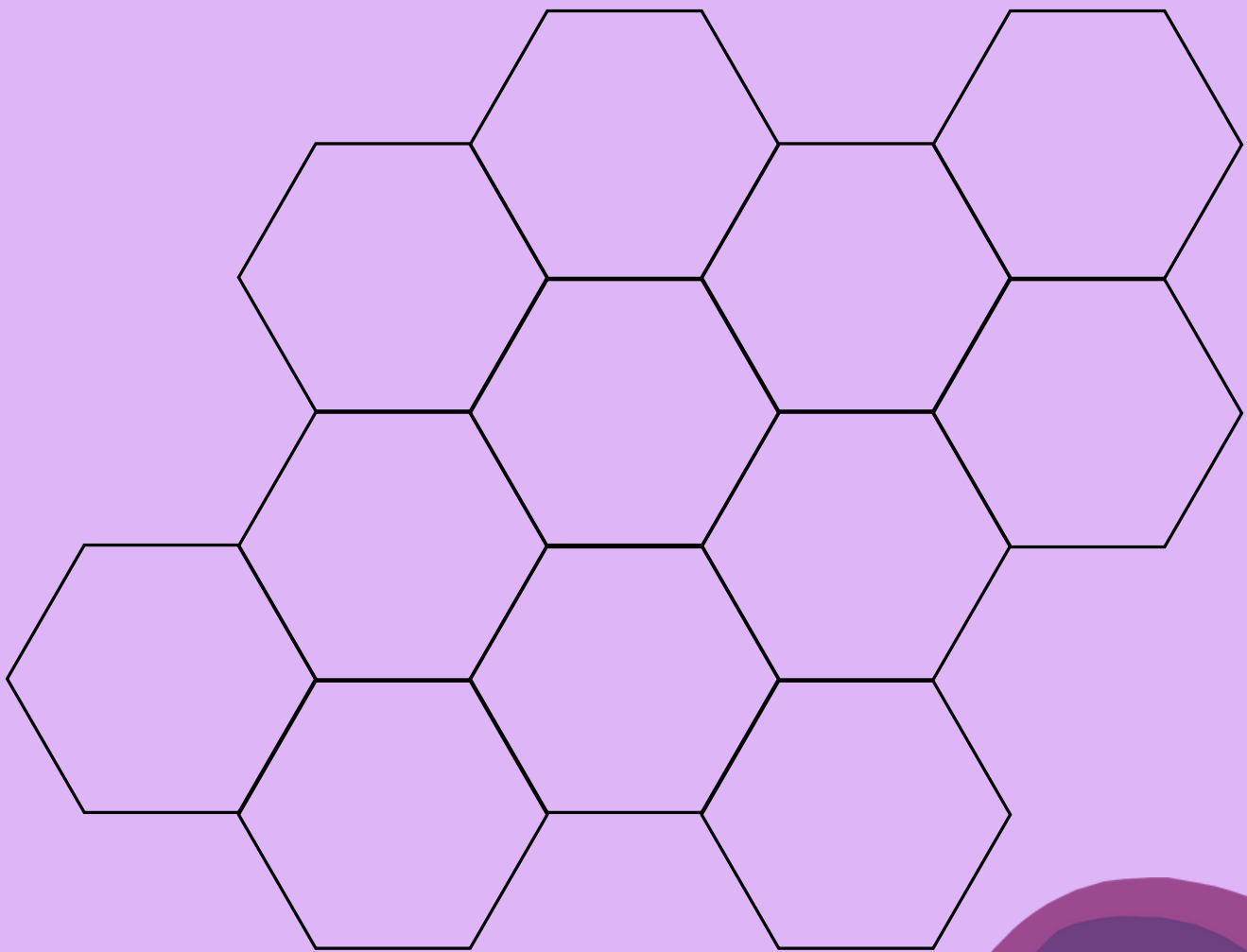


HERE NI ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



Mission Statement

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



Vision Statement

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



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

2023-2024 has been a period of considerable growth and positive change for HERe NI.

Staff have demonstrated resilience and creativity to ensure the needs of lesbian and bisexual women are met through multiple platforms. The increase of service users in this time period is a testament of the hard work of the whole team and operational management by Cara McCann.

I commend staff for utilizing social media as an engagement tool. Training, Family events, Cafe Menopause, and Coffee hour are just a few popular examples of activities.

Navigating funding options is an ongoing challenge but one of HERe NI's strength is working in partnership. We continue to be a key player involved with Belfast City Council to develop the LGBTQIA+ Hub for the city.

The Board of Trustees continues to evolve, maintaining good governance and strategic support. I would like to acknowledge the passion and commitment of trustees who have stepped down from their roles and welcome the skills of our recently appointed trustees.

This event is an opportunity to appreciate the dynamic HERe NI team and their professional delivery of diverse and meaningful programmes for women across Northern Ireland.

I would also like to thank service users, sector partners, funders and volunteers for their ongoing support.

As we reflect on the legacy of HERe NI and celebrate the present, there is firm focus on the powerful impact we aim to have in the future.

**Helen Coburn
HERe NI Chairperson**

DIRECTOR REPORT

The past year has seen Here NI grow from strength to strength during challenging and difficult times. We welcomed Hannah Blair: Communication and Engagement Officer, and Allison Newey: Domestic Abuse Researcher.

Some highlights:

- The older women's group has grown with over 105 women registered.
- We were chosen for a good practice visit from the Charity Commission.
- We distributed hundreds of supermarket vouchers to LGBTQIA+ women experiencing financial hardship.
- I was nominated for and received a Tolerantia award in Berlin.
- HERE NI are now an accredited organisation to deliver a range of training packages.
- We have lobbied for and received funding from the Department of Justice to research the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse on the LGBTQIA+ community, and look forward to working with our partners Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project on this project.
- We continue to work with sector partners and Belfast City Council to progress the LGBTQIA+ hub. A building is secured and Belfast City Council have secured some funding for the refurbishment.

When I started my post over 13 years ago with the equivalent to 2 full time members of staff, I could never have dreamed we would have a team like we do now. I love this organisation as much as, or more than I did 13 years ago. We have much more work to do, and I look forward to working with sector partners and many of the organisations represented tonight.

Our trustees have worked tirelessly to ensure our Board is professional, robust, forward thinking and strategic. I would like to thank our previous Chairperson Martina Hanna for her hard work and commitment during her tenure. Without such a dedicated staff team, volunteer team, clients and committed Board of Trustees, the content of this report would not be possible.

I would like to thank each and every one of the staff and Trustees that work to make our organisation what it is today. We look forward with excitement to the next 20 years to expand our services to meet the needs of the women who remain at the heart of all we do.

Cara McCann
HERE NI Director

TREASURER REPORT

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

- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- The Tudor Trust
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- LGBT Consortium
- Community Foundation NI
- Belfast City Council
- Training for Women Network
- Halifax Foundation
- Cooperation Ireland
- Working with Pride
- Cinema for All

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.

HERe NI returned net outgoing resources for the year of £9,590 (2022: £20,100) leaving unrestricted funds of £120,179 (2022: £116,284) and restricted funds of £51,333 (2022: £64,818).

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 2023. A copy of which can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary, HERe NI, 23-31 Waring Street, Belfast, BT1 2DX.

Charlene McKeown
HERe NI Treasurer

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Board of Trustees

Helen Coburn (Chairperson)
Charlene McKeown (Treasurer)
Gráinne Starrs (Secretary)
Sally Bridge
Danielle Mackle
Martina Hanna
Andrea Quinn
Erin McCarney
Sarah Jo Haveron
Emer McCool
Bethany Moore
Laura Boden

STAFF

Cara McCann - Director
Tracey McDowell - Finance & Admin Manager
Grainne Gibson - Children & Young People's Empowerment Officer
Sabrina Day - Early Years Project Officer
Jennifer McKinnon - Older Women's Project Officer
Sophie Nelson - Senior Policy Development Officer
Mary Ellen Campbell - LGBTQIA+ Heritage Volunteer & Training Officer
Joe Walsh - LGBTQIA+ Heritage Development Officer
Hannah Blair - Communication and Engagement Officer
Allison Newey - LGBTQIA+ Researcher

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

132
EVENTS
THIS
YEAR

START
TOGETHER
GROUP: 20
EVENTS

OLDER
WOMENS
GROUP: 38
EVENTS

HERE
TOGETHER
GROUP: 25
EVENTS

LGBTQIA+
HERITAGE
PROJECT: 33
EVENTS

YOUNG
WOMENS
GROUP: 9
EVENTS

Some of our events this year included:

- Soft Play Session
- Children's arts and crafts
- Documentary screening
- Crystal Queer Film Club
- A trip to the Museum
- Picnic in the Park
- Coffee hour
- Splash and Swim Session
- Grass head Friends
- Community Safety Event
- Children's song and rhyme time
- Pool Night
- Quilt-making workshop
- LGBTQIA+ History club
- Drumming Circle
- LGBTQIA+ Heritage Tours-
- 'Age without Limits' Action Day
- Plant with Pride
- Online LGBTQIA+ History Archive
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Awareness training
- An evening at the Opera
- Theatre trip and Q&A 'This Sh*t Happens all the Time'
- Cross-boarder residential
- Annual Pride dinner

Not to mention all the Pride events - this year we attended Belfast, Omagh, Lurgan, Foyle, Newry, Fermanagh, Causeway & Trans Pride.

STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

GRAINNE GIBSON

The Children and Young People's Empowerment Officer has engaged with a wide-range of families through the Here Together programme. Grainne has been working across Belfast and Derry to engage with young people and their families. Some of the activities within the programme have included collaborative work with Beat Carnival to complete a four week pre-pride programme, sessions with The Conservation Volunteers in their new Belfast Urban Garden, Celebrating Being Me workshop and many more events. Families of all ages and backgrounds engaged throughout the Pride season. We had some lovely pride themed events to highlight our diverse families, both in Belfast and Derry. Belfast Pride and HERe NI hosted a fantastic Family Fun Day at the City Hall and it was lovely to see some of the families at this event. Some of the families took part in the Pride Parade through Belfast also. It was wonderful to see the families having the confidence to take part.

Grainne has been out to deliver training on working with LGBTQIA+ parents and carers and highlighting our work to schools, family support hubs and parenting organisations over this past year, which will continue into next year. As we enter into the last funded year of the Here Together project Grainne hopes to reach more diverse families and to work with more parents, carers and children.

JENNIFER MCKINNON

In 2024, the older women's engagement officer, Jennifer, now engages with over 100 women age 30+, both in-person and online. The group saw the Ulster Orchestra in January and have attended various arts and culture events since, including: 'Monologues'; 'This Sh*t Happens all the time'; Belfast's 'Heart of the City' dinner and showcase event; 'Radium Girls', and the opera 'Eugene Onégin'.

In February, some older women attended a two-day cross-border workshop on 'Women, health and care and Constitutional Change' in Dundalk. The outcomes of this workshop were presented to the Oireachtas and contributed to a new all island women's charter. The activism continued throughout the year through an 'Age Without Limits' positive ageing campaign and an action day. The group also contributed to a consultation with the Public Health Agency on elderly care.

Jennifer has provided opportunity for the group to explore their health and wellbeing, through facilitating regular meditation sessions. In September, the group received funding for activity costs through the Elevate programme. The 'Let it Out' programme aims to develop creative expression and emotional release through uplifting activities; in October the group held a drum circle and a breathwork session.

The Older Women's Engagement Officer also organised events for this year's Pride. The annual Pride dinner, afternoon tea and our community safety event which was held in partnership with the West Belfast Community Safety Forum. The group also partnered with the Conservation Volunteers this year to host a 'Plant with Pride' event at Belfast Urban Garden.

HANNAH BLAIR

Hannah is the Communications and Engagement Officer at HERe NI. She was formerly the Admin & Communications Assistant. Hannah engages the public as a representative for the sector, attending events and conferences such as, 'A Study of Conversion Practices in Northern Ireland' and 'Queer/ing Research in Ulster University'.

They are also part of the social media team, planning our posts, assisting staff in running various social media campaigns and designing flyers, posters and various advertisements for HERe NI. Similarly, they also design the monthly newsletter, detailing upcoming events and special announcements.

Hannah also assists in running the Young Women's Group with Senior Policy Officer, Sophie. Hannah helps to plan sessions, advertise these events and aids in running the sessions. The Young Women's Group sessions have included craft nights, cinema nights, a pool night and currently the group are engaging in a radical quilting project which will document the lives of LGBTQIA+ young women in this region.

ALLISON NEWHEY

Allison Newey joined the HERe NI team in October as the sector LGBTQIA+ Domestic Abuse Researcher. She will be researching the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and abuse among the LGBTQIA+ population in Northern Ireland, as well as assessing the current legal, policy, and practice initiatives in place for domestic violence and abuse support.

Currently, she is working alongside Cara McCann and Dr. Danielle Mackle to develop a sector wide survey to obtain quantitative data on the rates of domestic violence and abuse. Later, she will conduct interviews with LGBTQIA+ survivors of domestic violence and abuse to give voice to their lived experiences. She also plans to interview support workers and stakeholders to gain insight on the institutional barriers for reporting or receiving support.

She is very excited to contribute to such an important yet under-researched topic. For anyone interested in participating in the research (either through interviews or through the survey) please contact her at: research@hereni.org.

SABRINA DAY

The Early Years Project Officer, Sabrina, has continued to deliver a varied programme for our 0-7 year olds. Over the past year, Sabrina has been busy building the project and welcoming new families. She has continued to do a wide range of activities such as cookery sessions where the group made brownies which was fun, and very messy. The group held sensory sessions with the babies where they got to experience lots of different smells and textures and a ball pool. The group have also had a few fun outings, such as a splash and swim session, a trip to the museum, and a picnic in the park. One of the families' highlights was the scavenger hunt around the museum.

Sabrina has also hosted a number of parent workshops this year such as First Aid Training and a managing challenging behaviour workshop. The parents that attended got involved in discussions and increased their knowledge in these specific areas.

Sabrina's baby group is starting to grow, and the babies are getting older and expressing interest in arts and crafts (with their parents help of course). This has been a beautiful memory making and bonding experience for all.

Over the past year Sabrina has had the pleasure in witnessing friendships being formed in both the baby group and the older group with the parents now meeting up outside the group for days out and camping trips.

MARY ELLEN CAMPBELL

Mary Ellen is one of two LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project Officers. Mary Ellen is the Training and Volunteer Officer and works alongside her colleague Development Officer Joe Walsh. This year the project have organised many diverse events marking the first ever Trans History Week, LGBTQ+ History Month, LGBTQIA+ Awareness Week and various local Prides. The Heritage Project activities included an event on the history of the trans fight for equality locally, LGBTQIA+ heritage project walking tours around Belfast, and a documentary screening with the PSNI.

This year HERe NI have become accredited by OCN NI to deliver their accredited courses. The Heritage Project delivered Tour Guide training to some of our volunteers and are currently working to have HERe NI's own LGBTQIA+ History course endorsed by OCN NI. HERe NI can also have courses certified with Continuing Professional Development Points. Heritage Project volunteers continue to be an integral part of the project, working alongside Mary Ellen and Joe to record and preserve local LGBTQIA+ history.

JOE WALSH

Joe Walsh is the Development Officer on the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project. The project has gathered momentum over the past year, with the podcast doubling in output from six to twelve episodes per year, History Club continuing monthly and the film club showing six screenings per year. The range of guests on the podcast and History Club have brought vast experience, and every recording has been a valuable resource to our entire community. These recordings are archived to allow academics or reporters to conduct research, or for rural or isolated members of our community to access information and find connection.

One of the LGBTQIA+ History Club videos had over five hundred views on Youtube in its first month of release. For LGBTQIA+ History month, the project hosted a number of events; each event engaging the community in a different aspect of the project. Through the project, Joe engaged many statutory agencies throughout the year including the PSNI and Housing Executive screening the project's own documentary "The Troubles I've Seen". This has been a useful tool to engage groups in conversations about life before and after decriminalisation of homosexuality in the North of Ireland/ Northern Ireland. The reputation of the project is growing every day as Joe continues to focus on the multi-platform social media presence and raising awareness of the project at every event.

SOPHIE NELSON

Over the past year Sophie has been an active member of the LGBTQIA+ sector and the women's sector. This month, Sophie took on a new role as Senior Policy Development Officer. She regularly engages with stakeholder groups, including The Women's Policy Group and the Belfast Women's Assembly. Over the past year, Sophie has submitted organisational consultation responses on Relationships and Sexuality Education, City Centre By-Laws, Gaps in Equality Legislation, and Domestic Abuse.

This year Sophie has given evidence to a range of stakeholders including: the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, the Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, the US Special Envoy to advance the Human Rights of LGBTQIA+ persons, the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), and the Assembly Education Committee.

In terms of progressing on organisational policy priorities: the Justice Minister has now committed to updating hate crime legislation to include gender identity as a protected characteristic; Eoin Tennyson MLA has consulted with HERe NI on drafting a Private Members Bill to place a ban on conversion practices; HERe NI are currently working with the Department of Health to update fertility guidance.

Sophie has also started a Young Women's Group at HERe NI, who meet once a month. The group has held craft nights, a pool night, and a cinema night. Sophie has also engaged with a number of organisations such as the Public Health Agency and Girlguiding Ulster to deliver Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Training to staff and volunteers.

EVALUATIONS

'The whole evening has gone beyond what I expected. Thoroughly enjoyed all of it. Great to connect with other women. Jennifer was fantastic and the meditation was amazing, loved the sounds, loved the words, loved the smells'

Jennifer's Older Women's Group

'It was a great session full of valuable information'

Sophie's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Training Session

'Parents would say to me, if it wasn't for my group, they would not have even met each other'

Sabrina's Start Together Group

'A lovely informal session which was very informative. Very excited to get involved and spread the word'

Cara's information session with PHA staff network

'My children feel more confident about our family and are proud to have two mums.'

Grainne's Here Together Group

'It has helped me to grow and develop as a person. I'm proud to say I'm a volunteer.'

Mary Ellen's LGBTQIA+ Heritage Group



www.hereni.org

Twitter: [@Here_NI](https://twitter.com/Here_NI)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/NIHere](https://www.facebook.com/NIHere)

Instagram: [@hereni_](https://www.instagram.com/hereni_)