A new committee was elected at the AGM in February 2016 including myself as chairperson. Under this Committee, the women’s group has had another very successful year and ran some worthwhile courses which were thoroughly enjoyed.

In addition we moved into premises on 1st December when we relocated our base to the Heaney Homeplace. We had become unsettled after a series of unfortunate events beginning in October. It started with the unannounced arrival of a Mixed Martial Arts Club who moved into the rooms upstairs in the Old School Centre, including our room where we did our sewing! From there things went downhill. After some discussions with the Bellaghy Development Association which were not productive it was decided to look for an alternative home. The Committee decided that a move would be beneficial for the future of the group. Committee members went to see Bellaghy Bawn and the Heaney Homeplace and on discussion it was decided that the Annexe of the Homeplace provided the most suitable new home for the Women’s Group. On Saturday 26 November after a week of clearing out over sixteen years worth of paperwork, possessions and memories, BWG finally moved out of the Old School Centre.

The manager of Heaney Homeplace was delighted to have BWG relocate to the annexe of his premises. We have been given permission to use a large cupboard in the Annexe to store our filing cabinet and other possessions at no cost and we rent out rooms as and when we need to. This has worked well so far as the rooms are warm, clean and set up for us when we arrive – doing away with the need for someone to go in early and get heat on and the room ready. A caretaker locks up when we are finished - again doing away with the responsibility of securing the building. We are fortunate enough that we still have funding from the John Moore fund which pays the rent, although this grant expires later on this year.

We hope to continue this year with more well-being courses from the Recovery College and also more poetry reading. If anyone has suggestions for courses that they would like and potential funding opportunities, I would be delighted to hear from them.
Events this year

St Patrick’s Night Party

A St. Patrick’s night party was held in the Old School on 16th March. The event was attended by old and new members, partners, guests and children. The Gribbin Girls sang at the event and we had poetry readings and music from some of the children in attendance. Refreshments of Irish stew and apple tart were provided by the Blair’s for all those who attended. We were delighted to hand over a cheque for £500 to Marie Curie Cancer Care. The majority of this money was raised at the St Patrick’s event and BWG rounded it up to make a total of £500.

Reading Room Project/Verbal Art

Verbal Arts in Derry offered us the opportunity to read and interpret poetry with the help of a facilitator. This commenced on 11th May and was led by Maura Johnston. Maura read poems by Seamus Heaney to the group and the group would discuss the meaning of the poems and the memories of life in the area which they brought back to everyone in attendance. Those in the group would also reminisce about their memories of Seamus Heaney himself. Maura’s sessions were extremely popular and carried on to the end of June and restarted in September and ran weekly to the end of November.

Brainfit

Richard McChesney of Fingerprint Learning delivered two sessions on 3 and 10 November to a group of approximately 20 attendees. The sessions looked at dementia, its causes and tips and exercises that could be used to help you keep your own brain fit and active. Richard returned on 8 December to deliver a third session with more hints and tips on keeping your brain active.

Chi Me

Three Chi Me sessions were delivered in November by Kathleen McWilliams. These fun and stimulating sessions involved some simple Tai Chi movements and positions as well as some games of indoor boccia. The sessions were all great fun and everyone enjoyed these and enjoyed learning some Tai Chi.

Christmas Party

The Christmas Party was held on Saturday 10th December from 2pm to 5pm in the Annexe of the Heaney Homeplace. Entertainment was provided by Francis Devlin and refreshments of tea, coffee, mince pies and shortbread were provided for all those who attended.
The Recovery College

Rosemary Hawthorne and Eileen Quinn of the Recovery College provided 4 weekly workshops to women's group members in the Heaney Homeplace. Topics covered included assertiveness, self-confidence, positive self-talk and building resilience. The workshops were very informative and fun and all the participants enjoyed the programme very much.

Heaney from the Heart

On 22 February the Committee along with Maura Johnston met for an evening in the Heaney Homeplace, with members of the Heaney family. The Heaney family requested that the group involved be kept small, and for that reason only the committee was involved. During the evening the family discussed and reminisced about Seamus Heaney and their recollections of him as a boy and a young man growing up in Bellaghy. They shared scrapbooks and presscuttings cataloguing highlights in his career and the winning of the Nobel Prize. The evening finished with some songs.

Funders and facilitators 2016/2017

The John Moore Foundation
Mid Ulster District Council
Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network
Verbal Arts
The Recovery College staff
Richard McChesney and Fingerprint Learning
Kathleen McWilliams
Maura Johnston

I would also like to thank all the funders and facilitators mentioned above.

I would also like to thank the committee members:

Treasurer Eilish Clarke
Secretary Marie McGuckin
Alva Overend
Deirdre Stathearn
Kathleen Hughes
Angela Boorman
Mairead Gribbin

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Maureen Doyle
Chairperson