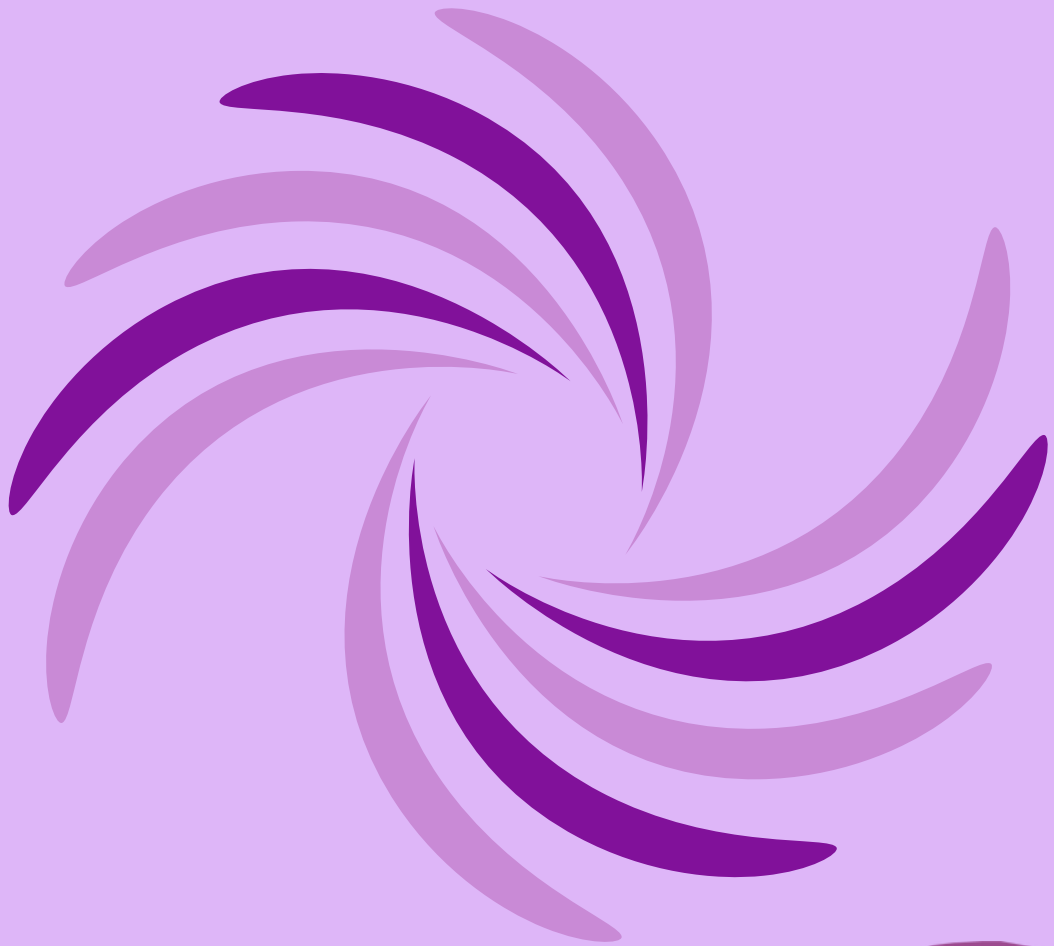


# HERE NI ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



## **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**

**Our work is founded upon the following values and principles:**

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

# CHAIRPERSON REPORT

2024-2025 has been a period of growth, reflection and resilience for HERe NI. Our role as trustees is to ensure the charity remains true to its mission, operates responsibly and delivers meaningful impact. The Board meet quarterly and recently reviewed and refreshed our strategic plan to align with emerging needs. We introduced a risk register, created subgroups and committed to a skills audit and governance health check. The Board have been energised by new members, building upon the strong foundation which the outgoing trustees helped to shape.

The passion of all HERe NI staff and high quality delivery is evident and we warmly welcome new members to the team. These positive changes will encourage motivation and strengthen implementation of our work, creating safe spaces both in person and online.

Some highlights include the completion of research into the prevalence of domestic abuse on the LGBTQIA+ community, with other important research projects currently underway. The award winning LGBTQIA+ Heritage programme is a catalyst for awareness and education, especially the film screenings of “We Were Always Here”, a powerful piece of lived experience and hope. The young women’s mental health project, funded by the Pilgrim Trust demonstrates how HERe NI support and empower women across Northern Ireland.

This year we have faced challenges especially with navigating and securing funding. The cost-of-living crisis has increased demand for our services and the supermarket voucher scheme, supported by Belfast City Council is just one example of the crucial support HERe NI continues to offer.

These experiences have reinforced the importance of agility, transparency and collaboration across the organisation. I appreciate Director Cara McCann’s professionalism and advocacy across many platforms alongside her management of funding opportunities.

We will invest in trustee development, ensuring we remain equipped to guide HERe NI through an evolving landscape. Looking ahead, increasing the design and delivery of accredited training through an LGBTQIA+ lens will be one of the key areas of focus.

On behalf of the Board, I express sincere thanks to the HERe NI staff team for their dedication, funders for their ongoing support and our partners who help us extend our reach and deepen our impact. We remain motivated to serve the LGBTQIA+ community through strong governance and strategic leadership ensuring HERe NI continues to thrive and serve with integrity.

Helen Coburn  
Chairperson, HERe NI

# DIRECTOR REPORT

The past year has seen HERe NI grow from strength to strength, even amidst a challenging funding climate and increasing demand for our services. Despite these pressures, we have continued to deliver impactful, high-quality work that empowers LGBTQIA+ women and their families across Northern Ireland.

Our organisation has expanded both in capacity and ambition. This year, we welcomed Fiona Craig as Older Women's Engagement Officer, Pádraig Donnelly as Community Engagement Officer for the LGBTQIA+ Engagement Project, and Tolulope Agbede as Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Researcher. Amanda McGurk, formerly our Young Women's Mental Health Worker, became our Training and Business Development Manager, leading the growth of our new Training and Development Social Enterprise.

Each of these roles strengthens HERe NI's ability to meet emerging community needs, build evidence, and create opportunities for inclusion, wellbeing, and advocacy.

## Highlights of 2025

- Our Older Women's Group continues to flourish, with over 156 women registered, engaging regularly in activities that foster connection, confidence, and belonging.
- We distributed thousands of pounds in supermarket vouchers to women and families struggling financially — providing essential relief during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

- In partnership with Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project, we were awarded a major Peace Plus tender to deliver an ambitious 2.5-year project that strengthens collaboration and inclusion citywide.
- HERe NI became an accredited training organisation, offering a growing suite of professional Heritage and inclusion programmes — the cornerstone of our sustainability strategy.
- We received Department of Justice funding to lead pioneering research on domestic abuse within the LGBTQIA+ community, launched at Stormont in September 2025 by the Justice Minister — a landmark moment in visibility, policy influence, and social change.

## Investing in Leadership and Skills Development

A significant personal and organisational milestone this year was my completion of the CMI Level 7 Certificate in Strategic Leadership and Management, followed by achieving Chartered Manager status with the Chartered Management Institute. This has strengthened my leadership practice and enhanced HERe NI's strategic direction, ensuring that strong governance, evidence-led planning and staff development remain central to our growth.

At HERe NI, we believe that skills development is the foundation of sustainability. Whether through accredited training, community learning, or professional mentoring, we continue to invest in people — building capability, confidence and leadership within our organisation and the wider sector.

### Looking Ahead to 2026

The year ahead will undoubtedly bring challenges, particularly in securing sustainable funding, but we are ready to meet them with creativity and resilience. A key focus will be the development of 2 Royal Avenue, the future LGBTQIA+ Hub for Belfast. This exciting partnership project will create a visible, safe, and inclusive space in the heart of the city - a shared home for collaboration, innovation, and community empowerment. We will also continue to grow our Training and Development programme, diversifying our income and expanding delivery across Northern Ireland. This model not only sustains our work but ensures that profits are reinvested directly into community programmes, supporting those who need us most.

### Acknowledgements

I want to extend heartfelt thanks to all of our funders, partners and supporters, whose belief in our mission makes our work possible. Your support allows us to deliver life-changing programmes, advocate for equality, and strengthen the voice of LGBTQIA+ women and families across Northern Ireland.

When I began my role over 14 years ago, HERe NI had the equivalent of just two full-time staff. Today, I'm proud to lead a diverse, skilled, and passionate team, supported by a dedicated Board of Trustees, volunteers, and community members — all working together to make equality a lived reality.

Our Board of Trustees continues to provide strong leadership, ensuring effective governance, financial stewardship, and strategic oversight. Their commitment, alongside our team's creativity and compassion gives me confidence that HERe NI's future is both sustainable and bright.

Thank you to everyone — staff, volunteers, funders, partners, and community members — who continues to support HERe NI.

Cara McCann  
Director, HERe NI



# TREASURER REPORT

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

- The National Lottery Community Fund
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- The Tudor Trust
- Community Foundation NI
- Garfield Weston
- Belfast City Council
- The Elevate Programme
- The Esme Mitchell Trust
- The Pilgrim Trust
- Public Health Agency (PHA)
- Department of Justice
- Awards for All
- Ireland Fund GB
- Halifax Foundation
- TK Maxx
- Working with Pride
- The Garrick Bar

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 incoming resources for the year of £23,206 (net outgoing resources 2023 - £9,590), leaving unrestricted funds of £118,823 (2023 - £120,179) and restricted funds of £75,895 (2023 - £51,333).

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 2024. A copy of which can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary, HERe NI, 23-31 Waring Street, Belfast, BT1 2DX.

Charlene McKeown  
Treasurer, HERe NI

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Helen Coburn (Chairperson)**  
**Charlene McKeown (Treasurer)**  
**Gráinne Starrs (Secretary)**  
**Sharon Quinn**  
**Erin McCarney**  
**Andrea Quinn**  
**Emer McCool**  
**Bethany Moore**  
**Laura Boden**  
**Dr Sarah Jo Haveron**  
**Dr Ngozi Anyadike-Danes**

# STAFF TEAM

**Cara McCann - Director**  
**Tracey McDowell - Finance & Administration Manager**  
**Grainne Gibson - Children & Young People's  
Empowerment Officer**  
**Sabrina Day - Early Years Project Officer**  
**Fiona Craig - 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**  
**H Blair - Communication and Engagement Officer**  
**Tolulope Agbede - Homelessness & Housing Insecurity  
Researcher**  
**Pádraig Donnelly - Community Engagement Officer**  
**Amanda McGurk - Training & Business Development  
Manager**

# EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

127  
EVENTS  
THIS  
YEAR

START  
TOGETHER  
GROUP: 21  
EVENTS

OLDER  
WOMENS  
GROUP: 31  
EVENTS

HERE  
TOGETHER  
GROUP: 20  
EVENTS

LGBTQIA+  
HERITAGE  
PROJECT: 47  
EVENTS

YOUNG  
WOMENS  
GROUP: 10  
EVENTS

**Some of our events this year included:**

- Mini golf
- Children's arts and crafts
- Documentary screening
- Crystal Queer Film Club
- Zine Making
- Lino Printing
- Coffee hour
- Bowling night
- Ice Skating
- Trip to Wild Ireland
- Children's song and rhyme time
- Soundbath Meditation
- Quilt-making workshop
- LGBTQIA+ History club
- Lush Party
- LGBTQIA+ Heritage Tours
- T-shirt design and flag making
- Visit to the farm
- Online LGBTQIA+ History Archive
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Awareness training
- An evening at the Opera
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls training
- Halloween Party
- 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

## GRÁINNE GIBSON

The Children and Young People's Empowerment Officer, Gráinne has engaged with a range of families through the Here Together programme. Gráinne has been working across Belfast and Derry to engage with young people and their families. There was also the opportunity for the two groups to get together at a joint session at Dundonald Ice Bowl. The families have taken part in workshops such as 'Mindful Me' and have had outings to Laser Quest.

Families of all ages and backgrounds engaged throughout Pride season. We had some lovely pride themed events to highlight our diverse families, both in Belfast and Derry making t-shirts, badges and flags to celebrate our identity. Belfast Pride and HERe NI hosted a fantastic Family Fun Day at Stormont Pavilion and it was lovely to see a lot of the families at this event. Some of the families took part in the Pride Parade through Belfast. It was wonderful to see the families having the confidence to take part.

Gráinne 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.

As we reach the end of the Here Together project, Gráinne would like to thank all the families who have taken part over the years and wish them well in the future.

# FIONA CRAIG

**Our new Older Women's Engagement Officer, Fiona started in October 2025. She facilitated the online WOW group sessions and has organised two events for the WOW group as part of the Belfast International Arts Festival in October and November.**

**Fiona has attended the CDHN Elevate Mentor's session in October and is undertaking the Elevate Impact training. In addition, Fiona will hopefully engage as a participant in the Community Development Practitioners Forum which is starting in January 2026.**

# TOLULOPE AGBEDE

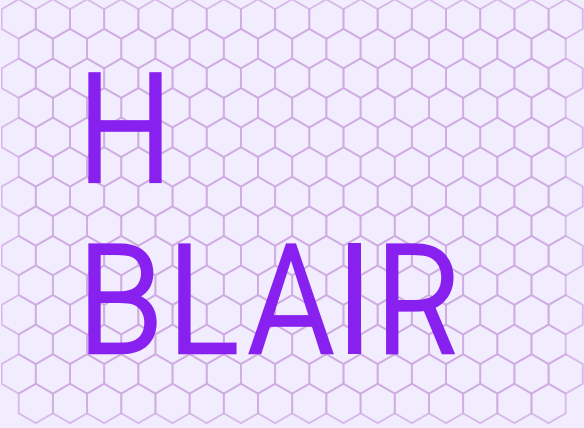
**As our new Housing and Homelessness Insecurity Researcher, Tolu, has been reading and reviewing existing information to understand the gaps in the literature before beginning work on the report. Tolu has been connecting with people and organisations, getting to know how they support young people experiencing homelessness. In developing the survey, Tolu has created a pilot to share with staff and gather feedback. Tolu has also attended events/conferences (such as Homeless Connect and Rainbow Refugees NI) and held meetings with some housing sector staff to ensure the research is shaped by lived experiences. She has also started putting together an advisory group of people who can guide the project and share their knowledge and experience.**



# PÁDRAIG DONNELLY

**Pádraig is the Community Engagement Officer with HERe NI for Out Connections Belfast: a joint project between The Rainbow Project, HERe NI & Cara-Friend that increases awareness, understanding, and respect for the LGBTQIA+ community in Belfast. Pádraig is building greater collaboration across the community sector and strengthening the delivery of local services.**

**This project forms part of the €17.1m Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan, which is led by Belfast City Council. Out Connections Belfast is supported by Belfast City Council and PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).**



# H BLAIR

**H is the Communications and Engagement Officer at HERe NI. H engages the public as a representative for the sector, attending events and conferences. However, H's main role is designing the monthly newsletter, detailing upcoming events and special announcements for service users to receive.**

**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.**

# SABRINA DAY

**As 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 pizza and cupcakes 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 trip to the farm and picnics in different parks, a trip to the museum, and a trip to scrapyard golf. One of the families highlights was the Halloween Party and the Mummy game. The Pride t-shirt making session in both groups were well attended and everyone had lots of fun.**

**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). 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. The families are all very comfortable in the group and the children in the older group even call Sabrina 'Auntie Sabrina'.**

# 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 continued to organise many diverse events marking LGBTQ+ History Month, LGBTQIA+ Awareness Week and various local Prides.**

**This year the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project developed a Reflections of LGBTQIA+ History course endorsed at Level 2 by OCN NI and one accredited by CPD. The first cohort of the CPD Course occurred in September and was undertaken by volunteers and staff. Mary Ellen also launched the new documentary 'We Were Always Here', looking at the life and experiences of LGBTQIA+ women locally.**

**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 is the Development Officer on the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project. Over the past year, the project has continued to grow in reach and impact. The monthly LGBTQIA+ History Club remains a core part of the project, with accessible and engaging discussions that are archived online for researchers and community members. The Queeritage podcast series has continued to amplify diverse voices, with episodes exploring personal stories, activism, and heritage including published writer Paul McVeigh author of *The Good Son* and Belfast's super drag star Trudy Scrumptious AKA Gordon Crawford.**

**A major highlight this year was the 12-week exhibition hosted at the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum, showcasing LGBTQIA+ history in the region. This was accompanied by a visual arts exhibition at An Chultúrlann, which brought together artists and storytellers to reflect on identity, resilience, and community; The Heritage Project were asked to speak at the launch event. The film club also continued with six screenings, including the premiere of the new documentary 'We Were Always Here', which explores intergenerational queer experiences of LGBTQIA+ Women.**

**Walking tours have remained a popular and powerful way to engage the public with local LGBTQIA+ history, offering both education and connection in public spaces. The project's reputation was recognised when we received the Award for Innovation in Community Services from Belfast Pride. Joe was invited to speak at the ceremony, where he honoured the legacy of Mizz Mae, a beloved figure in the local LGBTQIA+ community.**

**Across all platforms, the project continues to prioritise accessibility, representation, and collaboration. With every event, recording, and exhibition, the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project strengthens its role as a vital resource and celebration of queer life in Northern Ireland.**

# SOPHIE NELSON

**As Senior Policy Development Officer, Sophie continues to regularly engage with stakeholder groups, and has submitted organisational consultation responses on The Executive Office Draft Programme for Government, Conversion Practices Private Members' Bill, Women and Girls in Sport Private Members' Bill, The Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions and Associations, and the Equality Commission's legal paper and information on the meanings of 'sex', 'men', 'women' and 'gender reassignment'.**

**This year Sophie has progressed policy development around the Conversion Practices legislation. She attended an ILGA Europe meeting on ending Conversion Practices to learn from European countries on the effectiveness of their bans, and has worked with Eóin Tennyson MLA on his Private Members' Bill, as well as re-starting the Conversion Practices Coalition. Sophie has also met with Communities Minister Gordon Lyons, alongside the sector, to raise the issues of Conversion Practices and the need for an LGBTQIA+ strategy.**

**This has been a difficult year for the trans community, following the UK Supreme Court Ruling *FWS v The Scottish Ministers* judgement in April. In the weeks and months after, Sophie met with MLAs and provided briefings on the judgement. She hosted a information session at Stormont and organised and chaired a panel event at Féile an Phobail on why the UK supreme court ruling was not a victory for the feminist movement.**

**Sophie has also committed to strengthening cross-border relationships. This has included being part of the National Women's Council Ireland Women's Assembly, the All-island Women's Forum and the All-Island LGBTQIA+ forum. Sophie also sits on the steering group of the Belfast Women's Assembly and has hosted events throughout the year to encourage marginalised women's voices into the discussion on potential new constitutional arrangements.**

**Sophie has also developed new Allyship training for HERe NI, as well as delivering training to organisations like Ardoyne Youth Enterprise and Richmond Marketing.**

# EVALUATIONS

'It was a pleasure to host the first LGBTQIA+ exhibition in a local authority museum in NI! Most importantly, we really enjoyed working with you, and we're privileged that you chose us to share your story.'

Mary Ellen and Joe's LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project

'Thank you so much for coming in — your talk was fantastic.'

We truly appreciate everything you shared.'

Sophie's Allyship Training

'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

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

Grainne's Here Together Group

'Got a chance to meet up with old friends and meeting some new ones, loved the craic and jokes and the atmosphere was nice and wonderful. The food was great, liked the presentation and was well prepared.'

The Older Women's Group

'I appreciated the alcohol free nature of the event - there's a lot of alcohol taken during Pride Week and it was good to go somewhere where that was not a feature.'

The Older Women's Group



[www.hereni.org](http://www.hereni.org)

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

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