

Annual Report

AGM: Tuesday 26th November 2019.

**Vision Statement**  
Our vision is that all lesbian and bisexual women are visible, included and valued in all aspects of society.

**Mission Statement**  
HERe NI empowers, supports and advocates for all lesbian, bisexual women, and their families.

**Values and Principles**  
All our work is founded upon the following values and principles:

* -  Equality and Inclusion
* -  Respect and Non-Judgemental
* -  Professional and Knowledgeable
* -  Person-Centred and Empowering
* -  Reactive and Proactive

**Chairperson Report**

2018-19 has been a big period of change for HERe NI. I would like to share just some of our highlights with you.

We have been engaged with the Love Equality Campaign both in Westminster and more locally. Equal marriage has now passed and the first same sex marriages to take place from 10th February 2020. This momentous win presented lots of opportunities to engage with the media to highlight the campaign and HERe NI. However, there is quite a bit of work to do around conversions and religious marriages. We will continue to be part of the Love Equality campaign until every person is able to access marriage should they wish to do so.

Our family support project in partnership with The Rainbow Project has grown considerably. It is so refreshing to see the parents and children growing in confidence. We aim to focus on sustaining this successful project and hope to get further funding so it can continue when Reaching Out Supporting Families grant ceases July in 2020.

In November 2018, Cara our Director won an award at the GNI awards night for her personal contribution to the community. Our Family Support Officer Grainne was also nominated for ally of the year. Cara and her partner Amanda won the prestigious Attitude Pride award in London in July 2018 for their work on the marriage equality campaign. Our family project also got runner up in the Families First awards.

With the increase in media participation and an increase at public events, we are becoming more visible. While we continue to adapt and change, we are clearer about who we are, who we are here to support, and what support we can offer.

We have strengthened relationships with sector partners through formal joined up working. We will progress in this area of work and look forward to cementing relationships even further.

In my time as chairperson this term, I would like to thank the HERe NI staff, Board, service users, sector partners, funders and volunteers for their support, commitment and resilience.

**Danielle Mackle (HERe NI Chairperson)**

**Director Report**

2018-2019 has seen Here NI grow from strength to strength. The core aspect of our work has been with families. From the visibility of our family group we have had an increasing number of people contacting us about starting their own families. However, many women are having issues accessing fertility treatment on the NHS. We have also observed an increase in women contacting us about legal issues around guardianship of their children. We have engaged our company solicitor, along with our Policy Development Officer and several other organisations to assist in both these issues.

This year our small team as grown. Danielle Roberts started February 2019 as our Policy Development Officer. Danielle has increased our visibility on many issues and has developed many relationships within and external to the lgbt sector, with a lot of success working collaboratively with the Women’s Sector.

Amanda McGurk is based on a full time basis from March 2019 between HERe NI and Cara-Friend. She is the new LGBTQI+ Women’s Support Officer who is engaging with women who are or at risk of sexual and domestic violence. Amanda is also facilitating the first ever training around domestic and sexual violence in the lgbt sector.

With the growth in staff members has also come the growth in our peer support/social groups. Currently we have the WOW group, carers group, late night art, board games night, family group, mums to be group, book club, coffee hour, one off workshops and a meditation course. More and more new women are accessing a variety of different groups.

This period has also seen an increase in collaborative partnership working within the lgbt sector and beyond. There have been many fantastic events facilitated by HERe NI, The Rainbow Project, Cara-Friend, Belfast Trans Resource Centre, Girls Rock School and the broader women’s sector. Just one great example of Danielle’s work to date was the ‘out to vote’ project. This ensured our community was aware of how to register to vote and who they could vote for in their area.

We will be advertising soon for a new post funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund looking at lgbt history in NI. This is a collaborative project involving HERe NI, Cara-Friend and the Rainbow Project.

2020 will be a challenging year as the majority of our funding ends summer 2020. There will be a concentrated effort to bring in funding to allow us to continue and grow well beyond 2020.

We look forward with excitement to our future and aiming to expand our services to meet the needs of our service users who remain at the heart of all we do.

**Cara McCann  
HERe NI Director**

**Financial Summary**

On behalf of the HERe NI Board of Directors, I would like to thank the funders who have supported our work throughout this financial period. They are:

* -  The Big Lottery (Reaching Out Supporting Families)
* -  The Big Lottery (Awards for All)
* -  The Halifax Foundation NI
* -  Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
* - Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

In the current economic climate, sustaining the work of HERe NI is a high priority and we will continue to work with agencies and funders to ensure that our work continues and grows on a regional basis.

**Financial review**

The results are set out in detail on pages 6 to 14 of our annual accounts. The company returned net income for the year of £17,974 (2017: £9,350) leaving unrestricted funds of £46,554 (2017: £34,723) and restricted funds of £82,874 (2017: £76,731). The unrestricted funds are considered to be essential to provide sufficient funds to cover any unforeseen costs which may arise and fulfil legal obligations of the charity in the event that current levels of income are not maintained.

A full summary of financial information can be obtained from the full accounts for the year ending 31st December 2018. A copy of which can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary, HERe NI, 23-31 Waring Street, Belfast, BT1 2DX.

**Jill Rafferty  
HERe NI Treasurer**

**Board of Trustees**

Danielle Mackle (Chairperson)

Lisa Walker (Resigned 1 April 2019)

Karen Ritchie

Sharon Whittaker (Resigned 26 August 2018)

Geraldine McParland

Keira McCormack

Jill Rafferty

Jacqueline Johnston (Appointed 25 September 2018)

Sally Bridge (Appointed 25 September 2018)

Katie Trainor (Appointed 25 September 2018 and resigned 24 June 2019)

Stephanie George (Appointed 25 September 2018)

Alison McDowell (Appointed 25 September 2018)

**Staff**

Cara McCann (Director)

Tracey McDowell (Administrator)

Grainne Gibson (Family Support Officer)

Danielle Roberts (Policy Development Officer)

Amanda McGurk (LGBTQI+ Women’s Support Officer)

**Staff & Trustee Biographies**

**Cara McCann – Director**

Cara is a mum of a grown up son, is from West Belfast and lives with her wife, 2 Pomeranians and their cat. Cara has a degree in Sociology and a master’s degree in Gender Studies. She has many years experience in the community development field and has also taught Sociology, Social Policy and Gender studies at Queens University. In her spare time, she loves to play guitar, harp, sing and travel.

**Tracey McDowell – Administrator**

Tracey has many years experience in finance and administration working in banking and in the voluntary sector. She has experience of delivering sexual orientation awareness training and currently provides support and information to clients trying to start a family. As an adoptive Mum, Tracey is a strong advocate for adoption.

**Grainne Gibson- Family Support Officer**

Grainne has a BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Studies combined with almost 20 years of experience of working with children aged 0 to 11. For the past 7 years she has worked with young children & families in a family support role. Grainne has designed & delivered programmes for groups as well as one to one sessions, working in partnership with parents to help children to reach their full potential. She has delivered programmes such as “The Nurturing Programme” & “Cook it!”.  Grainne has 3 fabulous children who as she puts it are her greatest achievement & she loves to spend time with them. Grainne also enjoys reading & baking & has recently taken up sewing.

**Danielle Roberts- Policy Development Officer**

Danielle has a background in law and Human Resources, qualifying as a solicitor in 2009 before completing a PgDip in Human Resource Management in 2013. For the past few years Danielle has been working on a PhD project at UU researching barriers to PUL women’s political participation, and teaching politics and social policy. Danielle is also involved in feminist activism with Belfast Feminist Network and Alliance for Choice, and co-organiser of the annual Reclaim the Night Belfast march against street harassment and gender based violence.

**Amanda McGurk- LGBTQI+ Women’s Support Officer**

Amanda graduated with a degree in Sociology from UU in 2018. Amanda started her post in March 2019 supporting women who have experience of, or at risk of, sexual and domestic violence. She is based part time in HERe NI and part time in Cara-Friend. In her spare time Amanda loves to spend time with her animals, travel, bake and read.

**Trustees**

**Danielle Mackle** (HERe NI Chairperson) Danielle Mackle is a qualified social worker working for a large children’s charity. Danielle has experience working in the field of mental health as well as working with the BME community in NI and working with young people in the care system. Danielle has recently completed her PhD that explores the human development and well being of the LGBT community in NI. Danielle also lectures in Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy at Queens University.

**Karen Ritchie** is a mum of two. Karen has experience in learning consultancy and HR. She enjoys mountain and marathon walking, gardening, art, cooking and is a vinyl record collector.

**Keira McCormack** - Keira ran the charity Gender Essence Support Services, stepping down recently to concentrate on other parts of the charity. She currently works for a Domestic Abuse charity as an IDVA, helping to set up their LGBT specific services. Keira has significant experience working in the women’s sector in particular the Rape Crisis centre and Women’s Aid on developing groups. Keira co-founded Essence Arts, delivers training, and is a qualified Counsellor.

**Geraldine McParland** – Geraldine is a psychologist with extensive experience of working in the NHS and the public sector. She also has significant experience of research and has managed research projects. Geraldine has experience of serving on several boards.

**Jill Rafferty** is an experienced consultant working on projects across the public and private sectors. She has a BSc Hons in Computer Science and currently works for a professional services company. She is involved in a number of diversity networks supporting the respect and inclusion of LGBT matters and initiatives in the workplace. Jill is a mum of one and enjoys outdoor fitness activities in her spare time.

**Jacqueline Johnston** has a breadth of knowledge within the charitable sector.  Throughout her career she has been a passionate advocate for those in our community that are marginalised and vulnerable.  She currently works in supported employment, specialising in adapting organisations to make them more inclusive for them and their disabled employees. In her spare time, she enjoys baking and walking her dogs.

**Sally Bridge** and her partner, Catherine, started Dykes with Babes, the first lesbian parenting group in Northern Ireland, in December 2000 and their 2 young sons were founder members. She has since worked on the Love Equality campaign and her master’s research looked at school libraries in NI and how they support the information needs of their LGBT pupils. Sally works as a Librarian in Queen’s University Belfast and is the co-chair of the staff LGBT network, PRISM.

**Stephanie George** is a Social Worker who lives in Belfast with her partner and 2 children. She has been a long standing member of the HERe NI family group.

**Alison McDowell** is a Barrister specialising in family law with a particular emphasis on same sex families, surrogacy and equality issues. Alison is also a member of Lawyers with Pride. Outside of work Alison is a member of a local choral society and loves spending time with her family.

**Some of our great Events 2018/2019:**

* -  Health Days
* -  Bowling
* -  Film Night
* -  Breast and Cervical awareness screening
* -  Managing challenging behaviour in under 5s
* -  Bingo
* -  First aid at home
* -  Managing stress workshop
* -  Little chef workshop
* -  Guitar class
* -  Pride lunch
* -  Life coaching group session
* -  Adoption and fostering information session
* -  Family fun day
* -  Indian culture night
* -  Stepping into school
* -  Adult art workshop
* -  Children’s art workshop
* -  Pride afternoon tea
* -  International Women’s day staff (lgbt sector) tea
* -  Out to Vote workshops
* - Breaking down barriers workshops
* - Yoga
* - Meditation
* - Baby Sensory event
* - First ever Sexual Orientation Awareness training with the Catholic Church
* - First ever Sexual Orientation Awareness training with the DUP
* - Hillsborough Castle LGBT tour
* - Parenting panel (our parents facilitated event)

**Evaluation**

An external evaluator met with a focus group to discuss impact of our work. Here is some of the feedback:

When asked why they joined the groups their responses included the following:

* *It was a lifeline for me I was so depressed.*
* *It was a reason to get out of bed otherwise I would have been completely lost.*
* *I wanted to make friends and to have someone to talk to.*
* *I just felt so isolated.*
* *I wanted to meet people outside of the drink and drugs scene where there was no alcohol and you could meet real company and real support.*
* One attendee described how she felt when she first came along to the group:

*‘I was a bag of nerves. I was shaking like a leaf and so frightened within myself. This has given me so much confidence and made a big difference to me.’*

Attendees all emphasised the importance of being accepted for who you are and having someone to talk to. They all highlighted the positive impact on their mental health. They welcome the opportunity to speak to the Director on a one to one when their mood is low. One participant described it in the following terms:

*‘I can’t wait to Tuesday. It keeps me safe. I often feel miserable all weekend and then I start thinking about Tuesday and I feel better. I would cancel other appointments, but I would never cancel my Tuesday.’*

Another participant explained how her family do not accept her for who she is, and she feels she has nothing in common with them:

*‘I have nothing in common with my family. I can’t tell them about how hard my life is. You can come here and just be yourself. You feel your feet are grounded here. These people are my real family. They make me feel better.’*