



# MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**MUSEUMS  
ASSOCIATION**

# MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

The Museums Association and the Northern Ireland (NI) Museums Council have collaborated to bring together the case studies in this document. We believe that they clearly demonstrate the powerful impact that museums have when working with their communities across Northern Ireland. We're proud that our 43 Accredited museums are working closely with their communities to make Northern Ireland a better place to live, work and visit.

The NI Museums Council supports our museums in all of their work. Our vision is for a dynamic, inclusive and sustainable museum sector and our mission is to champion, develop and support museums. We facilitate and empower museums in Northern Ireland through Accreditation, providing training and skills development, advice and advocacy; brokering purposeful partnerships; and, enabling museums to connect with communities in order to increase participation in cultural and heritage activities.

**Sinéad McCartan**

Director, NI Museums Council





# “EVERY MUSEUM HAS THE POWER TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL AND LASTING DIFFERENCE – AND MUSEUMS IN NORTHERN IRELAND ARE STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE.”

We live in a time of massive upheaval – globally, nationally and in our communities, with poverty, division and loneliness constant themes of contemporary life. But museums across Northern Ireland are responding to these challenges and changing lives for the better, harnessing their fabulous collections to support people with dementia; providing opportunities for volunteering; engaging creatively with children and families; and offering training and learning opportunities. They are bringing people together in their

inspiring spaces to debate the key issues of the day and working collaboratively with partners to reflect on difference and celebrate shared culture and heritage.

This document demonstrates that every museum has the power to make a meaningful and lasting difference. Museums in Northern Ireland are stepping up to the plate and the examples here are both a powerful tool and a clear statement of our intent.

**Maggie Appleton**

President of the Museums Association  
and Director of the RAF Museum

# MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION INSPIRING MUSEUMS TO CHANGE LIVES

MUSEUMS  
CHANGE  
LIVES



## ENHANCING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Museums enhance our quality of life and improve our mental and physical health.
- Museums work in partnership with health and wellbeing organisations to support a range of people in society with different needs.
- Meaningful participation and volunteering promotes wellbeing and self-confidence and can broaden the horizons of participants, the museum and the public.

## CREATING BETTER PLACES TO LIVE AND WORK

- Museums help us to value the places where we live, work and visit and help us to understand where we have come from.
- Museums create a sense of belonging by engaging with communities and encouraging active public participation in decision-making.
- Museums use engagement, learning and collections to generate understanding within and between different groups and communities in society.
- Museums generate partnerships with community groups, charities and third-sector organisations to create spaces that are open and accessible to all.

## INSPIRING ENGAGEMENT, DEBATE AND REFLECTION

- Museums work with the public as active and creative participants in the life of the museum – using it as a space for exchanging opinions, experiences, ideas and knowledge.
- Museums help us to understand and negotiate the complex world around us, encouraging us to reflect on contemporary challenges such as discrimination, conflict, poverty and climate change.
- Museums use their research and collections to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world. They are not neutral spaces.
- Museums inspire learning and creativity for children and adults and work actively to ensure that a broad and diverse audience can access these opportunities at any stage in life.

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## DEMENTIA FRIENDLY MUSEUMS NI MUSEUMS COUNCIL

Local museums in Northern Ireland are committed to enhancing health and wellbeing through the Dementia Friendly Museums programme. The idea behind the programme is to create and deliver accessible and inclusive museums for all. Coordinated by the NI Ireland Museums Council, the programme, which started in October 2016, has delivered 25 Dementia Awareness sessions and created more than 250 Dementia Friends in local museums.

This has raised awareness among museum staff on how to support visitors and colleagues who may be living with dementia and has also equipped staff to design programming and activities to engage with those living with dementia and their carers.

“One lady with dementia who is finding it more difficult to express herself said to me yesterday: ‘I had forgotten all that – it brings it all back.’”

Local museums have developed and delivered dementia-friendly activities, including reminiscence and object handling sessions. They have created loan boxes, music and song workshops, and more recently, incorporated chair-based exercise into their programming.

Participating institutions have also teamed up with the voluntary sector to undertake environmental audits and have introduced small changes such as new signage to improve access for those living with dementia.

Community engagement is crucial to this work and local museums have fostered links to local support groups, sheltered housing and the general public. In many cases this has led to new audiences benefiting from bespoke dementia-friendly programming and it has also enabled regular visitors to maintain a relationship with their local museum after their diagnosis.

One of the dementia support workers who took part in reminiscence activity at Fermanagh County Museum says: “The sessions were a great success. One lady with dementia who is finding it more difficult to express herself said to me yesterday: ‘I had forgotten all that – it brings it all back.’”

## CARNLOUGH COMMUNITY HUB MID & EAST ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Carnlough Heritage Hub opened in April 2018 in what was previously the town hall. It acts as an orientation space at the heart of the village, encouraging participation in guided and self-guided walking tours to explore Carnlough and beyond, into the Glens of Antrim region and its landscape, geology and maritime history.



The exhibition has involved local people in researching and contributing their stories and valuing their industrial heritage. A team of 27 committed volunteers staff the Heritage Hub exhibition in a meet-and-greet role.

All volunteers have gained a World Host Ambassador award to develop their tourism skills in promoting local heritage to visitors. One volunteer has also gained a tour guiding award and regularly leads Carnlough town heritage walks.

Volunteers interpret the exhibition's research and signpost visitors to local sites of industrial heritage. From the exhibition's opening in April 2018 to the end September 2019, almost 1,800 public visits were recorded, with 80% of visitors from the region, 5% from the Republic of Ireland, 10% from the UK and 5% from overseas.

To add to this achievement, the volunteers at Carnlough Heritage Hub were crowned winners of the Best Heritage Research and Interpretation category at the 2019 Heritage Angels Awards ceremony in Armagh.





## LINENOPOLIS CONSORTIUM OF HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS

Linenopolis was a pop-up visitor experience that celebrated Belfast's linen heritage. The Linen Hall Library worked in partnership with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the photographic gallery Belfast Exposed and Ormeau Business Park on the innovative project.

Engagement was carried out across Belfast with intergenerational and older people's community groups. Participants shared memories of a working day, family life, famous shops and hardships in the linen industry. Workshops saw participants come together to research maps, street directories, school records and mill archives. These workshops gave participants an opportunity to tell their stories and feel valued through reminiscence sessions and oral history.

Belfast Exposed developed a series of workshops that improved participants' knowledge of photography. The concept of the workshops brought intergenerational participants together to document the linen buildings of Belfast's Linen Quarter and surrounding areas.

Prospective tour guides were self-selected from community groups and trained with Ormeau Business Park. Each guide was given the opportunity to carry out research, develop presentation skills and successfully lead guided tours. Guides ranged in age and the project was an opportunity to gain confidence and be part of a social group.

A travelling exhibition celebrated the lives of the project's participants and gave voice to their experiences. The project successfully connected the public to, and shared the legacy of, linen in Belfast.

“These workshops gave participants an opportunity to tell their stories and feel valued through reminiscence sessions and oral history.”

A photograph of three elderly women sitting at a wooden table, engaged in a craft or learning activity. The woman on the left has short white hair, wears glasses, a red necklace, and a teal long-sleeved shirt. The woman in the middle has short brown hair, wears glasses, a pink scarf, and a black vest over a patterned top. The woman on the right has short brown hair, wears glasses, a grey patterned scarf, and a dark jacket. They are all smiling and looking down at their work. On the table are several rectangular blocks of white and yellow material, possibly soap or wax, and some green leafy plants. The background shows a window with a grid pattern.

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## LIVE WELL NATIONAL MUSEUMS NORTHERN IRELAND

Live Well reaches out to people who don't normally visit museums, supporting active ageing through social engagement and new learning. More than 100 groups have enjoyed six-week outreach programmes – five weeks within communities and one supported museum visit – followed up by monthly open afternoons.

At the core of Live Well are collections, creativity and active engagement. Groups choose what collections to explore, though many find that “you discover an interest that you didn't know you had”, as one participant said.

Creativity offers a way of approaching collections and involving people. “By using the 5 Ways to Wellbeing – keep learning, connect, take notice, be active and give – as a checklist, we keep a focus on wellbeing and active participation,” says Hannah Crowdy, the head of curatorial at National Museums Northern Ireland.

“People tell us they've learned new things. They're proud of what they've achieved, feel more confident and have been able to contribute. They look forward to sessions and feel more positive afterwards.”

“There's an impact on communities too. Groups get to know each other better and people talk to family and friends outside the sessions about what they've done. We evaluate with every participant and have shared our learning through partnerships with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums and six local museums.”

As one participant said, being part of the programme made them feel more positive: “Part of a community, more knowledgeable, eager to learn.”

Another reflected: “We helped each other. We had a laugh about our efforts and shared our skills and knowledge and strengths.”

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LIVES  
CREATING  
BETTER  
PLACES**





## CELEBRATING OUR ETHNIC MINORITIES NORTH DOWN MUSEUM

For this initiative, North Down Museum used its Sir John Newell Jordan collection to explore and celebrate local ethnic minority communities. Jordan played an important ministerial role for the British Government in Korea and China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the collection is a mix of artefacts bought by and gifted to Jordan and his family during his tenure there.

“We wanted to use our amazing collection to explore and celebrate local ethnic minority communities.”

The project, which was funded by the EU Peace IV programme, saw three groups use the collection to learn about and celebrate Korean and Chinese cultures. Inspired by the collection, the first group developed original artworks and research that fed into the museum’s new permanent gallery. The second group, made up of young people aged 16 to 25, used the collection to create 3D printing, laser etching and vinyl etching artwork. The third group experienced traditional Chinese painting with tutor and artist Rong-Gin Yin.

In addition, three temporary exhibitions and a new permanent gallery were developed, as well as a publication, schools package and an intercultural festival that saw more than 700 people experience a variety of cultures.



## PLAYFUL MUSEUMS NI MUSEUMS COUNCIL

Playful Museums are local museums creating fun, engaging and accessible spaces for young children, toddlers, babies and their carers, families and educators. The aim is to make museums and their collections accessible and meaningful to those who are not typical museum audiences. This involves a shift in approach for parents, childcare workers and museum staff, who as a result have become more playful and discovered new techniques to engage the very young.

Initially a one-year pilot funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, the work has become embedded in the local museum sector, driven and coordinated by the NI Museums Council. This strategic lead involves partnership-building, training, promotion of an annual Playful Museums Festival, the development of a working group and grant support for bespoke programming.





“The children were very engaged and enjoyed exploring the items on display.”

Early Childhood Studies BA students from Stranmillis University College work with museums to develop creative and fun activities linked to their collections that support early child development.

As part of the initiative, Carrickfergus Museum created Micah the monkey, a well-loved puppet, based on a Barbary ape skeleton on display in the museum. The museum has developed a new Playzone for under-fives and offers weekly Super Saturdays with Micah.

Participants said the programme helped them develop new skills:

“I really enjoyed it as it was suitable for my three-year-old to be independent but also created an opportunity to bond with me.”

“The children were very engaged and enjoyed exploring the items on display.”

“The Playful Museums Festival is a great event and something which we look forward to every year.”

Training for the sector focuses on child development and creative techniques to engage under-fives. Community engagement is based on dialogue and rapport-building to design activities that support early childhood development and learning through fun, active play.

The highlight of Playful Museums is the festival, which takes place in February every year. This is a month-long series of bespoke under-fives programming across local museums in Northern Ireland. In 2019, 13 museums programmed 34 events and more than 5,000 people participated.

## THE LATE SHIFT PARTNERSHIP LED BY NI MUSEUMS COUNCIL

In 2016, visitor profiling research for local museums in Northern Ireland revealed that representation was lowest among those in the 18-40 age category, who accounted for only around a quarter of all visits. People were visiting museums as children, with their families or when they're older, but there was a lack of engagement from those in between.

In 2018, NI Museums Council partnered with Thrive and Seedhead Arts to run The Late Shift, an audience development project to help museums attract this missing audience.

The Late Shift was a series of after-hours, adults-only events that took place in museums across Northern Ireland during the Halloween season. More than 1,000 paying visitors attended six unique events.

Visitors honed their zombie-survival skills at North Down Museum in Bangor, joined a carnival of delights in Bagenal's Castle, Newry, gave sunrise yoga a go at Mossley Mill in Newtownabbey, went "into the mystic" at

Armagh County Museum, joined a 15th-century house party in Enniskillen Castle, and braved the Dark Tower, an evening of music and scares at Derry-Londonderry's Tower Museum.

Along the way, museums had support and training for capacity-building, creative programming, evaluation, and marketing and communications.

One third of attendees had never been to that specific museum prior to The Late Shift event and 68% of attendees said the event changed their perception of the museum. Almost half of attendees were aged 40 and under, 86% said they'd attend the event again and almost half felt that it encouraged them to find out more about local history.

As one participant said: "It was the best event I've been at this year. It looked amazing, great acts, great crowd and a fantastic advertisement for the museum."

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## ENNISKILLEN WORKHOUSE PROJECT FERMANAGH COUNTY MUSEUM

Fermanagh County Museum's ongoing Enniskillen Workhouse Project aims to reopen the entrance block – the only surviving part of the town's former poor house – with an exhibition about the institution, featuring the stories and memories of those who spent time there.

The workhouse closed in 1948 and the building became Erne Hospital before being demolished in 2014. In the exhibition, records and minute books will be displayed and used to tell the history of the institution for the first time.

The project also seeks to bring open reminiscence sessions into the community. Fermanagh County Museum has been offering reminiscence activities for more than six years with groups throughout Fermanagh, in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society, the Stroke Association and Clanmil Housing Association.

"Through these open sessions it became clear that some participants have strong links to and memories of the workhouse," says Catherine Scott, development officer – learning and access at

Fermanagh County Museum. "The daughter of the last man to row the boat across to the house, the son of the last clerk of the house, and a former nurse who worked at the workhouse and Erne Hospital have all attended reminiscence sessions.

"In time, the walls of the workhouse will tell the narrative of the rooms haunted with stories intertwined with poverty, loss and illness for over 100 years."

Local nursing home residents have been working with primary schools on the intergenerational reminiscence programme. The subject of the Enniskillen Workhouse will be integrated into this programme to prompt sharing of information and explore attitudes to poverty and government initiatives over the generations.



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## REIMAGINE, REMAKE, REPLAY CONSORTIUM OF CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

Reimagine, Remake, Replay is a four-year project that aims to connect young people and heritage in meaningful ways using creative media and the latest technologies, while delving into museum collections using new approaches.

The Reimagine, Remake, Replay programme is led by a consortium including Nerve Centre, National Museums Northern Ireland, NI Museums Council and Northern Ireland Screen, and is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Kick the Dust programme. The project has just completed its first year of delivery in nine museums across Northern Ireland and plans to connect more than 4,000 16- to 25-year-olds with museums and collections through the use of creative media and cutting edge digital technologies.

**“Being involved in Reimagine, Remake, Replay has opened up a whole new audience.”**

Activities have included young people planning, developing and delivering their own events in museums, working with heritage organisations to create apps and games, using 3D scanners and printers, vinyl and laser cutters, and virtual reality development to enhance and reinterpret collections. Participants have also been working towards achieving Open College Network accreditations and digital badges through each programme.

“Being involved in Reimagine, Remake, Replay has opened up a whole new audience,” says Elaine Hill, heritage development officer at Mid-Antrim Museum. “Our collections have inspired creativity using a range of digital technology and the project has supported local young people to develop skills in photography, animation and event management.

“Participants have delivered the Flamingo Ballroom escape room event and used digital fabrication, laser engraving and vinyl cutting to engage with a traditional music exhibition, demonstrating how we can use our objects in a different way.”

One participant said: “Before I started, I knew I had to start talking to people more because I wasn't the best at social situations and from that I've taken part in loads of different courses. Then I volunteered and now I'm actually leading courses, so it's really helped me.”

## LINEN LAB FE MCWILLIAM GALLERY

In October 2019, Linen Lab opened at the FE McWilliam Gallery in Banbridge. An exhibition, which showed new work by a group of visual artists and designers based in Northern Ireland and Belgium, was the result of a yearlong creative engagement programme that saw eight artists and designers collaborate with more than 400 young people from 13 local schools.

The Linen Lab exhibition documented the creative interactions between the artists and the young participants and presented new work developed during the project. Each artist's distinct thematic and aesthetic concerns emerged and developed, producing an exhibition that revealed the versatility of linen as a material, and highlighted its significance in our families, homes and industrial past.

The story of linen and Banbridge are intertwined: at the height of the linen industry, there were some 20 linen mills dotted along the Bann Valley. The Linen Lab programme raised awareness of this important story but also encouraged the young participants to see linen as more than just a textile of the past.



The experimental nature of the workshops highlighted some of the exciting possibilities of linen and flax for the future and helped the young people to engage with local industrial history in an innovative and creative way.

Teachers involved in the programme said that working with artists gave the students a unique insight into creativity and innovation and the importance of design in the workplace. One teacher said: "Everything is instant these days, so there is a tendency to leave things to the last minute. Linen Lab has been so helpful in getting [the students] to think forward, allowing time for experimentation."



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## NI SCHOOLS OUTREACH PROGRAMME

### MUSEUM OF FREE DERRY AND SIEGE MUSEUM

Now in its third year, the NI Schools Outreach Programme has been consistently successful in attracting young people from different backgrounds to visit both the Museum of Free Derry and the Siege Museum, where they have a discussion and Q&A with representatives from each institution.

While the Museum of Free Derry details events spanning 1968–1972 from a nationalist perspective, including the civil rights movement, Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday, the nearby Siege Museum covers the city's 400-year-old unionist history, which began with the plantation of Ulster and the creation of Derry's historic walls.

The programme aims to foster understanding and tolerance of differing traditions and cultures across the north of Ireland, bringing young people from these different backgrounds together in shared spaces to promote dialogue.

“Students learn about history, identity and culture they may feel as more associated with other communities, and we hope that by being exposed to and discussing these experiences, they will come to understand and accept different cultures and traditions,” says Julieann Campbell, heritage and programmes coordinator at the Museum of Free Derry. “These beneficial effects can then ripple out to affect positive attitudinal change within families, schools and communities.

“By introducing students to two important parts of our history, it also encourages cross-community use of both sites and shows how contentious issues from our history can be used as tools for education and reconciliation.”

“... contentious issues from our history can be used as tools for education and reconciliation.”





## THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND NATIONAL MUSEUMS NORTHERN IRELAND

On 31 March 2018, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) opened the new Troubles and Beyond exhibition at the Ulster Museum in Belfast.

This was achieved as part of the wider Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The aim of the project was to widen the scope of the collection through greater academic and community engagement and to ensure that the collection could be used to support a full and inclusive narrative.

**“I’m proud of the place I’m from, adamant that we will be better, excited to add to the future and happy that the museum offers such an overarching and dual dialogue of the past.”**

As well as material relating directly to political developments and conflict, collecting activity was focused on wider social, cultural and economic themes, thereby enabling more nuanced and inclusive engagement with this complex period of history. The museum worked with community groups and representatives to establish the significance of events and objects through workshops and dialogue, resulting in an important element of co-production within the project.

“The Troubles and Beyond exhibition and wider activity programme offer a platform for engagement and will continue to evolve in response to feedback from our audience,” says Hannah Crowdy, head of curatorial at NMNI.

“We believe NMNI has an important role to play in dealing with the legacy of the past and in creating a shared space in which to explore controversial issues through critical narrative and interpretation that presents multiple perspectives and offers the opportunity for dialogue and debate.”

One participant said of the programme: “I’m proud of the place I’m from, adamant that we will be better, excited to add to the future and happy that the museum offers such an overarching and dual dialogue of the past.”

## MAKING THE FUTURE CONSORTIUM OF HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS

Making the Future is a collaborative cultural heritage programme using museum collections and archives to explore issues of the past and create a vision for future change.

Delivered by a consortium including Nerve Centre, National Museums Northern Ireland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and Linen Hall Library, each institution shares its resources and expertise to look at topics as diverse as the Troubles, women in the archives, partition, the Decade of Centenaries and modern-day issues of culture and identity.

Collections from each institution are used to pose challenging questions about the past, to take the temperature of where we are as a society and to help participants and communities project ideas of the future.

Through exhibitions, events and sustained community engagement programmes, participants from across Northern Ireland and the border counties work together to explore a topic, gain exclusive access to archives and collections, and develop their own creative responses.

More than 1,500 people have engaged to date and outputs have included virtual reality films exploring Belfast's suffrage history, alternative graffiti art inspired by the Troubles, cemetery walking trails uncovering the stories of unheard women, and self-styled publications by young people reflecting important aspects of their culture.

Participants have said the programme had reawakened their interest in history and enabled them to explore their own views. One said: "Looking at the Troubles through art made me rethink and change my opinions."





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# RESOURCES FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE

## **A TOOLKIT TO HELP SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED INSTITUTIONS:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1150803](http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1150803)

## **MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics](http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics)

## **MY PRIMARY SCHOOL IS AT THE MUSEUM:**

[www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/-/projects/my-primary-school-is-at-the-museum.aspx](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/-/projects/my-primary-school-is-at-the-museum.aspx)

## **HOUSE OF MEMORIES:**

<https://houseofmemories.co.uk/>

## **MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES: FURTHER RESOURCES AND CASE STUDIES:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives](http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives)

## **CULTURE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING ALLIANCE:**

[www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk](http://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk)

## **OUR MUSEUM: COMMUNITIES AND MUSEUMS AS ACTIVE PARTNERS:**

[ourmuseum.org.uk](http://ourmuseum.org.uk)

## **MUSEUMS ESSENTIALS:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/professional-development/museum-essentials](http://www.museumsassociation.org/professional-development/museum-essentials)

## **POWER TO THE PEOPLE:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/19112018-power-to-the-people](http://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/19112018-power-to-the-people)

## **PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE:**

[www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/partnerships-with-purpose](http://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/partnerships-with-purpose)

## **UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER RESEARCH ARCHIVE:**

<https://le.ac.uk/rcmg/research-archive>

## **IMAGES**

Sing for Victory at the NI War Memorial Museum ©Northern Ireland War Memorial;

Linenopolis ©Linen Hall Library; Linen Lab project at FE McWilliam Gallery and Studio: ©Bradley Henderson; Reimagine, Remake, Replay ©The Nerve Centre; Making the Future Project ©Making the Future project; Carnlough Community Hub ©Mary Watson, Carnlough Community Association

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