



NI  
Museums  
Council

# Newsletter

Jan 2024



## Global Voices Local Choices

Celebrating the project at Stormont

### Member Study Trip

Belfast City Cemetery and  
Visitor Centre.

### Poverty Proofing Museums

And other highlights from  
the MA Conference.

### Improving Accessibility

Spotlight on new interventions  
in local museums.

[nimc.co.uk](http://nimc.co.uk)

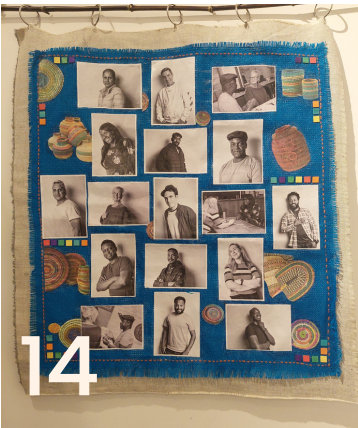


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Cover photograph of the participants, partners and supporters of the Global Voices Local Choices project on the staircase of Parliament Building Stormont. Image thanks to Presseye.

# Director's Note



Happy New Year from the NI Museums Council!

As we bid farewell to 2023, a year that posed its fair share of challenges for our museum members, we are pleased to reflect on the many opportunities and successes that emerged amid the adversities.

One significant achievement for NIMC arose from our active participation in the Culture, Arts, and Heritage (CAH) Strategy taskforce, led by the Department for Communities. Through our contributions to a wide range of roundtable events and sub-groups, we successfully advocated for new policies underpinning the integration of local heritage into the Northern Ireland curriculum. This strategic goal would foster closer collaboration between museums and mainstream education, creating new avenues for audience development and engagement.

Our recommendation to the Independent Review of Education committee, on behalf of the CAH taskforce was fully adopted within their final report, which was formally launched in December 2023.

The report emphasised the vital role that museums and local heritage assets can play in enhancing the curriculum, indicating that new policy is required to formally integrate local heritage throughout the education system. The independent review committee recognised the potential for museums to further enrich the educational experience, whilst developing a sense of identity and social cohesion through community building, especially for those experiencing disadvantage.

You can download the final report of the Culture, Arts and Heritage taskforce "Investing in Creative Delivery" from the Department for Communities website. You can also read the final report of the Independent Review of Education through this link: <https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/final-report>

This represents an important outcome from our advocacy efforts, and establishes a foundation from which to lobby any incoming Education Minister. A vital step towards meaningful and productive change.

I hope that you will find the articles below equally informative and encouraging. It is important to remember that despite the challenges that we have faced as a sector, positive and impactful outcomes are clearly arising from the passion and enthusiasm of museum professionals across NI. As a sector we should take pride in the knowledge that we punch well above our collective weight.

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NIMC Director, Johnathan Dalzell

# News in Brief

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## Annual General Meeting & Museums Forum

On September 26th 2023 we held our Annual General Meeting and Museums Forum featuring talks from England and NI which ranged from JobStart placements, Wild Escape programming, touring exhibitions, Global Voices Local Choices and the MA NI research project amongst others.

Following requests, the 2023 Forum was held online to support accessibility. It was a wonderful opportunity to share learning from across the sector.

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## Museum Impact Statement Deadline – 31st January



Preparations are well advanced for the Museum Trends 2023 Survey, which was previously undertaken in 2015 and published in 2016.

We plan to launch the Museum Trends survey 2023 imminently, to review the 2022–23 financial year (April 2022 – March 2023). The survey will occur through Citizen Space, which is an online survey platform used by Government for public consultations.

**We require that the 'Museum Impact Statement' must be compiled and submitted separately by Museum Managers independent of the online survey on or before Wednesday 31st January 2024. Guidance on this can be found on our website.**

Along with the Trends Survey, the Museum Impact Statement will give us an overview of where the NI museums sector currently stands since the last survey, which was undertaken in 2015 and published 2016. It can be used as a tool for advocacy for individual museums and the sector as a whole.



## Accreditation Awards

We are pleased to announce that the Siege Museum, Derry/Londonderry, have been using the Accreditation Standards to inform their policies, procedures, and development strategy for the museum. They have recently achieved their first Full Accreditation as part of the UK Scheme. Huge congratulations to the Siege Museum team who have worked hard with the support of their Accreditation Mentor, Roisin Doherty (Tower Museum), to achieve this!



Congratulations also to North Down Museum, Northern Ireland War Memorial, and Armagh County Museum who have all maintained Full Accreditation after submitting their return applications.

We look forward to continuing our support for accredited museums across Northern Ireland, to maintain and develop their standards of governance, collections management and user engagement.

## NI Museums Council Welcome new Board Members

We are delighted to have welcomed six new members to the NI Museum Council Board. We look forward to working with them over the coming years to support and develop the local museum sector in Northern Ireland.

Cllr. Christine Creighton - Nominated by Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Mr Matthew McMahon - Nominated by the Independent Museums; Affiliated with the Armagh Observatory & Planetarium.

Professor Elizabeth Crooke - Nominated by the universities, Affiliated with the Ulster University.

Councillor Kevin Savage - Nominated by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

Ms Jessica Hoyle - Co-opted to the Board, affiliated with Tourism NI.

Ms Ruth Bruce - Boardroom Apprentice 2023/24.



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## ICOM UK Conference in Belfast - 12 April 2024

We have been working ICOM UK and their partners to help shape this year's ICOM UK Conference 'Common Ground: the role of museums in divided communities', which will be hosted by The Ulster Museum, Belfast on 12th April.

This represents a valuable opportunity to hear from museum professionals from the island of Ireland, the UK and the global museum community. NI Museums Council are pleased to offer a limited number of FREE conference places to our members. Contact [catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk](mailto:catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk) for further details. Early bird discounts are also available until Jan 31st!

## Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Exhibition at The Linen Hall



NI Museums Council are pleased to have fostered links between the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Northern Irish museums, resulting in The Linen Hall hosting this touring exhibition from the Japanese museum from 8th Jan - 28th Feb this year.

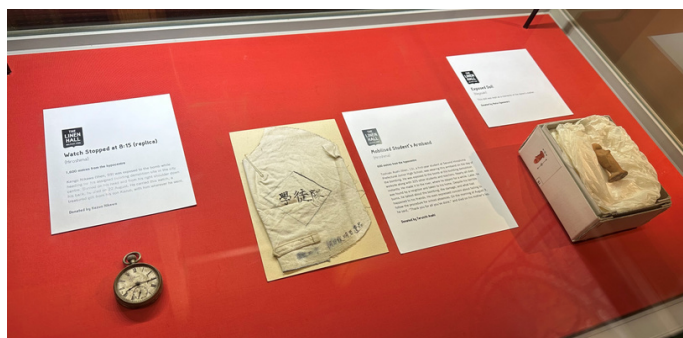
This first-of-its-kind exhibition on the island of Ireland, was produced by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and highlights the devastation caused by atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945; one of the most significant moments of the Second World War, which ushered in the nuclear age.

Since 1995, Hiroshima City has collaborated with institutions in major cities around the world to organise exhibitions to deepen public knowledge of the realities of atomic warfare, and to convey the devastating impact of these weapons of mass destruction.

Included in the exhibition are photographs of everyday life before and after the bombings, alongside objects kindly loaned from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. Many of these were donated by the families of the victims, bringing visitors face to face with the human stories of those who lost their lives.

The exhibition ends with hope, highlighting how the two cities have risen from the ashes of the bombings to spread a message of peace.

Please Note: This exhibition contains content that some may find distressing.





## Belfast City Cemetery and Visitor Centre – Study Trip

Members of the NI Museums Council met at the new Visitor Centre in Belfast City Cemetery (BCC) in August for a tour that was facilitated by BCC Heritage Officer Donald Bell and author Tom Hartley.

Dating back to the 1860s, BCC is one of the oldest public cemeteries in the city. The site contains many points of historical interest, including the 'Poor Ground', with over 80,000 unmarked graves, and an 'Underground Wall', built in Victorian times to separate Protestant and Catholic graves. BCC is the resting place of 570 Commonwealth servicemen and women of both World Wars, making it the largest Commonwealth War Grave site in Northern Ireland.

With funding from the National Heritage Fund, Belfast City Council has delivered a project to enhance the existing built and natural heritage of BCC and improve access and interpretation, while protecting and preserving it for future generations. The new Visitor Centre includes an exhibition space, an audio-visual learning experience and research stations. An Outdoor Classroom has also been built, which can be booked by schools, community groups and summer schemes.

BCC Heritage Officer, Donald Bell, discussed the history of the NHLF project, which dated back to 2017, exploring how the pandemic impacted delivery and volunteer engagement. Since opening, the Centre has attracted some negative feedback for the lack of engagement with the West Belfast community and has also been the target of anti-social behaviour.

Donald detailed the work that is being done to address these challenges and to repair the relationship with the community. This includes working with community groups to source Irish language versions of the interpretive panels, and including the historical tour of BCC in the Féile an Phobail community arts festival programme.

After a refreshment break the participants met with Tom Hartley for a tour of the BCC notable grave sites, and an analysis of the symbolism on various monuments. The informal museum meet-up allowed attendees to network and learn. Feedback indicates that participants believe the information and insight they gained will positively impact how they work in future.

"It gave me the opportunity to improve my knowledge of local history including that of the cemetery itself as well as more information on those buried there. This will aid me in my role, which often involves addressing genealogical and local history inquiries."

"I really enjoyed Tom Hartley's tour of the cemetery. It was a reminder of the complexity of Belfast's history and how many interesting personalities are buried there. I found it so interesting that I bought Tom's book and will definitely be returning to the cemetery to explore more!"

The Centre is due to close for refurbishments and installation of the new Irish language interpretation but will re-open in 2024. If you would like to attend a future NI Museums Council member's study trip, please check our website and social media for upcoming events.



*Photography*

*Belfast City Cemetery study trip images courtesy of NI Museums Council.*

*Left, top: Tom Hartley leads NI Museums Council members on a tour of BCC.*

*Left, bottom: Donald Bell pointing out the exterior design of the new BCC Visitor Centre including historical motifs.*

*Right, top: NIMC members exploring interpretative panels at the new BCC Visitor Centre which detailed the history of the site, identified notable graves and covered the social history of Belfast.*

*Right, bottom: Exterior interpretation panel identifying the location of the 'Underground Wall' built in Victorian times to separate the Protestant and Catholic graves.*



# MA Conference The Power of Museums

**This years MA conference ‘The Power of Museums’, was held at the Glasshouse Newcastle (previously known as ‘The Sage’).**

Nearly 50 sessions were delivered over two days featuring presentations, workshops, mentoring, and panel discussions covering the current issues facing museums and exploring the work that has been done in the sector over the past year.

Two presentations from NI were chosen to feature on the programme. In ‘How the stories we tell shape who we become’, Karen Logan (National Museums NI) looked at how objects tell the story of a person and what it can say about their identity, leading to the co-curated display within the ‘Troubles and Beyond’ exhibition.

The ongoing work of ‘Global Voices, Local Choices’ was also featured as a presentation and shortlisted for a Museums Change Lives: Decolonising Museum Award, missing out to the Wilberforce House Museum ‘Changing Perspectives in Hull’ project.

Conference began by acknowledging ‘Extinction Rebellion’ and the Israel-Gaza conflict, offering resources and advice for anyone in the sector who needed support.

The Plenary address was given by Vici Wreford-Sinnett, theatre and television writer and director, who has campaigned for the cultural equality of disabled people for almost thirty years, and Chi Onwurah, MP for Newcastle upon Tyne.

Continuing the conversation from the recent anti-ableism Museums Journal issue, Vici urged the sector to tell the stories of disabled people in ‘disabled-led’ ways, and to feature disabled protagonists who are “funny, vibrant and flawed”. She noted that 14 million British people are affected by anti-ableism and that the slow pace of change in this area is “disproportionate to the lifetime of effort that disabled people have put into calling for change”.

Chi spoke to the strong industrial heritage of the Northeast and of the role Newcastle University had in the civil rights movement when in 1967, it gave Dr Martin Luther King an honorary degree; the only UK university to do so during his lifetime. During his visit, Dr King spoke of three urgent problems: racism, poverty, and war. Reflecting on how these problems persist today, Chi described the “struggle for humanity as a day-by-day battle.”

The themes of diversity and inclusion, anti-poverty and climate action were prominent throughout the sessions. Curatorial diversity and co-production projects were covered in ‘Overlooked Stories’ from Leeds City Museum, ‘Shifting Power’ from Amgueddfa Cymru and ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’ from Peoples History Museum. Each of these projects partnered with young people and people with lived experience of disability, environmental activism, and LGBTQ+ work to create groundbreaking co-curated exhibitions and projects. The participants were dynamic, proactive, and energetic, speaking honestly about what did and did not work for them, including their fears about their work being performative and the issue of staff not being equipped to work with young people in this way.



They reminded us that young people like to ask 'why' and if you are telling them that something cannot or should not be done, you should prepare yourself to be asked why and have a good reason to give!

Amgueddfa Cymru were candid about the struggles that participants have had post project, highlighting an issue that many funded projects have after-delivery – what happens next? While the project offered a safe space that celebrates diversity, when this is stripped away, the flexibility and care is gone leaving a sector and audience experience that is quite rigid. This raises questions around duty of care for the young people and asks how we can attract a dynamic workforce with fresh perspectives and different voices, if the landscape is static and the opportunities for change are not immediately apparent.

Each evening the delegates were invited to a different museum, allowing them to network while visiting the Laing Portrait Gallery, The Great North Museum: Hancock and the Discovery Centre.

Approximately 800 people attended the conference, with 1200 delegates attending online. The NI Museums Council will be addressing a range of discussion points within its 2024-25 Business Plan and in its participation in the MA Code of Ethics review.

The 2024 MA Conference will be held on 12th – 14th November at the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds.



## Poverty Proofing Museums – MA Conference Highlight

One of the first presentations of the MA Conference was 'Poverty Proofing Museums' which looked at how our museums are failing families living in poverty. Paid entry, poor marketing, lack of indoor picnic spaces and visitor routes that force children through a shop on exit, to name a few. The current museum delivery model can act as a deterrent, or offer such a negative experience that people don't want to return.

Lorna Nicoll from Children North East spoke about the realities of living in poverty and the implications for child health and educational outcomes, stating that a child who receives free school meals for 80% of their school life will be approximately 22 months behind their peers by the time they leave school.

In 2011 Children North East commissioned a project to explore school life through the lived experience of 1,000 children in poverty. The children used digital cameras to show the world through their eyes and it demonstrated the stigma that they endure.

This includes being identifiable as a recipient of free school meals, missing out on paid trips, fear of joining clubs as they cannot afford the kits or equipment and 'birthday party poverty' – not admitting when it is their birthday to avoid the expectation that there should be a party. Children are learning to disguise this stigma or feign indifference.

Lorna discussed poverty premiums, whereby those in most need have to pay more for services because of systems that are not designed to help them. This includes paying for your electricity by top up cards, chargeable cash withdrawals, and importantly for museums, reduced entry fees for those buying annual memberships that exclude those who cannot afford a large one-off payment.

So what can museums do to help?

It is important that we recognise that poverty exists in our communities, our workforce, and our volunteers and consider this as a barrier to be addressed. Whilst poverty proofing needs to be a sector-wide agenda, there are small things that we can all do to help. Children North East have set up Poverty Proofing© Culture, which offers consultancy services to teams within cultural organisations. Their main advice is to listen to the experiences of their visitors, communities, staff, volunteers, and trustees on how poverty impacts them.

Consider how families and individuals living in poverty experience your venue, and identify potential barriers.

What are their travel costs to reach you and what does the journey look like? How do they look up information on your website, does it use a lot of data, are prices clearly displayed or will there be surprise add-ons that they haven't budgeted for? Can they bring packed lunches, and do you have adequate seating areas that are sheltered from the weather?

Consider schools and the experiences of schoolchildren. As families endure a cost-of-living crisis, school trips are the only option for some children to visit a museum. However, as transport costs become prohibitive, we risk losing this audience also. Do you leave time for schools to visit the museum shop and if so, have you communicated this with the teacher to check if this is appropriate? Will the children need any outdoor wear and has this been communicated to the school?

For your workforce and volunteers, consider office traditions such as sweepstakes, collections, and lunch clubs. Are there facilities to reheat lunches from home or are people forced to eat out or eat cold food? Do you remunerate staff travel and offer out of pocket expenses for your volunteers?

Do you schedule meetings before 10 am and after 3 pm; does this accommodate those who cannot afford breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs for their children?

The Poverty Proofing session highlighted the barrier that poverty can be, even to a free entry museum. It emphasised the importance of lived experience and the insights that can be gathered by working with networks, families, and communities.

It showed that big differences can arise from small changes and reminded us that, while the sector itself is struggling, we mustn't lose sight of how we serve those most in need as they will become generations of future visitors.



## Photography

MA Conference images courtesy of NI Museums Council.

Page 8, top: *Bridges over the Tyne, Newcastle.*

Page 9, left: *Young participants from Leeds City Museum talk about their co-curated 'Overlooked Stories' project.*

Page 10, Right top: *The Glasshouse.*

Page 10, right middle: *Discovery Museum.*

Page 10, right bottom: *Great North Museum.*



# Global Voices, Local Choices

NI Museums Council, in partnership with National Museums NI and the African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI), were delighted to co-host a showcase event at Stormont to celebrate museums, diversity and community input to decolonisation as part of Global Voices Local Choices project, which was funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Taking place over the last 12 months, and designed to engage marginalised communities, the success of the 'Global Voices, Local Choices' project was celebrated at the event.

Attendees, who included sponsoring MLA Kate Nicholl, reflected on the importance of providing people from all communities and backgrounds a fair opportunity to make choices relating to Ulster Museum's World Cultures collection, and how the objects within it might be interpreted in museum spaces in the future.

Approximately 60 people took part in a series of workshops in museums across Northern Ireland, including Carrickfergus Museum; Tower Museum; Armagh Robinson Library and No. 5 Vicar's Hill; Fermanagh County Museum; Causeway Coast and Glen Museum Service; and Ulster Museum.

Professional creative facilitators supported the groups to focus on the meaning and cultural significance of objects that reflect their history, identity and culture, and encouraged open dialogue to foster intercultural understanding and integration.



Agrippa Njanina, Project Engagement Officer (PEO) at National Museums NI said, "It's been wonderful to witness how this project has raised awareness and understanding of the World Cultures collection and amplified the voices of people from various ethnic backgrounds. Our museums are for everyone so this commitment to community engagement is crucial. By bringing diverse cultures and perspectives into Northern Ireland's local and national museums, our hope is that marginalised global experiences are represented as we consider and develop our decolonisation approach."

Alliance MLA for South Belfast, Kate Nicholl, attended the event and commented on how important a role museums play in good community relations.

She said, "Diversity enhances every aspect of our lives. It makes us more creative, more accepting, more inquisitive. I commend the work of Northern Ireland's local and national museums and partners for bringing diverse perspectives to the fore. It's a privilege to be sponsoring a celebration event of 'Global Voices, Local Choices' at Parliament Buildings. Their transformative decolonisation project doesn't just raise awareness and understanding of different perspectives, it inspires us all to be more inclusive."

The reflections of the participants, whether through art and crafts, music and dance, poetry or creative writing, are being displayed and interpreted in the museums to encourage better public understanding and celebration of diversity in Northern Ireland.

NI Museums Council Director, Dr Johnathan Dalzell said, "Northern Ireland Museums Council is delighted that our member museums came together to engage their respective communities in this journey of mutual learning and understanding. Raising awareness of the rich complexity and diversity of cultural heritage and identities is a priority for the sector as it challenges misconceptions and promotes empathy and understanding."

Takura Makoni, Policy Officer at ACSONI said: "We're delighted to partner on this project and pleased with the progress made. The need to do justice to the memory and heritage of ethnic communities is clearly appreciated. This project's approach – empowering people to share their thoughts through creativity – has helped participants share valuable insights that will ultimately help us all to become more connected into the future."

In 2022 Ulster Museum launched Inclusive Global Histories, an exhibition that demonstrates a commitment to decolonisation, diversity, and inclusion. It positions the need to better understand the complex global stories of thousands of items within the World Cultures collection – how and why they came to be here, how they may be shared with audiences, and what options there might be for their future. Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive at National Museums NI, said, "The legacy of Global Voices, Local Choices project will be significant to our work long into the future. By increasing representation and facilitating respect, tolerance and understanding, museums and their collections can play a greater role in promoting diversity and inclusivity."

Thank you to all who attended and input into the event! Read on to learn more from Agrippa on how the remaining local museum projects have progressed. The final set of creative responses by participants connected to Carrickfergus Museum are currently on display in the museum until the end of January.





**Photography**

*Stormont event photography courtesy of Presseye.*

*Page 11, top: Project partners and participants with event co-sponsor MLA Kate Nicholl at Stormont.*

*Following photos: participants receive thanks and a congratulatory certificate from MLA Kate Nicholl and PEO Agrippa Njanina.*

*Page 11, Carrickfergus participants along with Shirin Murphy, Carrickfergus Museum.*

*Page 12, top right: Members of the Causeway Multicultural Forum with Dr Nic Wright of CCG Museum Service.*

*Page 12, second down: Participants with Sarah McHugh and Sinead Reilly representing the Fermanagh County Museum project.*

*Page 12, third down: Participant families from the Ukrainian community with Carol Conlin of Armagh Robinson Library.*

*Page 12, bottom: The Tower Museum project represented by Roisin Doherty and members of the ACE group.*

*Page 13: All images are from the opening of the Carrickfergus displays, opened by Mayor Geraldine Mulvenna. On display until end of January.*



## Global Voices Local Choices Local Museum Project Updates

by Agrippa Njanina Community Engagement Officer

Exciting developments have unfolded in our collaborative project, *Global Voices Local Choices*, since our last update in the NIMC newsletter. The six participating groups and museums have successfully completed their engagement sessions, marking a significant milestone in our exploration of the 4,500 World Cultures objects housed at the Ulster Museum.

Each group, comprising around 10 participants, embarked on a creative journey, selecting an object from the extensive collection to consider and reflect on. Guided by creative facilitators, the community groups have produced an array of outputs, including creative artworks, letters, poetry, personal stories, videos, and booklets. These diverse art forms and resulting displays serve as vehicles to convey participants' stories in their own voices, allowing them to express reflections on decolonisation.

Representing over thirty different cultures, largely from ethnic minorities, the groups hail from various locations, including Derry/Londonderry, Armagh, Belfast, Carrickfergus, Fermanagh and Causeway coast and Glens.

A primary objective of the project was to empower individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, giving them a voice in the contemporary interpretation of world cultures objects.



The fascinating choices made by each group, both in objects and art forms, provide valuable insights into their cultural perspectives and preferences.

### Tower Museum: Active Citizens Engaged Celebrate Diversity through the Mbira

At the Tower Museum in Derry/Londonderry, the Active Citizens Engaged (A.C.E.) community group has been actively involved in *Global Voices Local Choices*, contributing significantly to the conversation on decolonisation. This culturally diverse group sought to showcase Asian culture whilst learning about other cultures.

The workshops delved into museum collections and the narratives behind them, sparking extensive discussions on identity. Participants revealed a rich tapestry of cultural diversity within the group, including individuals from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Caribbean, Malaysia, and Ireland.

Eager to explore the experiences of other ethnic minority communities, the group enthusiastically chose the Mbira, pictured above. A musical instrument traditional to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, and recent addition to the growing world cultures collection. Uniquely, the group united elements of Zimbabwean folk music with Asian cuisine, emphasising the universal connection between food and music. This resulted in a captivating video that showcased the rich contributions of diverse cultural experiences to Irish culture.

Karen Scrivens, the A.C.E group leader, emphasised the universal connection between food and music, stating, "Food and music always go together in every culture; in that regard, we are similar." The short film, expertly crafted by filmmaker Diana Cheung, beautifully captures the group's celebration of diversity, illustrating the harmonious blend of cultures through African drumming and Mbira melodies.

Mayor of Derry and Strabane, Councillor Patricia Logue, acknowledged the program's vital role in bringing people together.

*"Programmes like Global Voices Local Choices bring different cultures together to share their stories, and use artefacts as the starting point for conversations around culture and heritage and the traditions that are unique to different ethnic communities. I am delighted that the Tower Museum is engaging with the programme and providing a place for local people of all backgrounds to come together."*

The Mbira, with its own complex histories, now displayed in the Tower Museum alongside the video, adds a valuable cultural dimension. This handmade Mbira, donated by a Shona traditional musician from Zimbabwe settled in Belfast, serves as a gift for the people of Northern Ireland to learn more about African culture. Played by a skilled 'gwenyambira' like Mbira maker Edson Kachuta, the rhythms emanating from the instrument can sound complex, echoing a vibrant cultural heritage.



## Weaving Connections Through Basketry

The Carrickfergus Global Voices Local Choices group is made up of people from a diverse range of cultures. Some have settled in the area while others are seeking temporary asylum there. This eclectic mix forms the backdrop for a fascinating exploration into the heritage of a coil weave basket from North America, chosen as the focal point by the group for their project.

Despite limited information in our collections about the basket's origin and journey to Northern Ireland, the group embraced the opportunity to creatively speculate on its displacement. This exercise prompted reflections on their own experiences of being uprooted from their places of birth, adding a personal touch to their artistic endeavour. One group participant encapsulated the sentiment:

*"There is not much known about the basket, taken out of its country; there's a disconnect, something I can relate to."*

Guided by artist Janet Crymble and photographer Bernie McAlister, the group also embarked on a tour of the walled town. Along the way, they captured the essence of their surroundings through photography and delved into the ancient craft of coil weaving. Each member contributed an individual piece to the project, resulting in a remarkable wall of tapestries that symbolise the interconnection of diverse cultures.

The collaboration not only explored the shared experience of displacement but also serves as a testament to the strength and resilience of this community. Through their collective effort, the group has woven a visual narrative that celebrates the ties that bind us all, transcending borders and embracing the rich tapestry of diversity within Northern Ireland.



## Armagh Robinson Library Celebrates Success of Global Voices Local Choices Engagement Programme

Armagh Robinson Library recently played host to a dedicated group of Ukrainian families as part of the Global Voices Local Choices engagement programme. These families, who had sought refuge in Armagh City within the Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area due to the war in Ukraine, demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout their participation.

The Ukrainian families actively engaged in six sessions, creating a compelling collection of letters to exhibit along with their chosen object. This collection, showcased in Armagh Robinson Library throughout the month of September, highlighted the strength and creativity of the group.



During the engagement sessions, participants explored objects from the World Cultures collection at the Ulster Museum. Notably, they selected a comb from the Solomon Islands, drawing a connection to the symbols resembling Ukrainian 'vischyvanka', which served as the inspiration for their choice. Renowned poet and dramatist, Maria McManus, provided valuable support to the group, guiding them in crafting a series of poignant letters.



The object selected by the group is a comb from the Solomon Islands. Its decoration has made strong links with Ukrainian culture including design and use of colour.



The therapeutic nature of letter writing became evident as participants expressed themselves to either real individuals or fictional characters. These heartfelt letters were later recorded and shared on an online portal, allowing a broader audience to listen and connect with the narratives.

The success of the Global Voices Local Choices project is evident in the strengthened relationships between the Ukrainian community and Armagh Robinson Library, the Ulster Museum, and the NI Museums Council. This initiative underscores the commitment of local museums to be inclusive and welcoming spaces for diverse communities, a sentiment endorsed by Lord Mayor Alderman Margaret Tinsley.

The Mayor further demonstrated support by hosting an evening for the Global Voices Local Choices families at the Palace Demesne in December.

We are delighted that this project has not only enriched community involvement but also empowered individuals to express their perspectives on the World Cultures collection.

The Armagh Robinson Library looks forward to continuing its commitment to fostering understanding and trust within the community through engaging initiatives like the Global Voices Local Choices programme.



### Photography

*Photos courtesy of partners of the Global Voices Local Choices project.*

*Page 14, Top: Members of Active Citizens Engaged (ACE) explore items from the World Cultures collection in their Ulster Museum workshop.*

*Page 14, top right: The Zimbabwean mbira chosen by the ACE group.*

*Page 15, top right: Coil weave basket from North America on display in Carrickfergus Museum.*

*Page 16, top: Members of the Ukrainian group celebrate the opening of their display with project members in Armagh Robinson Library (ARL).*

*Page 16, bottom left: members of the ARL group explore collections as part of their Ulster Museum workshop.*

*Page 16, bottom right: The comb from the Solomon Islands chosen by the group working with ARL.*

*Page 17, top: Global Voices Local Choices participants, joined by Carol Conlin (ARL) and Agrippa at a pre-Christmas celebration event hosted by Lord Mayor Alderman Margaret Tinsley.*



## Improving Accessibility to Local Museum Collections

Our local museum members are dedicated to enhancing the accessibility of their collections. Alongside the impactful Global Voices Local Choices project (pages 11-17 for details), we are delighted to highlight several further initiatives from our local museums. These projects, while relatively small in scale, have the potential to significantly enhance visitor accessibility and engagement.

The 2018 Accreditation Standard requires museums to develop an Access Policy demonstrating how their access provision aligns with their statement of purpose, and complies with ethical and legal requirements. Such policies typically consider various access dimensions, including physical, sensory, cultural, intellectual, and financial aspects. A considerable number of our accredited museums have leveraged support from the NI Museum Council to conduct access audits, providing valuable insights that inform their access policies, plans, and projects.

The success stories featured herein are directly inspired by recommendations arising from these access audits, underscoring the effectiveness of robust Access Policies. These initiatives reflect a commitment to ensuring that our museums are welcoming and accessible to all, fostering a rich and inclusive cultural experience for our diverse audience.

In October 2023, NI Museums Council awarded just over £70,000 in Access and Inclusion Grants, which were funded by the Department for Communities. Three local museums were successfully funded, including Downpatrick and County Down Railway Museum, Newry and Mourne Museum, and Ballymoney Museum. We look forward to sharing news of these projects as they are completed.

## Newry and Mourne Museum Launches Easy Read Gallery Guide

In a step towards further inclusivity, Councillor Valerie Harte, unveiled the newly designed 'Easy Read Gallery Guide' at the Newry and Mourne Museum in October 2023. The guide, created to improve the experience of disabled and partially sighted visitors, was made possible through funding from The Museums Connect Grant Programme, generously provided by Art Fund through NI Museums Council (NIMC). This initiative aligns with the Council's goal of supporting museums in evolving their practices and connecting with diverse audiences.

Available in English, Irish, French, and Russian, the specialised guide features large print formats and incorporates detailed maps for each gallery within the museum. These maps serve a dual purpose by aiding visitors in navigating the museum and highlighting key artefacts on display. An orientation map is also included, showcasing accessible routes throughout the museum building.

The development of this guide can be traced back to recommendations from an Access Audit conducted by Access Matters UK in June 2021 on behalf of NIMC. The Council is pleased to see the outcome of these efforts, as the multi-lingual Easy Read Guides aim to enhance the orientation and engagement of visitors with the rich local history and culture showcased within the museum.

Councillor Valerie Harte said, "I am delighted that the Museum has made accessibility for disabled people

a core aspect of its work. I would like to extend my gratitude to the NI Museums Council for generously supporting this initiative. Ensuring the museum and its exhibitions are accessible to all is vitally important as we welcome visitors from all over the world to the Newry and Mourne area."

*Dr. Ken Abraham, the curator of the Newry and Mourne Museum, emphasised the guide's significance, stating, "A high percentage of our visitors have disabilities, and we are pleased to introduce this new guide to enrich their museum visits. It complements our popular audio guides, enhancing engagement with our exhibitions and museum collection."*

The 'Easy Read Gallery Guide' is available free of charge to all visitors at the museum reception, furthering the institution's commitment to providing accessible experiences for all.



Designed to cater to individuals with sensory processing needs, the Sensory Packs feature an array of items, including ear defenders, fidget toys, journey boards, and more. Visitors can now explore North Down Museum at their own pace, tailoring their experience with the help of these well-curated packs. To add an extra layer of convenience, the packs are color-coded, with each colour representing a distinct set of objects and activities. This unique feature allows visitors to choose a different coloured pack on each visit, ensuring a varied and educational encounter every time.

Expressing her enthusiasm for the initiative, The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Jennifer Gilmour, commented, "I am delighted that the museum is now offering this sensory support to its visitors, making a trip to the museum accessible for all and providing those with sensory processing needs a fun and enjoyable learning experience."

Arlene Matthews, Manager at North Down Museum, emphasised the museum's commitment to inclusivity, stating, "We are proud to launch our latest accessibility initiative and show our commitment to providing a high-quality and inclusive service to our visitors, creating a safe and fun learning environment for all members of our community."

North Down Museum welcomes visitors, from Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm, and on Sundays from 12 noon to 4 pm. Admission is free, ensuring that everyone can enjoy and benefit from the museum's offerings.



## Enhancing Museum Accessibility: North Down Museum Introduces Sensory Packs

North Down Museum was proud to launch their new Sensory Packs recently, a significant step towards improving accessibility for all visitors. These special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)-friendly packs, available to borrow at the museum reception, aim to facilitate a an improved and more enjoyable experience for both children and adults.

### Photography

Page 18: Thanks to Newry and Mourne Museum. Councillor Valerie Harte with staff and gallery guides in Newry and Mourne Museum.

Page 19: Thanks to North Down Museum..

Left: Mayor Jennifer Gilmour launches sensory packs (contents pictured separately top right) with Ruth Verner at North Down Museum.



# Get Involved In Playful Museums Festival 2024



In February 2024, The NI Museums Council will proudly host the annual Playful Museums Festival for under 5s. Nine museums will receive grants to deliver activities and events and there will be more opportunities to get involved announced via our mailing list and social media.

If you would like to get involved, you can promote your activity or event as part of our festival programme. We only ask that the activity is suitable for under 5s and is free to attend. Your activity could be a craft session, an under 5s area in the museum, a new trail, free entry for families or under 5s eat free in the café....there are many options you can try dependent on the size and resources at your museum!

Read on to see what opportunities we have for the festival and browse the programme on page 22. If you would like some advice or support for your museum getting involved, please contact [catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk](mailto:catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk).

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## Free Opportunities to support your Playful Museum work.

As part of Playful Museums Festival 2024 we are offering two FREE 12 month memberships to Play Resource and a FREE family workshop with Young at Art worth £750. Read on for further details on these and how to express your interest. Deadline for registering interest is 12th January. Successful museums will be notified on 15th January.

## Two FREE Play Resource Memberships Available.

Membership gives groups access to a one-stop-shop for creative learning resources and an invaluable source of information, support, and advice. Annual membership is open to groups working with children, young people and community groups.

The Membership Package offers access to:

- Free scrap materials, with unlimited visits to the Scrapstore
- Creative Ideas & Inspiration
- Access to our Connecting through Art Programme
- Discounted Room Hire

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## Young at Art FREE Workshop at Your Museum (Value of £750) on 17th or 18th February

### WORKSHOP DETAILS

- Age range: up to 5 years old
- Capacity: 80 (approx. 20 per hour x 4 hours)
- Duration: drop in, x4 hours
- Dates: 17th or 18th February 2024

The drop-in workshop activity will be designed and delivered by a selection of Young at Art (YAA) highly skilled and engaging artists who have built successful careers in the arts in Northern Ireland. YAA artists will supply their own materials and equipment and will ensure they are safe for use including appropriate cleaning between sessions.

Workshop content will be designed based on discussions with you, to incorporate any relevant themes or specific interests. YAA has delivered workshops on a multitude of themes for various clients and partners, with a wide breadth of skills and knowledge in this area. They are happy to present a workshop idea to yourselves based on previous delivery but are happy to work with you to incorporate your ideas/wants.

The museum will be required to provide:

- Table and chairs to accommodate workshop
- Chairs for workshop artists
- Approval/input on workshop design, providing YAA with any relevant information or themes that are to be included in delivery
- Water available for workshop artists
- Parking available for x2 cars

(While all YAA artists receive safeguarding training, supervision of the child participants remains the responsibility of their parents/carers, and the YAA artists must never be left in a position of responsibility for the young people).



**YOUNG  
at ART**

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## How to register interest for either opportunity:

These opportunities are open to NI Museum Council member museums. You are welcome to register interest for both opportunities. The successful museums will be notified by email. While YAA prefers to run the workshops on the 17th/18th February, please let us know if the 10th/11th also works for you as this is their second preference.

To register your interest, please email [catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk](mailto:catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk) with the following information:

- Name of museum
- How the offer will help with your museums objectives.
- Opportunity you are applying for (Playboard membership and/or Young at Art workshop)
- Confirmation that you can provide the specified requirements (if YAA offer)
- Specify which date you prefer (if YAA offer)
- How you intend to use your membership (if Play Resource offer).



### Photography

*Playful Museums Festival photography thanks to Peter O'Hara Photography and participant museums. © NI Museum Council.*

# Playful Museums Festival 24

## Programme

Friday 2nd Feb  
& 23rd Feb

### Bear Hugs – North Down Museum

Led by Clayful Minds, children will take part in a storytelling and clay session inspired by the Neill's coal shop teddies. Private event for pre booked nurseries.

Thursday 8th  
& 22nd Feb

### Maritime Babies – HMS Caroline

Sensory session for 4mths to pre-walkers exploring the world through maritime themed activities. Open to public to pre-book.

2nd, 5th  
& 7th Feb

### Childrens Reading and Sensory Space – Tower Museum

A multi-sensory environment using sound, light and movement. Open for bookings to nurseries, Sure starts and day cares.

Friday 9th Feb

### Jeannie the Hen –NI War Memorial

Storytelling and Story bag workshops focused on Jeannie the Hen. Private event for pre-booked nurseries.

Monday 5th, 12th  
& 19th Feb

### Messy Museum Mondays – Enniskillen Castle

Safe, fun, and messy play to explore the world through touch and feel and enjoy a world of sensory experiences. Open for public to pre-book.

Saturday 10th Feb

### The Crafty Castle Cat – Mid Antrim Museum

Storytelling and craft session about Ballymena Castle based on the adventures of the Castle cat. Open for public to pre-book

Monday 5th Feb

### A Belfast Fairytale – Linen Hall

Interactive storytelling and craft session introducing children to some of Belfast's best-known landmarks. Private event for pre-booked nurseries.

Dates TBD

### The Lightbox – The Argory

A new sensory space for under 5s and those diagnosed with sensory needs. Private event for pre-booked Sure start.

5th, 6th, 8th,  
19th, 20th &  
22nd Feb

### Treasured Teddies workshop – Ballymoney Museum

Build a bear to take home, create teddy bear crafts, dress up and colour-in. Open for bookings to nurseries and day cares.

Dates TBD

### Young at Art Workshop

Fun interactive workshop facilitated by inspired by your museum and its collections. YAA workshop provided by NIMC. Deadline for EOI 12th January

For booking information see host museum websites

[www.nimc.co.uk](http://www.nimc.co.uk)



# Training Update

Over the last quarter NIMC has delivered five training events, two online 'Let's Talk' sessions (Student placement and Social Prescribing) and an online NI Museums Forum to 137 people from across Northern Ireland, ROI and England.

Our free Let's Talk online sessions have remained popular for sharing knowledge and good practice as well as creating discussion amongst our museum members and the wider museum and heritage sectors. The summer Let's Talk focused on student placements and heard from Stranmillis University College, UU and QUB about the placements schemes that they run and how the museums of Northern Ireland can get involved. Our autumn Let's Talk looked at social prescribing and featured presentations from university of Edinburgh, University of Oxford, NI Environment Link and the Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum.

We partnered with the IMA to deliver two free online sessions focused on evaluation frameworks and impact plans. Caroline Taylor provided online training in Applying to Funders and Sam Bowen returned to NI Museums Council to provide SEND in Museums training in practical ideas for open ended craft activities, which was chosen as an area for development in an online poll by the NI sector.

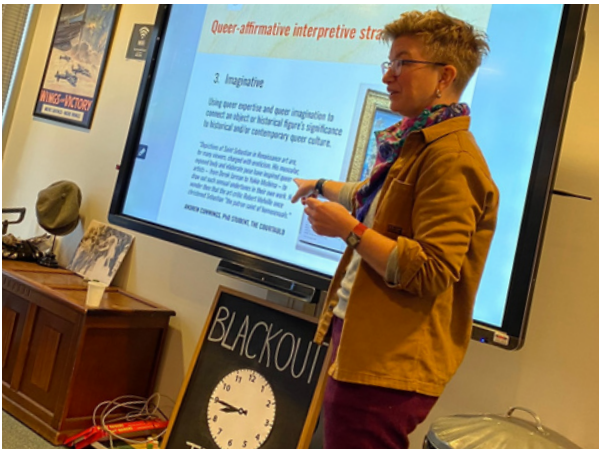
The 'Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage and Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2021/22 report' (Department for Communities) highlighted that volunteering had dropped by 11% following the pandemic. To explore this trend, Volunteer Now delivered online training in September which focused on the 3Rs of volunteering: recruitment, retention, and reward.



On 14th December 16 delegates met at the NI War Memorial (NIWM) to attend the Queer Possibility training. Participants received a training workshop from Margaret Middleton around interpretative strategies, a presentation from LGBTQ+ activist Claire Hackett focused on the importance of bringing intersectional perspectives to uncovering LGBTQ+ histories. and a LGBTQ+ tour of the NIWM from Michael Fryer. The session was very well received and participants left inspired to bring more of this learning into their museum practice.

Following on from our successful member's study trip to Belfast City Cemetery Visitor Centre (read more on pages 6 & 7), we look forward to our next study trip at the end of January to the Museum of Literature Ireland and Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin.

If you would like to know more about any of these sessions, please reach out to [catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk](mailto:catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk) or if you would like to hear about upcoming events, please join our mailing list and visit our website and social media.

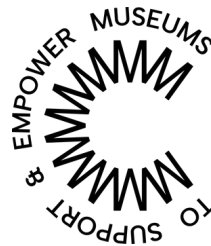


**Photography**

Page 23, top: NI War Memorial Museum’s Outreach Officer Michael Fryer leading training participants on a LGBTQ+ tour of the exhibitions, highlighting LGBTQ+ of perspectives and experiences of life during WWII.

Page 24, top left: Margaret Middleton, freelance exhibit designer and consultant, discussing strategies for interpreting queer stories in history.

Page 24, top right: Claire Hackett, the founding coordinator of Falls Community Council’s oral history archive Dúchas, speaking on bringing intersectional perspectives to uncovering LGBTQ+ histories.



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