

# Belfast PEACE IV

## Belonging to Belfast

A celebration of Belfast's  
diverse communities



Energising Belfast together



Belfast  
City Council



Rialtas na hÉireann  
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Northern Ireland  
Executive  
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# Welcome



**I am immensely proud, as Chair of the Shared City Partnership at Belfast City Council, to introduce this Belfast PEACE IV Culture Café review - looking at the cultures featured in the PEACE IV Culture Café series of events that have been delivered from 2018-2022.**



The PEACE IV Programme is designed to support peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border region and is funded by the European Union and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Working closely with local communities, we developed a Culture café series, that focussed on sharing the traditions, life, food, cultural artefacts, and language of the diverse cultures that call Belfast their home. The events were designed to promote understanding, create conversations to challenge stereotypes, encourage respect for others and engage communities to build good relations.

The Council's Community Plan, the Belfast Agenda, outlines the vision for Belfast as "a city re-imagined, connected and resurgent, delivering inclusive growth that leaves no-one behind."

Good relations is key to this, because it needs us all to work together and contribute to making the City safe and welcoming for all. Through the Shared City Partnership, we bring together Councillors, statutory agencies and voluntary and community partners to advise and guide on building good relations across the city. We believe good relations is everyone's business, we all have a role to play to create a brighter and better future for Belfast.

The PEACE IV Programme is important to our good relations work. With investment of £14.5m from 2018 to 2022, its co-designed local projects have taken many forms across its three themes. Its objectives are to build positive relations between communities, encourage use of shared spaces and services and invest in our children and young people as the next generation of our city.

Our Culture Cafés have shone a spotlight on a range of cultures here in Belfast:

- African
- African-Caribbean
- Arabic
- Bulgarian
- Chinese
- Indian
- Italian
- Jewish
- Polish
- Spanish

They have been imaginative and interesting, generating lively conversations. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to the Culture Café series. We thank ArtsEkta for compiling this Belonging to Belfast booklet.

The Culture Cafés have also contributed to the aims of our Good Relations strategy by, increasing knowledge of diverse cultures, identities and heritage, creating respect for diversity, fostering an increased sense of belonging, and also challenging racism and stereotypes.

We all have differences and similarities, and that is a beautiful thing to be celebrated. We are proud of the impact the Culture Cafés have had, in a broad sense, they have promoted Belfast as a city for all. Of course, we have a lot more work to do to create a shared society, and we hope that you will contribute to achieving this.

With greater understanding and respect, our city will be stronger and more resilient, enriched by the cultures and communities within it.

**JOHN KYLE,**  
**Chair of the Shared City Partnership, Belfast City Council**  
**June 2022**

# Belfast's Migration Story



# The African Community



**With a long history of migration, Belfast is a proud city of many different cultures and traditions.**

The city grew rapidly in the second half of the 19th century as it moved to become one of the engines of the Industrial Revolution. It was in this period that migrant labour first came to Belfast. This included the settlement of Jewish people mainly from Germany who primarily worked in the city's bustling linen industry.

In the early 20th century, immigration from India, Pakistan and China led to the development of a growing diverse community in the city who contributed to economic life through setting up small family-run businesses.

Global trends at the turn of the 21st century resulted in the arrival of migrants from Portugal and South East Asia including the Philippines who filled vacancies predominantly within the food processing and health and social care sectors respectively.

Following the expansion of the European Union in 2004 to include A8 countries, there was a shift in the scale and pattern of migration including high levels of people from Central and Eastern European countries, most notably Poland and Lithuania, who sought employment and new opportunities in the city.

It is now estimated that the largest minority ethnic communities in Belfast are from Eastern Europe followed by the Chinese, South Asian, South East Asian, African, African Caribbean and Arabic speaking communities. Of course, Belfast is home to many different communities each of whom bring their culture, food, language, art and traditions to the city which enriches us all.

**The African community in Belfast has grown greatly over the past number of years. The presence of the community can be seen across just about every sector in society, from schools and shops to hospitals and universities. The African community has added so much to the city of Belfast, in professional skills, cultural enrichment and international connections.**

## Life in Belfast

In Belfast, there are doctors from Sudan working in the city's hospitals as well as nurses from Zimbabwe, professors from Nigeria and business people from Somalia, all setting up life across the city. The African organisations that are emerging have been able to give a voice to this diverse community and there are many representatives on a range of issues, from campaigns on educational opportunities to combating racism.

Over the years, small groups have emerged from within the community to represent particular interests. There are groups from Darfur, Eritrea, Zambia, Uganda and many others. And, of course, there are many international campaigns, such as the Sudan Doctor's Association, that feel they have the space here to campaign for peace and freedom in their home country.

## Culture

The culture of Africa is incredibly diverse due to the fact it is varied, depending on which country you visit. The continent is home to multiple populations, many of which have been influenced by external factors. Each country has its own tribes, languages and cultural differences. Even small African countries like Uganda have more than thirty established tribes.





## In Conversation with **Jahswill Emmanuel**



### **Food**

The African continent is home to people from hundreds of different tribes, ethnic and social groups. The food of Africa is a combination of local fruit, grains, vegetables, milk and meat products, their own traditions and Arab, European and Asian influences. Eating habits of the different African regions vary greatly. Colonisation has also affected the food and drink served in some parts of Africa such as Kenya where it is common for people to drink tea.

### **Language**

There are thousands of indigenous languages and dialects spoken in Africa. Every African country has its own languages, even the smaller countries. However, because African countries were once part of European colonies, many people are able to speak Creole or Pidgin versions of English, Portuguese or French. In Northern Africa Arabic is spoken, whereas in East Africa Swahili is the dominant language.



**Jahswill Emmanuel has helped more than 50 different nationalities to become part of community life in Belfast through his charity Multi-Ethnic Sports and Culture Northern Ireland (MSCNI) set up in 2016.**

The father-of-three devotes much of his spare time to running sports programmes and events for developing 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' youth.

Ethnic minority groups can struggle with life here and Jahswill wanted to help tackle the isolation they feel and encourage participation in sports.

Originally from Nigeria, Jahswill left his home country looking for a better life when he was just 16, moving to London initially and finally settling in Northern Ireland in 2004. He married a Belfast woman and has four children.

He explains what led him to settle here: "I was with some mates living in London but was finding it a struggle as I couldn't get work. My cousin lived here and he said I should come over as it was a really peaceful place. When I arrived, there were no African shops and we had to use an Asian shop.

"Now it is so diverse you have shops for all different communities in Northern Ireland as there has been such a growth in diversity and multi-cultural communities here. Also, we now have African churches where we can go to worship. However, in terms of cultural expressions, we are behind as not many African cultures are being celebrated.

"I think cultural awareness should be incorporated into all projects, so that local people can be fully aware of emerging cultures in Northern Ireland and vice versa."

# In Conversation with Lori-Gatsi Barnett



**Lori Gatsi-Barnett was born in Zimbabwe where she lived until she was 17, when she moved to the US to attend university in Pennsylvania. She initially studied medicine, but realised it wasn't the right path for her and decided to explore business instead.**

After university, Lori worked at a large multinational corporation, gaining business experience and invaluable mentoring from the company's vast, culturally diverse staff.

Her wanderlust brought her to London, where she worked in a variety of industries including estate agencies and interior design. Lori and her daughter went to stay with Lori's brother who had settled in Northern Ireland.

Being welcomed by her sister-in-law's family helped them settle in and cemented Lori's decision to stay in Belfast. Sunday dinners featured "more potatoes than I've ever seen before!" and was like "having a Thanksgiving dinner every week". With women running the kitchen and the sharing of food and laughter, it also reminded her of family gatherings in Zimbabwe.

Having travelled and worked around the world, Lori believes people must be seen "as individuals with a contribution to make". Since moving to Belfast, she has become known as a social entrepreneur

and diversity champion. She has chaired HAPANI, been involved with the African Chamber of Commerce, and more recently founded the JoinHer Network, an organisation that provides training, events and workshops centred around cultural diversity, equality and community connection.

Lori compares Northern Ireland's historic peace agreement to Martin Luther King Jr's 'I Have A Dream' address. She says: "Every country has people that dream of a better tomorrow than they have today. I think the Good Friday Agreement was the same desire for better... it doesn't say we forget your pain, or invalidate all the atrocities. It says, if you and I are willing to be vulnerable together and set aside the things that are designed to keep us apart, we can create a world that can allow all of us to be the embodiment of that Good Friday Agreement."

## Recipe African Zanzibar Chicken



**Feast on the warm flavours of Zanzibar, an island off the east coast of Africa. Known as the Spice Island, Zanzibar has food like nowhere else in the world. Have a go at preparing your own flavoursome chicken with a blend of traditional spices.**

### Shopping List

- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 large chicken, jointed into 8 pieces, skin on
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 green chillies, chopped
- 3 green or red tomatoes, finely chopped
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp coriander seeds
- 4 green cardamom pods
- 2 limes, juice only
- 275ml chicken stock
- 2 x 400ml tins coconut milk
- 1 bunch basil
- cooked basmati rice, to serve

### Let's Get Cooking!

#### Step 1

Heat a deep-sided frying pan until hot and add the oil and then the chicken. Fry on each side for about one minute, until the meat is browned all over. Remove the meat from the pan and set aside on a plate.

#### Step 2

Add the onions, garlic, one of the chillies and the green (or red) tomatoes and cook for about five minutes. Meanwhile, place the turmeric, cumin seeds, coriander seeds and cardamom pods into a pestle and mortar and grind until fine.

#### Step 3

Add the ground spices to the onion and tomato mixture. Add the lime juice. Add the chicken stock and coconut milk to the pan and bring to the boil. Return the chicken to the pan and simmer for 20 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through.

#### Step 4

Place the remaining chilli and the basil into the pestle and mortar and grind to a paste. Add the chilli and basil paste to the chicken at the last minute and season to taste.

**Serve hot with basmati rice!**

# The Arabic Community



**Belfast is now home to a growing and diverse Arabic speaking population. With the arrival of many new migrants in recent years, largely as a result of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, there now exists a rich Arabic culture in the city.**

## The Arab World

The Arab world is made up of 414.5 million people that live in 22 Arabic speaking countries. These are situated in the Middle East and North Africa, including countries such as Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Perhaps the most common Arab characteristic is adherence to the Islamic faith. Muslim Arabs comprise about 93% percent of the Arab population. The other 7% of Arabs are largely Christian or Druze.

## Food

Arabic food stems from a variety of cultures around the Mediterranean, Red, Arabian, and Caspian Seas. While Arabic food encompasses a variety of cuisines which vary from region to region, it's generally characterised by fragrant and copious spices, nuts, olive oil, and creamy elements. Mutton, lamb, and goat are traditional meats. Chicken, camel, beef and fish are also used, but less frequently.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is a holy month of fasting in Islamic culture. It has deep ties to the Quran and holds spiritual significance for Muslims around the world. Throughout the month, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, only eating after a prayer at sunset.

The evening meal that follows is often a social event shared in homes or mosques. Shops and restaurants stay open late into the night to accommodate daily fasts, creating a lively nightlife. In the morning, drums and bells sound before dawn, warning Muslims to eat their last meals before the next day of fasting. When the month ends, people celebrate with a large feast and festivities known as Eid al-Fitr. Pastries and sweets are served in abundance alongside other celebrations, such as gift giving and family visits.

## Life in Belfast

The majority of Muslims in Belfast come from families who immigrated during the late 20th century. Today they come from over 42 countries of origin, from Western Europe all the way through to the Far East. As of December 2019, there are a total of ten Islamic centres or prayer places in Northern Ireland the majority of which are located in Belfast. These centres organise social and religious events for the Muslim communities in their respective areas. The Belfast Islamic Centre was established in 1978 and is one of the city's oldest mosques.

## Cultural Links

Belfast has an emerging landscape of cultural organisations which are helping to promote the Arab culture and traditions within local communities and create a sense of belonging for the diverse Arabic community that now call the city their home. For example, local group Yallaa provide cultural training workshops, Arabic cultural events and cookery demonstrations.

More recently, an Arabic Saturday School has been set up in the city by a group of parents from Syria, to keep the Arabic language alive in the younger generations who are being brought up in Belfast.



## In Conversation with **Noha Oman**



**Noha came to Belfast from Sudan seeking asylum in 2017. While her application for asylum was being processed, she lived in temporary accommodation, in the North and East of the City.**

One of the first things Noha did was to find voluntary work - not only to occupy herself, but as a way to learn about Belfast, meet new people, gain work experience and contribute to her new community. Speaking both English and Arabic, she quickly found a voluntary role teaching in Conway Education Centre, supporting other people "in the same situation" as her.

It was important for Noha to build and maintain her English language skills, especially as the new accents and fast pace of speech in Belfast could be challenging. She attended conversational classes in local churches, which she says were also invaluable for learning about everyday life and customs here. Noha also attended and volunteered at a Friendship Club in Belfast, which helped her make even more new friends and enjoy days out to places like Newcastle.

When she received refugee status, she was able to find paid employment and works as a support worker at a Belfast homeless shelter. She also went to Ulster University in Jordanstown to complete her Master's Degree in Law. In Sudan, Noha worked with vulnerable people, including refugees, and victims of human trafficking, smuggling and other forms of abuse and studied international human rights law and justice.

In her time in Belfast, Noha has seen the city become noticeably more diverse. She comments it has a "more vibrant atmosphere, with more integration". Pre-pandemic, she socialised as often as work allowed, enjoying a number of multicultural festivals and events.

She loves to see food, music and customs being shared, but notes that many of her Belfast colleagues "go very red in the face" if they try any spicy Sudanese food she brings in to share.

## In Conversation with **Lana Osman**



**Lana Osman arrived in Northern Ireland from Sudan in 2019 and lives in Belfast with her husband and son, and has other friends and family here too.**

She points out the "historic relationship" between the UK and Sudan, with many Sudanese students coming to live and study in England during the 1980s and 1990s. Lana knew a bit about England before coming to the UK, but knew little about Northern Ireland.

Lana volunteered for HAPANI (Horn of Africa People's Aid NI) in Belfast during her first weeks living here. Although the organisation has "Africa" in its name, she says it helps "anyone, especially asylum seekers and refugees". With an excellent education and a second language, Lana volunteered in helping people navigate education, housing, and other governmental systems.

After volunteering for a few months, she successfully applied for a job as finance and administration officer within the organisation. Lana holds an MSc in management from Khartoum University in Sudan, but originally studied chemical engineering.

Lana has become a qualified interpreter since arriving in Northern Ireland and is about to complete an MSc in Business and Innovation at Ulster University.

She says she feels at home in Northern Ireland, recognising similarities between social attitudes and the way of life in Sudan and NI. Lana sees the Arabic community in Belfast growing, with people from Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Algeria and Indonesia, to name a few. Her experience has been mainly positive, but says some negative attitudes to refugees and immigrants remain.

"I hope people can understand that people arriving here have often faced suffering, and don't deserve to face more suffering." She says it is "important to bring cultures together" and she's delighted to see organisations like ArtsEkta, Beyond Skin, Yallaa and Ormeau Community Cinema helping to showcase Arabic art, food, film and culture. "It is entertainment, but gives an opportunity for locals to see another part of the world."



# Learn Arabic Calligraphy

**Born during the Islamic Golden Age, Kufic script is the earliest invented style of Arabic calligraphy and is prized for its beautiful compositions and the harmony of its lines and forms.**

## What you will need

- Square cut bamboo pen
- A3 sheet of paper
- Ink

*If you do not have access to a bamboo pen or ink, you can use a normal ink pen to practice your calligraphy.*

## Basic Arabic Calligraphy Shapes

**Vertical stroke** - pull your pen downwards to create a straight vertical stroke.

**Horizontal stroke** - Pull your pen from left to right to create a horizontal stroke.

**Oblique stroke** - pull your pen down at an angle so that it gently curves, ending in a horizontal stroke that sits above the line of your paper.

**Circle** - Use two strokes to form your circle, almost as if you were drawing rounded parentheses pushed together.

**Returning tail** - Create a line that looks like a tilde (~), then from the left side extend it into a downward curve.

## Basic Arabic Calligraphy Writing

The aleph is the first letter in Kufic script and is often used as a warm up that beyond helping you gain confidence can also serve as a form of meditation. To make an aleph, create a vertical stroke and then gently curve it to the right.

## Work from Right to Left

In Arabic calligraphy, text is written from right to left, so as you're practicing make sure to write in that direction.

## Go Over Your Strokes

Because a pen can't hold much ink, to create solid, dark lines you will need to re-dip it frequently so that you can go over and fill in your strokes.



# The African Caribbean Community

**In Belfast, we have a large and diverse African Caribbean community. Caribbean culture is a mesmerizing mix of influences rooted in its rich heritage, shaped by its long history of colonisation, and moulded by waves of immigration. The region is a vibrant mix of different languages, cuisine, music, and customs. Its culture is a beautiful blend of traditions shaped by each country's socio-cultural experiences.**

## Caribbean Islands

The Caribbean Islands is an archipelago located in the Caribbean Sea, that can be subdivided into a few different regions: the Lucayan Archipelago, the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles and the ABC Islands. There are 13 sovereign states and 17 dependent territories in the Caribbean, and the predominant languages are English, Spanish, French, Dutch and Antillean creole. The Caribbean sprawls across more than 1.06 million square miles and is primarily located between North America and South America.

## Language

The Caribbean's diversity is reflected in its many dialects and languages. Spanish is the official language in many countries like the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba while French is spoken in areas including Haiti,

Guadeloupe, Martinique, St Barthelemy, French Guiana, and St Martin. People in other areas like Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saaba, St Eustatius, and St Maarten on the other hand can speak Dutch. Creole and Patois are spoken across the region. Although English is the most common language spoken by many locals which makes it easy for tourists to go around the islands.

## Music

Music as any other cultural aspect is closely related and determined by the history of its region. Over the years music was a means of escape for many and is today an excellent representation of Caribbean society. Some of the genres to gain wide popularity outside the Caribbean include Merengue, Calypso, Reggae, Salsa, Soca and Zouk.





## In Conversation with **Wendy McGuire**



### **Food**

Food is considered as the utmost essential trail of Caribbean culture. The food cooked by the population of a Caribbean island is a combination of diversified ingredients alongside different flavours which varies across regions. Moreover, this a long traditions in the Caribbean culture where the entire family cooks collectively to celebrate achievements.

### **Celebrations**

Based on the region's folklore and customs, Caribbean parades are known the world over for their music, dance moves, and vibrant costumes. They showcase the best aspects of the rich Caribbean culture and their people's vibrant way of life. Each year different countries in the region host hundreds of festivals and carnivals and people take preparations seriously.

Sometimes called a "carnaval" these fun street parties are meant to celebrate and commemorate events in history. Music is an important part of these parades as well as glittering costumes and colourful floats.



### **Wendy McGuire was brought up in the midst of the African Caribbean community in Birmingham and has been head chef in some of Belfast's finest kitchens.**

She now works in Established in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter – a specialist coffee shop where everything from the ketchup to the bread is made fresh on the premises.

Her family, who are originally from Jamaica, were among the infamous Windrush generation who settled in the UK after the Second World War. Wendy came to Northern Ireland 25 years ago after meeting her husband who is from Belfast.

She says: "I grew up really interested in food from the age of five. My mum got fed up with me wanting to always be in the kitchen but she taught me so much.

"I am a bit of a novelty being black and a woman and wanting to work as a chef in kitchens.

"Because I was female, I needed to go the extra mile to prove myself. I had the skills and experience but not the qualifications so I studied for all my NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Belfast and I am also classically trained in French cuisine.

"I think because of my colour people always think that I just cook spicy food. Caribbean food it is so diverse and influenced by so many other cultures. It's also about cooking and having fun."

Up until six years ago she had to drive to Dublin for most of her ingredients and is relieved to now be able to source them in Belfast. Now a much more culturally diverse city than when she first arrived, she does regard Belfast as home.

She adds: "Belfast has come so far and so many people coming and going keeps it fresh and alive.

"There is a lot of opportunity for people who are moving here, the city is quite welcoming in that way and there are lots of really good positive things happening."



# Recipe Jerk Chicken

In African Caribbean culture, Jerk chicken is one of the treasured dishes and no party is complete without one. Gracing your dinner table with this recipe never disappoints and will leave your loved ones wanting more.

## Shopping List

- 1 pound chicken thighs (deboned)
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- 3 garlic cloves (minced)
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2tbsp walkers wood jerk seasoning
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp thyme (ground)
- 4 tbsp cooking oil

## Let's Get Cooking!

### Step 1

In a large bowl, add all your ingredients apart from chicken pieces. Mix them using your fingers until they are properly mixed.

### Step 2

Add your chicken pieces, making sure each piece is fully coated. Put the bowl in a fridge and leave it for 5 hours or overnight to marinate

### Step 3

Place the chicken pieces on a grill and keep turning them often while applying cooking oil with a brush on the surface until it is fully cooked with a brownish appearance.

### Step 4

Enjoy with rice and greens.



# The Bulgarian Community

The Bulgarian community increased significantly in Belfast after Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 with many people migrating to seek new opportunities. Although still a relatively small community, they continue to contribute to the city bringing their rich culture and traditions and participating actively in community life.

## Culture

The culture of Bulgaria is based on an interesting blend of Thracian, Slavic and Bulgar traditions, along with the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many ancient customs remain, such as Thracian fire dancing, which is recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Bulgaria also has a strong folkloric tradition that pervades many aspects of art, literature, music, celebrations and daily life. Bulgarian is a Southern Slavic language with about 12 million speakers in Bulgaria and also in Ukraine, Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Greece and Romania.

## Food

Bulgarian cuisine is representative of the cuisine of Southeast Europe. It shares characteristics with other Balkan cuisines. Bulgarian cooking traditions are diverse because of geographical factors such as climatic conditions suitable for a variety of vegetables, herbs, and fruit. Aside

from the vast variety of local Bulgarian dishes, Bulgarian cuisine shares a number of dishes with Middle Eastern cuisine, including popular dishes like moussaka, gyuvetch, kyufte and baklava.

## Celebrations and Traditions

Bulgarians love to celebrate and their calendar is full of traditional and other festivities. The extent to which some of the more traditional holidays are celebrated may vary from region to region and the folklore traditions are more prevalent in rural Bulgaria than in the larger towns.

A very important role is played by the Name Days. Most name days are fixed calendar days although some are related to religious events such as Easter and therefore fall on different dates each year. Friends and family are free to visit those celebrating their name day, bringing gifts and flowers.



## In Conversation with **Paolina Hawthorne**



Not only do the Spring months mark one of the most charming times of the year to experience Bulgarian cultural and folklore traditions such as the Martenitsas, but also some of Bulgaria's most significant holidays (such as the National Day and Easter) are celebrated at this time of year.

### **Bulgarian Association of NI**

The Bulgarian Association of Northern Ireland was formed in 2014 to provide support to the Bulgarian community in areas such as employment rights, legal status and access to statutory agencies. The association also preserves and promotes the culture of Bulgaria by

providing language education to Bulgarian children and any other children and adults interested in learning.

It also introduces the Bulgarian culture through its folklore music, dance and traditions thus educating the wider public and ultimately leading to better understanding of different cultures, cultural diversity and community cohesion. The association runs the folk dance club 'Chemshir' which has over 25 members of all ages attending its weekend classes to learn dances from different regions of Bulgaria.



**Paolina Hawthorne was a TV presenter in her native Bulgaria before moving to Northern Ireland in 2007 to satisfy her thirst for adventure.**

She arrived here alone, aged 24 and despite not knowing anyone, went on to establish her own business working in interpretation and translation.

Paolina was among the first from the Bulgarian community to arrive in Northern Ireland and her business has grown to cater for the growing multinational community, helping more than 75 different cultures as they settled into a new life here.

Now married to Belfast man who works as a ship broker, she has two young children.

She recalls how difficult her first years were adapting to a new country and culture: "I was happy in Bulgaria but I really wanted to travel and explore. "When I first arrived here, every little thing was different - how the heating system worked, shopping, registering with a GP, lots of things which made the first couple of years quite difficult.

"It took awhile to get to know people and make friends.

"The rules meant I had to be self employed and that turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I speak French, German and English so I decided to become an interpreter.

Proving to be a natural businesswoman, she set up Diversity NI.

From training a group of 20 interpreters in her first year she now has 700 people on her books, speaking 75 different languages and employs a staff of ten people.

For her, every job is personal. She adds: "I think everyone deserves to have a place where they are happy and understood. Northern Ireland today is such a diverse community and that's credit to the people here. My experience has been nothing but positive and I have had so much love, support and friendship in my personal journey.

"Nobody knew me when I arrived but I was shown nothing but kindness and I am so grateful for it."

# Craft Survachka

Survachka is one of the most beloved and colourful Bulgarian New Year's customs. It is performed with a twig or stick, decorated with twisted multicoloured threads, with popcorn, yarn, all kinds of dried fruits and coins. To this day, on the first day of the New Year, children pat adults on their backs using the survachka, while uttering special well-wishings.

## What you need

- A branch (from a bush tree)
- Colourful yarn and pom-poms
- Dry fruit and popcorn
- Scissors and thread
- Strong glue or a glue gun

## Step 1 - Prepare your work area

Find a spot where you can put the Survachka in upright position so both your hands can be free to work on it. This can be a vase, or a jar, or someone can hold it for you.

## Step 2 - Create the base branch

Tie together the small branches that are growing from the bigger "base" branch. You have to form either a round shape or a heart shape. Starting from the top, wind the multicolour yarn around the "base branch". After you finish with the "base" branch, start winding the side branches that you tied in a round shape.

## Step 3 - Fill out the design

Take a couple of pom-poms and glue them together. Tie them to the branch. Use your imagination to create a colourful design. Make a big bowl of popcorn and start to thread the popcorn on a piece of thread. Tie the popcorn to the branch.

## Step 4 - Add the dried fruit

Get the dry fruit and thread it with the needle as you did with the popcorn. Tie it to the survachka. Add more decorations to finish off the design.



# The Chinese Community

Chinese people first arrived in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s. Despite the civil unrest from the late 60s, Chinese immigrants continued to settle into Northern Ireland so much so it became the largest minority ethnic grouping in the 1980s until the EU expansion in 2014.

## Arrival in Belfast

A large majority of the first-generation Chinese people came to Northern Ireland from the leased rural area of Hong Kong, the New Territories, which was the buffer zone at the border between mainland China and the British colony of Hong Kong.

The Chinese people in the New Territories were mostly indigenous Hakka speakers who had farmed in small holdings for generations. Whilst Hong Kong city prospered into a world trade centre in the decades after millions of refugees left communist China for Hong Kong, the New Territories had remained under-developed and many rural young people emigrated to the UK to seek better prospects elsewhere.

In the early years, not many came straight from the New Territories to Belfast. Most of them had come through 'chained migration', with a relative or friend to employ them in an established restaurant or take-away in the main cities in the UK.

They then made a second move to settle in Northern Ireland as the catering trade in Britain became more competitive with other fast-food outlets saturating the market.

During the troubles, many such outlets did not feel safe opening up in Northern Ireland but not the Chinese. Over time, nearly every town and city in Northern Ireland now has a Chinese take-away or restaurant.

The Chinese community is now well established and into the third generation with the early settlers' children and grandchildren all born and brought up in Northern Ireland and well-integrated into the society, many are in professions such as medicine and accountancy.

In the last ten years, there's a new wave of immigration, mostly from mainland China with new people working across the hospitality, academic and other professional sectors. The UK Government



## In Conversation with **Weihong Tu**



has recently promised some Hong Kong citizens the right to reside in the UK given the increasing political tensions in the former British colony. Some families with links to Northern Ireland have already found homes in parts of the province here.

### **Culture & Traditions**

Chinese people are very proud of their culture and traditions. The Chinese New Year is celebrated not only within families but often, pre-pandemic times, throughout towns and cities hosted by local councils in Belfast, Derry, Lisburn, Newry, Armagh and other places with colourful decorations, performances of dances, martial arts, calligraphy, lantern making and of course Chinese food for Chinese and local residents to enjoy together.

In the summer, the Dragon Boat Race in Belfast is popular too with teams of Chinese and local people competing against each other on the River Lagan. The Mid-Autumn Moon Festival is the time to enjoy family getting together to look up to appreciate the full moon in the clear autumn sky, complimented by brightly lit lanterns of all shapes and sizes, tea and the delicious moon cakes.

There is no institutionalised religion for Chinese people but many would have a tablet with their family name on it set on a shelf in their home or business. Flowers and lit joysticks and candles would be placed in front of the tablet at festival times and birth or death anniversaries of their deceased parents.

### **While working as a nurse in Saudi Arabia in 2004, Weihong Tu met her Northern Irish husband who was stationed there with the RAF.**

After a whirlwind romance, the couple married in Weihong's home city of Wuhan in China in 2005 and returned to Saudi Arabia where they stayed until her husband retired from the RAF in 2012.

Then, along with Weihong's young daughter they set up home in Co Down in Northern Ireland. Aged 15 and the only Chinese girl in her school, her daughter suffered from cruel racial abuse which got so bad in her first year at high school there that her parents moved to Belfast.

Weihong says: "My daughter went to a girl's school where she was picked on because she was from China. She was miserable every day.

"We moved to Belfast because we knew there was a bigger Chinese community there and she went to Methodist College and was very happy."

Sadly, William passed away from cancer three years ago aged just 57, leaving his family devastated. Annie, now is living and working in London as a marketing manager.

Weihong, who doesn't drive, found support and new friends at ArtsEkta, the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) and the International Aid Trust who she now volunteers for.

She had been trained as a child in ballroom dancing and rediscovered her talent when she made new friends at the CWA.

She says: "The CWA was so welcoming to me. When I joined the ballroom dancing classes I met more Chinese people.

"People there asked me to open my own class and I was shy but they persuaded me. So, I became a dance teacher and now runs dance classes for the Chinese community twice a week.

Going back to doing something she loved as a young girl has helped Weihong to really become part of her local community and she now considers Belfast home.

# In Conversation with Heng Wang



**Heng moved to Belfast in 2018, coming here to do her PhD at Queen's University, examining the inequality of English language teaching in China, and inequality within the Chinese education system.**

Heng was born in Geelong Province in China, bordering North Korea. After graduating from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University in China with a science degree, she spent some time teaching in South Africa, spending a gap year back in China before heading to Northern Ireland.

Heng's artistic interests led to her spending time in South Africa. "I was in the university art group and I was the leader of the dancing team," says Heng, "When I was in my last year, my team was invited to South Africa to do some performances in a cultural exchange programme." Having decided a scientific career wasn't for her, she decided to spend time in South Africa and taught Mandarin, Chinese dance and tea culture.

Having decided to pursue an academic career in teaching, Heng decided that the pace of life and proximity to nature in Belfast was ideal for her.

As well as her PhD, Heng also does some proofreading and research assistant work. She has also returned to her artistic

roots more recently, performing Chinese classical dance at a Chinese New Year event. She is passionate about using her academic work also to "grow the connections between China and Northern Ireland".

Heng also has a young son who was born in Belfast during the pandemic. Weekly gatherings at her local mosque have allowed Heng and her baby son to become part of the city's increasingly diverse Muslim community. During the pandemic, weekly meetings continued online and have since resumed in person since restrictions ended.

She hopes to put down roots in Northern Ireland and for her son to be educated here, but is also keen that he maintains strong links with his cultural heritage. She says "Personally I think Chinese classical culture and literature is very beautiful. I don't know if he will be willing, but I would like him to recite the ancient poems that I learned."

# Craft Make a Chinese Lantern

**In ancient China, Chinese lanterns were used to provide light and as aspects of worship. Today, they are used only for decoration and as modern forms of celebration and worship. Lanterns have become a symbol of national pride in China and are used to decorate homes and public places.**

## What you will need

- Coloured paper
- Pencil and eraser
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Tape or stapler
- String or twine for hanging lanterns

## Step 1 - Select Paper, Cut Handle and Fold

Start with coloured paper to match the colour theme of your party. Cut off a strip of paper  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide from one end of the paper that measures the width of the paper -  $8\frac{1}{2}$ " or 9". Fold the sheet of paper in half lengthwise.

## Step 2 - Mark Lines and Cut

Mark a line across the length of the folded paper  $\frac{1}{2}$ " in from the open edge. Make marks every  $\frac{1}{2}$ " along this line, then draw lines at each mark straight to the folded edge—marking  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide strips. Cut on these lines from the folded edge to the

original marked line. Cut through both layers of paper. Open the paper flat. If the marks are very noticeable, gently erase them.

## Step 3 - Tape

Bring the edges together in a cylindrical shape with the cut strips running vertically. Be sure that the fold is on the outside of the lantern. Tape the edges together at the top, middle, and bottom. You may use staples instead of tape.

## Step 4 - Add Handle and Hang

Attach the handle, cut in Step 1, to one end of the lantern with tape or staples. The lanterns will stand on their own. They can be hung individually from their handles or loosely tied at intervals along a cord or rope hung overhead.

# The Indian Community



**The first members of the close-knit Indian community arrived in Belfast during the 1920s and 30s. Although a minority of immigrants came from southern India and urban areas in other parts of the subcontinent, most of the original settlers came from northern India, particularly the states of Punjab and Gujarat. In fact, many originated from the same village.**

## Heritage & Cultural Links

Belfast has many links to historic cultural and trade links to India. People have been working in and visiting India from as early as the 1930s. Companies like Mackie and Sons and Sirocco Works sent their employees to India. The workers were responsible for selling machines, setting up sites and managing the workplace. Another popular job involved working in tea factories and engineers and managers went to India to manage tea gardens. Very few of the workers had been outside of Northern Ireland before and had no idea what India would be like. Another link came through the Indian army, as many Indian soldiers fought alongside people from Northern Ireland and many Indian soldiers died during the World Wars.

## Working Life

Many of the earlier Indian settlers in Belfast were involved in the door-to-door sale of goods, especially clothing. Once door-to-door sales had become a successful way of making money, many people opened their own shops, selling clothing or groceries. The businesses were kept within the family: wives, brothers, uncles, sons and daughters all worked in the shops. In recent years, the Indian community has made a vital contribution to the hospitality industry as well as in medicine, with many working as GPs, house doctors and consultants. There is also a growing new migrant population who are working in Belfast's emerging tech sector.

## Food

Food is very important in Indian culture, particularly during celebrations and holy ceremonies. Indians cook with many ingredients and spices and cooking is an important part of daily life. Everything is cooked using fresh ingredients and food plays a central role in family life, as people gather together at mealtimes and share about their day.

## Weddings

Weddings are a very important rite of passage within the Indian community. Some people have arranged marriages while others choose their own partner. An 'arranged marriage' means that the bride and groom's relatives help to choose their partner on their behalf. The bride and groom will only agree to it if they like each other. In Hindu culture, weddings are attended by hundreds of people and can last up to seven days. As there are many religions in India, ceremonies differ in many ways.

## Celebrations

Festivals are to Indian culture what spices are to Indian cuisine, the most important forms of celebrations. Be it ringing in the colourful street party of Holi or lighting up the halls with diyas in Diwali, each and every festival in India is welcomed with big celebrations and unison of cultures.

Here in Belfast, many of the most popular Indian festivals have been celebrated by different groups over the years including:

**Diwali** – a festival of new beginnings and the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness, taking place between October and November. The word Diwali comes from the Sanskrit word deepavali, meaning 'rows of lighted lamps'. Houses, shops and public places are decorated with small oil lamps called diyas. People also enjoy fireworks and sweets too, so it's really popular with children. Diwali is celebrated annually in Belfast by the Indian Community Centre.



## In Conversation with **Mukesh Sharma** **MBE DL**



**Navratri** – another triumph of good over evil where Hindus celebrate the goddess Durga for killing the demon Mahishasura with a celebration lasting nine nights. In 2015, Belfast celebrated this festival with an epic outdoor theatre production produced by cultural group ArtsEkta at City Hall filled with storytelling, dance and music.

**Holi** - a popular ancient Hindu festival, as the 'Festival of Colours' marks the official arrival of Spring and celebrates the eternal and divine love of Radha Krishna. Belfast has hosted its very own Holi celebrations at St George's Market, Custom House Square and the Titanic Exhibition Centre.



### **Indian Community Centre**

The opening of the Indian Community Centre (ICC) in North Belfast in 1982 cemented the cultural establishment of Indians in Northern Ireland. The ICC is a religious centre for Hindu Indians, who constitute the majority population in terms of religious affiliation. The centre is used for many cultural celebrations, weddings and other community activities.



**Mukesh Sharma MBE DL is a businessman who serves on several charity boards. He was commissioned Deputy Lieutenant of Belfast in 2015 and awarded an MBE in 2016 for services to the travel industry.**

Mukesh's parents moved to England from North India in the 1950s, where he was born. His father worked as a door-to-door salesman in the textiles industry.

The family moved to Northern Ireland in 1968 when his father bought a shirt factory on Belfast's Great Victoria Street. "We lived on Mountcollyer Street and employed a lot of people in North Belfast," says Mukesh.

Mukesh's father later opened a travel agency called Thriftway Travel while Mukesh was at university in Jordanstown. He took a year out to help in the business and ended up staying, taking it over after his father's retirement.

Mukesh's father was a co-founder of the Indian Community Centre, where Mukesh met Nisha Tandon. They were both passionate about the power of the

arts to bring communities together, and eventually co-founded ArtsEkta and created the annual Belfast Mela.

"Arts are a central part of Indian culture," says Mukesh. Since childhood he's played the harmonium, a keyboard instrument, and also plays the tabla, a pair of hand drums.

"When I left business, I wanted to give back to the community that welcomed and supported us," says Mukesh. He now serves on the boards at ArtsEkta, Moving On Music and The Princes Trust. He was also appointed to the Northern Ireland Executive Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition.

Mukesh is Chair of the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) NI, a trustee of the NHLF UK and Chair of Barnardo's NI.



# In Conversation with Kousalyaa Wanan MBE



**Kousalyaa Wanan, MBE is a primary school teacher at Leadhill Primary School in Belfast. She's also a dancer in the South Asian Dance Academy and a community arts facilitator. She received an MBE for services to Indian dance, ethnic art and the community in Northern Ireland in 2017.**

Kousalyaa moved to Belfast with her parents and her brother when she was a teenager. She attended Newtownbreda High School which she credits with helping her settle into her new home. The Indian Community Centre also supported the family, introducing them to the temple and helping them connect with other Indian families to learn more about life in Northern Ireland.

Kousalyaa had always loved dance and after performing at a school concert, she was asked to dance at the Indian Community Centre's Diwali celebrations. This led to being involved in interfaith and cross community youth groups through ArtsEkta, which led to the formation of the South Asian Dance Academy (SADA). Kousalyaa and nine other dancers received some Kathak dance training which allowed them to facilitate ArtsEkta dance workshops in schools and community groups.

She believes art is a powerful tool for fostering acceptance and integration. "Art doesn't have a language. Whether it's music, art, dance - there are no barriers," says Kousalyaa. "It allows people to come together and have a shared experience." The first official SADA performance was at the 2010 Belfast Mela. She says: "We had beautiful costumes tailor made for us in India and afterwards everyone was cheering and taking photos - we felt like celebrities!"

Kousalyaa followed her childhood dream to be a teacher, training at Stranmillis and specialising in art (inspired by her own art teacher at Newtownbreda). Kousalyaa taught art at a secondary school for two years and now teaches P5 pupils in Leadhill Primary School.

## Craft Rangoli



**Rangoli is a traditional Indian sand-painted design often seen during auspicious celebrations. Historically created on floors inside and outside of homes, Rangoli can be made in a wide variety of designs, sizes, and materials. Whether you're looking for a fun activity to do with the kids or making decorations to celebrate Diwali, Rangoli can be enjoyed by beginners and experienced artists alike.**

### What you need

- Black or white card (or paper)
- Pencil and rubber (or chalk)
- Coloured decorations e.g. spices, grains, flowers
- Glue

### Step 1 – Choose your design

Rangoli can be made in any number of designs, but whether you choose a simple or complex design, most are symmetrical. You can use a plant or animal for inspiration, or you can create your own geometric design.

### Step 2 – Sketch the design outline

Use a pencil to practice drawing the outline of your Rangoli on black or white card. Keep practicing until you are happy with your design. If you decide to create your Rangoli on the floor, you will need to draw a basic outline on the floor using chalk.

### Step 3 – Choose the materials for your design

Rangoli can be filled in with any number of colourful household materials like spices and grains, or with store-bought materials like pre-coloured Rangoli powder. Using a variety of colours and dimensions will enhance the artistic nature of the final design.



# The Italian Community



**Italians have been migrating to Belfast since the 19th Century, and there are currently more than 1,600 people of Italian descent living across Northern Ireland.**

## Arrival in Belfast

The first wave of immigrants comprised highly-skilled craftsmen brought in to create mosaics and terrazzo floors for the many Catholic churches being built at the end of the 19th century. The work kept them in Belfast for extended periods of up to six years at a time. Clonard Monastery, in west Belfast, and Holy Cross church, in Ardoyne, both boast wonderful examples of Italian craftsmanship. The famous Crown bar, in Belfast, which dates from 1826 is another example of an Italian labour of love.

By the mid 1800s, Little Patrick Street in Belfast housed the main concentration of immigrants. The Italians who came to Belfast around this time were mostly poor people trying to find a better life. The majority of them came from southern Italy and Cassalattico in particular, is home to many Irish Italians. By the end of the 1800s, Belfast's 'Little Italy', was well established. Relatives of the original settlers arrived and the Italian population in Belfast grew considerably, extending into York Street.

## Links to Belfast

Guglielmo Marconi - a famous Italian link with Belfast is the inventor of wireless radio. Guglielmo Marconi was born in Bologna, Italy in 1874 to an Italian father and an Irish mother, Annie Jameson, whose family owned the Jameson Whiskey Distillery in County Wexford. Marconi installed his invention in ships and major ports around the UK, including the RMS Titanic.

**Angelo Morelli** - Morelli built up an empire of cafes and shops in Belfast, which date from 1911 alongside many other Italian businesses. In his early days in the city Morelli used to make ice cream by hand and sell it on the streets from a cart. The Morelli family business grew through decades of hard work into the local institution it is today.

**Felix Piccionne** - Piccionne established himself as a leading artist in the city, and his work can still be seen today in St. Malachy's Church, where his religious paintings depict scenes including Jesus falling under the weight of the Cross and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.

## Culture

Italian culture is the amalgamation of thousands of years of heritage and tradition, tracing its roots back to the Ancient Roman Empire and beyond. Italian culture is steeped in the arts, family, architecture, music and food. Home of the Roman Empire and its legendary figures such as Julius Caesar and Nero and was also a major centre of the Renaissance. Culture on the Italian peninsula has flourished for centuries.

## Food

Italian cuisine has influenced food culture around the world and is viewed as a form of art by many. Wine, cheese and pasta are important parts of Italian meals. Pasta comes in a wide range of shapes, widths and lengths, including common forms such as penne, spaghetti, linguine, fusilli and lasagna. For Italians, food isn't just nourishment, it is life. Family gatherings are frequent and often centred around food and the extended networks of families. No one area of Italy eats the same things as the next and each region has its own spin on Italian food.

## Celebrations

Italians celebrate most Christian holidays. The celebration of the Epiphany, celebrated on 6 of January, is much like Christmas. Belfana, an old lady who flies on her broomstick, delivers presents and goodies to good children, according to legend. Pasquetta, on the Monday after Easter, typically involves family picnics to mark the beginning of springtime.

November 1 commemorates Saints Day, a religious holiday during which Italians typically decorate the graves of deceased relatives with flowers. Many Italian towns and villages celebrate the feast day of their patron saint. September 19, for example, is the feast of San Gennaro, the patron saint of Napoli. April 25 is the Liberation Day, marking the 1945 liberation ending the Second World War in Italy in 1945.



# In Conversation with Luigi Circillo



**Luigi Circillo is a talented Italian musician who moved to Belfast with his wife Laura in January 2010 in search of a better quality of life.**

The couple, who have one daughter Nadia, knew they wanted to leave Italy but when a job hunt through a recruitment agency turned up Northern Ireland, their initial response was a definite no.

Luigi explains: "We both did a lot of travelling and had been fed up in Italy and we saw our future somewhere else.

"I sent my CV around Europe and when the recruiter suggested Belfast, at first Laura was really resistant. He asked us to come for the interview and stay the weekend and take time to get to know the city and that's what we did.

"That weekend completely changed our minds. People were so welcoming. When we were trying to do some sightseeing not only did they give us directions but they took us to the places we wanted to go. We just felt these people are really affectionate and it's a behaviour that is contagious. If people are kind to you, you tend to be kind to them.

"We decided to come maybe for a couple of years but now we feel it is home."

Luigi got a job in IT while he pursued his love of singing and playing a classic Spanish guitar.

Eight years ago he performed at Belfast Mela in Botanic Gardens, where he has been a regular ever since. He now has established himself as one of the most representative singers of the Italian circuit in Northern Ireland. It has been difficult getting established but now he is in demand for events across the province. He says: "It can be really hard as a musician. I started with the Queen's University Choir to try and get to know more people.

"I love Mediterranean music and some people asked me why don't I just do Italian music but it's very hard to find musicians as you have to work a lot harder to build your repertoire for Italian music which is why I became a soloist."

Now promoting himself online, he travels across Belfast and further afield for regular performances mostly at weddings and in local sports and social clubs.

# The Jewish Community

**There have been reports of Jewish people in Belfast as early as the 1860s mostly from Germany with many involved in the linen and wool trade. Today the city is home to members and descendants of the original Jewish community as well as converts, students and immigrants from Israel, America, Europe, Asia and Africa.**

## Rites of Passage

Jewish boys are circumcised at eight days old, the ceremony takes place in the synagogue and a specialist called a Mohel travels to Belfast when required. At the age of 13, Jewish boys will study a section of the Torah – five books of Moses. They are then invited to recite this at a service known as a Bar Mitzvah. In progressive communities, girls are also included in this practice and it is referred to as a Bat Mitzvah.

Jewish weddings are held under a Huppah, a temporary booth made up of four poles and a square decorated fabric. The Huppah symbolises the home that the couple will go on to build. The wedding traditionally ends with the groom breaking a glass as reminder of their humanity and bond.

## Jewish Cemeteries

Jewish burials are traditionally held within 24 hours, where the body is prepared by the 'Hevra Kadishah' and supervised until the funeral. After the funeral a ritual called Shiva is observed with prayers said with the family of the deceased for seven days together with other customs. The old Jewish cemetery is in West Belfast and was used between 1871-1914.

## Kosher Eating

Judaism has very strict, specific practices regarding food especially rules about meat. 'Kosher' is a term used to describe foods that comply with dietary guidelines set by traditional Jewish law. When the community was larger, Belfast had a Kosher butchers and shops however nowadays Kosher food is sourced from elsewhere with deliveries coordinated through the community centre. There are also a number of supermarkets that stock a small selection of Kosher food.

# In Conversation with Paula Tabakin



## Celebrations

There are many important days throughout the Jewish year. Jewish holidays are based on the Lunar calendar and begin in the evening and continue through the next day. Some of the main Jewish holidays are: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkut, Chanukah, Purim and Pesach. Each holiday has specific foods and customs as well as different prayer services and rituals. Some are fast days or days in which certain foods and work are prohibited.

## The Wolfson Centre

The Wolfson Centre in North Belfast is a synagogue as well as a cultural centre for Jewish events. Regular services are held on Saturday Mornings known as the Jewish Sabbath. Orthodox Jewish prayer requires ten men to hold a service and all ritual practice is carried out by male members of the congregation with woman sitting in a separate section in the back. The services are held in Hebrew. Cultural and social events are held in the centre and are open to all Jewish denominations and are inclusive of both men and woman.

## Previous synagogues in Belfast

The synagogue in Ainsley Street (1904-1964) was the centre of Jewish life in Belfast and included a Jewish ritual bath, known as a Mikvah. Between 1871 and 1904 there was a synagogue on Great Victoria Street. This was founded by Daniel Joseph Jaffe, the father of the first Jewish Mayor of Belfast, Sir Otto Jaffe.

## The Millisle Kinder Farm

During the Second World War, the Belfast Hebrew congregation secured a farm in Millisle to rescue children fleeing Europe. The first children started arriving in 1939. Many of the residents went on to live in the US, Canada and Britain with a small number remaining in Northern Ireland.



## Paula Tabakin has had an active role in the Jewish community in Northern Ireland since arriving in Belfast 20 years ago.

Born in South Africa she moved with her family, including her Belfast-born mother, to Israel at the age of 12.

After studying for a degree in community and political theatre at Tel Aviv University she decided to take a gap year.

She applied for a job with a Jewish family in Belfast, to teach their nine year old daughter Judaism in preparation for her bat mitzvah.

"The plan was to eventually go back to Israel but after the au pairing, I moved in with my aunt and got a job and just settled here," she said.

Now working as an activity coordinator in the care field, she lives in Belfast with her partner who is from Coleraine and their daughter.

Paula has been at the forefront of leading the Reformed Jewish movement in Northern Ireland.

She says: "The reform movement would include women in the services, whereas in the orthodox synagogue, the women sit at the back and are not involved in the rituals.

"It is very important to state that this is not instead of the synagogue in Belfast as I have a lot of respect for the orthodox community. We are complementary to them.

"I've always been affiliated with the mainstream community here and I have worked as an information officer for them. "A year ago, I, along with the young girl I first came here to teach, set up the Progressive Jewish Link on Facebook to streamline events and ever since I have been involved with people identifying with the liberal side of Judaism."

Paula says in her early years here she found Belfast very 'Christian centric' but believes that Northern Ireland is now starting to become more open to different faiths.

She adds: "There is more openness to it now. Someone wished me a happy Hanukkah (Jewish festival of lights) and to me that is like visibility. Those small acknowledgements are quite meaningful."

# In Conversation with Michael Black



**Michael Black has lived in Belfast his whole life, growing up in North Belfast near the Antrim Road. His family arrived in Belfast when fleeing persecution of Jewish people in Eastern Europe in the early 19th century.**

Michael's grandfather Isaac Black arrived in Belfast from Poland as a young man and arranged for the evacuation of his family to Belfast shortly after. Many of the family continued on to the USA where they settled, but Michael's grandfather and one of his brothers settled in Belfast and worked their way up to being business owners.

Isaac died before Michael was born, but he says he has been "an inspiration" to him. His grandfather started working as a door to door salesman and worked his way up to running a successful business in Belfast. He established a furniture business, Black & Sons, which his father and uncle worked in. After selling the business, they continued to work for prominent retailers in the city, before buying the Gilpin's furniture store and a number of other small businesses.

Today, Michael is the Chairman of the Belfast Jewish Community and oversees the efforts to maintain the traditions of the faith in Belfast. "Before COVID,

we would have met once a week," says Michael, "There are approximately 65 members of the community now. We have someone who looks after the fabric of the synagogue, someone who acts as treasurer, and we have a minister we liaise with who leads services."

At its peak in the 1970s, there were around 1,500 members of the Jewish community in Northern Ireland, and Michael says there was a focus on cross community relations which continues to this day. There were regular community meetings, involving people of all faiths and traditions, where they would gather to play bingo or have talks.

Michael says there was also a Hebrew school where children would learn Hebrew as this is the primary language in which Jewish services are conducted. Michael oversees the sourcing of kosher food for people in the community. There are no kosher food producers in Northern Ireland, so this needs to be ordered from England.

## Recipe Za'atar & Herb Potato Latkes

**Latkes are a Jewish classic – essentially, potato cakes made with onion. Take them up a notch by adding a handful of herbs and za'atar - a peppery blend of herbs popular in the Middle East.**

### Shopping List

- 900g potatoes (about 5 large starchy potatoes, such as Maris Pipers), washed but left unpeeled
- 1 medium onion (approx. 225g)
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 15g matzo meal or flour
- 2 tbsp za'atar
- 20g flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- 20g coriander, roughly chopped
- 500ml vegetable oil, for frying
- Tahini sauce (optional)

### Let's Get Cooking!

#### Step 1

Using a food processor with a grating insert or a box grater, grate the washed, unpeeled potatoes and transfer to a large bowl of very cold water. Grate the onion into a bowl. Scoop the grated potatoes out of the water using your hands, shaking off the excess water.

#### Step 2

Transfer the potato and onion mixture to a large, dry bowl and add the egg, matzo meal, 1 tsp salt, ½ tsp ground black pepper, the za'atar and most of the herbs.

#### Step 3

Pour about 1½cm depth of oil into a large frying pan and set it over a medium heat. Allow it to get hot — a cube of bread should turn golden in a minute. Scoop heaped tablespoons of potato mixture from the bowl and press down firmly to release any more water. Flatten and carefully add to the pan, about 2cm apart.

#### Step 4

Flatten the latkes again with a fish slice and leave to cook until crisp and dark golden underneath – about 4-5 mins, then turn them over. Cook for a further 4-5 mins until both sides are golden brown, and the potato and onion are cooked through.

#### Step 5

Transfer the latkes to plates or baking sheets lined with kitchen paper and sprinkle with a little salt. Repeat until all the mixture is used up. You may need to top up the oil during the cooking process. Drizzle over a tahini sauce (if using).

# The Polish Community



**Belfast experienced mass migration from Poland starting from 2004, when Poland became part of the European Union and when the Republic of Ireland, as well as, the UK decided to open the labour market to the Polish workforce. In the past 18 years, Polish people have contributed culturally and economically into the growth of the city and have become part of the local social landscape, making Belfast more vibrant and diverse with new perspectives and hopes for the future.**

## **Heritage & Cultural Links**

During the Second World War, Polish Airmen were based in Northern Ireland between 1940 and 1945 serving with the RAF and Polish Squadrons. In total, over 100 Polish personnel served in Northern Ireland during this period. 14 Polish military graves from this period can be found in several locations across the province, including Belfast, Newtownards, Glenavy and Ballycranbeg.

Before 2004 there was only approximately 40 to 50 Polish people based in Northern Ireland. Mainly second-generation children born from the mixed marriages between a Polish soldier who stayed in the UK after the Second World War and a local mother. There were also a few professionals working for local companies or academics at local universities. In fact, they were not organised as a group, so there was no Polish community as such.

## **Life in Belfast**

Coming to Belfast was very challenging, as the majority of Polish people did not have a good enough understanding of the local situation, and some also found the language a challenge. It was a learning experience; starting from scratch, trying to master the language and understand the social dynamics was difficult enough. But the Polish community quickly found a way of moving forward and adopting in their new environment.

In 2006, the first Polish organisations started to emerge, including social support groups, as well as Polish Saturday schools, sports clubs and cultural societies. In the same year, the first public event promoting Polish culture took place. The Polish Picnic happened in the Botanic Gardens in Belfast, gathering over 6,000 participants from the Polish and local communities.

In 2009, Poland nominated an Honorary Polish Consul operating from Newry and in 2018, established a full time Consulate based in Belfast and operating from Malone Road.

Polish people have become part of Belfast and play a very important part in shaping the society. From running their own businesses, being employed on almost all levels and contributing culturally and economically, Polish people feel at home here. It is very interesting to observe the second generation of the community blending into the local tapestry, understanding the culture and being able to make Belfast more vibrant and enriched.

## **Polish Easter Traditions**

Poland is a country full of unique traditions and customs, especially those rooted in the Catholic faith. One of the most important holidays is that of Easter. It is customary in Poland to bring food to church in a basket on Easter Saturday to have everything that will be eaten on Easter Sunday blessed. Another Polish Easter tradition is Smigus Dyngus or Wet Monday, which involves pouring girls with water so that they can marry happily in future.





## In Conversation with **Karolina Baldgya**



### **All Saint's Day**

Known as Uroczystość Wszystkich Świętych in Poland, The most beautiful cemeteries to visit in Poland during the holiday include Warsaw's Powązki and Krakow's Rakowicki and Salwator.

### **Weddings**

Greeting with bread and salt, carrying the bride over the stoop or throwing vodka glasses back over the shoulder are only

some of the Polish wedding customs. Equally popular is the Oczepiny ritual – removing the bride's veil and thus accepting her into a group of married women. The Money Dance - collecting money from guests to dance with the bride or the groom – is also a common wedding tradition.



### **It was love which first brought Karolina Baldgya to Northern Ireland seven years ago and now the freelance community artist regards Belfast as her home.**

Karolina (38) has one daughter Pola (11) who was just three when she moved here with her mum. In her first two years Karolina worked in a number of jobs including a school canteen and factory before returning to her passion of art.

She says: "My story is slightly different as I didn't come here for work but for love but sadly that story didn't have a happy ending. When we split up my daughter was settled and had friends at school and I felt I couldn't move her again."

"Before I came to Belfast, I felt there wasn't much opportunity for me to grow as person in Poland. Once I moved here I was able to expand my skills.

"After seven years I feel this is my home more than Poland. I think I must have had a previous life as an Irish princess as I feel like I have been here before, everything feels so familiar to me."

Karolina studied in Poland for a Master's Degree in Education and completed a post graduate course in visual art in education. As well as teaching art workshops for a range of community groups, she also runs

a number of art businesses. She started running workshops on traditional Polish paper crafts in 2016.

Then in 2019, she was thrilled to manage a cross-community festival in Newry and Mourne as part of the Peace 1V initiative.

She explains how it has helped in the one area she found difficult on moving here: "The biggest challenge for me when I came here was the language barrier.

"Being asked to organise the community events was a great experience as I had to break my communication barriers and lift the phone and speak to people and meet people. It was a great learning experience for me.

"Being here has changed me. I have far more confidence in myself and I love the fact that I get to live beside other cultures."

# In Conversation with Maciek Bator



**Maciek Bator arrived in Northern Ireland in 2004 with no plans to stay here long term. He had decided to go travelling and a friend who was working in Dublin recommended he check out Ireland, saying he would be able to save money and pursue his ambition to travel. Having contacted a number of employment agencies, he was offered a job in a Northern Ireland factory just three days later.**

Maciek decided to stay for a few months and if he didn't like it, he could move on. He lived near the factory between Magheralin and Lurgan for three months, but preferred the pace of life in Belfast. Although he still had ambitions to see more of the world, he decided to spend some time living in Belfast, moving there in 2005.

A year later, Maciek was involved in the creation of the Polish Association, and began working for the Northern Irish Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM). Being bilingual, he worked with people moving here from Poland, helping them settle in and advising on practical issues. He found himself enjoying life in Northern Ireland, and that people were "friendly, if you were not involved in the 'green and orange' narrative".

Maciek says it was only in 2012 he realised he "wasn't going anywhere"! He says it's easy to live in Northern Ireland for "five, ten, twelve years and if you don't make the decision, you can still feel like you are here temporarily".

After deciding to stay, he founded For Your Freedom And Ours CIC, a social enterprise dedicated to the shared history between Poland and Northern Ireland which was forged during the Second World War. Polish fighter pilots joined British airmen in RAF Squadrons during the Battle of Britain. A Polish RAF squadron was based in Ballyhalbert during the war in 1943, and there are Polish airmen buried in Belfast's Milltown Cemetery.

Maciek saw the potential for this shared history to be used to counteract anti-Polish prejudice. He believes that "education is better than criticising". By tapping into shared civic pride in WW2, the organisation has run a number of successful programmes aimed at bringing NI's local communities and its Polish communities together.

## Craft Wycinanki



**Wycinanki have been a popular folk craft in Poland since the 1900s. The decorative designs are mainly associated with two regions, Łowicz and Kurpie. The Kurpie cut-outs are made with a single sheet of paper and are thus totally symmetrical and only one colour. Those from the Łowicz area feature colourful designs built from layering the intricate pieces of paper. Though traditionally hung as decorations in windows, on walls, and from ceiling joints, today the classic designs are found everywhere.**

### What you will need

- Coloured paper
- Cardstock
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pencil

### Step 1 - Choose your design

Take a few minutes to look through some images of Wycinanki folk art on the internet to inspire your design.

### Step 2 - Plan your design

Begin by selecting a colour of paper and folding it in half. Using a pencil begin sketching out half of your design on the folded paper. Make sure portions of your drawing come to the edge of the fold. Sketching in this way and using the fold of the paper will create the symmetry that is found in both styles of Wycinanki.

### Step 3 - Add to your design

Repeat this process in different colors creating the various layers of your Wycinanki art. Using glue, carefully secure the layers of your Wycinanki together to form your final design!





# The Spanish Community



**Belfast has many links to Spain and Spanish-speaking countries of the world. As a harbour city, Belfast saw its fair share of Spanish sailors in its seafaring hey day, and it's rumoured this was the inspiration for naming The Spaniard Bar in the Cathedral Quarter. More recently, Belfast has welcomed Spanish speakers from all over the world, to its universities as international students, into its rapidly growing tech sector, as well as many other industries.**

## Heritage

In Belfast City Hall, the Spanish Civil War window is a commemorative stained glass window marking the contribution of Belfast citizens to the anti-fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 – 1939. 48 Belfast-born people fought against Franco's forces in Spain, and 12 died in Spain. Many local people took part in the Spanish aid campaign, including Belfast activists Alderman Harry Midgley, Betty Sinclair, Sam Haslett and Sadie Menzies. The city also has links to Spanish speaking nations in South America; Simón Bolívar reportedly recruited men from Belfast and Dublin to fight in Venezuelan armies in the 1800s.

## Food and drink

You don't have to look too far for food from or inspired by Spanish and Latin American cuisine. St George's Market has an authentic, Spanish-owned food stall Tapitas which offers delicious paella,

a traditional Spanish seafood dish. Owners Carmello and Nash have years of experience in Spain's hotel catering industry. They admit that the Belfast penchant for chorizo means they include it in their paellas - much to the horror of native Spaniards as you will never find chorizo in paella in Spain!



Tapas food consists of small plates of Spanish savoury food or appetisers, and it's seen an explosion of popularity in Belfast over the past decade or so. Restaurants and bars such as 2Taps, Revolución de Cuba, EDO and many more proudly serve Spanish and South American inspired food and cocktails.

Mexican and Tex Mex food - such as burritos and tacos - is very popular in Belfast, with many restaurants and takeaways doing a roaring trade in this type of food, including the famous Boojum and La Taqueria. Burritos are served in a soft tortilla, while tacos are usually in a crispy tortilla, both filled with spicy meats and vegetables.

## Music

Spanish music is often associated with traditional styles such as flamenco and classical guitar. Some regions are known for using bagpipes, and the jota is a well known style of music and dance, usually accompanied by handheld percussion instruments called castanets.

Flamenco is a fusion of music, singing and dance associated with Southern Spain. It traditionally involves hand clapping, finger snapping, guitar music and song. Latin

American music is diverse and includes influential styles associated strongly with dance, including merengue, rumba, salsa, samba, and tango.

Los Dramaticos are a flamenco and Latin American music duo based in Belfast. Classical guitarist Victor Henriquez is originally from Chile and flamenco guitarist Paddy Anderson is Irish and fell in love with flamenco music while living in Andalucía.

## Culture, customs and traditions

Spanish speakers, for example Hispanic or Latin. Broadly speaking, hispanic refers to individuals who are Spanish speaking, while Latin refers to those who are from a Latin American country.

Spanish is currently the fourth most spoken language in the world, with 534 million speakers. Spanish "fiestas" (festivals) are large celebrations and carnivals devoted to a specific Saint or City. These fiestas have traditional foods, fireworks, dancing, handmade decorations, parades, concerts, and theatre.

Bullfighting is a practice traditionally associated with Spain; somewhat controversial, it is banned in many



## In Conversation with **Nash Chercoles**



countries around the world. It sees matadors fighting a bull in a stadium called a bullring. Less controversial, the tomato fights of La Tomatina are popular with Spanish tourists.

You may be familiar with the term “siesta”, a Spanish word meaning nap. It used to be commonplace for shops and businesses to close for an hour or two in the afternoon to allow for a post-lunch siesta at the warmest part of the day, but the practice is no longer commonplace.

### **Traditional Spanish clothing**

El traje corto (short suit): short jackets, combined with a white shirt, and high-waisted trousers. Usually worn by men with a Spanish sombrero (hat).

La mantilla (veil): a long lace or silk veil that covers women’s head and shoulders. It was once a requirement to wear it before entering a church.

La peineta (comb): a tortoise-shell comb worn by women to secure the mantilla in their hair.



### **Nash Chercoles has brought a flavour of his home country of Spain to Northern Ireland since he decided to make his home here in 2006.**

Nash and his business partner and friend Carmelo Lopaz worked hard for three years, navigating our foreign business system to finally set up two food companies. Their dedication has paid off and today their business, Tapitas, a popular Spanish street food regular at St George’s Market and a Spanish catering company Nashcar are thriving.

Nash and Carmelo both worked in hospitality in Spain before moving to Northern Ireland, where they found a very different industry to what they were used to.

Nash explains: “My friend Carmelo met his wife who is from Northern Ireland in Spain and moved here to live. I wanted an adventure and decided to join him and we both worked front of house in a Belfast hotel for a year.

“Hospitality in Spain is much better paid than in Northern Ireland. After a few years Carmelo came up with the idea of opening a small food company selling tapas and other Spanish food.

“It was a challenge but we found everyone very helpful. At the start we only had a casual permit for St George’s Market and we had to sit outside it for hours before it opened to get a table and even then it wasn’t guaranteed.

“That was hard and we did it for a couple of years and never gave up. We just felt if there is no pain then there is no gain.”

Their perseverance paid off and they have been a permanent and popular feature of the Belfast market now for more than 10 years.

Their customers have been a mix of locals and people from the Spanish community pleased to get a taste of home. Both men are now married to local women and have families and regard Belfast as home.

Nash says: “The thing I am most proud of is that we didn’t give up on our dream. We struggled many times in the early years and it would have been easy to give up and go back to Spain but we didn’t. We can’t complain as the people here really helped us a lot.”

# In Conversation with Victor Henriquez



**Victor Henriquez has lived in Northern Ireland since March 2000. Victor was born and lived in Chile until he came to Belfast to complete his degree in language teaching. After completing his Masters, Victor worked in fundraising at Christian Aid.**

He's been married to his wife for ten years, who he met at a New Year's house party in South Belfast. "She's Irish but has lived in Chile, and speaks Spanish with a Chilean accent!" Victor laughs. The couple have two young children and while Victor considers himself "bi-cultural" he feels "Northern Ireland is home".

Over the past 12 years, Victor has worked as a teaching assistant in the School of Languages at Queen's University.

He is also a musician, specialising in Latin American traditional music on the guitar. "Much like traditional music in Ireland, there's no formal learning path; you become an 'apprentice'. You observe good players and copy them until you feel confident enough to do your own thing."

In 2008, Victor got the opportunity to play music at Argentinian restaurant La Boca, meeting another musician who introduced him to a weekly jam session at The Black Box. Soon, he was taking part every Friday. He says: "Some of us started

calling it 'church' because it became a hub of creativity and human connectedness, regardless of identity and background."

Victor formed a fusion duo with flamenco guitarist Paddy Anderson called Los Dramaticos and in 2015, decided to pursue music full time. As well as gigs, Victor gained tech skills, and facilitated music workshops and performances for all-ability groups. Inspired by this experience of music as a vehicle for therapy and communication, Victor trained as a psychotherapist and volunteered as a counsellor before setting up his private practice in 2021.

Recent projects include an Arts Council NI-funded collaboration with Mexican dancer Mayte Segura, resulting in a 30-minute show which premiered at Belfast's Accidental Theatre. He's currently working on another project with a classical pianist.

## Recipe Pimientos de Padrón



**Pimientos de Padrón are small, bright green peppers that come from the municipality of Padrón in Galicia, in the northwest part of Spain.**

### Shopping List

- Padrón Peppers
- Salt
- Oil

*If you can't find Padrón peppers you can use shishito peppers for a similar dish.*

### Let's Get Cooking!

#### Step 1

Wash your Padrón peppers and dry well. The drier they are, the better they'll brown and blister.

#### Step 2

Heat the olive oil in a heavy skillet (cast iron works well). Make sure there is a good centimeter or two of oil. We aren't deep frying, but the oil is key to the end result.

#### Step 3

When the oil is very hot (but not yet smoking) add the peppers and allow them to blister and brown before turning. Turn a couple of times until they're soft and browned on all sides.

#### Step 4

Remove them with a slotted spoon and sprinkle your favourite sea salt on top. Eat them whole - leaving only the stems behind!

# Useful Contacts

There are many community groups and organisations in Belfast who support and promote the diverse cultures in the City. Organisations who have been involved in compiling this booklet are listed below.

## **Africa House NI**

Botanic House  
1-5 Botanic Ave  
Belfast, BT7 1JG  
t: 028 9031 5778  
e: turaarutura@africahouseni.org  
w: www.africahouseni.org

## **African and Caribbean Support Organisation NI (ACSONI)**

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t: 028 9043 4090  
e: admin@acsoni.org  
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## **Arts Ekta**

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e: admin@artsekta.org.uk  
w: www.artsekta.org.uk

## **Belfast Islamic Centre**

38 Wellington Park  
Belfast BT9 6DN  
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## **Bulgarian Association of NI**

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## **Chinese Welfare Association**

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e: office@cwa-ni.org  
w: www.cwa-ni.org

## **CRAIC NI**

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e: info@craicni.com  
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## **Horn of Africa People's Aid NI**

Botanic House  
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Belfast, BT7 1JG  
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e: info@hapani.org

## **Indian Community Centre**

86 Clifton St  
Belfast, BT13 1AB  
t: 028 9024 9746  
e: iccnibelfast@gmail.com  
w: www.iccbelfast.org

## **Polish Educational & Cultural Association**

c/o Holy Rosary Primary School  
Sunnyside Crescent  
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e: info@peca.org.uk  
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## **Sailortown Regeneration**

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## **The Wolfson Centre**

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## **Yallaa**

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Belfast City Council provides support through the Good Relations Unit and the Migrant Forum. For more information contact goodrelations@belfastcity.gov.uk or tel 028 9027 0663.



For more information on the Culture Cafés  
or the PEACE IV Programme, visit  
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