



Impact report

Compiled by Smith and Kent Consulting, May 2026

At the heart of Belfast city centre, 2 Royal Avenue gives people a reason to come into the city – and a reason to stay.

“As a family we adore 2 Royal Avenue. It is what the city has been missing! It has entirely changed every trip we have into the city – we make sure to call in every time [...] Thank you!”

It also offers something a city centre rarely does – space to simply be. Not to shop or hurry through, but “a third space”, like “an indoor public park in the heart of Belfast” – a place to “take a moment,” “relax, think, create, meet, learn and grow,” “so rare to find [...] free to visit, no obligations, that is so beautiful and welcoming.”

“2 Royal Avenue is a gift to the city – a genuinely open, accepting and inspiring space for the people of Belfast.”

For parents, carers, older people, disabled people and more, it makes the city usable in ways that it was not before. It is “incredibly important for giving people a place of respite during day trips”, a space that “works for people who often find the city difficult to navigate” and “that makes a trip into town possible”. “Otherwise, I would stay away.”

Inside, 2 Royal Avenue is “always buzzing [...] all ages and backgrounds sometimes doing their own thing and sometimes crossing into each other’s spaces and meeting.” Carers gather for a coffee morning. The chess club is now more a crowd than a handful. Parents bring toddlers for meetups and sensory play. Uniformed children huddle quietly, doing homework. Someone is playing the piano, drawing appreciative applause.

“There is nowhere else in Belfast that offers a free, city-centre cultural and community hub that provides so much for the public.”

It is particularly good at the kinds of activity that fall between systems – not quite cultural, not quite service, not commercial, but socially vital. Bereavement cafés, family advice clinics, social events for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers and much more all sit comfortably here in a space that is open, welcoming and “full of life”.

“It marks us out as a city [that] is actively investing in its citizens and its culture [...] that Belfast is a good place to be – and that all of us have a place here.”

2 Royal Avenue is not just well loved and not just well used. When people come, stay and come back again, when they bring family and meet their friends, they also support shops, cafés and businesses nearby. It changes how the city centre is used, and it changes how people feel about the city. Over time, some say it even “feels like home.”

Impact at a glance

In the past year,ⁱⁱ 2 Royal Avenue has:

- Welcomed **296,856 visitors**, making it one of the **most used public spaces** in Belfast city centre.
- Generated **£26.2 million in social value**,ⁱⁱⁱ helping people **connect, feel better** and take part in the **cultural life** of the city.
- Generated **£116 of social value for every £1 invested**.
- Reduced loneliness, with **54 per cent of visitors feeling less lonely**, including **37 per cent who feel much less lonely** because of 2 Royal Avenue.
- Boosted **cultural participation**, with **51 per cent attending more often** than before.
- Provided a genuinely **shared, welcoming space**, attracting a diverse mix of people across different **ages**^{iv} and **community backgrounds**.^v It is particularly good at engaging groups more likely to experience loneliness or face barriers to cultural participation, including **disabled people**,^{vi} people from **minoritized ethnic backgrounds**^{vii} and **LGBTQ+ people**.^{viii}
- Driven **232,950 additional visits** to Belfast city centre, contributing **£8.6 million in visitor spend**, including **£1.3 million in spend brought into Belfast** from outside the city.^{ix}
- Generated **£6 in additional city-centre spend for every £1 invested**.^x
- Encouraged people to stay longer, with **76 per cent spending more time** in the city centre, including **43 per cent who spend much more time**.
- **Gave people a reason to visit** – **59 per cent** of 2 Royal Avenue visitors would not otherwise come into the city centre, including 25 per cent who would have stayed at home and 13 per cent who would have gone somewhere outside Belfast.
- Provided **good quality employment** for a small team, providing over £145,000 in wages and £66,500 in associated social value.^{xi}

How people use 2 Royal Avenue^{xii}

“We’d be lost without this wonderful free place.”

Michael brings his grandchild into 2 Royal Avenue to give his daughter a break. She is juggling a lot between work and childcare, and he worries about her mental health.

For Michael, 2 Royal Avenue is somewhere warm and central where he can spend time with his family without pressure to spend money he doesn’t have – “a chance to get our head showered for a few minutes.”

Over time, 2 Royal Avenue has become part of how the family manages the city together. Sometimes his daughter comes too now. Michael describes it as somewhere they can always rely on, a place that makes the difference between a stressful outing and a manageable one. A small act of care in a busy world.

Michael, grandfather

“This is a space that makes a trip into town possible.”

Jenna doesn’t plan long days in advance. The city centre can be unpredictable, tiring and difficult to navigate. What matters is knowing she can come in, settle and take things at her own pace, without needing to explain herself or commit to anything.

2 Royal Avenue is a place where she can meet her support worker, meet friends, see some art or do some craft as it catches her interest. Sometimes she stays for hours. Sometimes she comes and goes. The point is that it is up to her.

This flexibility changes how Jenna uses the city. It is no longer something to manage, work around or even avoid, but somewhere she can take part – on her own terms.

Jenna, disabled visitor

“I can just show up and be surprised with culture and delight.”

Gill comes into 2 Royal Avenue as part of their working day. They meet people there, work between appointments or call in when they have time to spare. What keeps them there is what they find when they arrive – an exhibition, live music, a pop-up workshop.

This overlap between everyday use and cultural activity is what keeps them coming back. Meetings run on into something else, or a quick stop becomes time spent. Over time, it has become their default meeting spot, somewhere reliable but never predictable, where they often end up staying longer than intended and leave having seen or experienced something new.

Gill, regular visitor

“It has entirely changed every trip we have into the city.”

With three young children, Niamh approaches the city centre differently now. Trips need to be planned, with space to stop, reset and adapt. 2 Royal Avenue has become the place that makes that possible.

She uses it as a base – somewhere to feed, change, let the children play or simply take a break from the noise and pace of the streets outside. She describes it as “a godsend throughout the baby years” and says it has “entirely changed” how and how often they come into town. It gives her confidence that the day will work, even when it all goes wrong.

Niamh, mum of three

“It’s a place for the lonely, the marginalised and everyone in between.”

Declan first came to 2 Royal Avenue through a community group he attends. The group meets there regularly – sometimes for organised sessions, sometimes just to spend time together in a space that feels open and unpressured. Over time, he has started coming in outside those sessions as well.

For him, the value is not just the activity but the atmosphere. It is a place where, as he puts it, “you don’t care who anyone is.” It makes it easier to fall into conversation and feel part of what is going on around him. When he hasn’t been in a few days, the staff all ask after him. It is enough to take the edge off his loneliness.

Declan, member of a community group

“I’ve met so many people – it brings the city closer together.”

Olena was introduced to 2 Royal Avenue through a support service for newcomer families. At first, it was a practical place to meet – somewhere central, easy to find and comfortable to sit and talk.

Now she comes back to meet friends, use the WiFi and practise her English. What began in a language class in 2 Royal Avenue carries on informally – people stop to chat, conversations start easily, others join in.

For Olena, it is not just about access to services or activity. It is about having somewhere in the city where she can take part without feeling on the outside. A place that helps turn a new city into somewhere she would like to call home.

Olena, newcomer to Belfast

ⁱ Quotations from research carried out by MayWe, 2 Royal Avenue's operator and the audience development agency thrive between 2024 and 2026

ⁱⁱ The following findings are based on data compiled by MayWe for 2025/26, and a survey carried out by Smith and Kent Consulting in April 2026, which received 601 responses. The sample size for the following analysis is n=601, unless otherwise stated. This provides a reliable picture of visitors' experiences. Results have a margin of error of ± 4 percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level, meaning reported percentages may vary by around 4 percentage points either way. (A margin of error of ± 5 percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level is commonly used as a benchmark in survey research.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on [MeasureUp](#) outcome values, which use tried-and-tested wellbeing valuation methods (such as WELLBY) consistent with HM Treasury Green Book guidance. Figures are indicative and adjusted to avoid double counting.

^{iv} Including 19 per cent of visitors aged 16 to 24 (compared to 14 per cent of Belfast's population (NISRA 2024 mid-year estimates)) and 25 per cent of visitors aged 55 and over (which is equal to NISRA's 2024 mid-year estimates)

^v 36 per cent of 2RA visitors come from a Catholic community background, 24 per cent, Protestant and 37 per cent, neither. According to the 2021 Census, 44 per cent of Belfast's population are Catholic, 40 per cent Protestant and other Christian and 17 per cent other religions or none.

^{vi} Disabled people make up 27 per cent of 2RA's visitors (n=241) compared to 24 per cent of Belfast's population (Census 2021).

^{vii} People from minoritized ethnic community backgrounds make up 9 per cent of 2RA's visitors (n=264) compared to 7 per cent of Belfast's population (Census 2021).

^{viii} People from the LGBTQ+ community make up 23 per cent of 2RA's visitors (n=251) compared to 4 per cent of Belfast's population (Census 2021).

^{ix} Spend that would not otherwise have occurred

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Social value reflects the estimated wellbeing benefit of being in employment using the HM Treasury Green Book and HACT's [Social Value Bank](#) proxies.

^{xii} Case studies are composites based on actual feedback gathered by Smith and Kent, thrive and MayWe. Names and identifying details have been changed.