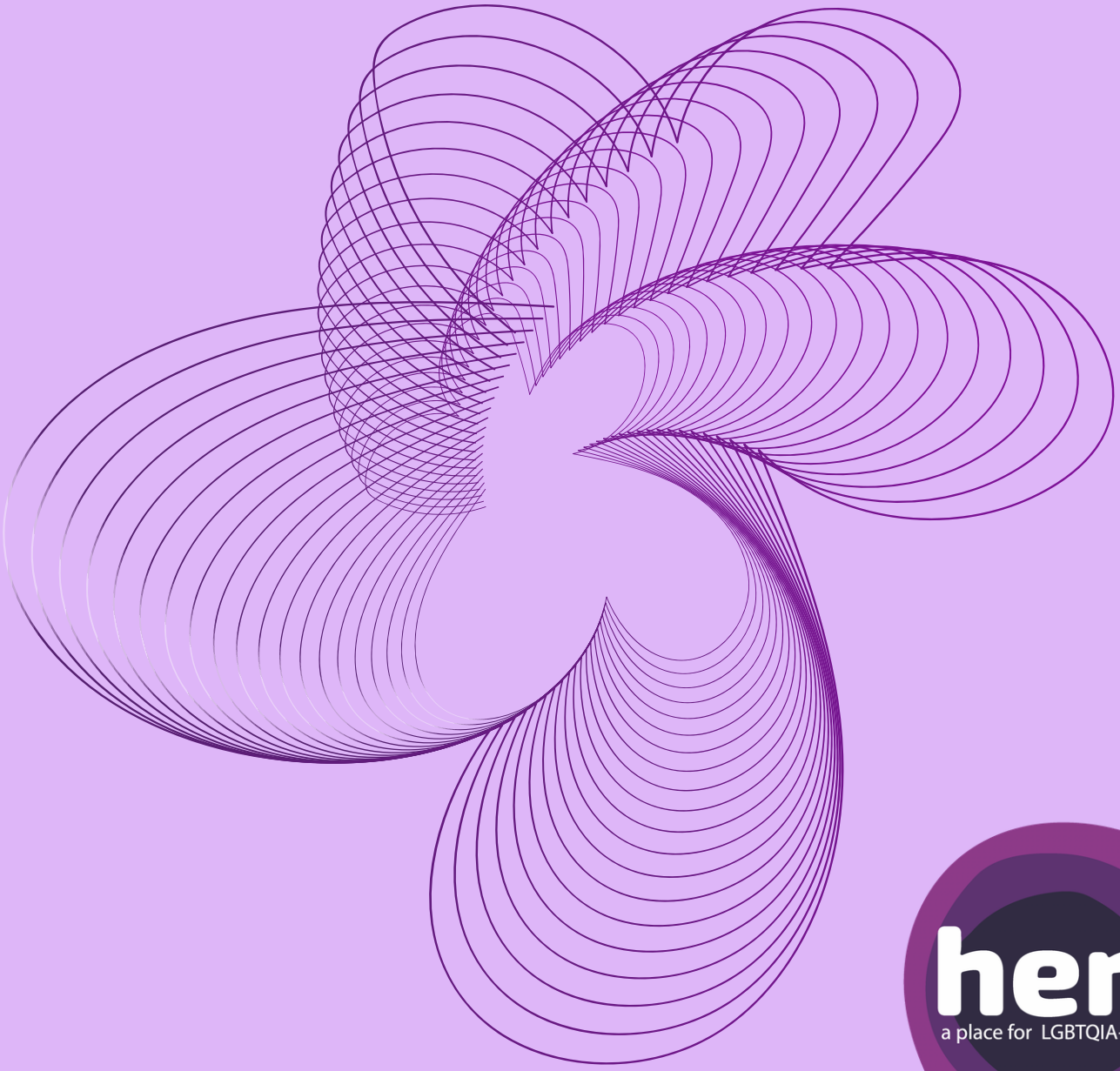
HERE NI ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026



here
a place for LGBTQIA+ women

Mission Statement

HERe NI empowers, supports and advocates for all LGBTQIA+ women and their families.

Vision Statement

Our vision is that all LGBTQIA+ 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

2025-2026 has been a period of reflection, courage and vision for HERe NI. As trustees, our role is to ensure the organisation is true to its mission, operates responsibly and delivers meaningful impact for LGBTQIA+ women and their families. Members of HERe NI's Board have remained committed and invested in developing our skills and knowledge. A particular highlight for trustees was participating in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls through an LGBTQIA+ lens session from HERe NI's training programme. This has deepened our understanding and awareness, equipping us to provide informed leadership as we navigate an evolving landscape.

The passion of the HERe NI staff team is evident, providing support through a wide range of workshops, events and projects. Staff have demonstrated creativity in delivering programmes that complement and reinforce one another with welcoming spaces both in person and online. The Young Women's Mental Health Project has grown in visibility, building valuable links with other organisations and expanding networks for participants. Similarly, the Older Women's Group has developed a partnership with Age NI, creating opportunities for inclusion, connection and community among older LGBTQIA+ women.

Intergenerational work remains an empowering element of the organisation's approach, bringing women together through shared experiences, wellbeing activities and social development. These opportunities for building connections help strengthen community and reduce isolation, regardless of age. Good governance remains central to the work of HERe NI. The Older Women's Steering Group plays an important role in ensuring diverse voices contribute to organisational development and decision-making. This commitment to participation and accountability helps ensure HERe NI remains responsive to the communities we serve.

The Heritage Project has highlighted the importance of preserving and celebrating LGBTQIA+ history. Capturing and sharing these stories not only honours those who came before us but also ensures future generations understand the progress achieved and the work that remains. HERe NI's receipt of four Belfast Pride Awards recognised our strengths in activism, allyship and partnership.

Alongside service delivery, research and policy development remain key elements of our work. By contributing to evidence-based discussions, empowering communities and tackling inequalities, HERe NI continues to advocate for systemic change. The recent Introduction to Campaigning workshop has helped build confidence and capacity among participants to become advocates for issues that matter to them.

This year, we continued to face challenges in securing sustainable funding. The cost-of-living crisis has increased need, making the work of HERe NI more important than ever. The supermarket voucher scheme, delivered in partnership with Belfast City Council, is just one example of the practical assistance the organisation has been able to provide during difficult times.

HERe NI staff members have brought enthusiasm, fresh perspectives and a dynamic approach to their roles. Senior Leadership has increased responsibility and further strengthened their skills and capacity, fostering a collaborative culture across the organisation. I would like to acknowledge the professionalism and leadership of our Director, Cara McCann. Her representation of HERe NI across numerous platforms continues to inspire and raise the organisation's profile.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to the HERe NI staff team for their dedication and hard work, to our funders for their ongoing support, and to our partners who help extend our reach and deepen our impact.

Most importantly, we thank the LGBTQIA+ women and their families who place their trust in us and shape our work every day. We remain motivated, hopeful and determined to ensure HERe NI thrives and serves with integrity in the years ahead.

Helen Coburn
Chairperson, HERe NI

DIRECTOR REPORT

The past year has been one of significant achievement for HERe NI as we continued to support LGBTQIA+ women and families, strengthen our influence and build a more sustainable future for the organisation. Against a backdrop of funding uncertainty and growing demand, our staff, volunteers and Board have shown commitment, creativity and care.

A key achievement has been securing core funding to support the essential staffing and organisational capacity behind our services. Alongside this, we have increased both grant income and earned income, strengthening our financial position and supporting our ability to plan ahead. Diversifying our income remains central to sustaining our work and responding to emerging needs across the North.

We have also seen increasing numbers of women engaging with HERe NI. This reflects both the reach of our work and the growing need for safe, inclusive spaces, practical assistance and emotional support. As women and families face isolation, financial pressures, discrimination and barriers to services, our programmes provide opportunities for connection, support and participation.

A particular highlight was the recognition of our work at the Belfast Pride Awards. Our Older Women's Worker, Fiona, received Ally of the Year, our training work received the Partnership Award, and our Senior Policy Worker, Sophie, was recognised as Activist of the Year.

HERe NI also received the P.A. Mac Loughlin Award. These achievements reflect the breadth of our work and the dedication of those who deliver it. We were also delighted to be named finalists at the Social Enterprise NI Awards, recognising our accredited training and our contribution as a charity.

Our research and advocacy have continued to bring the experiences of LGBTQIA+ women into policy discussions. Our domestic abuse research and No Place Like Home housing research have highlighted barriers to safety, secure housing and appropriate support. We have used this evidence to engage decision makers and advocate for more inclusive services.

Alongside this, our older women's work has continued to grow, our young women's mental health project has extended its reach, and our heritage programme has preserved and celebrated histories too often overlooked. We have also progressed our partnership work towards a shared LGBTQIA+ hub in Belfast.

As Director, I am proud of what we have achieved together. My thanks go to our staff, volunteers, trustees, funders, partners and the women and families who place their trust in us. Their involvement shapes our priorities and strengthens our voice. We enter the year ahead focused on sustaining essential support, building on our funding successes and working strategically across the North to meet increasing need and improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ women and families.

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 Awards for All
-The National Lottery Heritage Fund
-Belfast City Council
-Community Foundation NI
-Department of Justice
-Esmee Mitchell Trust
-Elevate Mentoring Programme
-Ireland Funds GB
-Public Health Agency
-Arts Council NI
-Pilgrim Trust
-Garfield Weston

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 £111,939 (2024: £23,206), leaving unrestricted funds of £118,384 (2024: £118,823) and restricted funds of £188,273 (2024: £75,895).

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 2025, a copy of which can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary, HERe NI, 23-31 Waring Street, Belfast, BT1 2DX.

Andrea Quinn
Treasurer, HERe NI

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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

STAFF TEAM

Cara McCann - Director
Tracey McDowell - Finance & Administration Manager
Fiona Craig - Older Women's Project Officer
Sophie Nelson - Senior Policy Development Officer
Justine Eastwood- LGBTQIA+ Heritage Development Officer
Ferdia Roe - Young Women's Mental Health Officer
Rita Aburahma - Community Engagement Officer
Amanda McGurk- Training & Business Development Manager
Lauren Armstrong Boyd - PhD Researcher: Ageing Back Into The Closet

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

124+ EVENTS THIS YEAR

OLDER WOMENS GROUP: 42 EVENTS

RHYME TIME: 6 EVENTS

COFFEE HOURS: 21 EVENTS

LGBTQIA+ HERITAGE PROJECT: 35 EVENTS

YOUNG WOMENS GROUP: 20 EVENTS

Some of our events this year included:

- **Quilt-Making**
- **Pottery**
- **Crystal Queer Film Club**
- **Creative Writing**
- **Coffee hour**
- **Movement Session**
- **Arts and Crafts**
- **Self-Defence**
- **T-Shirt Printing**
- **Sewing**
- **Mini Golf**
- **LGBTQIA+ History club**
- **LGBTQIA+ Heritage Tours**
- **Gender Budgeting training**
- **Will we remain invisible women? Féile an Phobail panel event**
- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Awareness training**
- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls training**
- **Reflections of LGBTQIA+ History in Northern Ireland**

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

RESEARCH REPORTS

HERe NI's health and housing research has strengthened the evidence base on the inequalities facing LGBTQIA+ women across the North. *Still Invisible? LGBTQIA+ Women's Health and Service Needs in Northern Ireland* highlights mental health difficulties, unmet support needs and barriers to accessing inclusive services and community connections. *No Place Like Home* examines housing insecurity, financial pressures, discrimination and the challenges women face in finding safe accommodation. Together, these reports highlight the connections between housing, health and wellbeing, informing our support services, training and policy advocacy. By bringing women's experiences directly to policymakers and service providers, we are using this evidence to advocate for earlier intervention, more inclusive services and coordinated support.

HERe NI's housing research, *No Place Like Home: Housing Insecurity and Homelessness among LGBTQIA+ Women in Northern Ireland*, was launched in March 2026 by the Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Paul Doherty. The research brought attention to women's experiences of insecure accommodation, financial pressures, family rejection and discrimination, highlighting the need for safe housing and accessible, inclusive support. Its findings are informing our advocacy for stronger homelessness prevention, improved referral pathways and greater recognition of LGBTQIA+ women within housing policy and services.

Our health research, *Still Invisible? LGBTQIA+ Women's Health and Service Needs in Northern Ireland,* examines mental health, unmet support needs and barriers to accessing services and community connections. Tolu Agbede spent a year with HERe NI undertaking this vital research work, helping us build a stronger evidence base grounded in women's experiences. Together, the health and housing reports demonstrate how safe accommodation, financial security, social connection and inclusive services are closely linked to wellbeing. They provide a foundation for our support, training and policy work across the North.

STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

JUSTINE EASTWOOD

Justine Eastwood is the current Heritage Development Officer for the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project, having joined the team as Heritage Support Officer in February before stepping into her new role in June. Over the past year, the Heritage Project has continued to expand its reach, engaging with LGBTQIA+ communities in Belfast and beyond.

Through our Heritage Walking Tours, we have connected with a diverse range of audiences, including the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS), and visitors attending the Fleadh Cheoil from across the globe. By highlighting Belfast's hidden and lost LGBTQIA+ historical sites, the tours have provided lifelong residents and new visitors alike with opportunities to discover stories that might otherwise be overlooked or lost to time.

Our regular History Club and Film Club events have also continued to bring people together through a shared interest in LGBTQIA+ history and culture. From watching and discussing beloved works of queer cinema to exploring the lives of LGBTQIA+ figures and a wide range of research topics, these events provide spaces for learning, discussion and connection.

Justine has worked alongside the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Training and Volunteer Officer to collaborate on public events, such as LGBTQIA+ History Month, LGBTQIA+ Awareness week, Volunteer Appreciation week and local prides.

FERDIA ROE

This year has seen the young women's group go from strength to strength. The number of women engaging in the group has risen from 44 to 129 in the last year. Ferdia delivered 87 one-to-one listening ear sessions which have provided mental health check ins and emotional support to LGBTQIA+ young women, and made 13 referrals for co-cultural counselling. The listening ear sessions were a vital resource to our clients during the racist attacks and intimidation in June. During this time, Ferdia linked in with Rainbow Refugees to help our clients find temporary alternative accommodation as well as helping to secure food vouchers and emergency funds to be allocated to those clients who were afraid to leave their house.

Initially, the young women's group were meeting once a month, and there is now a monthly craft session as well. Since January, there has been twenty activities plus an additional monthly online and an in person coffee hour. Some of the highlights have been: a pottery session and t-shirt screen printing, an inter-generational crazy golf session and a sewing workshop which was run by a local artist that taught our clients the essential skill of how to repair their clothes and how to use a sewing machine.

Ferdia also engaged in outreach, meeting with universities, training centres, women's groups, social groups, community hubs, and has attended events in Ulster University (an event on sexual harassment), The Greenway Women's Centre, a conference in Newcastle in England and many other workshops. In addition to this, Ferdia attended multiple marches such as Reclaim The Agenda for International Women's Day, Reclaim the Night and Belfast's first Dyke March.

Ferdia also engaged with Take Five and was trained as an ambassador for the Five Steps To Wellbeing to be able to discuss this with clients who are struggling with their mental health to have practical resources to combat this. Ferdia completed 14 training courses to learn tools to be able to work holistically with their clients.

RITA ABURAHMA

'Through the Out Connections Belfast project, we delivered focus groups with members of the LGBTQIA+ community to gather feedback on their experiences, needs and priorities. This feedback, alongside case study interviews, is helping to inform the project's research and shape our outreach sessions to ensure they respond to the realities and experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in Belfast.

We also began delivering tailored LGBTQIA+ awareness and inclusion sessions with community organisations across Belfast, creating opportunities for open discussion, learning and greater understanding. Through these sessions, we aim to equip organisations with the knowledge and confidence to create safer, more welcoming spaces for LGBTQIA+ people. Alongside this, we strengthened connections with community organisations and project partners through networking and steering group meetings, supporting collaboration and a shared commitment to building a more inclusive Belfast.'

LAUREN ARMSTRONG BOYD

Lauren is a new PhD student who will be researching the ageing LGBTQIA+ population in Northern Ireland. Her research focuses on the lived experiences and the specific needs of the older generation. Lauren aims to use findings from focus groups and interviews to evaluate the current planning and delivery of services in NI to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

As part of the time spent at HERe NI, Lauren will engage with the Older Women's Engagement Project. This will allow for Lauren to build connections with members of the group and to inform any research practices. She hopes to use her experience to develop and deliver training sessions to support service providers and stakeholders.

SOPHIE NELSON

Our Senior Policy Development Officer has made significant progress on many of HERe NI's policy priorities over the past year, despite the difficult political climate that currently exists. Sophie continues to represent LGBTQIA+ women's voices on a range of stakeholder groups, including the Exeprt Reference Group on Domestic Abuse, the Women's Policy Group, the Belfast Women's Assembly, the All-Island Women's Forum, the All-Island LGBTQIA+ Forum and the East/West LGBTQIA+ Forum.

Over the past year Sophie has submitted government consultation responses on hate crime reform, conversion practices, the victims and witnesses bill and the childcare strategy. HERe NI appeared before Assembly Committees, including the Justice Committee with The Rainbow Project and Women's Resource and Development Agency to give evidence on The Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill to advocate for Hate Crime reform. Sophie will give evidence in December to the Committee for Communities on the Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill.

Sophie sits as Co-Convenor of the Ban Conversion Practices Coalition, and has co-chaired several meetings of the coalition this year. The Coalition have met with Eóin Tennyson to discuss the sections within the Bill and our views on amendments to the Bill. Sophie also co-organised a protest outside Stormont to demand MLAs back the Bill and appeared on BBC Radio Talkback to argue for a comprehensive ban.

Alongside our campaigns for legislative reform, HERe NI have hosted a number of panel events and workshops. This included hosting a panel event at Féile an Phobail on LGBTQIA+ women's health needs in a New Ireland, as well as a workshop during Belfast Pride week on LGBTQIA+ mothers and the fight for parental rights. A steering group of LGBTQIA+ mothers who had personal experience of parental rights issues was established following the event to feed into our policy development on this issue. As recognition of our achievements this year in policy, Sophie was awarded LGBTQIA+ Activist of the Year at Belfast Pride Awards.

FIONA CRAIG

The Older Women's Engagement Project continues to thrive, with activities remaining active and well attended. The WOW group continues to meet monthly, both in person and online. Fiona has facilitated a wide range of health and wellbeing activities, under previous funding from Elevate and the Public Health Agency. These have included arts and crafts, quilt making, pottery, movement sessions, and creative writing.

The project provides opportunities to access information and develop new skills. Education and awareness sessions have included topics on gender identity and sexual orientation, an introduction to campaigning, and a session with The Rainbow Project's Cancer Champions. Age NI delivered a session on benefits and residential care costs, while Advice NI provided a five-week Staying Safe and Savvy Online course for members of the WOW group. James Stevenson from Quilter Financial Advisers delivered a session addressing financial issues.

Members have had opportunities to participate in a range of external cultural activities. These have included The Upside-Down House and The Rest of Our Lives as part of the Belfast International Arts Festival and Dyke Systems Ltd as part of Outburst.

The WOW Steering Group was established, with eight members drawn from the WOW Group. It represents an important step in strengthening member participation and ensuring that the project's future development is informed by the women it serves.

Fiona has continued to engage with the Community Development Practitioners' Forum and has been invited to represent HERe NI on the Forum's Steering Group; contributing to a wider dialogue on community development practice. In addition, Fiona was invited to present at the Elevate Celebration and Evaluation Event in April and at the Forum, sharing learning and insights from HERe NI's work funded by Elevate and highlighting the application of a community development approach.

AMANDA MCGURK

HERe NI's Training and Business Development Manager, Amanda, has strengthened the organisation's approach to income generation by securing grant funding and developing accredited training for the earned income market. This work supports our financial sustainability while creating opportunities to build strategic partnerships and extend our reach across the North.

With funding from Belfast City Council, Amanda designed and delivered CPD-accredited Ending Violence Against Women and Girls through an LGBTQIA+ Lens training to 278 individuals. This has now been extended to Derry City and Strabane Council with additional funding. She also secured £15,000 from the Department of Justice to deliver further sessions, with delivery underway during the reporting period.

Amanda expanded our training portfolio by developing CPD-accredited LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in Sport training, supported by Belfast City Council through its European City of Sport initiative. The first two sessions have been delivered, incorporating contributions from local LGBTQIA+ inclusive sports teams, who also feature in the training video.

To strengthen future earned income, Amanda developed and secured CPD accreditation for Domestic Abuse in the LGBTQIA+ Community training, which is being marketed to organisations. She is also updating our Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Allyship courses, with updated CPD accreditation planned for both.

Together, these developments provide a stronger foundation for combining grant-funded delivery with paid training commissions. Our strategic focus is to build relationships with public bodies, community organisations and other employers across the North, generating income that sustains HERe NI's work while improving understanding, inclusion and responses to the needs of LGBTQIA+ women and communities.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SHARED:

"Loved it! It was easy to get to, and Kit is a lovely teacher. Enjoyed meeting new people and getting back into sewing with a machine. I struggle with agoraphobia, so going out in the evening was a big step for me. I mainly went because I know Kit so that felt safe. But now I feel confident that I can attend other group sessions and feel at ease. Thank you!"

Ferdia's Young Women's Group

'Loved the atmosphere and sense of community'

Fiona's WoW Group

'I learned a lot about campaigning and how it works. It gave me confidence to be able to bring a campaign forward if I need to'

Campaigning Session with the WoW Group

'I learned exactly what each letter means in the gay community. It was great to be with friends again to have chats to. This is my only evening outing i get from my home.'

Amanda's SOGI Training

"I had a lovely chill time with my friend. We were both very glad we attended and had a nice chat with someone new beside us. Loved that today's class was just freeform so we get to use our creativity."

Ferdia's Young Women's Group

"Please continue these history clubs, they all lead to really informative discussions"

Justine's History Club

IMPACT STATEMENTS:

“The financial support from HEReNI had a immediate and significant impact on both me and my son during a very distressing time.

After being displaced from our home due to racist violence and intimidation, we were left dealing with fear, uncertainty, and sudden financial pressure. The support helped cover urgent costs such as transport to and from emergency houses, and essential day-to-day needs at a time when our normal routines, kitchen, and feeding pattern had been completely disrupted.

It also helped ease some of the sudden financial burden of trying to secure safer accommodation, including costs associated with moving and preparing for a new tenancy. This support reduced some of the overwhelming stress I was carrying as a parent trying to keep my child safe.

Beyond the financial help, receiving this support made me feel seen, believed, and cared for. Knowing that there were people and organisations willing to stand with us during such a traumatic experience made a meaningful difference. It gave us hope and reminded us that we are welcome.”

Client response to HERe NI’s Emergency Relief Fund

“This will really help my special needs child and me in this difficult time. Thanks so much, I really appreciate HERe NI.”

Client response to HERe NI’s Emergency Relief Fund

“This is incredibly helpful in so many ways. I was so stressed about how I would make it through the coming week, and this will benefit me more than you know. I am so grateful for your support.

I can buy some food and fresh clothes; I could not have done this without this fund.”

Client response to HERe NI’s Emergency Relief Fund



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