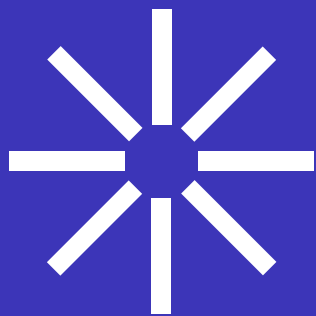




NORTHERN IRELAND **NOW** CONTEMPORARY COLLECTING



Phase Two
Engagement Toolkit



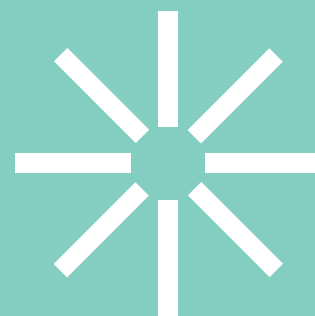


www.digitalfilmarchive.net

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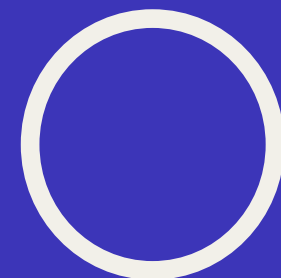


**BELFAST
STORIES**



**Belfast
City Council**

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Introduction

Northern Ireland Now has been a transformative project for Northern Ireland Screen, one designed to ensure that the voices shaping society today are represented and celebrated in our moving image collections. Over the course of this project, we have worked tirelessly to address long-standing gaps in our Digital Film Archive, amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities – ethnic minorities, disabled and neurodivergent individuals, LGBTQIA+ people, working-class groups and those who may otherwise have thought that moving image heritage is not relevant to them. This initiative is helping to reshape the archive, making it a more inclusive reflection of the diversity of life in Northern Ireland.

Collaboration has been at the heart of this work. By partnering with the Nerve Centre and a variety of community and advocacy organisations and individuals, we have been able to gather materials that reflect the realities of contemporary communities and embrace the challenge of curating modern formats, ensuring the archive captures the cultural pulse of today.

This project was as much about empowering people as it was about building a collection. Participants, partners, and staff gained invaluable skills in curation, cataloguing, and digital preservation, ensuring the legacy of this work extends well into the future. By engaging directly with communities, we not only contextualised new additions to the archive but also revisited older materials, giving them new meaning and relevance.

Through the public showcases, the production of this resource and, most importantly the new connections and partnerships that have been forged, NI Now has created a lasting impact, transforming Northern Ireland's Digital Film Archive into a space where everyone can see themselves, their communities, and their stories.

Francis Jones *Head of Heritage & Archive, Northern Ireland Screen*

Project Overview

Northern Ireland Now is an innovative contemporary collecting initiative from Northern Ireland Screen and Nerve Centre that works with diverse communities to capture, digitise and preserve stories that are often underrepresented within the Digital Film Archive.

Supported by the BFI, awarding funds from the National Lottery, and by Belfast City Council, the initiative places diversity and inclusion at its heart, working with communities across Belfast to address historical gaps in the collection and ensure a richer, more representative record of contemporary life in Northern Ireland.

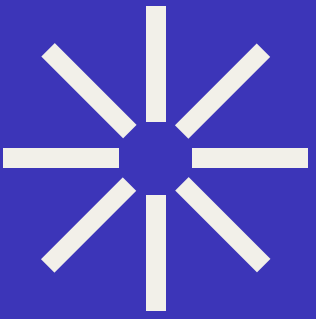
Rather than collecting material on behalf of communities, Northern Ireland Now empowers people to become active contributors to the archive.

Through partnerships with community organisations, participants receive training, creative support and access to the tools to document their own experiences in ways that feel authentic to them. Their films are preserved alongside existing archive collections, creating new connections between past and present.

This toolkit draws on the learning from that process, sharing practical approaches, reflections and resources that can help other groups deliver inclusive, community-led contemporary collecting projects of their own.

For more information, visit:

www.nervecentre.org/culture/northern-ireland-now



Elsbeth Vischer,
*Northern Ireland Now
Project Coordinator*



Kalakeli

June – August 2025

Bringing the vibrant traditions of South Indian drumming to the heart of Belfast, Kalakeli plays an important role in the city's cultural life, performing at festivals and community celebrations including the Belfast Mela.

Through Northern Ireland Now, the group documented their performances, rehearsals and creative practice, capturing the energy, skill and cultural significance of their work.

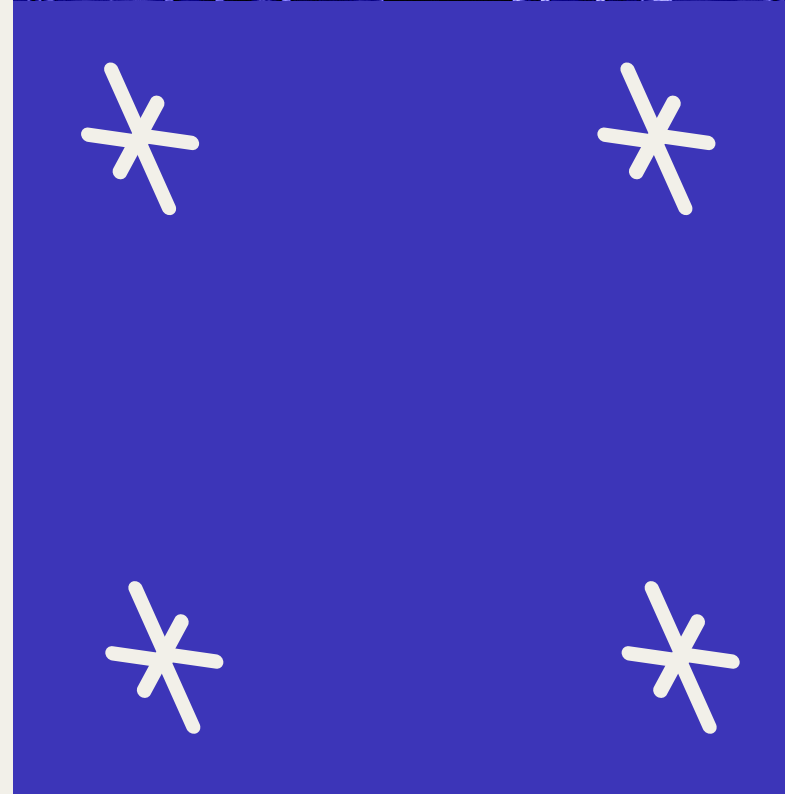
Their films celebrate the rich diversity of contemporary Northern Ireland, ensuring that traditions from across the world, and the communities who keep them alive, are represented within the Digital Film Archive for future generations.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"An early partner, Kalakeli clearly saw the value in documenting their unique cultural heritage and the musical culture and heritage of Southern India. This is another example of the diverse place that Belfast is today and how music can bring communities together."



1



John Paul II Youth Panel

August 2025

A youth panel in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast took part in a week-long summer school of workshops with Northern Ireland Now, learning about heritage, archives and issues or urban identity faced by young people in their communities.

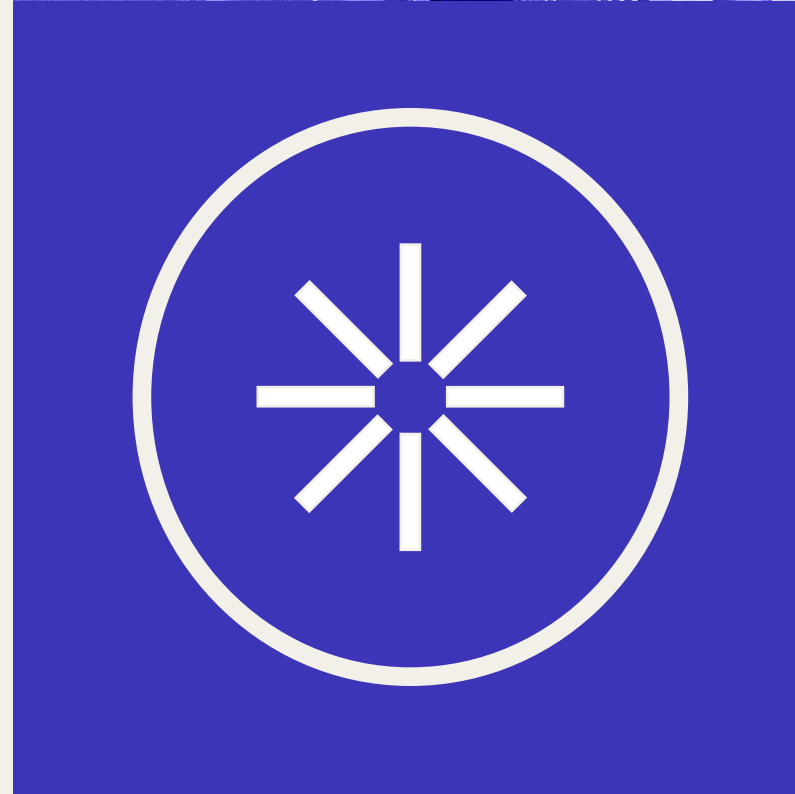
From anti-bullying dramas and TikTok-style films to historical documentaries featuring interviews with local people, the group contributed a diverse body of work to the archive, reflecting contemporary life through their own creativity and lived experiences.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"The youth panel were passionate about a range of issues and one of the biggest challenges was narrowing down ideas and ensuring every crew member felt their views had been listened to. In the end, a lot of good compromise was reached and it was impressive to see."



2



Black Moon

August 2025

Returning to our collaborative partner, The Black Box in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, a group of DJs and club-goers took part in a five-day Northern Ireland Now programme during August.

As organisers of a monthly club night created by and for the disabled community, participants were keen to develop new digital production skills, creating original visual content that could be projected alongside live DJ performances.

The finished works premiered at the group's showcase before reaching an audience of more than 11,000 people during Culture Night at The Black Box on 19 September 2025.

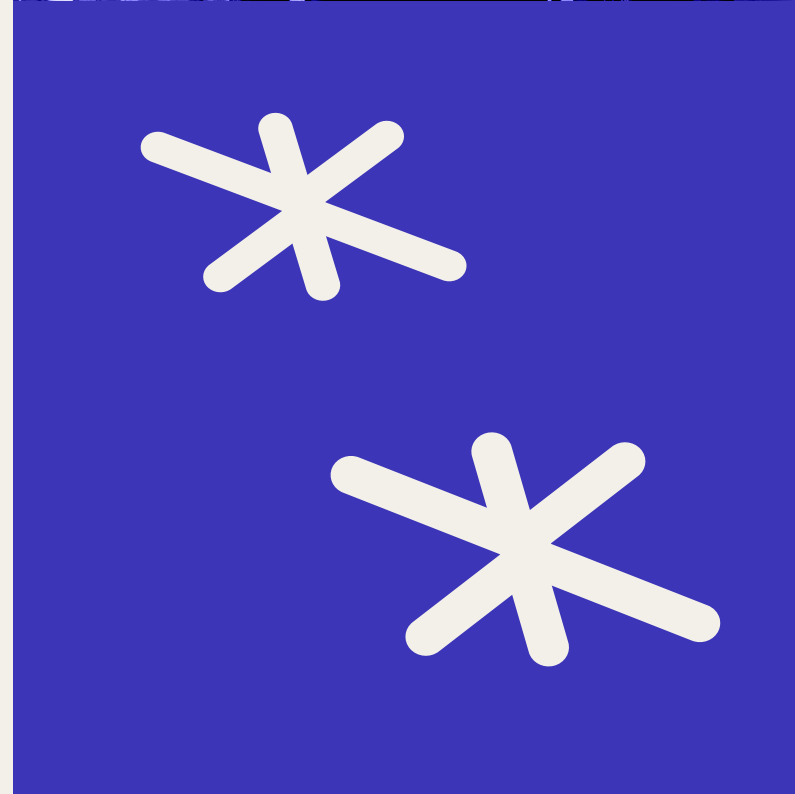
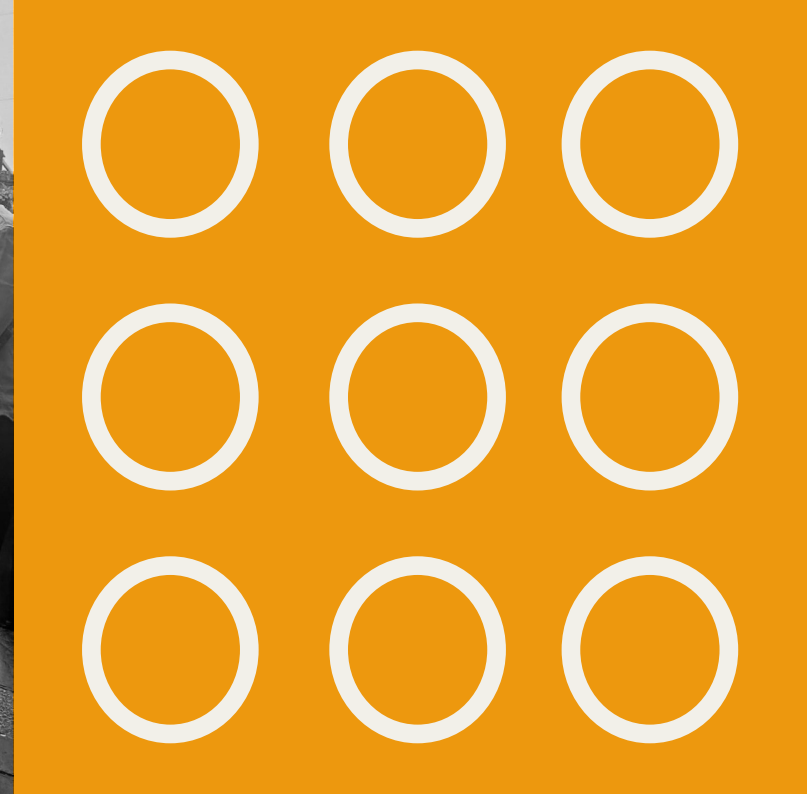
The project not only expanded participants' creative and technical skills but also ensured their experiences and perspectives became part of Northern Ireland's contemporary screen heritage.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"Every individual from Black Moon had different expectations of what a 'club visual' could be. Some people were club-goers and some DJs. We had such a range of videos collected from experimental, to animated, to music showcases and it truly reflected the wonderful diversity of the group as a whole."



3



Legacy Project Eastside 'Bout Ye'

September–October 2025

Working with EastSide Partnership at the Visitor Centre in CS Lewis Square, East Belfast, the Northern Ireland Now team collaborated with young people taking part in the 'Bout Ye' Sure Start programme over five creative sessions.

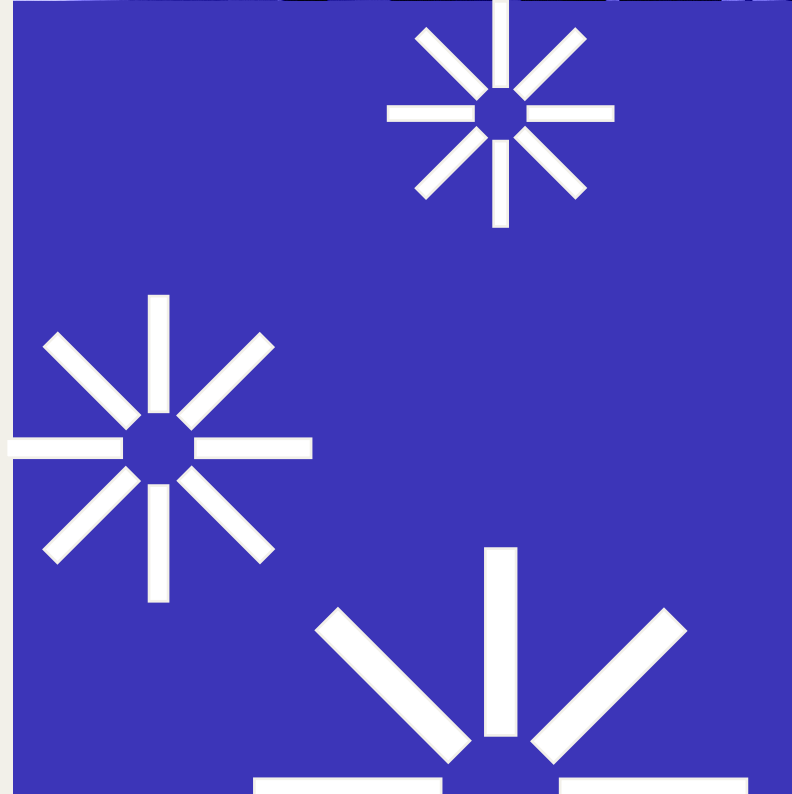
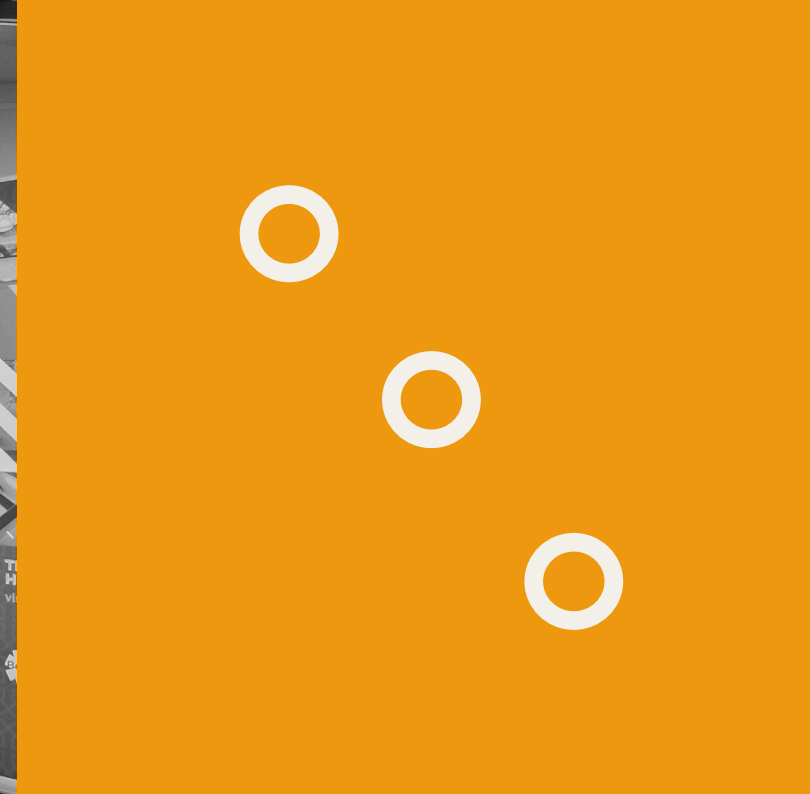
Participants had used filmmaking to explore the issues that mattered most to them and their local community. Films tackled topics including the closure of Connswater Shopping Centre, environmental pollution and the changing character of East Belfast, providing a powerful insight into the experiences and priorities of young people in the area. By cataloguing these perspectives, the group created a valuable contemporary record of the area.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"Meeting in the Eastside Visitor Centre really helped engagement with this group, as it was a space these young people were familiar with. It also increased our proximity to the Greenway and helped channel memories and reflections of the surrounding space that influenced participant videos."



4



SOUP

Beat Carnival

October 2025

Things took a spooky turn over Halloween half-term with a creative bunch of Beat Carnival members, in the SOUP group (Stories of Unruly People) based out of the Beat Carnival's home on the lower Shankill Road area of central Belfast.

Working alongside Nerve Centre's VFX Academy, participants were learning professional special effects make-up techniques before applying their new skills to the production of their own original horror films.

From an unexpected appearance by Supernanny to a techno-loving party gatecrasher, their films showcased plenty of imagination, humour and creativity.

Northern Ireland Now worked with the young people involved to catalogue and add their films to the archive, culminating in a public showcase of their films to the local community.

5



Young at Art Collective

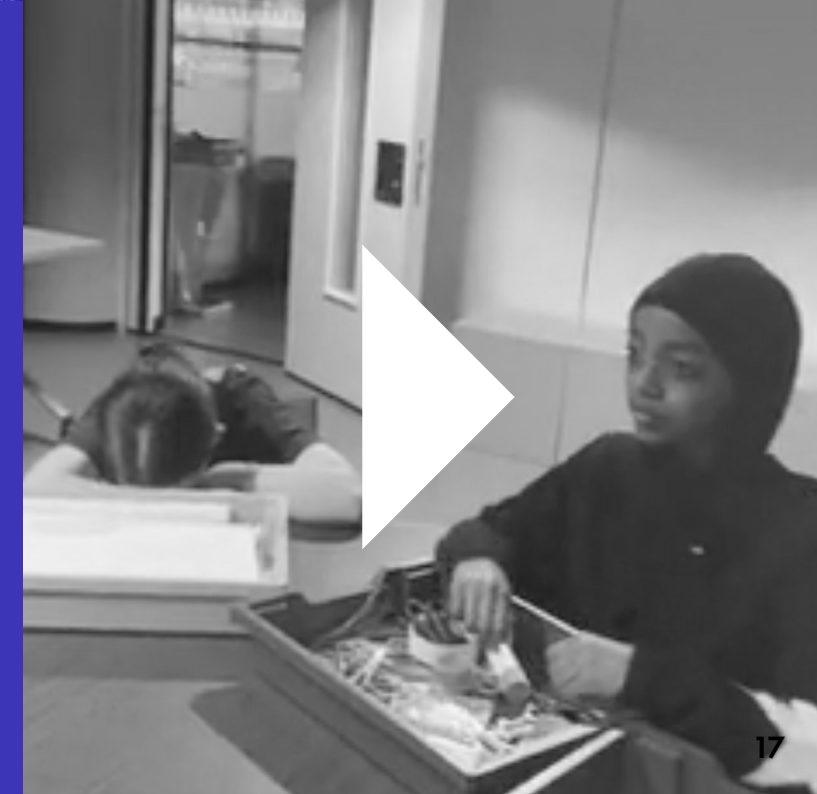
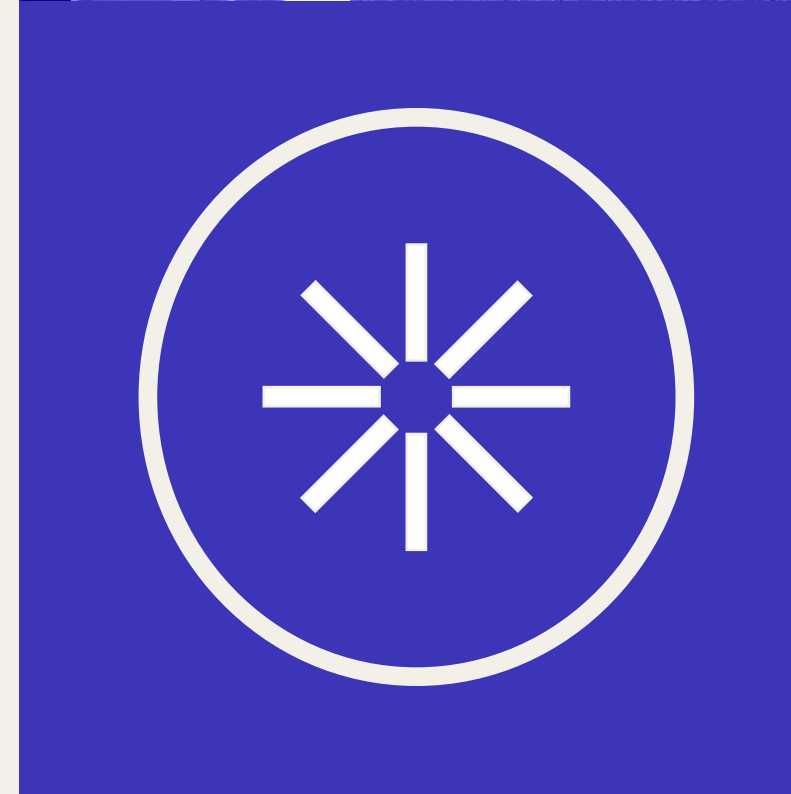
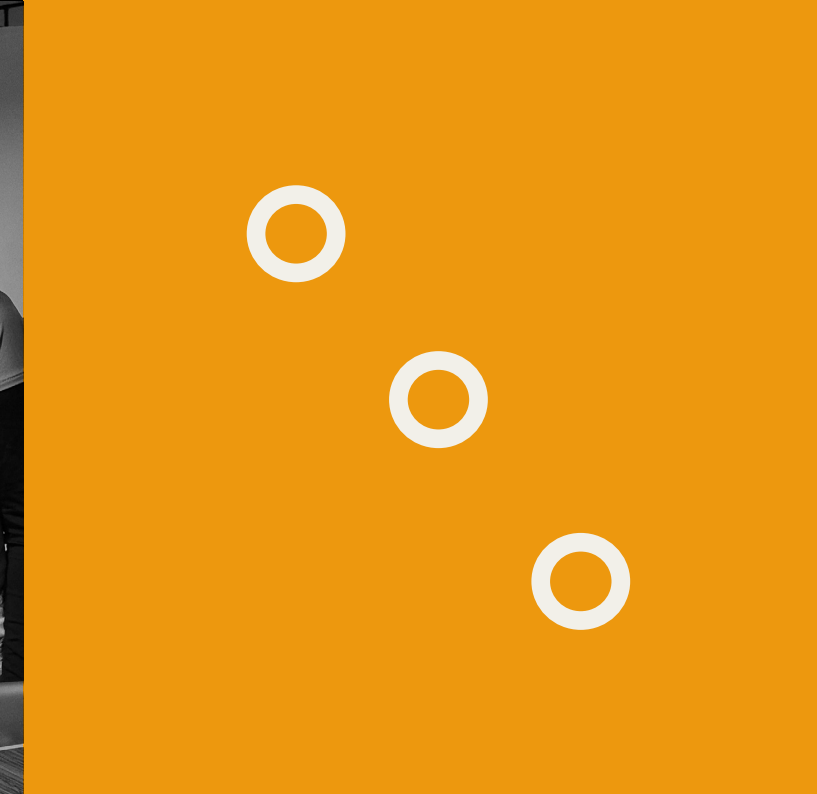
November 2025–March 2026

The Young at Art Collective Alumni brought together a talented group of 8–12-year-olds who had previously taken part in Young at Art's regular Sunday workshops in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter. Building on earlier experiences, the group returned to contribute new stories and a series of original animated films for the Digital Film Archive.

Their work demonstrated remarkable imagination and creativity, with stories ranging from vampire headteachers to magical beanbags and other wonderfully inventive characters and worlds.

The films premiered at a special showcase during the Belfast Children's Festival in March, where an audience of more than 50 people celebrated the achievements of these emerging young filmmakers.

6



Our Social Space

January–February 2024

Based at Dance Addiction Studios in East Belfast, Flicks Hut brings together a community cinema club and a vibrant group of experienced vintage dancers.

Drawing on their shared passions for film, dance and local heritage, participants embraced the Northern Ireland Now project to submit a unique collection of contemporary screen content.

Inspired by the glamour and style of the 1920s, the group had produced films celebrating vintage dance, performance and community.

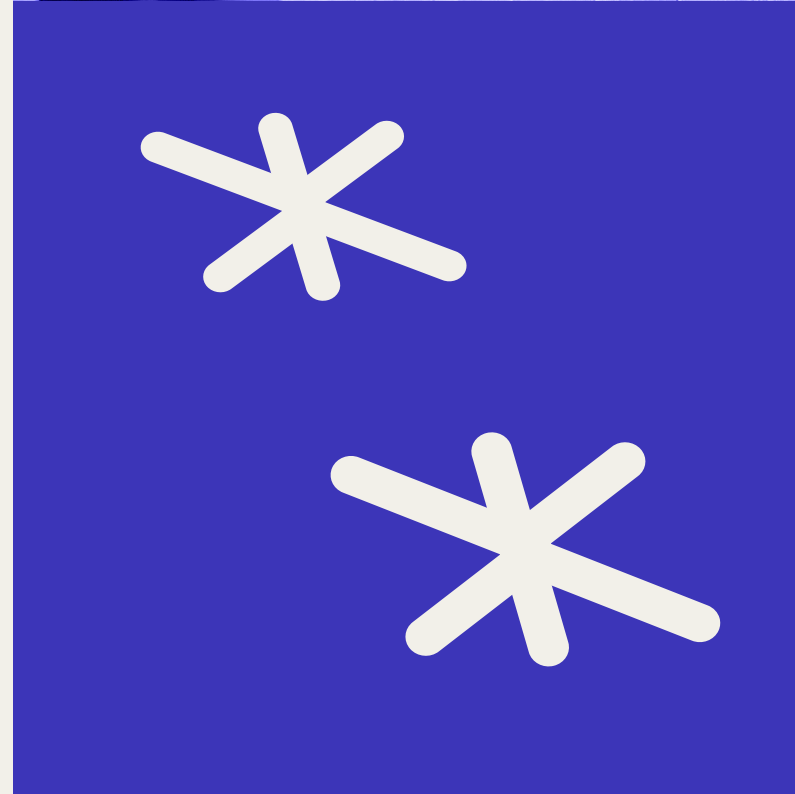
Their work culminated in a showcase with a distinctly Jazz Age atmosphere, where period costumes, music and dance brought their creative vision to life. The resulting films capture not only a shared love of vintage culture but also the friendships, creativity and sense of community that continue to thrive within the group today.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"There were technical challenges that this group overcame fantastically. Some participants had never used iPads before and editing was a difficult new skill. The videos they have contributed to the archive are testament to their perseverance and creativity."



7



Open Arts NI

January–February 2026

Big characters came out in full force from the Open Arts Drama Group.

Participants brought energy, creativity and a wealth of experience to Northern Ireland Now, using the project as an opportunity not only to document their own stories and achievements, but also to explore how disabled people and their communities can be better represented within the Digital Film Archive.

Meeting regularly at The Crescent Arts Centre in South Belfast, the group contributed a rich collection of films celebrating their performances, friendships and creative journey.

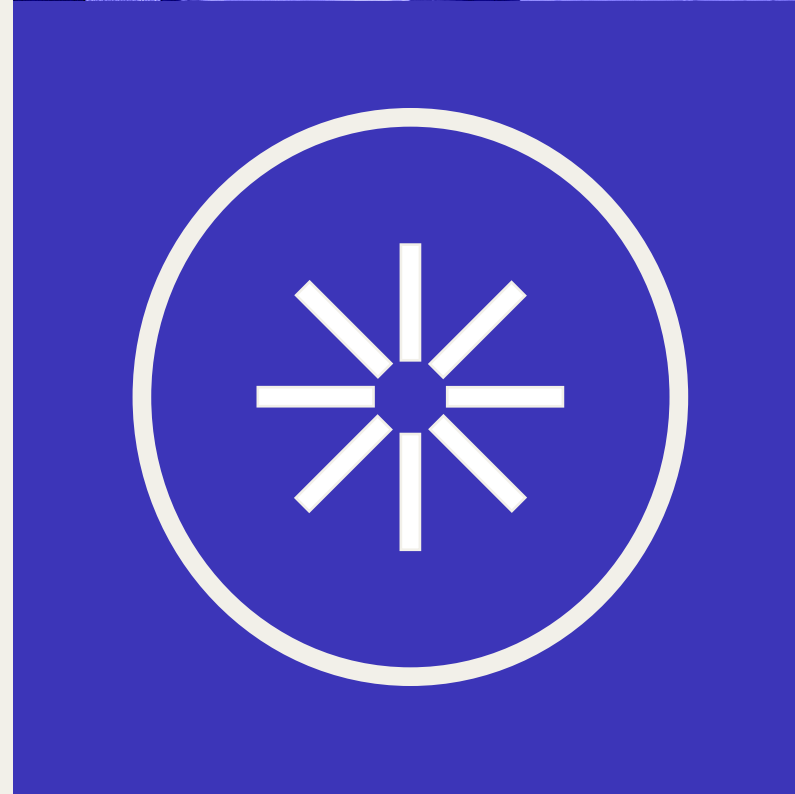
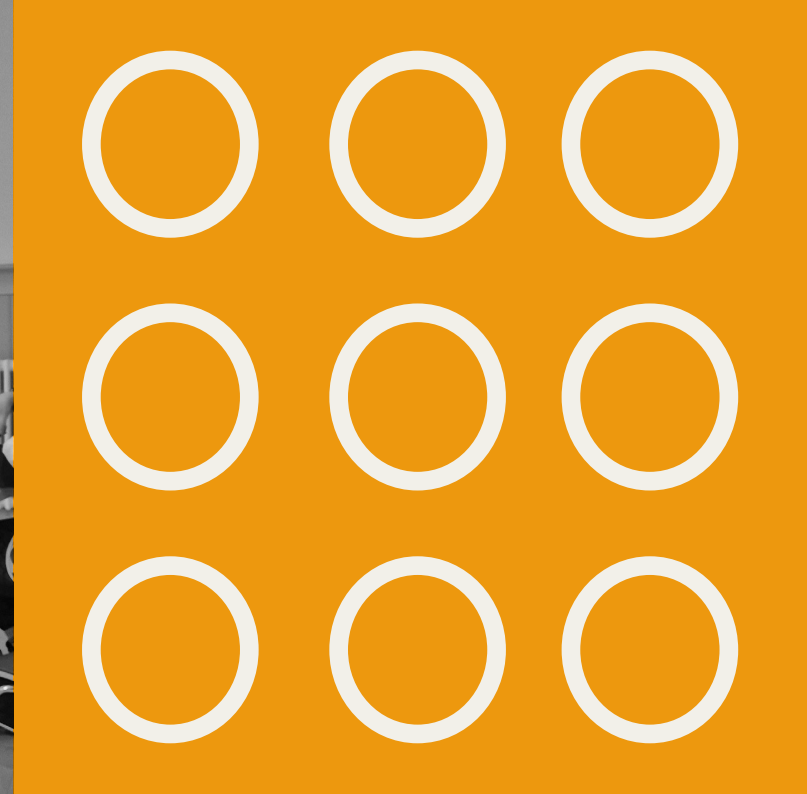
For some participants, their involvement with Open Arts spans more than two decades, making these recordings an important contemporary record of the organisation's lasting impact and the role it has played in their lives.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"Adept at drama and improvisation, film and archives were new to most participants in this group. We did, however, discover a video of one participant's grandmother singing in the Digital Film Archive! Sharing this in an early workshop was a really special bonding moment that reinforced the power of film."



8



Newington Day Centre Carers

January–February 2026

Based near the Waterworks in North Belfast, Newington Day Centre provides a vital community hub for vulnerable adults and their carers.

Through Northern Ireland Now, participants reflected on the importance of connection, mutual support and the sense of community that sustains those with caring responsibilities.

The project offered carers valuable time to step away from their daily routines, learn new creative skills and share their own experiences through film. Exploring the Digital Film Archive's collections also proved especially meaningful, with many participants recognising familiar places, people and events that prompted personal memories and conversations.

Their contributions now form part of the archive, ensuring the often-overlooked experiences of carers are represented within Northern Ireland's contemporary screen heritage.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"It was really impactful to see the resonance with archive materials of North Belfast and how this sparked conversations and enabled workshops to flow with carers in Newington Day Centre. Individuals' inspiration from the archive reinforced why it was so important for them to become a part of the archive for the future."



9



Include Youth

January–February 2026

As part of Include Youth's Give and Take Programme, this Belfast-based group of young people explored how contemporary stories are organised, described and preserved within the Digital Film Archive.

Working collaboratively, participants developed practical cataloguing skills while reviewing and organising films documenting their own experiences.

They selected and described footage from previous activities, including team-building trips, ice skating outings and cookery sessions at their youth centre, helping to ensure these memories can be discovered and understood by future audiences.

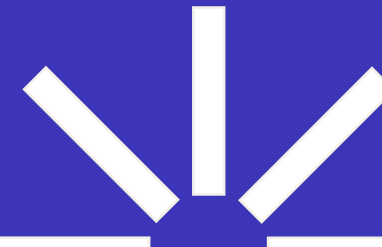
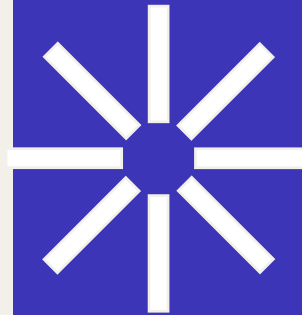
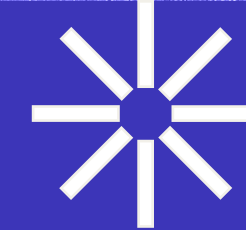
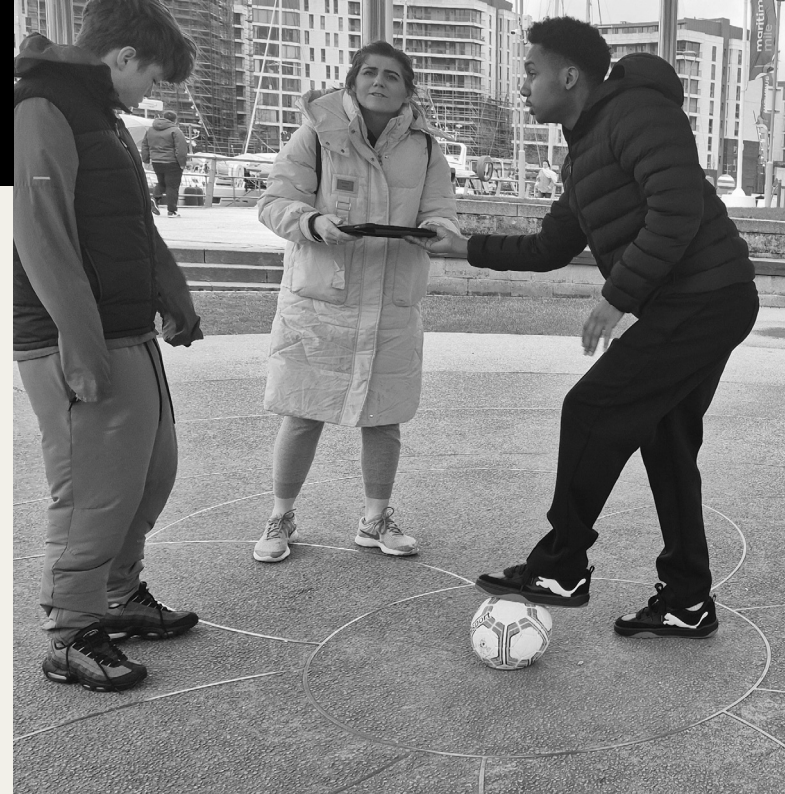
Through the process, they gained a greater appreciation of the important role cataloguing plays in making community stories accessible and preserving them as part of Northern Ireland's contemporary screen heritage.

Project Coordinator Insight:

*"Young people from the **Give and Take** programme in Include Youth had really valuable contributions that others will find inspiring to come across in our Digital Film Archive. One reflection that stood out was a young man's acknowledgement of playing football after moving to Belfast and how this united everyone from different religions and ethnicities. This was such a positive experience for him in his own life."*



10



25

Migrant Centre

February–March 2026

Operating in the Ballynafeigh Community Development Agency on South Belfast’s Ormeau Road, the Migrant Centre participants described many different experiences that they felt important to document and archive.

Many of the group were experienced filmmakers who contributed a diverse collection of narrative, documentary and experimental short films to the Northern Ireland Now Phase 2 collection. Their work explored a wide range of personal and cultural themes, including the experiences of young women facing arranged marriage in Somalia, the history and heritage of Sudan, and the challenges and opportunities of building new lives in Northern Ireland.

Project Coordinator Insight:

“Participants engaged in fascinating discussions of the problematic (mis)representation of migrant communities in Northern Ireland within the archive and were inspired to tell their stories to enhance the contemporary collections. This was a fantastic outcome that will be so vital for future research and education within the collection.”



11



Bridge NI

February–March 2026

Meeting across community venues, including centres in the Cregagh area of East Belfast, this women's group explored feminist history, representation and the importance of ensuring women's stories are preserved within the Digital Film Archive.

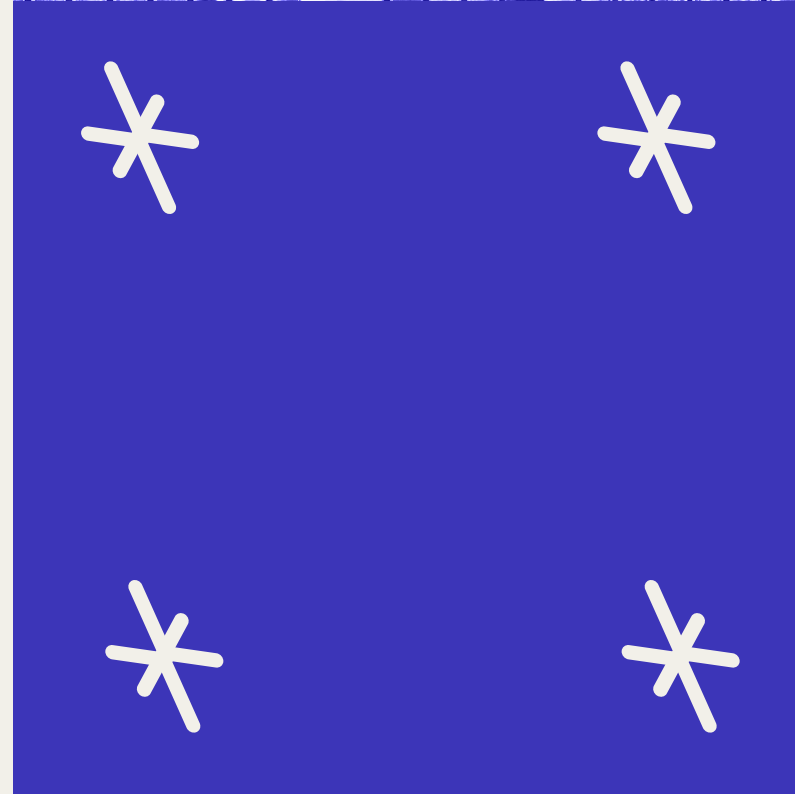
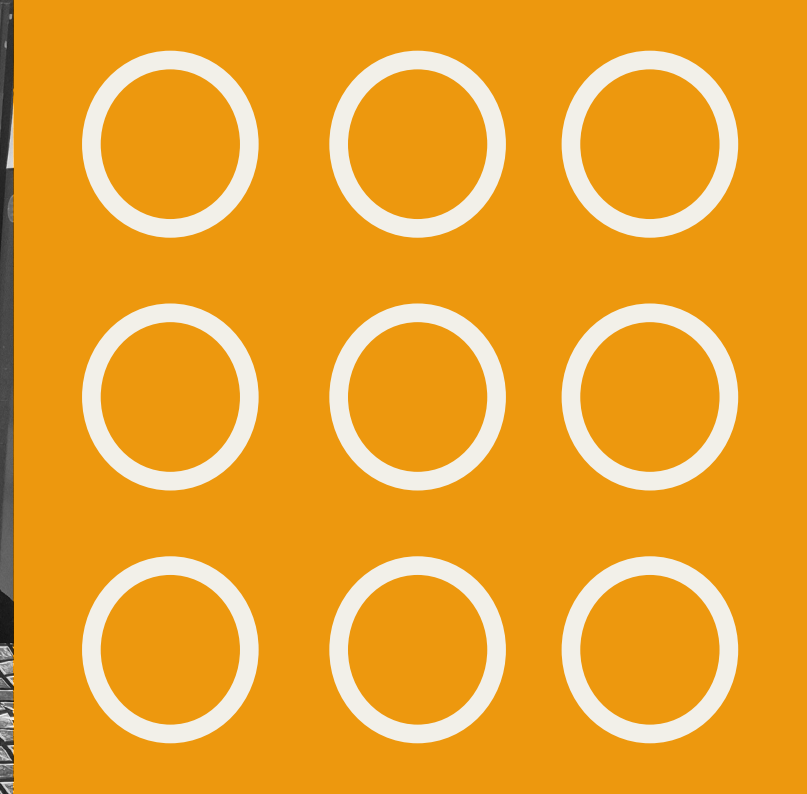
Working alongside Nerve Centre staff, participants developed digital archiving skills while documenting experiences and perspectives they felt deserved greater visibility. Although some initially lacked confidence in using new technology, they quickly embraced the creative process and produced a range of valuable contributions to the collection.

The project culminated in a celebratory International Women's Day showcase in March, recognising both their achievements and the importance of amplifying women's voices within Northern Ireland's contemporary screen heritage.

12

**Project Coordinator
Insight:**

"Forming just after lockdown, participants from Bridge NI reflected on how important it was to take the time to 'show and tell' memories shared via their own video content. This proves that skills around preservation and cataloguing of digital videos are useful for all sorts of communities."



Bridge of Hope

February–April 2026

Bringing together members from Ashton Centre, New Lodge Arts and New Lodge Youth, this partnership explored the theme of resilience through an intergenerational contemporary collecting project.

Young participants had interviewed older women from their local community, recording personal stories that reflected on life in Belfast, the challenges they had faced and the resilience that carried them through difficult times. These conversations created an important record of lived experience while fostering meaningful connections between generations.

The project culminated in a showcase attended by more than 60 people, where participants celebrated the films and reflected on how communities found hope and joy even during some of Belfast's darkest periods.

One young participant captured the spirit of the project perfectly with the words, "Hope is stronger than fear", a fitting reflection of the stories shared and the legacy they now leave within the Digital Film Archive.

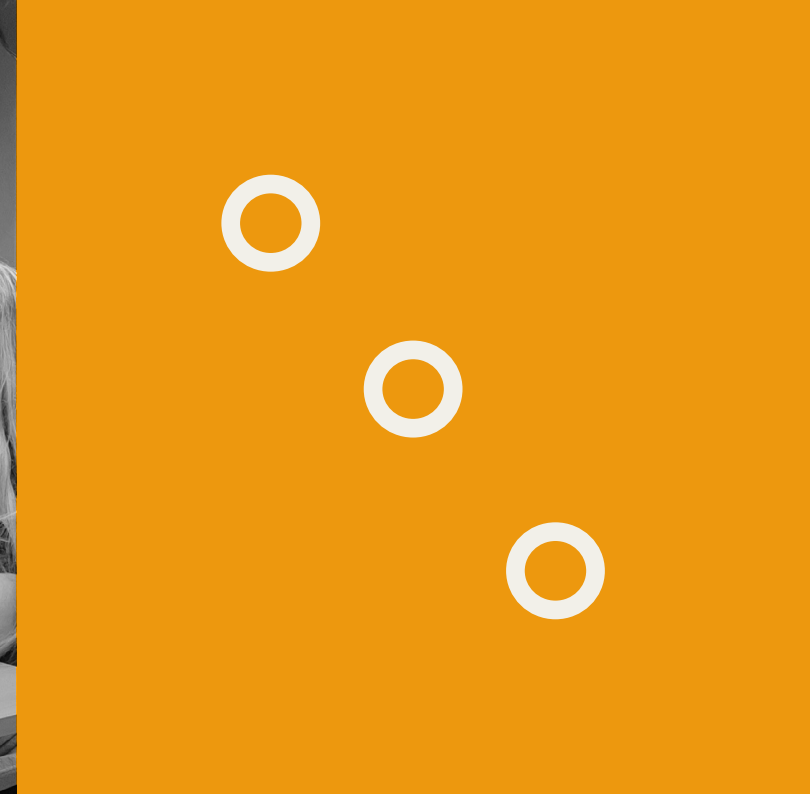
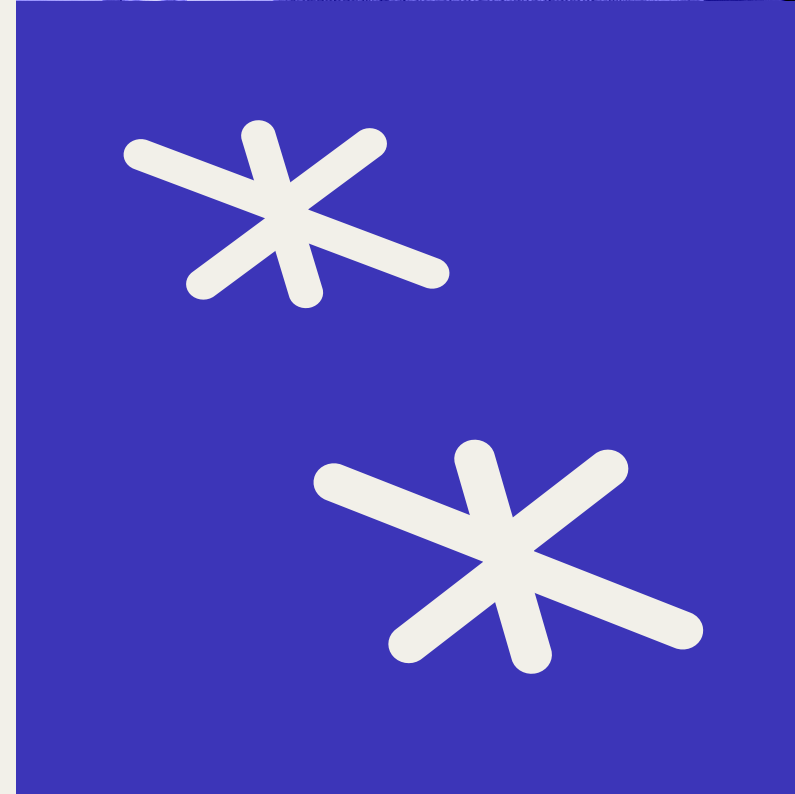
Project Coordinator

Insight:

"What really stood out about this collaboration was the success of the intergenerational conversations in the room. After some initial nerves, young people got to know the older women and they formed a bond that was heartwarming to see. It demonstrated the importance of these partnerships to enhance community peace-building."



13



Public Call Out

March 2026

Northern Ireland Now invited members of the public to take part in a special behind-the-scenes visit to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Open to anyone interested in contributing to the project, the visit offered participants a unique opportunity to explore how archives are collected, preserved and made accessible.

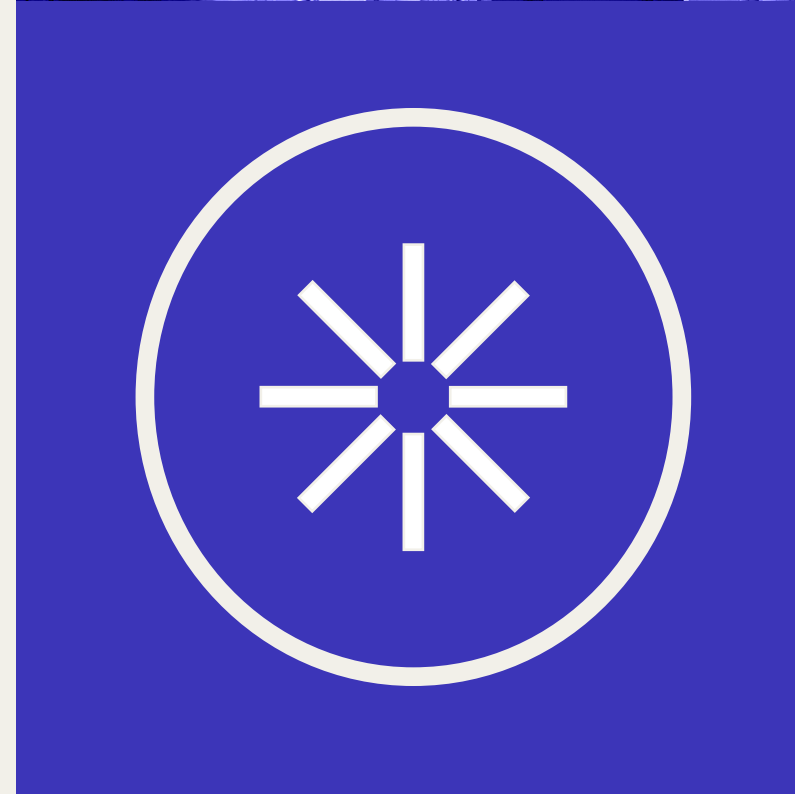
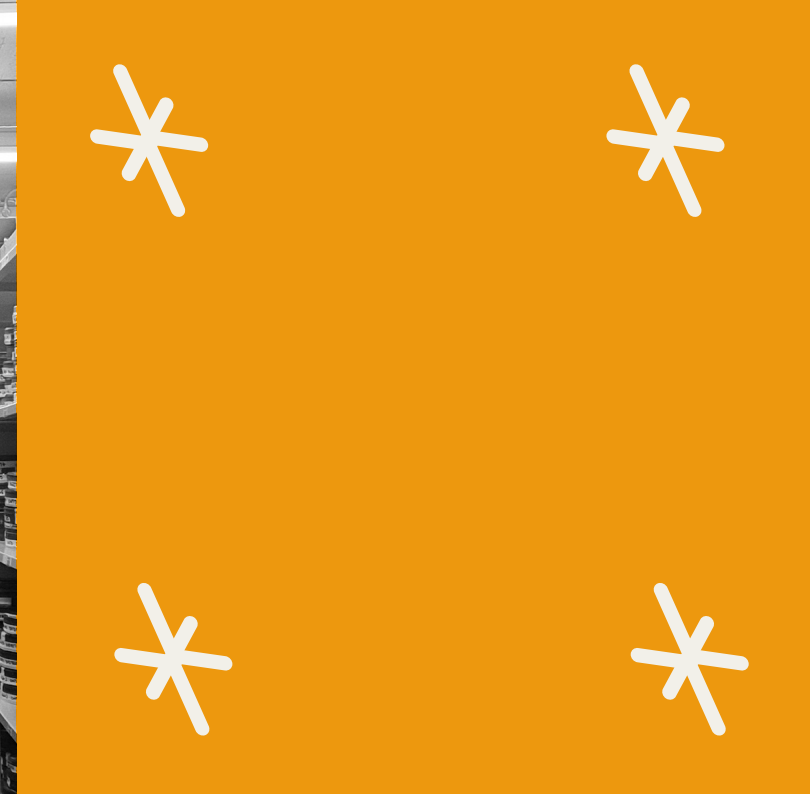
The group included journalists, filmmakers, historians and local heritage enthusiasts, each bringing their own interests and perspectives to the experience. Alongside a guided tour, participants enjoyed hands-on research with original archival materials, deepening their understanding of the role archives play in preserving Northern Ireland's shared history.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"We took a different approach in recruitment via public call out for this group. It was fantastic to see the vaults at PRONI and where the physical UTV video archive is stored. In future it would be really useful to roll out this kind of site tour for more community partners as well."



14



SHE SAFE R-City

April–June 2026

Based in North Belfast, the SHE SAFE group brings together girls aged 13–14 to explore issues that directly affect their lives, including period poverty, reproductive health education and gender equality.

As part of Northern Ireland Now, participants explored how women have been represented within historical archives. These conversations prompted thoughtful discussions about whose stories are preserved, whose voices are often missing, and how today's young women can help shape a more representative archive for the future.

Their contributions provide an important contemporary perspective, creating new connections between Belfast's past and present while ensuring the experiences of young women are better reflected in the Digital Film Archive.

Project Coordinator Insight:

"Our final showcase of the project was with SHE SAFE and we were delighted that they invited lots of friends and family to enjoy their video contributions. Hearing from the girls about why it was important to be a part of the archive, made all the difference. Many of them spoke about taking filmmaking forward in their careers in school and beyond, which was a brilliant outcome of the project."



15



Quire & Belfast Feminist Film School

May 2026

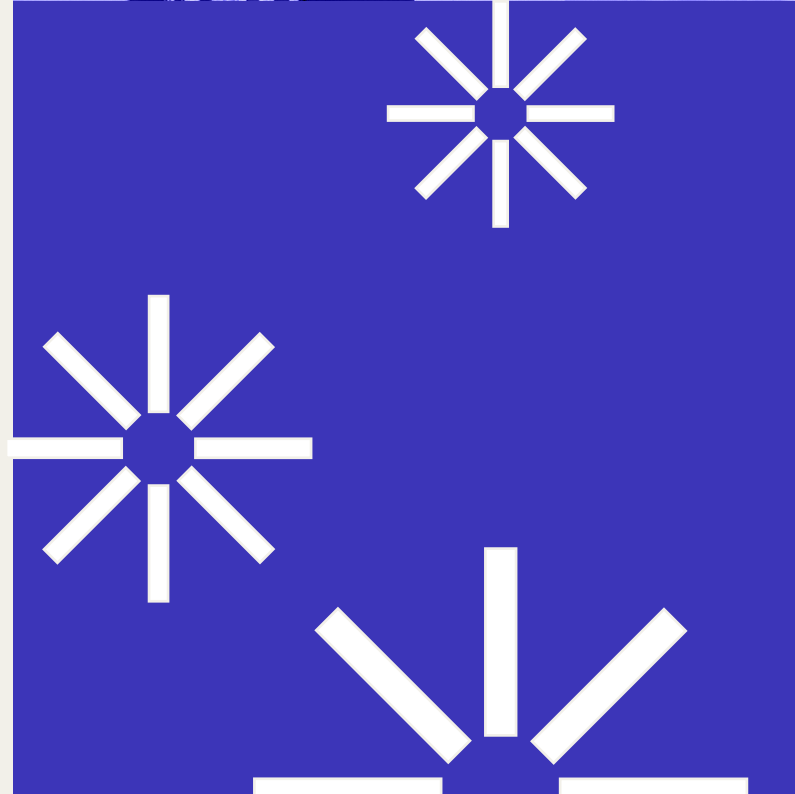
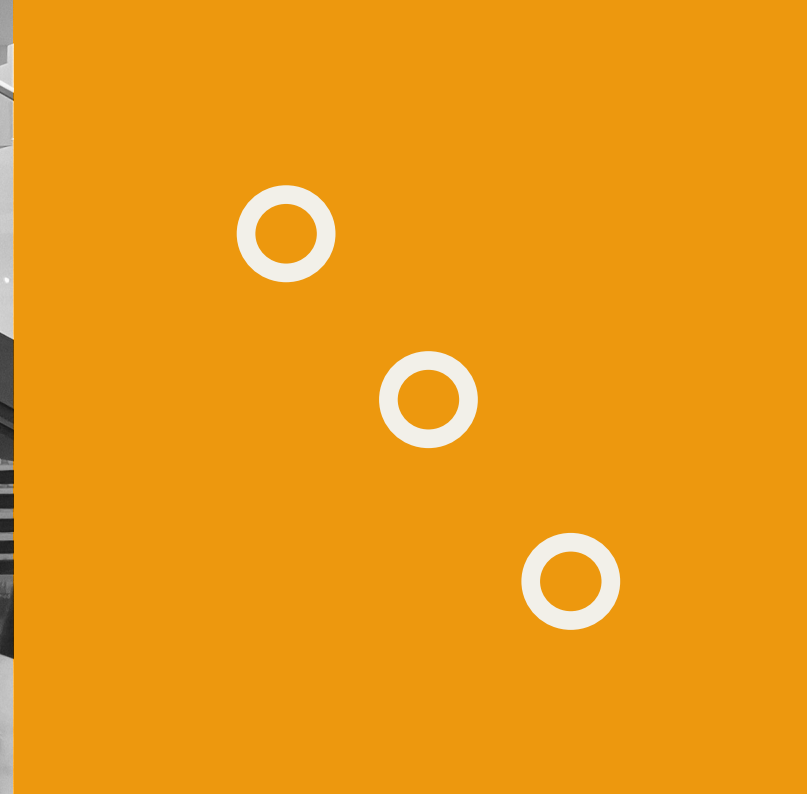
In May, two organisations with a shared commitment to LGBTQIA+ and feminist history came together at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) to explore archive collections, contribute their own film materials and consider how these stories can be preserved for future generations.

Participants included members of Quire, Belfast's LGBTQIA+ choir, alongside alumni of the Belfast Feminist Film School, a programme developed through Ulster University.

Together, they reflected on the long-term preservation of their creative work, from recordings of Quire's earliest performances to collaborative films produced through the Film School.

Discussions also explored the importance of language, identity and inclusive cataloguing, recognising that the way collections are described can be just as important as the material itself in ensuring communities are accurately represented and their stories remain discoverable.

16



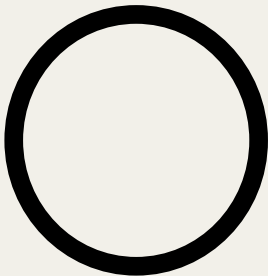
Participant Feedback

"I really enjoyed the experience in general, working with others and getting in costumes to film."



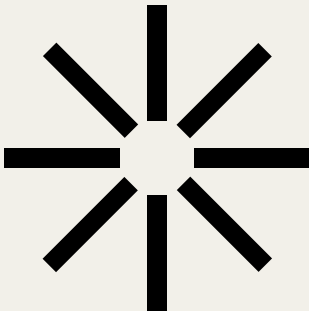
"I enjoy the creativity and ownership of each young person."

"How fun it was and how I was able to develop skills I wouldn't have been able to learn otherwise"



THANK

YOU



"Having a laugh with my friends"

"Taking part in the film & working with other kids my age to come up with fun ideas."



"Giving the young people ownership... whilst knowing they are making a snapshot in history."

"Developed new skills and more confidence in creativity"

"Seeing our child grow in confidence & learning new skills was amazing."



Belfast City Council

"Great to get together and discuss how Bridge NI started."



"Reminiscing about all our yesterdays."