

NORTHERN IRELAND RESOURCES NETWORK

RETHINK - REUSE - REPAIR

annual report
2025/26







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An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

contents

03 Welcome

04 Executive Summary

06 Meet the Board

07 Meet the Team

08 New Members to NIRN

12 NIRN and the Policy Landscape

13 The Pressure on Textiles Reuse: Why NIRN's Work Matters

14 Members Metrics

15 Highlights of 2025/26

16 Creating Impact Through Environmental Campaigns & Collaboration

17 Mend at the MAC

18 Restart Repair Café at Westminster

19 Cross Network Learning & Cooperation

20 ISEP & CIWM Conference

21 Circular Councils - Local Authority Forums

22 Circular Schools

23 NIRN Annual Conference 2025 - Building Circular Communities in Gortin

25 Circular Communities

26 Member Focus - Circular Resources Library Tools for Solidarity and Repair Café NI

27 Member Visits

28 Artitude - Climate, Culture & Circularity

30 Awareness & Communication

31 Podcasts

32 Circular Resources Hierarchy

33 Reuse and Repair Week - An Annual Event

34 Shared Island Collaboration



welcome

Hello and welcome to the Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN) Annual Report 2025/26.

Looking back over the past year, it is amazing to see all the great things that have taken place. What stands out most is the growing number of people, schools, councils and community organisations across Northern Ireland getting involved in reuse, repair and circular living in practical ways.

This year has felt like a real turning point for the Northern Ireland Reuse Network. We have seen a growing appetite for collaboration, with organisations and communities across Northern Ireland coming together to discover what is possible through reuse, repair and circularity. Circular Schools has helped us bring these ideas to a wider audience through education, while Circular Communities has opened the door to organisations that have not previously been involved in the reuse and repair movement. Alongside this, the continued development of our Circular Resources Library has given existing members more opportunities to connect, exchange ideas and learn from each other.

It has been particularly encouraging to see our shared island work with Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) continues to flourish, bringing members together to share ideas, learn from one another and strengthen the reuse and repair movement.

We continued to advocate for the sector through engagement with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), local councils and communities, ensuring that the practical experience of those delivering reuse and repair on the ground helps inform policy and future strategy.

It was also fantastic to come together at our annual conference in Gortin, Co. Tyrone, where members, partners and stakeholders shared ideas and celebrated achievements.

To top it off, it has been a mighty year for our members, volunteers, partners and everyday circular heroes, whose passion and hard work continue to drive this movement forward. Every repaired item, workshop, campaign and conversation helps create a more circular Northern Ireland.

Eimear



Eimear Montague

Executive Director, NIRN

www.ni-rn.com
@NIRN



executive summary

NIRN continued to strengthen its role as a leading voice for reuse, repair, and circular economy action across Northern Ireland.

In 2025/26, NIRN continued to expand its reach and influence across Northern Ireland, strengthening its work with communities, schools, councils, government and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors. The network grew to 65 members, supporting organisations working across reuse, repair and the circular economy.

The growth of the NIRN team was an important step forward during the year. The appointment of Community Network Managers, an Operations Officer and an Environmental Education Officer increased our capacity to support members, deliver programmes and extend our reach across Northern Ireland.

Through Circular Schools, NIRN expanded its educational work, engaging 18 schools across 6 council areas and reaching over 690 pupils. The programme developed a stronger focus on material streams and links to the Department for the Economy's Draft Circular Economy Strategy, helping young people explore waste prevention, reuse, repair and sustainable resource management.

Through Circular Communities, NIRN began developing a new approach to engaging communities not yet embracing reuse, repair and circular economy principles. Focus groups with existing members helped shape a future training and mentoring programme, with initial pilots delivered with non-member communities. This work laid the foundations for a peer-to-peer approach to raising awareness and encouraging greater participation in reuse and repair.

NIRN annual conference this way ›

NIRN's Annual Conference in Gortin was a **key highlight**. It brought together stakeholders from across the circular economy sector to explore opportunities, challenges, and emerging policy developments.

The event featured keynote contributions from: Kate Beggs (The National Lottery Community Fund), Elizabeth Kelly (Deputy Principal - Waste Prevention Policy Lead, DAERA), and Mary Fleming (Change Clothes), reflecting the growing cross-sector and all-island collaboration shaping the future of reuse and repair.



Conference discussions focused on community-led climate action, waste prevention, textiles, behaviour change and the role of circular economy principles within local development and government strategy.

NIRN continued to advocate for the sector through engagement with DAERA, local authorities and strategic partners, bringing the practical experience of reuse and repair organisations into wider policy and strategy discussions. This included participation in a National Lottery-supported workshop exploring environmental funding approaches and a collaborative visit to the Stranraer Zero Waste Hub with local authorities and DAERA representatives.

Collaboration continued to grow through NIRN's shared island work with CRNI and participation in the RREUSE conference in Europe. These opportunities strengthened connections with reuse and repair networks and provided valuable learning on Extended Producer Responsibility, social enterprise and inclusive circular economy models.

Public engagement remained central to NIRN's work, with activities linked to European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR), Non-Disposable Cup Day and collaborations with Ulster University (UU). Digital engagement also continued through podcasts, webinars, storytelling and educational content, helping bring circular economy themes to wider audiences.

Together, these activities reflect a year of increased capacity, stronger collaboration and growing engagement across Northern Ireland, providing a strong foundation for the continued development of reuse, repair and circular economy action

meet the board



Heidi Redmond

Strategic Officer,
Strategic Investment Board (SIB)



Marcus Campbell

Project Officer,
Belfast City Council



Meg Magill

Innovation & Entrepreneurship,
Project Manager at Intertrade Ireland



Liam McNally

Practitioner,
International Synergies
(recently retired)



Nuala Griffiths

Environmental, Social &
Governance Manager,
Heron Brothers



Michael Sloan

Area Manager,
East Belfast Mission



Professor Ian Montgomery

Dean of Sustainability &
CSR at Ulster University

NIRN Team



Eimear Montague

Executive Director



Catherine Taylor

Operations Manager



George Gillespie

Community Network Manager

for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Ards & North Down Borough Council, Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council & Belfast City Council area



Catherine Mullin (New)

Community Network Manager

for Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Mid Ulster District Council & Newry, Mourne & Down District Council area



Katie O' Donnell (New)

Community Network Manager

for Causeway Coast and Glens Council, Derry City & Strabane District Council & Mid & East Antrim Borough Council area



Orlaith Quinn (New)

Environmental Education Officer



Maria McLaughlin

Communications & Events Officer



Julie Armstrong

Project Officer, Artitude

new members



St Columb's Park House combines community development and environmental action through projects including The Bloom Project, community gardening and skill-sharing. Its work promotes resource reuse, wellbeing and practical engagement with environmental issues.



Sperrin Soul brings a creative and inspiring approach to environmental education to the NIRN membership. Based in the foothills of the Sperrins, the organisation helps children and families connect with nature through hands-on activities that transform waste into opportunity, from creative reuse projects using single-use plastics to natural dye workshops and the redistribution of pre-loved wellies.

Rathlin Development & Community Association brings a unique island perspective to NIRN, demonstrating how circular economy principles can support remote and rural communities. Through its Repair Café, waste reduction education and creative reuse of local materials, the association is helping build a more sustainable and resilient future for island residents.



Laurencetown, Lenaderg & Tullylish Community Association (LLTCA) brings a strong commitment to sustainability, community empowerment and resource sharing to NIRN. Through its repair café, tool library, community fridge and freezer, and growing projects, LLTCA provides practical circular economy solutions while reducing waste, building resilience and bringing the community together.





Aghalee Repair Café brings a strong tradition of community-led repair, reuse and skills sharing. Based in Aghalee Village Hall, Northern Ireland's last remaining Carnegie Hall, the café offers upholstery, sewing, knitting and clothing repair workshops. Supported by dedicated volunteers, it helps preserve skills, reduce waste and strengthen rural community connections.



Based in Bangor, **Sustainability Stories** reduces waste through creative repair, upcycling and reuse. Its practical workshops on textiles, furniture and household items help people develop the skills and confidence to extend product lifecycles, while promoting education, creativity and community action.

Glen Development Initiative (GDI) brings valuable experience in community development, environmental action and local regeneration to NIRN. Working at the heart of communities in Derry/Londonderry, GDI supports sustainability, wellbeing and skills development, creating lasting social and environmental benefits.



Action Cancer brings a unique perspective to the NIRN membership, demonstrating how reuse can deliver both environmental and social impact. Through its network of charity shops, donated clothing, furniture and household items are given a second life, helping to reduce waste while generating vital income for life-saving cancer prevention, detection and support services across Northern Ireland.





Tools for Solidarity (TfS) Downpatrick joined NIRN this year, reinforcing its commitment to sustainability, skills-sharing and community empowerment. The charity restored a neglected historic site, transforming it into a working workshop for tool refurbishment and international solidarity.



Me, You and Them is a grassroots charity and social enterprise based in Dungannon. Founded in January 2020, they focus on promoting positive mental health and alleviating poverty within the local community. They receive and distribute used items such as clothes and furniture. They run workshops on DIY and on up styling items.

Dromore Repair Café became an NIRN member, adding to the growing number of volunteer-led repair cafés across Northern Ireland. Bringing together skilled repairers and local residents, the café is helping to build a culture of repair within the community, extending the life of everyday items while creating opportunities for learning, connection and skills sharing.



Banbridge Men's Shed joined the NIRN network, bringing its strong commitment to community, companionship, practical skills and repair. Through woodworking, restoration and hands-on projects, the group helps extend the life of materials while creating opportunities for learning, connection and shared purpose.





Life Cycles is a social enterprise committed to sustainability, wellbeing, and social inclusion through cycling. Founded by Monica Downey, the organisation began with a vision to make cycling accessible to all whilst promoting waste reduction and tackling transport inequality. Located within the Derry Train Station, Life Cycles collect unwanted and discarded bikes and give them a new lease of life through repair and refurbishment. The qualified mechanics, supported by volunteers and trainees, ensure these bikes are safe, reliable, and ready to be rehomed.



The Garrison Shed is a place where men and women can gather to work on practical projects, socialise and share skills. Their work centres on repair and reuse, with a current focus on furniture restoration and upholstery. Members use reclaimed materials wherever possible, giving resources new life. Over time, they hope to broaden their skills and expand into a wider range of repair and upcycling projects.

The Garrison Shed are currently building partnerships within their community so that their projects can benefit the local community and have a wider impact. For example, providing support to the local preschool by restoring and upholstering damaged school furniture to reduce costs for the preschool and also prevent resources from going to landfill.



Rural Action plays an important role in promoting the circular economy through programmes focused on community resilience, local economic development and environmental sustainability across rural Northern Ireland and beyond**.**

Through community engagement, workshops, educational programmes and events, Rural Action raises awareness of recycling, waste reduction, resource efficiency and sustainable practices. It also supports rural social enterprises to explore circular economy opportunities, encourages resource recovery and the repurposing of materials, and works with community organisations to explore potential pilot initiatives.

Partnerships across the statutory, public, private and voluntary sectors allow Rural Action to share learning and best practice, while helping inform local and national policy and supporting the development of more sustainable rural communities.

NIRN and the policy landscape

NIRN's work during 2025/26 continued to align closely with the developing policy landscape around climate action, resource management, waste prevention and the transition to a circular economy. Alongside delivering practical programmes with members, communities and schools, NIRN strengthened its role as a voice for the reuse and repair sector, bringing the experience of practitioners into policy discussions at local, regional, UK, Irish and European levels.

A significant area of engagement during the year was DAERA's Rethinking Our Resources: Northern Ireland Resources and Waste Management Strategy. The draft strategy, published for consultation in January 2026, sets out a long-term approach to resource and waste management, including actions on waste prevention and reuse, and a vision for a low-carbon circular economy.

NIRN supported member engagement with this developing policy landscape through its Local Authority Forums, member focus groups, consultation responses and direct engagement with DAERA. This included contributing to discussions around the Waste Prevention Programme, Plastic Pollution Plan and Climate Action Plan, and facilitating opportunities for members and local authorities to engage directly with policy development.



Beyond Northern Ireland, NIRN maintained and developed relationships with CRNI, Circular Communities Scotland (CCS), RREUSE and other environmental and sector networks across Ireland, the UK and Europe. Participation in conferences, working groups, workshops and international events provided opportunities to share NIRN's experience, learn from developments elsewhere and bring relevant learning back to members.







the pressure on textile reuse

why NIRN's work matters

While there is much to celebrate, NIRN members continue to face significant challenges, particularly in the textiles sector. The rise of fast fashion, overproduction and increasing clothing consumption is placing growing pressure on charities and reuse organisations working to keep textiles in use.

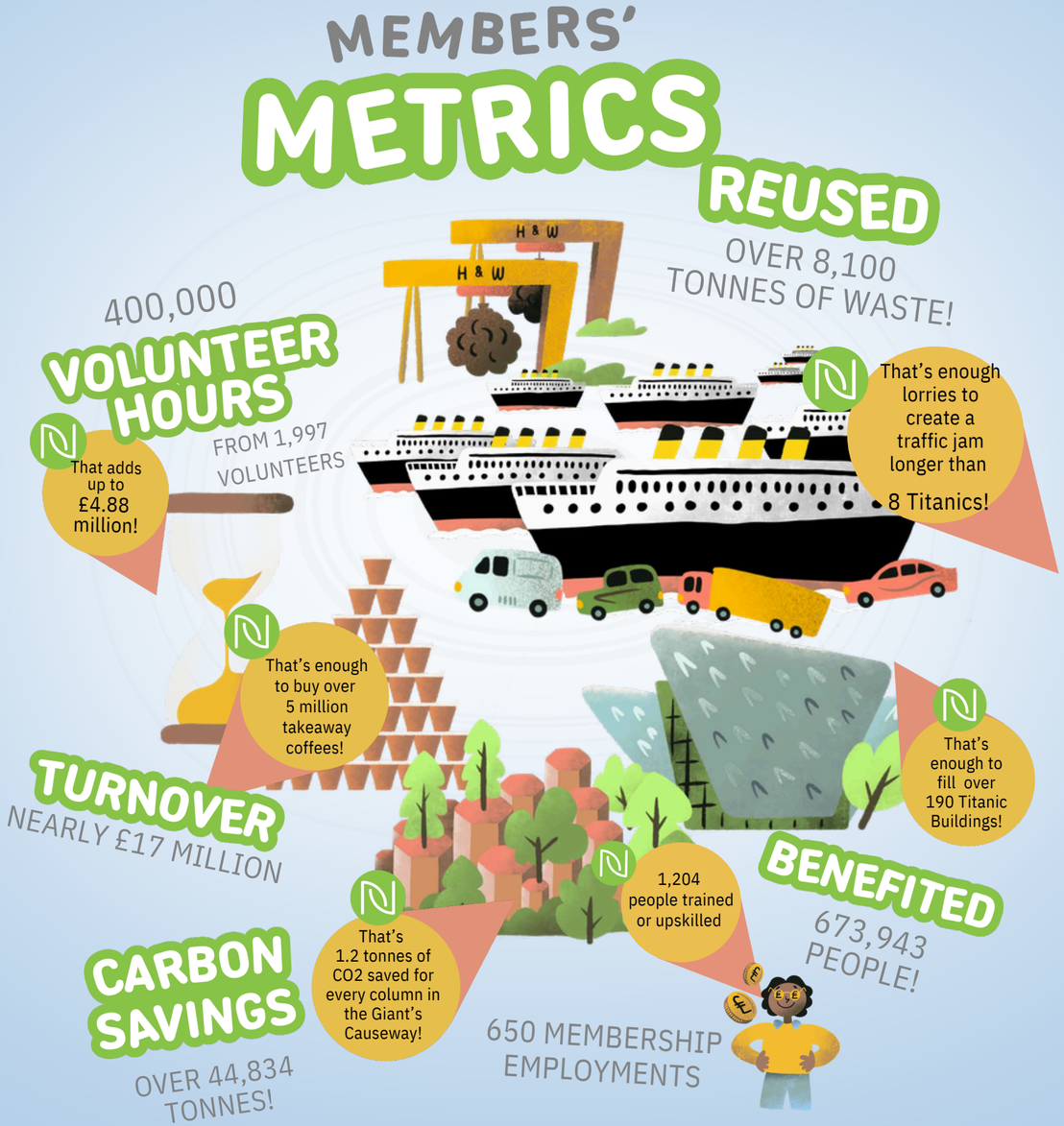
During 2025, WRAP and RREUSE highlighted mounting pressures on textile collectors, sorters and graders, including rising operational costs, declining garment quality and increasingly saturated second-hand markets. WRAP estimates that UK textile collectors and sorters now spend around £88 million each year managing worn-out and low-value textiles, while the UK Textiles Pact reported that 17% more textiles were placed on the UK market in 2024 than in 2019.

For NIRN members, these pressures have a direct impact. Organisations are managing increasing volumes of low-value and unsuitable donations, while facing higher costs to sort, process and find appropriate outlets for textiles. At the same time, changes in global second-hand markets are making it more difficult to generate value from items that cannot be reused locally.

These challenges highlight the importance of reuse at source, better quality donations and more sustainable consumption. They also reinforce the vital role NIRN members play in extending product life, reducing waste and creating social and environmental value through local reuse, repair, skills development and employment.

NIRN continues to support its members in responding to these pressures, while advocating for a policy and economic environment that prioritises waste prevention, reuse and repair and supports a more circular textile system.

MEMBERS' METRICS



highlights 2025/26



First ever repair café held on Rathlin Island

Arpil 2025



Eimear speakiing at the CIWM Conference

May 2025



NIRNs Catherine Taylor talks about repair cafés with Andy Cooper Causeway Hospital Radio

June 2025



New Colleague addition - Katie O' Donnell. Community Network Manager, Derry and Strabane area.

July 2025



New Colleague addition – Orlaith Quinn Environmental Education Officer, strengthening delivery of the Circular Schools and education programme.

August 2025



NIRN joined local authorities and DAERA on a study visit to the Stranraer Zero Waste Hub to explore zero waste systems and learning for Northern Ireland.

September 2025



New Colleague addition – Catherine Mullin – Community Network Manager (Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Newry, Mourne & Down Council and Mid-Ulster District Council)

October 2025



NIRN team members attended the Circular Communities Scotland Conference, sharing ideas and exploring circular solutions.

November 2025



For the first time, NIRN supported Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Environmental Youth Speak and participated in judging.

February 2026

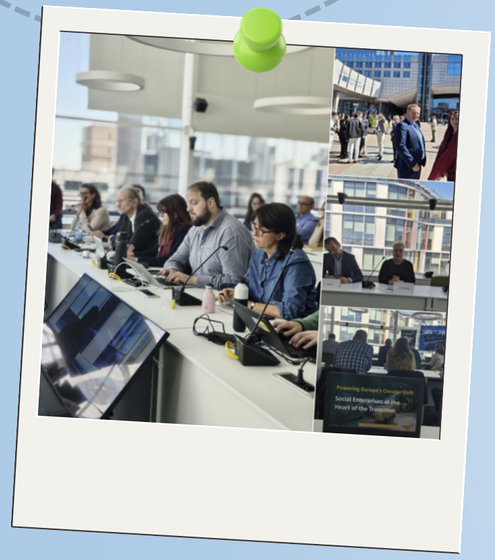


Repair Café delivered as part of the Lord Mayor's Easter Trail with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

March 2026

creating impact
through environmental campaigns and collaboration

NIRN played an increasingly visible role in major environmental awareness campaigns, international sustainability events and public engagement initiatives across both Northern Ireland and Ireland.



None of this would have been possible without our partners across councils, universities, schools, community organisations and government departments, who helped bring global environmental themes to life through practical local action.

NIRN worked with Ulster University on a Reusable Cup campaign ahead of Non-Disposable Cup Day, achieving a 39% increase in reusable cup use, and organised 5 reuse and repair events with members during European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR) 2025.

To keep momentum going year-round, NIRN used a calendar of key sector dates, including EWWR, International Repair Day and E-Waste Day, to guide communications and social media. This has now grown into a consolidated 2026 calendar covering NIRN, member and partner activity.

The Artitude project deepened public engagement through the arts, connecting climate action and the circular economy. This year saw confirmed branding, a published suite of podcasts, toolkits and case studies, and new partnerships with cultural organisations including The MAC and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and MyEarth Platform.

In March 2026, NIRN joined Restart at the Westminster Repair Café, supporting their event and connecting with Northern Ireland MPs in attendance to raise awareness of repair and the work of NIRN.

By working together with members and partners, we are amplifying the message of reuse and repair, and showing that collective action creates lasting change.

mend at the mac

climate in action

Mend at The MAC brought NIRN's work on textile reuse and repair into a high-profile cultural setting in Belfast, delivered through NIRN's Artitude project in partnership with The MAC and Tools for Solidarity.

Held on 28 September 2025 as part of The MAC's year-long Climate in Action programme and Sustainable Fashion Week 2025, the event combined a drop-in textile repair café with four hands-on mending clinics led by Sue Bamford of Tools for Solidarity, covering button repair, darning, hemming and visible patching.

The Threads of Change event helped shift perceptions of clothing from disposable to worth caring for. An exhibition showcased repaired and repurposed garments, including handmade slow-fashion designs, and a screening of Unravelled – The Story of a Jumper explored the emotional value of the clothes we keep. NIRN member St Vincent de Paul hosted a rail of affordable pre-loved clothing, extending garments' lives while showcasing the work of NIRN and its members.

The MAC Director Lisa McGinley described Climate in Action as "a pledge to our planet, our audiences and our future."

By combining practical skills, storytelling and affordable pre-loved fashion, the event helped shift perceptions of clothing from disposable to worth caring for, extending garments' lives while showcasing the work of NIRN and its members.



View video of the event here!



restart repair café

at westminster

On 25 March 2026, George Gillespie, NIRN Community Network Manager, represented NIRN at the third Westminster Repair Café, joining repair advocates, community organisations and policymakers from across the UK to highlight the role of repair in reducing waste and supporting the transition to a circular economy.

A key focus was engaging with Northern Ireland MPs from across the political spectrum, including newly elected Green MP Hanna Spencer, to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing the reuse and repair sector. These conversations helped bring Northern Ireland's experiences and priorities into wider UK policy discussions. George also caught up with NIRN member Repair Café NI and exchanged ideas with organisations such as CCS, strengthening relationships across the repair movement.

Television presenter Sean Fletcher shared the story of his 27-year-old toaster, recently repaired rather than replaced, a simple illustration of the message at the heart of the repair movement: keeping products in use for longer reduces waste and saves resources.

Taking part reinforced NIRN's commitment to championing repair and influencing policy, building on its ongoing engagement with government on the forthcoming Circular Economy Bill.





cross network

learning & cooperation



Sustainability in Action with Ulster University

NIRN worked with Ulster University (UU) this year on strategy, practical projects and research. In April, NIRN's Executive Director was appointed a Visiting Professor and joined the university's inaugural External Sustainability & CSR Advisory Team, and NIRN later gave input into UU's sustainability strategy.

The partnership was also hands-on. As part of UU's Future Island Programme, NIRN delivered a pop-up Repair Café on Rathlin Island, the island's first ever. In the autumn, NIRN worked with UU staff and students on a Reusable Cup campaign across all three campuses, leading to a 39% increase in reusable cup use. NIRN also brought Department for the Economy officials and councils together for a UU PhD workshop on a circular economy framework for tourism, linking academic research with policy makers.

Working with Queen's University Belfast

NIRN took part in two Queen's University Belfast events bringing sustainability into practice. At the Sustainability in Action Day, Community Network Manager George Gillespie joined a panel and took questions from students and staff, sharing how community networks and capacity-building support sustainable practice and how organisations can embed sustainability into everyday operations.

George also visited the Collaborate4Climate Exhibition, whose 18 panels highlighted Ireland's most pressing climate challenges, including food, transport, textiles and the built environment. Queen's hosted the final stop of this all-island programme, supported by the Creative Ireland Shared Island Fund.

partnering for a green transition

ISEP & CIWM Conference

On 4 March 2026, NIRN acted as a supporting partner for *Collaboration for a Green Transition,* a Belfast conference co-led by the Institute of Sustainability & Environmental Professionals (ISEP) and the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM). It was the first time NIRN had been invited to partner on the event. Timed to coincide with International Women's Day, it championed inclusive, community-led climate action.

NIRN helped organise the event, including reaching out to and confirming speakers, and colleagues attended on the day. The conference explored how to shift waste culture, build local circular economies and engage communities through co-design. A core focus was Ulster University's Future Island project, which presented Rathlin Island as a model for place-based, grassroots environmental action, building on NIRN's own pop-up repair café on Rathlin with the university in April 2025.





driving the conversation!

Our team engaged with leading sector voices and policy makers, including:

- **Zoë Lenkiewicz,** who provided vital global perspectives on sustainable waste infrastructure.
- **Jane Corderoy** from **DAERA,** who detailed Northern Ireland’s legislative path toward a net-zero future.



circular councils

local authority forums



NIRN's quarterly Local Authority Forums continued to give councils across Northern Ireland a dedicated space to share experiences, explore emerging challenges and identify opportunities to advance circular economy principles in their communities.

Bringing together local authority representatives and DAERA, the forums have become a valued platform for collaboration, learning and knowledge exchange.

During 2025/26, forums were held at Owenkillew Community Centre in Gortin (June 2025), Resurgam Trust in Lisburn (December 2025) and Rostrevor Men's Shed (February 2026), alongside a September 2025 visit to Zero Waste Park, Stranraer, where council members and DAERA saw the economic and social benefits of a reuse and repair hub.

A highlight was the February 2026 forum at Rostrevor Men's Shed, the first of four in 2026 focused on key material streams: Packaging, Food, Textiles and Electrical. DAERA updated members on the public consultation for Rethinking Our Resources: Northern Ireland Resources and Waste Management Strategy, and participants took part in a Climate Fresk workshop, a collaborative educational tool based on IPCC research. Attendees mapped the causes and impacts of climate change and discussed resilience and the role local authorities can play in supporting change.

The forum also showed community-led reuse and repair in action, with attendees learning about the social and environmental impact of Rostrevor Men's Shed's repair activity and skills sharing.



CIRCULAR SCHOOLS

The Circular Schools Programme introduces pupils to circular economy principles through practical, engaging learning on reducing waste, reusing resources and making more sustainable choices. Building on the Zero Waste Schools pilot, which reached 12 schools across four council areas, the programme grew in 2025/26 to 18 schools across six council areas, including six new schools and two new councils, and reached 690 pupils

Learning from the pilot, NIRN recruited its own Environmental Education Officer to develop and own the training modules, improving consistency and quality. The content was refocused on the four priority material streams in the draft Circular Economy Bill: textiles, electricals, food and packaging, with new electrical waste and repair modules helping pupils understand the impact of electronic consumption and disposal

NIRN members, including FareShare NI, Tools for Solidarity and Habitat for Humanity, supported workshop delivery alongside this NIRN-led content. Celebratory events in Belfast, Armagh, Fermanagh & Omagh and Derry & Strabane in 2025 were attended by civic leaders, and NIRN presented the programme at the Circular Communities Scotland AGM in October.

During the 2025/26 academic year, **NIRN continued to develop and refine the Circular Schools Programme,** building on the foundations established through the Zero Waste Schools pilot, launched in 2024.



NIRN annual conference 2025

building circular communities in gortin

The NIRN 2025 Annual Conference took place on 14 October in Gortin, County Tyrone, bringing together community organisations, policymakers, councils, educators and social enterprises to advance Northern Ireland's circular economy. Hosted by BBC environment and climate journalist Louise Cullen, the day promoted community-led sustainability, regional inclusion and grassroots reuse and repair. Discussion covered community resilience, behaviour change, the opportunities within the Draft Circular Economy Strategy, and the social, economic and environmental value of local circular action.

Supporting community-led change

Kate Beggs, Northern Ireland Director of The National Lottery Community Fund, shared the Fund's perspective on supporting community-led change. During 2025/26, National Lottery investment supported circular activity across NIRN's network, including:

- Life Cycles NI, supporting bicycle refurbishment and repair skills
- Repair & Share Foyle, through its community repair and reuse programme
- ARTITUDE: Climate, Culture, Circularity, which continues with support from the National Lottery Climate Action Fund. NIRN plays a key role in connecting creative climate action with the wider reuse and repair movement.

Reuse in action

Hope365 brought its "Trailer for Change" mobile donation hub to the conference, giving members the chance to donate clothing as part of community outreach and reuse initiatives. Michael Holmes of Hope365 said the event was, above all, a valuable space for networking and building connections.





The event featured keynote contributions from leading voices across the environmental and policy sectors both North & South

Turning Reuse into Hope The Power of Circular Networking

Workshops and breakout sessions
Collaboration for Change: Sarah McGeough of Kainos led a session on how organisations can strengthen their volunteering and social value commitments by better matching people, skills and community needs.

Resource Matching: Liam McNally, NIRN board member and practitioner with International Synergies, led a workshop on resource matching. Through International Synergies Northern Ireland, local businesses can turn waste and underused items into valuable inputs for other companies, reducing waste while saving money.

Community-powered textiles: Change Clothes Crumlin Founder and CEO Mary Fleming shared her expertise in building community-powered textile initiatives. She showed how Change Clothes makes sustainable fashion accessible, affordable and highly social through garment swapping and repairs.

Creativity meets circularity
An update on ARTITUDE highlighted the growing connection between creativity, climate action and the circular economy. Particular attention was given to Mend at The MAC, which showed how circularity and creative practice can come together in new and engaging ways.

Connections across Ireland
The conference welcomed Aidan Ó Gormáin, newly appointed Executive Director of CRNI. His attendance was an important opportunity to strengthen links between the reuse and repair networks across the island of Ireland and to share learning on community-led circular action.

A visible commitment from the Board
NIRN's Board played a strong and visible role throughout the day. Michael Sloan, Heidi Redmond, Liam McNally, Nuala Griffiths, Marcus Campbell, and Professor Ian Montgomery attended and took part, reflecting the Board's ongoing commitment to NIRN, its members, and the growth of reuse, repair and the circular economy across Northern Ireland.



Have a look at the video of the conference here

circular communities

The Circular Communities Pilot Project, supported by DAERA, continued its work to help community groups across Northern Ireland move towards zero waste.

Many community groups and social enterprises are keen to get involved in reuse and repair but do not know where to start. This year, NIRN introduced and piloted a training module to help. It introduces the circular economy and the waste hierarchy, shows how reduction, reuse and repair can bring greater environmental and community benefit than recycling alone, and spotlights what communities across Northern Ireland are already achieving.

The programme began by listening. Four focus groups, held in Omagh, Belfast, Derry and online, brought together 33 members to share what motivates groups to start reuse and repair activity and what keeps that momentum going. Their insights shaped the training programme. A pilot module was then developed and three taining courses were delivered, with the learning used to refine the content.

Next, members will mentor groups that complete the module, helping them develop and launch their own reuse and repair activity. Learning from the pilot will inform updated modules for the 2026 to 2027 year.









member focus

sharing sewing machine repair skills through the circular resources library

Demand for sewing machine repairs at local repair cafés has been rising. To meet it, Repair Café NI partnered with Belfast charity TfS through NIRN's Circular Resources Library, which connects members to share skills and experience. In December 2025, TfS hosted a full-day workshop at its Belfast facility for six Repair Café NI volunteer fixers, representing 4 member cafés.

The workshop combined theory with hands-on practice, giving volunteers specialist instruction from TfS in repairing domestic sewing machines. It covered diagnosing faults, cleaning the mechanisms, lubrication, thread tension adjustment and safe disassembly. Volunteers then put this into practice, refurbishing six donated machines so they could be used again. They also wrote a practical troubleshooting guide, giving fixers a resource they can use at future repair events.

The link between TfS and Change Clothes began at the NIRN Conference in October, where Change Clothes founder Mary Fleming shared how community textile initiatives work. That introduction led to TfS delivering sewing machine repair training for Change Clothes in January 2026 (see Shared Island Collaboration). Together, the two exchanges show how one connection made at an event can lead to skills being shared across the network and across the island.

With fixers keen to take part in more advanced training, NIRN expects the partnership to continue.

During 2025/26, NIRN undertook over 100 member visits across Northern Ireland, engaging with reuse organisations, repair initiatives, social enterprises, local authorities and community groups.

These visits provided opportunities to share best practice, strengthen partnerships, identify emerging challenges and showcase all the innovative circular economy activity taking place.





member visits
in pictures

artitude

climate, culture & circularity



Artitude is an ambitious community climate project taking place across the Derry City and Strabane area, with NIRN acting as a key partner connecting the programme to the wider circular economy, reuse and repair. Led by The Playhouse alongside other partners, Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) and Repair & Share Foyle (RSF), the project uses creativity, storytelling and community participation to explore climate action and sustainability in accessible ways.

During 2025/26, Artitude entered Phase 2, introducing embedded artists within local communities. Gemma Walker-Farren is working with the Triax communities using theatre and storytelling approaches, while Julie Griffiths is leading engagement with Faughan communities through ecological and textile-based, participant led creative practice.

NIRN's role has focused on dissemination and knowledge sharing, helping connect learning emerging from the project to members, educators, artists, councils and policymakers across Northern Ireland. Through podcasts, workshops, repair and reuse collaborations, public events and communications activity, NIRN has helped translate community creativity and participation into wider conversations around circular economy policy, environmental education and sustainable behaviour change.

A strong emphasis was placed on sharing the learning and stories emerging from ARTITUDE: Climate, Culture, Circularity. During 2025/26, NIRN produced seven podcasts featuring community activists, practitioners and project contributors, exploring themes including repair, reuse, youth climate action, community resilience, e-waste, storytelling and the circular economy.

The project also created a series of videos featuring content from The Story of a Jumper and Mend at The MAC. Two case studies documented the Mend at The MAC collaboration and ARTITUDE's contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Practical toolkits were developed - Loopy Lou and Linny Bin, Story & Change Masterclass and Climate Wheel of Fortune, alongside ARTITUDE Climate, Culture, Circularity Action Cards developed for My Earth Hub.
https://www.ni-rn.com/artitude-toolkits-case-studies/
https://www.ni-rn.com/artitude-podcasts/

artitude








ARTITUDE
Climate/ Culture/ Circularity/
STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE

awareness
& communication

Throughout 2025/26, NIRN continued to raise the profile of reuse, repair and circular economy principles across Northern Ireland through a diverse programme of communications, campaigns and public engagement activities.

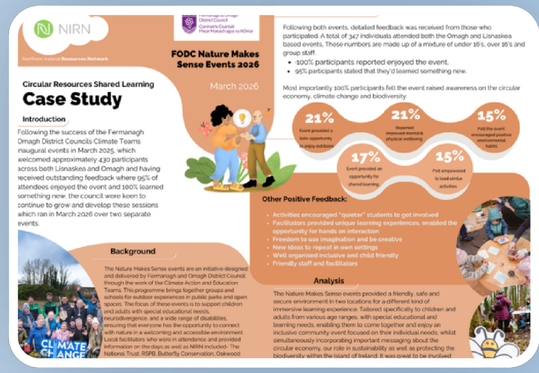
Through regular social media activity, member spotlights, newsletters, podcasts, videos and case studies, we shared practical examples of circular economy action and celebrated the achievements of organisations and communities leading positive change.

website redesign

During the 2025/26 operational year, NIRN completed a comprehensive redesign and technical enhancement of its official website. The upgraded platform improves digital accessibility and establishes clearer pathways for visitors seeking information on regional reuse and repair activities.



Check it out!
www.ni-rn.com



The newly refreshed website provides:

Streamlined Workflows: Provides clear structural navigation identifying the distinct operational areas and collaborative initiatives led by NIRN and its members.

Dedicated Case Studies Page: Features real-world impact stories, operational insights, and success metrics from across the member network.

New Podcast Hub: Offers engaging multimedia content featuring expert interviews and discussions of circular economy practices.

This upgrade enhances the NIRN's public visibility, helping connect individuals, community groups, and local stakeholders with essential reuse and repair resources.

NIRN Case Studies
Podcast Hub

podcasts

sustainable conversations series



Podcasts are one of the ways NIRN shares the stories behind reuse and repair. They give members a platform to talk about their work in their own words, reach people who may never attend an event or read a report, and show what circular action looks like on the ground. The Sustainable Conversations series focuses on how communities across Northern Ireland are embracing reuse, repair, food redistribution and the circular economy.

NIRN released a number of episodes during the year. The three featured here show the range of the network: food redistribution, charity retail and community sharing, including one made with members of CRNI to reflect shared learning and experience across the island.

Food Heroes Working to Save Food Being Wasted	A look behind the scenes at the FareShare Headquarters with members working on the frontlines of food redistribution and combating food insecurity.
More Than a Shop: The True Impact of Charity Retail	An exploration into how charity shops act as upcycling hubs, training centres, and community support systems fighting fast fashion waste.
The Power of Toy Libraries	A discussion of how sharing toys reduces plastic waste, builds community connections and supports families. Produced with members of CRNI, it reflects the value of shared learning across the island.

NIRN

CIRCULAR RESOURCES HIERARCHY

most favourable ›











circular economy resources management hierarchy

The Circular Waste Hierarchy ranks waste management options by what is best for the environment, giving priority to preventing waste in the first place. The challenge is to move away from disposal and energy recovery, where too much waste currently ends up, and up towards prevention, reuse and recycling.

NIRN and its members work at the top of the hierarchy, in prevention and preparing for reuse, keeping items in use for longer.

The Circular Resources Hierarchy
NIRN has created its own version, shown in the illustration. The change in name is deliberate: we want to promote a world without waste, where the word "waste" no longer exists. It suggests something of little or no value, when the products and materials we already have are valuable resources.

reuse and repair week an annual event



Following the success of Northern Ireland's first ever Repair Week in 2025, NIRN is now working to establish Reuse & Repair Week as an annual flagship event for the circular economy sector across the island of Ireland.

Developed originally in collaboration with ReLondon, the 2025 campaign marked a major milestone for Northern Ireland, becoming the first region in the UK to host Repair Week outside London. Over 50 events took place across all nine council areas, led by more than 20 organisations and community partners, demonstrating the growing public appetite for repair culture, practical sustainability and community-led climate action.

Building on this momentum, Reuse & Repair Week 2026 (30 May – 6 June) has expanded significantly into a Shared Island initiative led jointly by NIRN and CRNI, with support from RREUSE, the European network for social and circular enterprises. The expanded programme moves beyond repair alone to include the wider principles of reduced reuse and circular living.

Events throughout the week included repair cafés, bike maintenance workshops, clothing swaps, furniture upcycling, sewing and textile repair sessions, electrical repair workshops, tool libraries, school projects and community sustainability events across Northern Ireland and Ireland.

The programme officially launched at Belfast Grand Central Station with a pop-up Repair Café designed to showcase practical repair skills and community participation.

Importantly, the week has become far more than a series of events. It is increasingly acting as a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing and policy visibility across the reuse and repair sector. Through partnerships with councils, schools, universities, social enterprises and grassroots organisations, NIRN is helping connect local community action with wider conversations around circular economy policy, behaviour change and sustainable resource management.

The growing scale of participation reflects how reuse and repair are becoming more mainstream across Northern Ireland and Ireland. What began as a successful regional campaign has quickly evolved into a larger movement focused on keeping valuable resources in use, building local skills and strengthening circular communities across the island.

shared Ireland collaboration



NIRN continued to strengthen its partnership with CRNI, creating opportunities for members to connect with organisations, practitioners and policymakers working across the reuse, repair and circular economy sectors.

The two teams met in Dundalk in May to agree shared priorities, developed a joint training calendar and visited the Rediscovery Centre together in September. Each network also attended the other's annual conference, including a welcome for CRNI's new Executive Director, Aidan Ó Gormáin, at the NIRN Conference in October.

Members benefited from practical exchange. Through NIRN's Circular Resources Library, TfS delivered sewing machine repair training for CRNI member Change Clothes in January 2026. A joint podcast on toy libraries showed how sharing helps families save money, reduce waste and build community connections. Through CRNI and the European network RREUSE, NIRN continues to access emerging policy developments and best practice. Discussions in December set out joint plans for 2026-27, including a Shared Island Reuse & Repair Week and the Circular Communities Pilot.

Why a shared island approach matters

Working across the island of Ireland benefits both networks and their members. For NIRN and CRNI, joint working avoids duplication, opens up shared funding and policy opportunities, and strengthens their voice with government and European partners. For members, it means learning from peers, sharing skills and tools, and reaching new partners and supporters. Together, both networks and their members become more resilient, better connected and better placed to keep valuable resources in use.

Let's keep in touch

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NORTHERN IRELAND RESOURCES NETWORK

RETHINK - REUSE - REPAIR



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