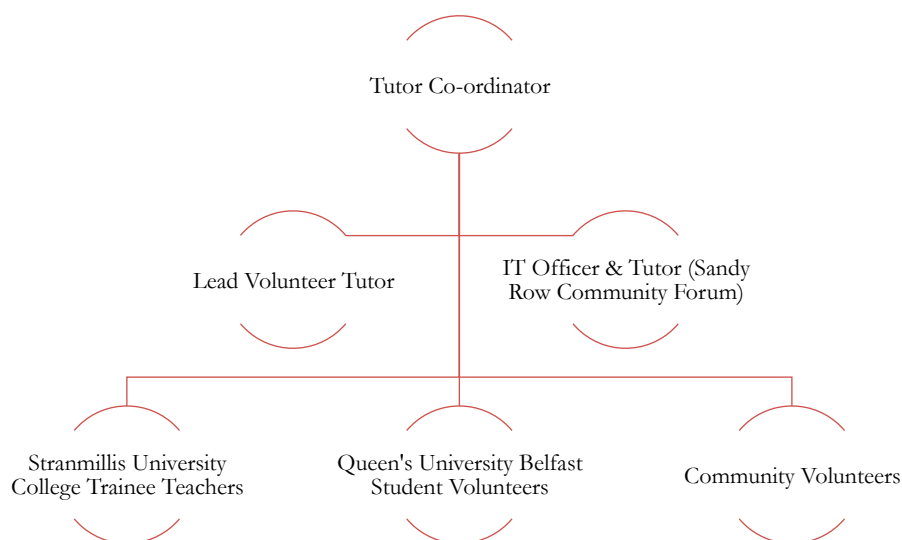
The Lead Tutor Volunteer assists the tutor co-ordinator in many of his functions, particularly in the areas of curriculum development and educational strategy. At present time the Lead Tutor Volunteer is a PhD candidate at the University of St Andrews and member of the local



community. Occasional tutoring services and information technology support are provided by an administrative volunteer from the Sandy Row Community Forum.

Volunteers have tended to come from Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast and the broader Belfast community. Stranmillis University College students, all from the teacher-training program, volunteer from November to February. Queen's students from across the university (tutors have previously come from departments as diverse as dentistry, English and history) volunteer from October to May of each year. There are also a number of highly qualified volunteers from the community, including recent graduates, community/youth workers, accountants and retired teachers, who share their time and expertise with the pupils. In recent years volunteers have come from both communities in Northern Ireland and from a range of international backgrounds. In a community with low educational achievement and of significant ethno-religious homogeneity, our tutors provide students with much needed role models for educational success and also help to teach pupils about respect for/the value of different cultures and traditions. All of those who work with our pupils have valid AccessNI checks.

### **Organizational Structure**



## **Programming**

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### **Primary 1/Primary 2**

For the youngest pupils that we work with, our focus is on homework completion and literacy development. Children work through assigned reading books with tutors on a one-to-one basis, while homework assignments are completed with one-to-one assistance or in small groups. Students also have the opportunity to read interest books with our tutors, with reference books relating to students' personal interests being extremely popular. Pupils also have the opportunity to engage in co-operative educational play with their peers, which allows them to develop teamwork skills.

## **Primary 3/Primary 4/Primary 5**

Our sessions for P3-P5 pupils are very much focused on homework completion and skills reinforcement. Students bring in homework assignments and work one-on-one (most frequently) or in small groups with tutors to ensure full completion that reflects the best of our pupils' abilities. In working closely with students, tutors are able to identify any trouble areas. Where students are having difficulties in a particular subject or area of the curriculum, extra practice and reinforcement materials are available and tutors work carefully with the pupils to ensure to ensure that key concepts are learned and retained.

## **P6/P7 Numeracy Program**

While Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils are also able to come to the Homework Project to complete homework assignments with the assistance of a tutor, the focus in these later years is on building the skills needed for success at the post-primary level. Where difficulties with mathematics have been repeatedly presented by parents as an area of key concern, the Numeracy Program has been developed to help boost the skills of those at risk of entering secondary-level education significantly behind their peers, those looking for extra support to improve their mathematics performance, and those who are looking for additional challenges in mathematics. The numeracy program reaches across the Primary 6 and Primary 7 curriculums, with the ability to also cover the Primary 5 curriculum if pupils so require. There are currently 15 pupils on the program for the 2012-2013 school year.

## **Summer Scholars**

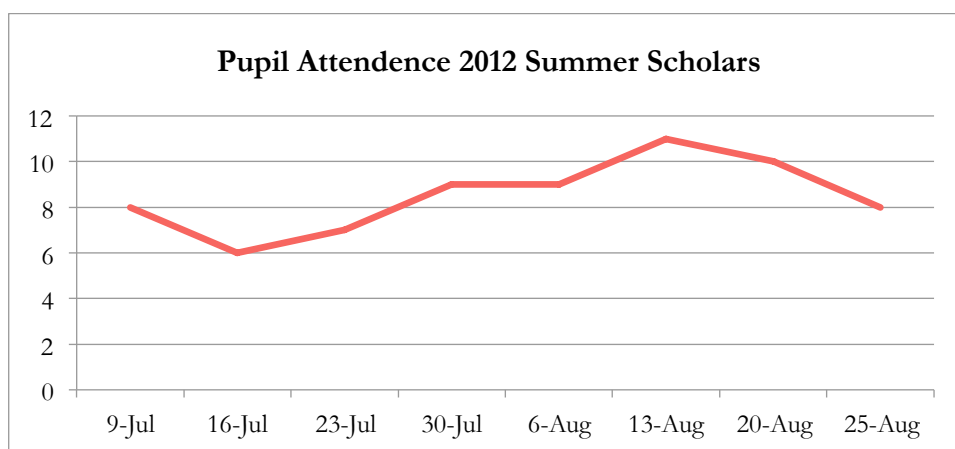
A summer version of the numeracy program runs over eight sessions during the annual holidays. The summer program was developed to respond to the recognised detrimental impact that long breaks from academic activity have on pupils, particularly from socio-economically disadvantaged communities.<sup>15</sup> In 2012 the program was able to achieve record attendance with 11 pupils registered and a daily attendance of 8.5.

Given competition from a locally organised summer activities scheme running at the same time, that so many young people voluntarily committed to improving their numeracy (and in some cases literacy) skills and getting ready for the next school year in an area of endemic educational underachievement is really rather remarkable.

On July 23, 2012 Mr M Storey, Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Committee visited the Summer Program, taking the time to talk with both children and parents about their experiences with the Homework Project. He also met with the tutor co-ordinator regarding the financial needs of the facility.

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<sup>15</sup> Karl L Alexander, Doris R Entwistle and Linda Steffel Olsen, "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap" *American Sociological Review* 72, no 2 (2007): 167-180; W A Macauley, "Case Study F – Flexibility in the Curriculum: Academic Performance and the School Holidays," in Dawn Purvis and the Working Group on Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class, "Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class," 34-35.



## Keys to Success

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### Collaboration and Partnership

The success of the Homework Project has been underpinned by partnership building both within the communities served and across Belfast. Contact between the Homework Project and its main feeder schools, Blythefield Primary School and Donegall Road Primary School is frequent, at least once weekly, often more. The Homework Project operates an 'open-door' for parents to encourage them to voice their questions and concerns. Parents with pupils on the numeracy program are also given a progress report every six weeks in order to keep them informed of the improvement and challenges faced by their child.

In September 2010, the Homework Project expanded its community partnerships, beginning to work more closely with the Sandy Row Community Forum and Stranmillis University College. The Sandy Row Community Forum provides administration for the Children in Need Grant and other technical assistance for the Homework Project while the partnership with Stranmillis has meant that a number of student teachers are able to gain valuable experience working as volunteer tutors from November to February each year. Soon to be placed in the classroom, the volunteers from Stranmillis represent a valuable resource for the Homework Project, providing highly qualified tutors versed in a range of learning methods. In June 2012 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community Services Branch presented a 'Community and Education Partnership Award' for fostering social enterprise through collaborative partnership jointly to the Homework Project, Stranmillis University College and Blythefield Primary School. In making the award, the Community Services Manager of the NIHE praised the partnership for helping to raise pupil aspirations and for its strategic tackling of low levels of educational attainment in the local area.

In 2012 a number of students from Queen's University Belfast also began to volunteer with the Project, diversifying the experience and talent pool of our tutors. In addition to providing practical assistance to the pupils involved in the Homework Project, these student volunteers are

modelling opportunities for educational advancement where there is a lack of ready role models of educational achievement. In February 2013 a fourth-year student from the School of Dentistry at Queen's was awarded volunteer of the month in recognition of his efforts volunteering in the Homework Project.

## Financial Management

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The finances for the Sandy Row Homework Project are distributed and managed by the Sandy Row Community Forum, the main local umbrella organisation for a range of small community groups. Over the past five years, the activities of the Homework Project have been made possible through the generous support of Children in Need, the BBC's charity supporting a range of programs benefiting children and young people across the United Kingdom. Over the past five years, Children in Need have provided a £50,000 operating grant (£10,000 per annum), however this is set to expire in June 2013, with future funding still to be secured.

### Proposed Budget 2013 – 2016

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	Total
Tutor Co-ordinator's Salary	12,000	12,000	12,000	36,000
Workbooks/Printing	500	500	500	1,500
Marketing and Outreach	300	150	100	550
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,800</b>	<b>12,400</b>	<b>12,300</b>	<b>37,500</b>

In order to maintain present levels of service and expand future offerings, a total operating grant of £37,500 would be needed over the next three years. In the first year, this would require an operating grant of £12,800, decreasing to £12,400 and £12,300 respectively in years two and three. We are very confident that with a stable source of medium-to-long term funding we can build on our successes in raising attainment levels among pupils, building partnerships, and developing strategies for boosting confidence & raising aspirations right across the whole community.

## Plans for the Future

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### Literacy Program

Following on from the great success of the Numeracy Program, we would like to expand into running a Literacy Program. While we would expect that many of those already engaged in our numeracy program for Primary 6/Primary 7 pupils would be interested in enhancing their literacy skills, this program would also help us to reach out to new students who have yet to come to the Homework Project. The literacy program would, like the numeracy program, begin with a focus on bringing students up to the standard outlined in the Primary 6/Primary 7 curriculum and

preparing for post-primary level studies while providing students with the opportunity to engage in enriching 'off-curriculum' activities that will reinforce basic skills while honing critical thinking abilities.

Looking at the success of writing centres such as Fighting Words in Dublin, itself modelled after 826 Valencia in San Francisco (United States), it is clear that improving literacy among young people, particularly those from communities of socio-economic disadvantage greatly increases educational confidence and pupils' sense of self-worth & accomplishment.<sup>16</sup> The ability to write in particular offers students not simply the capacity to better answer test questions or class assignments, but a creative outlet for self-exploration and personal development. Writing offers young people the opportunity to engage with and find meaning in the world around them and is therefore valuable in and of itself as well as being a means to an end.

## **Expansion of the Numeracy Program**

In order to ensure that as many students as possible are receiving the assistance they need to develop and enhance their numeracy skills we would like to increase the number of places on the numeracy program to 20 from a current intake of 15. As demand for the numeracy program is high, not only among pupils in our partner schools but from pupils from Sandy Row and the Village who attend a wide variety of primary schools, expansion is needed to keep pace with community needs. In order to expand the Numeracy Program, we also need to grow our base of stable volunteers as we have found that the greatest amount of success is derived from one-on-one tuition where it is possible for the tutor to develop a keen understanding of the pupil's learning style and individual areas of strength.

## **Partnership Development**

We would also like to continue to grow our community partnerships. Beginning with the local primary schools with whom we work most closely, we would also like to see the strengthening of our partnership with Queen's University Belfast. Most pressing, we would like to see in our partnership with Stranmillis University College further consideration of the potential for including volunteering with the Homework Project as part of the teaching practice of trainee teachers. Such recognition of efforts in the Project would help to ensure a consistent and ready supply of tutors. It might also help in extending the availability of Stranmillis students beyond February and into the rest of the school year.

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Kent, *A Guide to Creating Student Staffed Writing Centres: Grades 6-12* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 16. For more information on Fighting Words please visit: <http://www.fightingwords.ie/>. For more information on 826 Valencia please visit: <http://826valencia.org/>.