Conserving stories of Northern Ireland's LGBTQ+



Richard O'Leary, project co-ordinator for The Troubles I've Seen, tells us how the project is going, how it has adapted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and offers some advice.

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In September 2019, we announced a £70,000 grant for The Troubles I've Seen, the first large-scale LGBTQ+ project of its kind to be funded in Northern Ireland.

The two year project aimed to capture and record the memories and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s. This was a time of significant legislative change, and through The Troubles I've Seen, we hear the story of those who lived during this period for the first time.

As part of our LGBTQ+ History Month celebration throughout February, we caught up with project co-ordinator Richard O'Leary to find out how National Lottery funding is making a difference.

Tell us a bit about your project

"Because of their experiences of criminalisation, discrimination and prejudice in Northern Ireland, many LGBT people were not 'out', did not keep written records or openly share their stories.

"This project aims to collect, share and conserve the hidden heritage of the LGBT community, focusing on the 1980s and 1990s.

"We've recruited 16 volunteers and they help by locating queer objects, discovering LGBT stories and seeking out places from our LGBT past. We've also created a social media account and we're developing a digital archive to conserve our LGBT stories.

"We will also be producing a documentary on 'The Troubles I've Seen".

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the project?



Elspeth, a volunteer

"Two weeks after the launch of our project we went into lockdown and everything had to change. Our volunteers were recruited online, and all our meetings and training take place online too. We've also had to postpone our documentary until year two of the project.

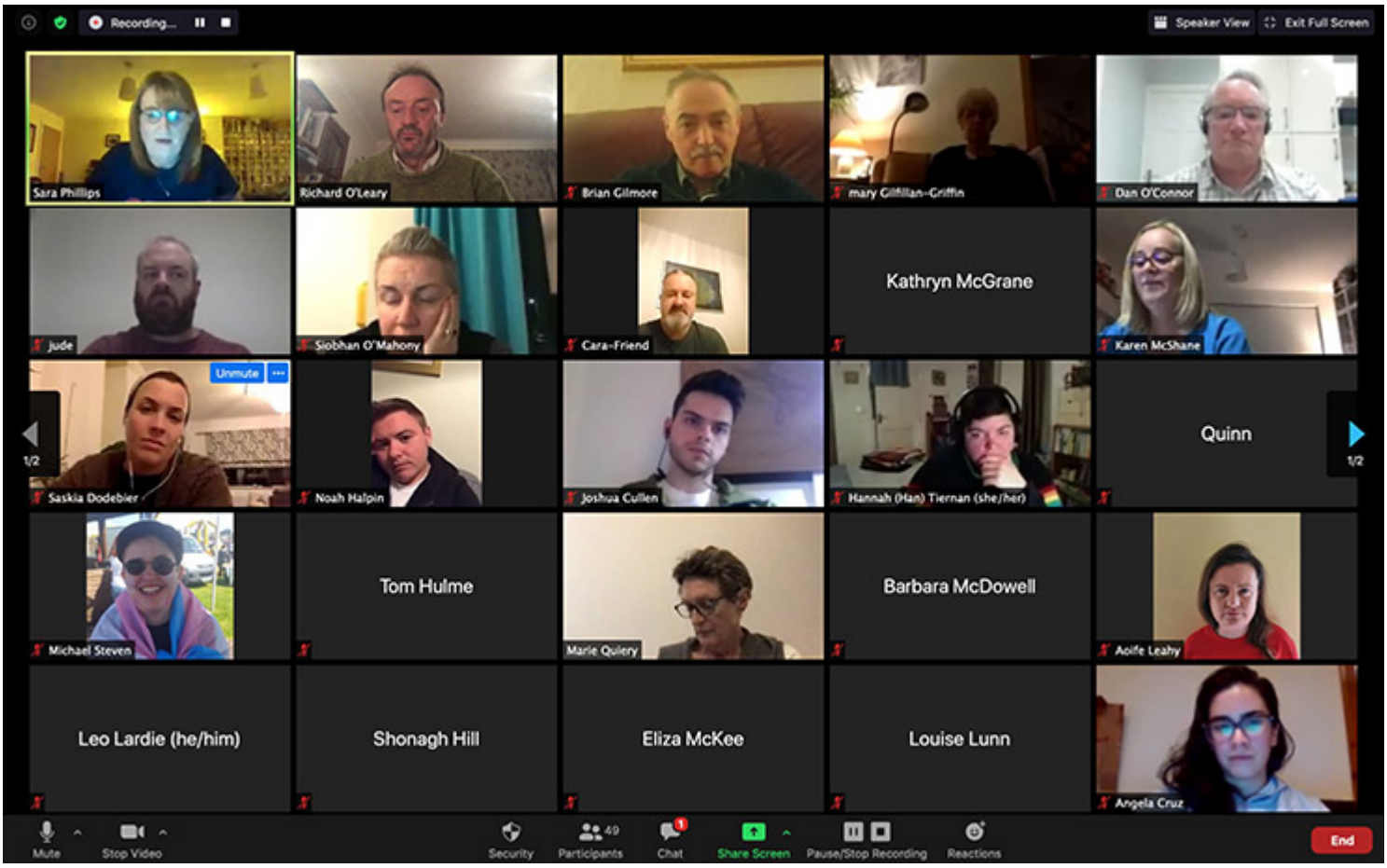
"Instead of visiting physical archives together, our volunteers have been visiting places individually and recording them on their phones. They've also been really creative by finding and recording queer objects in their own homes – embracing the idea of heritage from home."

What has the response been like to the project?

"The response of the LGBT community has been fantastic.

"We've had lots of interest from people who do not identify as LGBT but are curious to learn about LGBT heritage and history.

"We have hundreds of followers on our social media accounts and our monthly LGBT History Club attracts an average of 50 participants. There is a real appreciation from our audience for these virtual community gatherings."



What advice would you give to heritage organisations to help them engage with the LGBT+ community?

"Heritage organisations need to be aware that there is an appetite for LGBT heritage from both the LGBT community and wider society.

"Our project has built successful partnerships with the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, The Museum Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

"If they reach out to the LGBT individuals and organisations they will find partners in helping them bring this heritage to the fore."

Find out more

The Troubles I've Seen is led by HERe NI working in partnership with The Rainbow Project and Cara-Friend. To find out more about what the group are getting up to during LGBTQ+ History Month, follow them on Twitter @LGBTHistoryNI.

Learn about more LGBTQ+ projects we've been proud to fund.





in Northern Ireland

Cara McCann. Credit: Pacemaker Press



ty, thanks to emergency funding

Martha having a costume fitting

Foyle Valley Transport and Railway Museum