



NIRN
Rethink - Reuse - Repair

Annual Report 2021



NIRN

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Forward

Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN) was initially established as a pilot project, funded by DAERA and developed by Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) to trial and evaluate the effectiveness of a representative body for reuse and repair organisations and local authorities in this region. Its vision is to connect community groups, charities, social enterprises and local authorities across Northern Ireland to promote less waste and support the growth and collaboration between these reuse and repair organisations.

Further to the success of this trial, it was agreed that NIRN would be created as a stand alone organisation and 3 core strategic goals were set for 2021:

- Transition NIRN into a separate entity
- Establish and grow the network
- Mainstream reuse and repair

The attached report outlines the progress made

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Goal 1: Transition NIRN into a separate organisation

The pilot phase of the project identified that the preferred route to develop NIRN was to establish it as a Social Enterprise (SE).

Edwards & Co, a Belfast based and leading charity and social enterprise firm, ranked No. 1 in Chambers UK for charity law, was appointed to provide legal expertise. [Articles of Association](#) were agreed and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by four members of the network.

Viabes Corporate Services, a Social Enterprise specialising in strategic consultancy in a number of fields including governance, was contracted to develop a [NIRN board recruitment pack](#) and support recruitment for the board roles. In response, 5 board members were confirmed. With confirmation of board members, a submission was made to Companies House and Northern Ireland Resources Network was incorporated in February 2022.



Viabes, in collaboration with NIRN developed a governance manual customised to the needs of the NIRN board and executive team to ensure compliance with best practices, local laws, codes and regulations.

NIRN Board Members



Michael Sloan, Area Manager, East Belfast Mission (EBM)

Michael oversees management & development of EBM - an award winning Social Enterprise with stores selling preloved clothing, furniture, & bicycles. As a CRNI Board member, he has a wealth of experience in reuse & repair in the Social Enterprise and Community sector.

Nuala Griffiths, Environmental, Social and Governance Manager, Heron Bros

Nuala oversees construction projects in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and is experienced in the public & private sector, delivering events and engaging with organisations to showcase a wide range of careers that the construction industry offers. Her focus is on a wider circular economy and how the construction industry can make an impact in their communities.



Heidi Clarke, Project Officer, Strategic Investment Board

Heidi has a background in sustainable development, with over 10 years' experience in the town planning sector across UK. She currently works for SIB supporting the Department for the Economy in the development of a Circular Economy Strategic Framework - the government's first commitment to a CE, providing vision for collaboration and greater circularity across business and society. Heidi is committed to making personal choices that have a positive environmental impact and discovering the latest green initiatives that demonstrate what a

CE looks like in real life.

**Sara Dyer, Self Employed
Sustainability Consultant**

Sara is a passionate advocate of environmentalism and sustainability. She established her own Sustainability Consultancy to engage and support businesses embedding sustainability within their organisations. In her personal choices she commits to a lifestyle which minimises environmental impacts and engages in activity to positively promote sustainability.



Liam McNally, Practitioner, International Synergies

Through his work, Liam engages members in practical and innovative application of Industrial Symbiosis within their businesses to achieve positive economic benefits, environmental compliance and positive social responsibility when utilising resources. Liam is adept at problem solving to assist businesses seeking to apply Circular Economy and IS principles, which supports them on the first steps towards Net Zero Waste.

NIRN Executive

Eimear Montague, Project Manager

Eimear is responsible for developing the reuse & repair Network in Northern Ireland. She is a founding board member of Sustainable Building Solutions (SBS), which shaped the strategic direction of the Travis Perkins Group in the Sustainability Market.



**Caroline McGuinness Brook, Events, and
Social Media Coordinator**

Caroline established the Cloth Nappy Library in Derry. She also supports Zero Waste North West coordinating the opening of Zero Waste hub and development of a repair cafe in the region.

Goal 2: Establish and grow the network

Establishing the network

At the end of 2020, 10 members had joined the network. Over the following 12 months this more than doubled to 23 members.

New members include:

- **Hands that Talk:** Striving for social inclusion for Deaf people. Their work includes a charity shop and upcycling and refurbishing of furniture.
- **Ards & North Down Council:** Running initiatives to encourage householders to reuse by trialling a paint reuse scheme and free bulky waste collection for items donated through the Freecycle Platform.
- **Fashion and Textile Design Centre (FTDC):** Working with designers to repurpose existing textiles/materials and holding monthly repair cafes to engage the public in mending clothes.
- **Creggan Country Park:** Providing environmental education programmes, upcycling old wetsuits & boats, and running a community fridge.
- **Banbridge Toy Library:** Loaning out a range of toys, providing families with a more affordable and eco-friendly way to play.
- **Refill NI:** encouraging communities to provide free drinking water to the public as well as the eradication of single use plastic bottle waste.
- **Armagh, Banbridge And Craigavon Council:** Facilitating reuse and repair of furniture, bicycles and textiles from their recycling centres.
- **Be Safe Be Well Mens Shed:** Operating 5 Mens Sheds engaged in repairing used items for the public, including wooden and metal benches/chairs/tables.
- **Blythwood Ireland:** Running 8 charity shops that sell pre-loved goods including clothes, household goods, books and furniture.



- **SVP:** Managing a network of over 20 charity shops in Northern Ireland that provide people with pre-loved items including clothes and furniture at affordable prices.
- **Compass Advocacy Network (CAN):** Working with people who have learning disabilities to realise their potential in work, social and community activities. Running 3 retail outlets for previously loved clothing, furniture and refurbishment of furniture.
- **East Belfast Mission:** preloved furniture, bicycles, clothes, books and bric-a-brac as well as running refurbishment and recycling warehouse to repair furniture and bicycles that would otherwise end up as waste.
- **Tools for Solidarity:** Supporting artisans in the poorest countries by providing high quality refurbished hand tools and sewing machines.



Tools For Solidarity
est: 1984



Growing the Network

Nurturing and supporting our existing members is key to the growth of the NIRN network.

Training provided

Collaborative funding awards including the **Community Foundation All Island Shared Fund** and **National Lottery Climate Action** identified the need to support members in understanding differing considerations in applying and managing these funds and training workshops provided.

Storytelling workshops to help members connect with the public online when COVID presented limited opportunities to engage directly.

Connecting

COVID curtailed members' activities and limited our opportunities to meet directly. Further to restrictions lifting, NIRN visited 15 members including:

- Participating in **Repair Cafe Belfast** first in person repair cafe after lifting of COVID restrictions.
- Meeting with **Fermanagh & Omagh Council** (FODC) and their Chief Executive to visit community group, Gortin Mens Shed, who benefit from products collected in FODC recycling centres.
- Visiting **Creggan Country Park** to discuss a new venture in opening a Community Fridge and identifying funding to support development.
- Facilitating a focus group meeting with members including **Repair Cafe Belfast, Zero Waste North West (ZWNW), and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC)** on the opportunity of opening a repair cafe in the region.



As a result of facing similar challenges and opportunities, developing connections between **NIRN and Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI)** members was a key objective. Joint zoom meetings were held on topics ranging from challenges and opportunities in response to COVID; All Island funding; positive impacts of reuse and repair on climate action, and ways for networks/members to communicate.

Funding

New funding opportunities were flagged. NIRN held focus groups on specific grants including:

- **All Island Fund:** A meeting held with members of NIRN and CRNI to highlight and discuss this fund. The fund's objectives were to develop greater dialogue and collaboration between organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, focusing on social justice and tackling inequality. Two NIRN members, **Cloughmills Community Action Team** and **British Heart Foundation NI** were successful in their subsequent applications.

We were also active in promoting NIRN members to funding organisations:

- Made a presentation to **Community Foundation NI** and engagement with **National Lottery on Climate Action Fund**.
- Responded to **SEUPB Peace Plus** consultation and highlighting the need for a larger proportion of funding on environmental projects.
- Responding to carrier bag levy consultation and participating in the **Environmental Fund** workshop, promoting the need to fund schemes to support the activities that reduce waste and support the circular economy.

Communication - Website & Social Media

- Collaborated with MyNI (promoting environmental activity to NI public sector) on a week-long awareness raising campaign. We increased traffic to our NIRN website by + 1.5k, and by +65k on social media.
- Introduced [Members Monday](#) and [Thursday Thoughts](#) as part of social media activity and saw a 200% increase in followers
- NIRN organised professional photographs of members. During 2021, we entered the photographs into a 'virtual photography exhibition' run by Carbon Copy. **East Belfast Mission's** photograph of bike repair won the 'local circular economy activity' category.



Key Policy Areas

Our policy work involves responding to consultations and agreeing position papers with our members on key issues that impact the reuse and repair sector.

NIRN engages with policy makers and key stakeholders to implement recommendations which support the development of opportunities for our members and growth of the Circular Economy.

Consultation submissions:

- **Draft Green Growth Strategy:** Promoting the inclusion of a zero waste strategy alongside a zero carbon strategy. The circular and low-carbon agendas are complementary and mutually supportive. By stating within the strategy that zero waste is part of the vision for Northern Ireland, it shapes direction, focus, and action on the Circular Economy.
- **Single Use Plastic (SUP):** Promoting a ban that would deliver immediate and long term impact on the environmental damage created by SUPs.
- Joint submission to **National Economic & Social Council (NESC)** Ireland on [Climate and Biodiversity Consultation](#) by NIRN & CRNI, promoting the positive impact of the Circular Economy on climate and biodiversity and the current Shared Island activities on the Circular Economy by members of our networks.
- **Environmental Plans, Principles and Governance:** Outlining the need to embed zero waste as well as zero carbon into environmental principles in the policy making decisions of Northern Ireland's Departments.

NIRN Position Papers & Engagement

- [Social Value and Green Public Procurement](#)
 - Presented to NI Finance Minister on benefits of inclusion of sustainability in NI public procurement and gave recommendations
 - Presented to the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and provided opportunities to progress Circular Economy as part of NI public procurement
- [Climate Change and the Circular Economy](#)
 - Invited by the Department for Economy to participate in Circular Economy Strategic Framework (CESF)

- Engaged NI All Party on Climate Action on how the Circular Economy and low carbon agenda are complementary and mutually supportive
- Shared with RREUSE Network (International network of reuse, repair and recycling social enterprises)
- Participating in Northern Ireland Environmental Link workshops in the lead up to COP26. Promotion of NIRN to other attendees and highlighting link between Circular Economy and Climate Action

Quantify impact NIRN member have on reuse and repair activity in Northern Ireland

- Compiled and disseminated triple bottom line KPIs - tonnes reused, tonnes repaired, carbon saving, jobs created, training opportunities and economic turnover.
- Information compiled highlights the many environmental, economic and social benefits the members deliver.
- Total amount saved from waste and was reused and repaired was over 2000 tonnes. This equated to nearly 15,000 tonnes of CO₂.
- Members' activities are the equivalent of over 680,00 trees planted (1 adult tree absorbing 48 pounds of carbon).

Member Metrics 2021



REUSED
2,234 TONNES



REPAIR SERVICES
25 TONNES



CARBON SAVINGS
14,978 TONNES



EMPLOYEES
210 PEOPLE



VOLUNTEERS
807 PEOPLE



TURNOVER
£6,241,144



CUSTOMERS SERVICED
153,333 PEOPLE



EDUCATION & TRAINING
1,354 PEOPLE

Goal 3: Mainstream Reuse and Repair

Member engagement with all sectors of the community

Working with members and promoting their engagement across a range of sectors including:

- Engaging 2 NI councils, **Belfast City Council** and **Derry City and Strabane District Council** in the **Circular Cities Network** in the UK led by **ReLondon**, a Partnership of the Mayor of London and London boroughs to improve waste and resource management to transform the city into a leading low carbon circular economy. This sharing network allows cities to learn from and share experience on how to accelerate CE.
- Participation of **Fermanagh and Omagh District Council** and **Derry City and Strabane District Council** in **Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful Clothing and Textile** research to help develop the communication plan for the **Fashion Forever Campaign**.
- Presentation to **Energia/Power NI** colleagues on '*What can the Circular Economy do for us?*' -spotlighting members work and ways for employees to engage
- Promoting members activities to **Sustainable NI** for case study they compiled on [Community Fridges](#)
- Highlighting NIRN members and their work to key stakeholder organisations including funding bodies; **Community Foundation, National Lottery**, Environmental groups; **Sustainable NI, NI Environment Link, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB)** and 3rd level colleges - **Ulster University** and **Queen's University Belfast**, Waste Sector organisations, **Arc 21, Bryson Recycling** on collaborative opportunities

Become the go-to Organisation on reuse and repair activities

We carried out a range of activities to raise the profile and recognition of NIRN as predominant in reuse and repair in Northern Ireland:

- We were invited by Department for the Economy to participate in Circular Economy Strategic Framework and compiled [response for Call for Evidence](#)
- **Our NIRN Conference ‘Voices and Vision of the Circular Economy Northern Ireland’** will explore activity already taking place to transition NI to a circular economy and includes speakers from central governmental departments, local authorities, and our members with the vision of promoting the multitude of environmental, economic benefits and engaging a wider audience in these opportunities.



Collaboration with members

We partnered with members to support and develop their reuse and repair activity and drive further awareness of the benefits of their work

- Led by the Playhouse Arts Centre, we collaborated with NIRN members ZWNW and DCSDC on a successful application to the National Lottery under their **Climate Action Fund**. The **Artitude Project** will engage the public in workshops, using art as means of learning and sharing the connection between climate action and consumption.



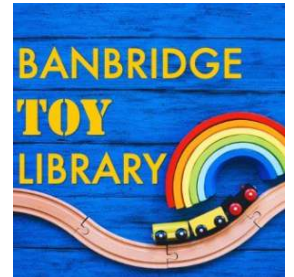
NIRN Members



Fermanagh & Omagh
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí



Belfast
City Council



Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle
Chathair Dhoire &
Cheantar an tSratha Báin
Derry Cittyie & Strábane
Destrick Council



Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon
Borough Council



Ards and
North Down
Borough Council



Tools For Solidarity
est: 1984

