

CASE STUDY

MEND AT THE MAC, BELFAST
CLIMATE IN ACTION /
SUSTAINABLE FASHION WEEK 2025



BACKGROUND

In 2025, Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN), through its Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity Project, partnered with Tools for Solidarity (TFS) and the Metropolitan Arts Centre (The MAC) to deliver a special event as part of Sustainable Fashion Week.

The collaboration emerged when NIRN was invited to take part in The MAC's 2025 / 26 programme, Climate in Action - a year long theme exploring how creativity can respond to the climate crisis.

Through exhibitions, performances and community projects, The MAC's programme aims to raise awareness of sustainability while demonstrating how cultural organisations can adopt greener practices in production, energy use and procurement.

The MAC Director Lisa McGinley described the initiative as 'a pledge to our planet, our audiences and our future.' Climate in Action is both a cultural season and a collective journey. Inviting artists, communities and partners to imagine a more sustainable world.

At the core of this collaboration were a series of mending clinics led by Sue Bamford of TFS, where participants were supported to repair their own garments. These informal, drop-in sessions focused on simple but valuable techniques such as sewing on buttons, patching, hemming and visible mending - equipping people with the confidence and skills to extend the life of their clothing.

Alongside the clinics, audiences could engage with Unravelled – The Story of a Jumper, connecting the practical act of repair with the emotional and cultural value of the garments we hold onto. This was complemented by the Threads of Change exhibition, which provided a wider context for textile reuse, sustainability and the stories embedded within clothing.

St. Vincent de Paul hosted a pre-loved clothing stand, offering visitors the opportunity to browse and purchase second-hand items - reinforcing the message that reuse and repair go hand in hand.

Together, these elements created a multi-layered event that combined making, learning and reflection, bringing together artists, repair practitioners, community organisations and the public in a shared exploration of how we can care for what we already have.



MEND AT THE MAC



Sunday 28th September, 11am to 3pm
The MAC, 10 Exchange Street West, Belfast BT1 2NJ
Partners: NIRN, The Mac, Artitude, TFS
Facilitators: Sue Bamford, TFS & XXX

Northern Ireland Resources Network, Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity and Tools for Solidarity partnered for a special Sustainable Fashion Week 2025 event at The MAC, Belfast. The event combined practical repair skills, storytelling and creative inspiration to encourage participants to rethink their relationship with clothing.

- A drop-in textile repair café – where expert menders repaired garments and bags.
- Four hands on mending clinics, led by Sue Bamford from Tools for Solidarity
- The Threads of Change: The Future of Sustainable Fashion exhibition
- A screening of Unravelling – The Story of a Jumper
- A rail of pre-loved clothing for sale – provided by St. Vincent De Paul

Participants could drop in throughout the day to repair garments, learn new sewing skills or explore creative approaches to sustainable fashion



MENDING CLINICS

To deepen the impact of this work, The MAC, NIRN and TFS agreed to host a hands-on repair event to align with Sustainable Fashion Week 2025. Keeping with the week's focus, TFS's Sue Bamford designed practical mending clinics where participants could learn simple but valuable repair techniques. These included sewing on buttons, attaching patches, hemming and visible mending – skills that empower people to keep garments in use for longer.

Sue facilitated the four mending clinics, where participants were invited to learn new sewing and mending skills to take any repaired items home with them, ensuring the clothes lasted longer.

Clinics were broken down by:

11am – 12pm: Button Up! Sewing on a Button the Right Way

12pm – 1pm: Hole no More – Darning Made Simple

1pm – 2pm: Hem it Up - Quick Fixes for a Perfect Finish

2pm – 3pm: Make it Visible – Decorative Patching

By sharing these techniques in a supportive, community focused setting, the event highlighted how small acts of care can make a big difference: fewer clothes discarded, less waste going to landfill and a shift towards a culture of sustainability and repair.

REPAIR CAFES

The event also hosted a drop in textile repair café, for those who wanted to observe and be part of one-to-one repair support from expert menders. This ensured that people who could not attend a clinic could still have their items repaired and learn in a less formal way.

THREADS OF CHANGE EXHIBITION

The Threads of Change: The Future of Sustainable Fashion exhibition celebrated creativity and reuse. Mannequins borrowed from Ulster University displayed handmade and repaired garments demonstrating sustainable fashion practices. Highlights included:

- A denim apron, hat and bags made by the sustainable brand 'Rejeanerate' from repurposed jeans.
- Handmade dresses and coats illustrating slow fashion craftsmanship
- Garments featuring visible mending such as patched trousers and darned knitwear.

<https://youtu.be/D5uz8Frrqnw>



UNRAVELLED - THE STORY OF A JUMPER

Unravelled – The Story of a Jumper, written by Marcella Di Palo, tells the story of a much loved jumper that, rather than being discarded when damaged, is repaired and cared for over time. The journey of the jumper is used as a metaphor to explore themes of repair, value, and the emotional connections that people have with their clothing. As part of the Artitude programme, the production is to be used as a creative engagement tool to help audiences understand circular concepts in an accessible way.

The production was an invaluable addition to the joint event at The MAC and allowed the audiences on the day to have open discussions about reuse, care and sustainable consumption.

<https://youtu.be/BeWgMjt1yPk>

PRELOVED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

To complete the event, St Vincent de Paul (an NIRN member), was invited to bring several rails of preloved clothing to sell on to any willing customers. This addition extended the event's focus on sustainability by giving attendees the opportunity to browse, purchase and repurpose quality second hand garments. By featuring preloved items alongside mending clinics and the Threads of Change exhibition, the event reinforced the message that fashion doesn't have to be new to be valuable.

The presence of St. Vincent De Paul also highlighted the social impact of sustainable fashion: supporting charitable initiatives while reducing clothing waste. Visitors could leave with practical skills, upcycling inspiration and tangible items that reflected a more responsible and mindful approach to clothing consumption. This combination embodied the event's goal of promoting a circular fashion culture, where garments are repaired, reused and reimaged – rather than discarded.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The event at The MAC demonstrated how creative engagement and practical learning can encourage sustainable behaviour. The participants:

- Learned practical garment repair skills.
- Experienced hands-on mending in a supportive environment
- Explored creative approaches to sustainable fashion by viewing the exhibition
- Accessed affordable preloved clothing

By combining repair, creativity and storytelling, the event helped to shift perceptions of clothing as disposable items to valuable objects worth maintaining and caring for.

CONCLUSION

The Mend at The MAC event successfully demonstrated how creativity, collaboration and practical skill sharing can promote a more sustainable approach to clothing. By combining a hands-on mending clinic, drop in repair café, the Threads of Change exhibition and preloved clothing sales, the event highlighted the potential of circular fashion to reduce waste, extend the life of garments and inspire mindful consumption. Storytelling through Unravelled – The Story of a Jumper helped audiences to connect emotionally with the concept of garment care, reinforcing that sustainability is both practical and creative practice.

The event also illustrated the value of partnerships, bringing together artists, community organisations, and supporters to amplify impact. Participants left with practical skills, inspiration and tangible examples of how small actions – like repairing or repurposing clothing, can contribute to a wider culture of sustainability.

This model could be expanded by:

- Hosting additional repair cafes and workshops in other locations
- Offering more advanced repair skills such as zip replacement
- Running workshops that create garments from scrap fabrics / upcycling
- Developing storytelling activities where participants share the histories of their garments
- Building partnerships with additional arts organisations and NIRN members
- Engaging local authorities to expand visibility and impact.
- Delivering online tutorials and digital repair resources

