



About HERe NI

HERe NI is the leading organisation in Northern Ireland dedicated to supporting LGBTQIA+ women and their families. We provide life-changing and life-saving services to those often overlooked — from mental health support and advocacy to peer connection and community building.

Founded over 20 years ago in response to a lack of inclusive, women-focused LGBTQIA+ support, we work with people of all ages across Northern Ireland — from children and young people who are part of an LGBTQIA+ family, to older women who have lived through decades of exclusion and invisibility.

What We Do

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing Support:** 1-to-1 sessions, peer-led workshops, and trauma-informed spaces
- **Community Programmes:** Social groups, creative projects, and events that reduce isolation and build confidence
- **Advocacy & Awareness:** We work with schools, healthcare providers and policymakers to make systems more inclusive
- **Specialist Work:** Including support for trans women, older and younger LGBTQIA+ women, survivors of domestic abuse, LGBTQIA+ Heritage and LGBTQIA+ families
- **Accredited LGBTQIA+ training:** We provide OCN and CPD accredited LGBTQIA+ awareness training to a wide range of organisations in person and online. All our trainers hold the TK UK 3 teaching qualification. This training can be created to meet the needs of the organisation requesting it.

Why HERe NI Matters

Too often, LGBTQIA+ women — especially trans, older, rural or low-income women — are invisible in mainstream services. HERe NI exists to change that reality. We offer safe spaces where people can feel seen, heard, and supported.

HERE NI matters because we support and empower LGBTQIA+ women in Northern Ireland through services, advocacy, community, and education — working towards a more equal, safe, and welcoming society

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against LGBTQIA+ women and girls in Northern Ireland (NI) is shaped by a complex interplay of sectarianism, conservative cultural norms, and limited access to inclusive services. LGBTQIA+ women in NI experience intimate partner violence and family-based violence, often compounded by social stigma. To understand violence against LGBTQIA+ women and girls in NI, it's important to recognise the unique cultural, social, and political context that shapes their experiences. NI has historically experienced high levels of hate crimes targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals, with women and trans women particularly vulnerable. In more conservative areas, LGBTQIA+ women face “corrective” violence aimed at enforcing heteronormativity, particularly in tight-knit or religiously conservative communities- we have observed this from women who live in Belfast but come from a minority ethnic background. LGBTQIA+ women often face discrimination within institutions meant to protect them, such as healthcare and the law. The mental health toll of experiencing violence, combined with societal stigma, has led to severe psychological distress among LGBTQIA+ women.

Hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ individuals have increased, with violent incidents often targeting women perceived as non-conforming to traditional gender roles. Northern Ireland's history of sectarian conflict and strong religious influences contributes to a cultural environment that can be hostile to LGBTQIA+ identities. Religious leaders in some communities have publicly condemned LGBTQIA+ identities, leading to family rejection and community ostracism for LGBTQIA+ women. LGBTQIA+ women in NI face unique barriers when experiencing intimate partner violence, often exacerbated by social conservatism and lack of inclusive services.

The Government (both in Stormont and Westminster) must provide adequate resources to organisations like HERE NI to help us achieve the following:

1. Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Harmful Social Norms

 **Impact:** Society will shift towards **more equal, respectful relationships**, free from harmful gender norms.

2. Encouraging Inclusive and Respectful Relationship Education (RSE)

 **Impact:** A new generation will grow up understanding respect, consent, and healthy relationship dynamics.

3. Reducing discrimination and increasing social inclusion

💡 **Impact:** A more inclusive society where everyone, regardless of gender or sexuality, can live free from fear and discrimination.

4. Strengthening support systems and safe spaces

💡 **Impact:** Survivors of violence will have more pathways to safety, support, and justice.

5. Empowering individuals to become active agents of change

💡 **Impact:** A society where people feel responsible for preventing violence and promoting equality in their daily interactions.

By addressing violence against LGBTQIA+ women and girls and providing adequate resources, it creates ripple effects—promoting respect, equality, and nonviolence in all relationships. When everyone understands, respects, and values diversity, society becomes safer and more inclusive.

Northern Ireland urgently needs a resourced LGBTQIA+ strategy to ensure equality, safety, and inclusion for a community that continues to face disproportionate levels of discrimination, poor mental health, and social exclusion. Unlike other UK regions, NI has no coordinated approach to tackling LGBTQIA+ inequality across health, education, housing, or justice. A strategy would provide a clear framework for action, accountability, and investment—centering lived experience and ensuring public services meet the real needs of LGBTQIA+ people. Without it, progress remains fragmented and the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals remain at risk and overlooked in policy and practice.

HERE NI hold a presence on a range of forums to ensure that LGBTQIA+ women's voices are heard in efforts to end violence against women and girls.

- HERE NI sit on the Expert Reference Group for the implementation of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (2024-203), as one of the key stakeholders across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors to advise the Department of Health and Department of Justice who oversee the strategy.
- We are also part of the Belfast Area Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership and sit on the Protection and Justice working group, to ensure experts in the area are aware of the services that our organisation provides.
- HERE NI also sit on the All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence.
- HERE NI sit on the Anti-Sexual Harassment Forum convened by Raise Your Voice. Raise your Voice is a project that will tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence across Northern Ireland through working in the community, increasing public awareness, educating organisations on best practice and lobbying for legislative advances in this area.
- HERE NI are on the steering group for a WRDA project on gathering the experiences of women affected by violence and homelessness. HERE NI service users have engaged in this project by giving personal testimonies of violence and homelessness

as an LGBTQIA+ person. These will be used to build a campaign to end violence against women and girls and homelessness in the coming months.

Consultation work:

- HERe NI have responded to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework in September 2023.
- HERe NI have submitted a response to the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Consultation in September 2024.
- HERe NI have given appeared before the Department of Education in October 2024 to give evidence on their mini-inquiry into RSE to stress the importance of teaching around healthy relationships to drive prevention efforts to tackle violence against women and girls. (see committee hearings: <https://niassembly.tv/committee-for-education-meeting-wednesday-16-october-2024/>)
- HERe NI submitted written and oral evidence to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls on the human rights status of LGBTQIA+ women in Northern Ireland.
- HERe NI give oral evidence to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in January 2024 on the specific situation of LGBTQIA+ women in Northern Ireland and their experiences of violence.

Research engagement:

- HERe NI have taken part in Preventing Violence against Women and Girls in Public Spaces in Belfast - Systems mapping workshops – with Queen’s University Belfast to try to tackle the root causes of VAWG and identify feedback loops. The outcome will be the development of a series of actions to tackle VAWG in Belfast.
- Led on the Department of Justice funded project on the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and abuse on the LGBTQIA+ community (to be launched 1st September 2025).

Speaking engagement:

- HERe NI spoke at this years ‘Imagine Festival’ in Belfast on the panel event ‘Her Story: Ending Online Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland.’
- HERe NI and other sector organisations met with the Justice Minister to lobby for updated hate crime legislation (to include gender identity as a protected characteristic), and the importance of funding LGBTQIA+ domestic abuse worker.

Campaigning:

- Launch of social media campaign for 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. This was to raise awareness that gender-based violence can happen to LGBTQIA+ people and within LGBTQIA+ relationships.
- Attending annual Reclaim the Night Rallies.