

IN-Ren Black History Month 2023 Celebrated

Black History Month (BHM) is a celebration which recognises the achievements and contributions of people of diverse heritage around the world. In partnership with The National Lottery, Engage Renfrewshire and the IN-Ren Network a grant opportunity was created to bring these celebrations to life for Renfrewshire's grassroots organisations.

The aim of this grant was to increase anti-racism and integration activity within the Renfrewshire community by supporting and encouraging community activity to celebrate Black History Month 2023, providing opportunities to celebrate and creating new relationships between people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and local groups.



IN-Ren and Engage Renfrewshire awarded a total of £3,000 to 8 organisations, reaching 158 participants, so far. The activity ranged from storytelling and sharing cultural food, to a walking tour honoring Peter Burnet, the first recorded African American to live in Paisley. Organisations across the Engage Renfrewshire membership came together to deliver their programs demonstrating the positive impact this funding has had to build relationships and integrating activity in Renfrewshire.



Stories of Adversity, and Hope

Much of the work undertaken on these projects involved bringing people together to share stories. 3 organisations brought women from black and minority ethnic communities together, to learn about their lived experience. Both Fablevision and Sewing2together All Nations used textiles as a medium of storytelling, culture sharing and learning. Fablevision used their funding to launch ‘Woven in Renfrewshire’, an exhibition on display until the end of 2023 in Paisley’s Royal Alexander Hospital, they said “The event was above and beyond expectations”.



The women that shared their experience were working either in the formal care sector or informally in families and communities. This provided learning for those taking part, with one woman sharing “ I either feel invisible or I am a visible target....often being told to 'get back to where I came from' by families of patients...” and another saying “It's important that our voices are heard. So often we feel unheard...”

Sewing2together All Nations also brought women from diverse backgrounds, many being refugees or asylum seekers, together to ‘break bread’ using traditional, culturally appropriate recipes, and to work with traditional African textiles. Sewing2together All Nations partnered with local group, the School of African Cultures, to deliver their sessions. One participant said “It was a great time of celebration for all of our BAME group members, and it was great to share African culture in dance and food and conversation.”

The School of African Cultures developed an intergeneration project ‘The story of our grans’. Young people of Black African background interviewed Black African older people to learn about their lives and culture, and to build stronger links between the generations. While the group struggled with their intended social media distribution, due to lack of expertise to edit the video interviews, the funding enabled them to develop reach beyond BHM and create a mini booklet to be distributed throughout the community. This group also learned about some of the work still to be done around other inequality issues, saying:

“They {the young people} also realised that the issues experienced by their “grans’ are like what they are still experiencing now. For example, although progress is being made for gender equality all over the world. There is still a long way to go.”

Celebrating Cultural History - Renfrewshire and Beyond

This funding has enabled a breadth of work celebrating black history, from stories of African culture being shared between generations living in our community, to a walking tour sharing the life and history of Peter Burnet, the first recorded African American to live in Paisley, to educating school children on the history of the Agojie Women, and other positive black female role models. Shopmobility’s walking tour reached 60 participants, increasing their membership numbers, and received positive exposure in the local press. The funding enabled partnership working with other local organisations (Loud and Proud CIC, and Invest in Renfrewshire) while supporting those with mobility and disability issues to take part on the tour, sharing this interesting part of local history with a diverse group of individuals.

BIG TURNOUT FOR HISTORICAL TOUR

Black History Month a success as Buddies celebrate life of Peter
People learn all about first African-American in town

CALAMITOUSLY
More than 40 people turned out to hear the tale of the first African-American to arrive in Paisley.

Shopmobility Paisley and Friends teamed up with Paisley Heritage Society of Paisley to deliver a unique history tour on Saturday, October 10, Black History Month and as the event focused on the life of Peter Burnet, who arrived in Paisley in 1784 and set to work for James Oswald, helping the production for which the town is now best known for - weaving.

Peter was born in 1744 on the South Bank in the North West, Virginia.

At the age of 11 or 12, he joined a group of other enslaved persons who planned to work their freedom. Their craft was intercepted by British pirates. The pirates, who employed Peter as a cabin boy.

Though he initially found the

...lately Captain Parling, Peter received a tip-off that he would soon be sold into slavery, in a plantation in the West Indies belonging to Parling's brother.

He slipped away from the plantation while it was moored in New York.

It was there he began working for William Hunter, an itinerant merchant whose family owned successful businesses on both sides of the Atlantic, whose he accompanied to Scotland.

The master then went on to the north where one of his sons came country with a chance for a career.

He was named as Oswald's carriage highlighting Peter's low status in the household, and told the story of his life in Paisley.

It was indeed a local 'P' Peter's middle name, which, as well as his name, is also a reference to his Paisley origins.

This tour was made by Paisley Heritage Society of Paisley in association with Paisley Arts.

The event was funded by Shopmobility Paisley and Friends, said "We had our first annual tour which we held as part of Black History Month, with the majority of them coming along the tour and a screening of the video about Peter's life."

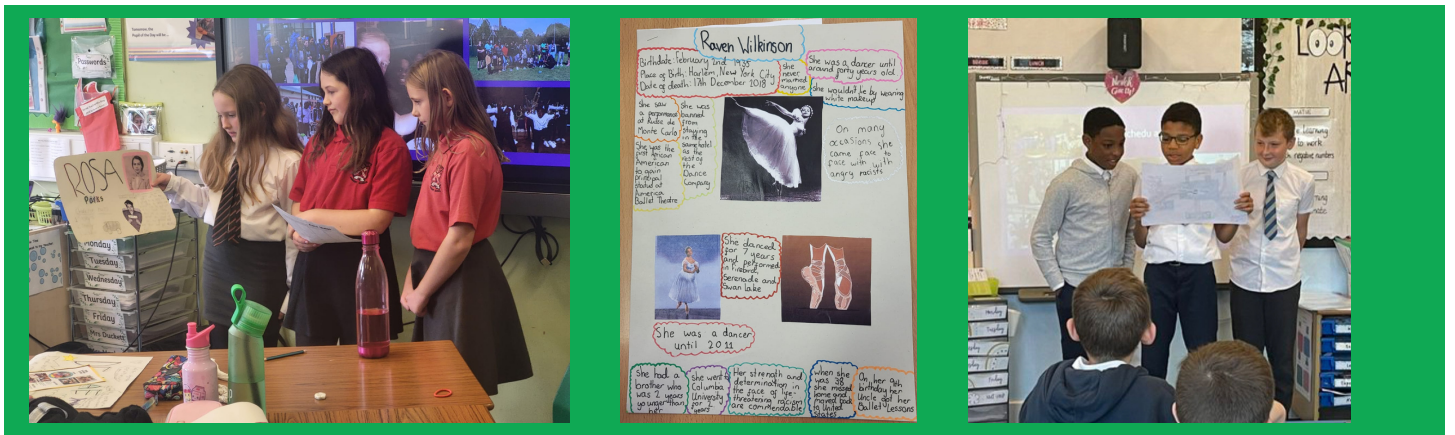
"It was a great and educational tour and our thanks go to Paisley Heritage Society of Paisley and to Shopmobility Paisley and Friends for organising the tour and to Victoria McIlroy and Louie 'P' Prasad for providing access for those with mobility issues."

"Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped to make this an amazing success."

Councillor Kirsty MacLennan, chair of Shopmobility Paisley and Friends, added: "It was a pleasure to see so many people celebrating the story of Peter Burnet in Paisley School."

Inspiring Our Young People

Two groups focused their work on young people, REEM and Pachedu, both used creative mediums through discussion, debate, and arts and crafts to share experience of settling in Scotland, and prominent individuals in black history. Pachedu attended 5 schools to share stories of the Agojie Women, encouraging and supporting young people to develop, and deliver, short presentation to their peers on other important black women throughout history.



Overcoming Obstacles

As highlighted throughout, the majority of the funded projects were able to successfully deliver their activity. However, one organisation was unable to generate enough interest in their project to make delivery successful. They contacted us to discuss an alternative use of the funding, and this was agreed, resulting in the organisation purchasing a variety of culturally diverse books for children. These books written by black authors portray situations children and young people from diverse backgrounds will face or encounter in their daily lives. These books have been shared widely with organisations such as Pachedu and the School of African Cultures. The purchase of these books enables children and young people to see themselves represented in meaningful ways and provide learning opportunities for indigenous children and young people.

Our Learning

The Black History Month funding has facilitated a range of activity reaching across the generations, and has created opportunities for groups to work together, sharing resources and expertise, and building partnership opportunities. From this activity there has been a clear message of working together to learn from one another, to break down barriers and celebrate our differences. Working relationships have been strengthened and new friendships developed.

The theme of intersectionality was prevalent in the feedback from the funded organisations with acknowledgement of how far we have come to break down barriers of race and gender, and how far we still have to go to ensure equality for all. This funding facilitated the conversations and relationships that can begin to make these changes. The strong participation levels demonstrates the appetite for this change, and the legacy of the work has reached across Renfrewshire.

