



2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT

"Simply put, it's one of the best and most important children's festivals in the world today."

- BCF Delegate Feedback

ABOUT YOUNG AT ART

Young at Art (YAA) is Northern Ireland's leading arts provider for children and young people, and home to the annual international Belfast Children's Festival.

We strongly believe that every child has the right to access exceptional and innovative creative arts experiences, regardless of who they are and where they come from. Our festival is internationally focused and multi-artform with a long history of positive collaborations with other sectors and organisations.

Since our first festival at the dawn of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, we have grown both the Belfast Children's Festival (BCF) and our year-round Education & Engagement Programme significantly. In 2023-24, we delivered our 26th festival, BCF24, seven Education & Engagement projects as well as Year Round activity with key partners engaging with a total of 37,156 children, young people and adults.

[VISIT YAA](#)

"The Belfast Children's Festival is nothing short of extraordinary. Its unwavering dedication to artistic excellence, inclusivity, and community engagement sets a benchmark for festivals worldwide in performances for young audiences and families."

- BCF Delegate Feedback

INTRODUCTION

From humble beginnings in 1998, we have grown to become, in terms of visitor footfall, the largest and one of the most respected dedicated arts festivals for children and young people in the UK and on the island of Ireland.

Over the festival's ten days, 5-16 March 2024, we welcomed over 32,000 visitors to nearly 120 events across the city of Belfast, with a further 129,340 joining the festivities by listening into a live outside radio broadcast from the festival.

BCF24 had a distinct circus theme running throughout the festival's programme, with hand-picked incredible shows, 'thrills and spills' and even a few 'death defying feats', and inclusive performances created especially for children and young people with disabilities and additional needs. Our Festival Family Day Out encouraged families to "Roll Up! Roll Up!" and join the fun across Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, with events, activities and creative experiences for all the family. The festival also hosted a special *Dutch Focus* this year, bringing some of the finest performances for young audiences to Belfast from the Netherlands.

Our Education & Engagement Programme delivered a diverse and varied range of projects to nursery, primary and secondary school and community groups, all leading into and out of the festival's programme. This supported children and young people to reflect on and creatively respond to the changing world around them and enabling them to develop their creativity, confidence, imagination, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and support their mental health and wellbeing.

None of this would be possible without the great people we work with! The artists, technicians, facilitators and volunteers; the schools' dedicated head teachers, teachers and classroom assistants; the support from our funders; the unwavering commitment of our Board; and last, but certainly not least, our wonderful YAA staff team. Our heartfelt thanks go to all.

Maria Lee
Chair

Eibhlín de Barra
Director

YAA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- **WHAT DO WE DO?**

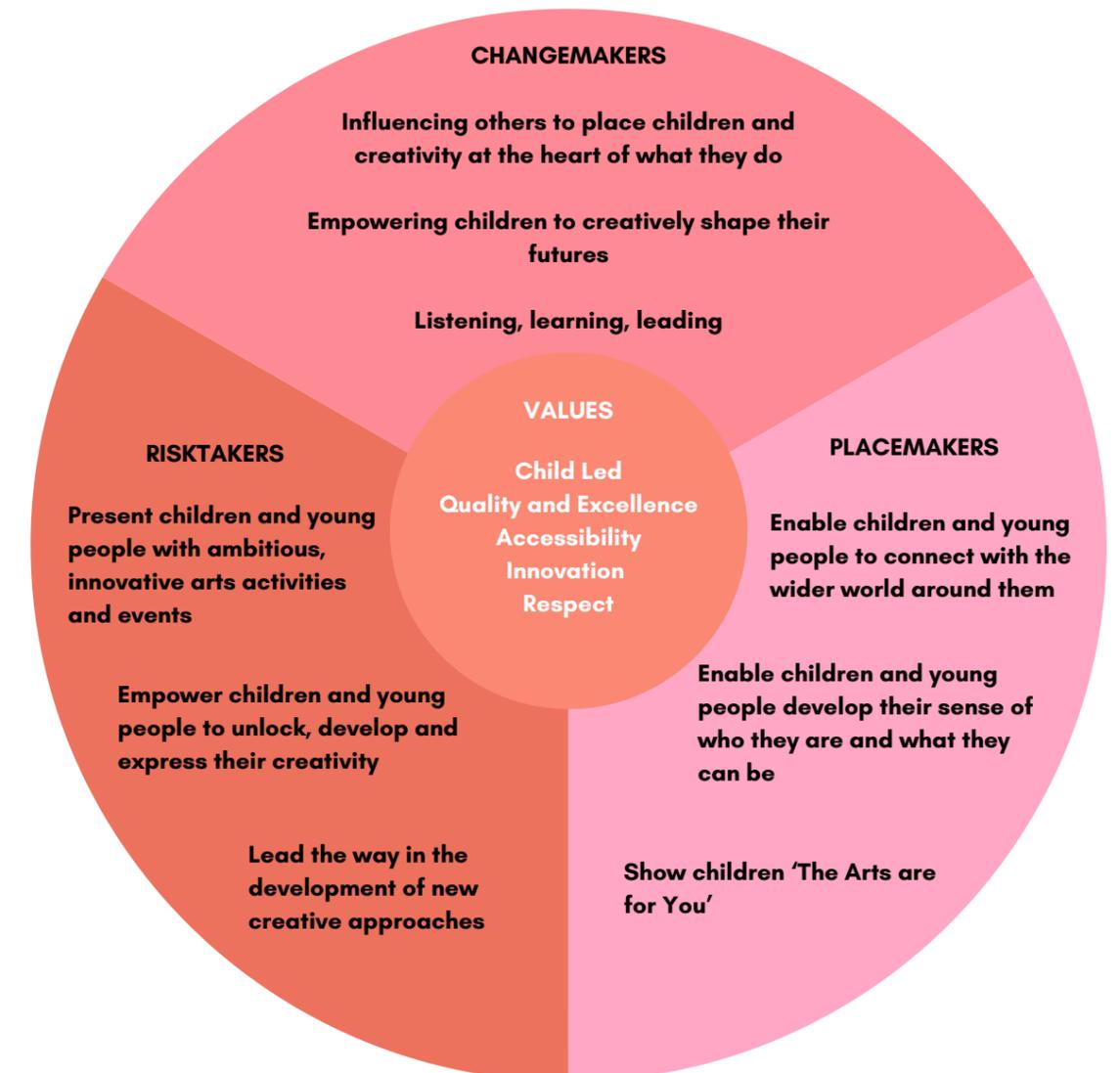
Create and curate exceptional and innovative arts experiences for all children and young people.

- **WHY DO WE DO IT?**

The world needs creative people.

- **HOW DO WE DO IT?**

By being Changemakers, Risktakers and Placemakers, underpinned by our values: child-led, quality and excellence, accessibility, innovation and respect.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



Young at Art's commitment to understanding and improving the sustainability of our work continued in the past year. As a children's arts charity with an international festival and arts-based Education & Engagement Programme, we celebrate the cultural, social and economic value of our work while being mindful of its environmental impact.

In finding our balance, we are guided by how our work contributes to the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in particular:

- **Good Health & Wellbeing** – attendance at and participation in arts and cultural activities contributes positively to feelings of wellbeing generally;
- **Quality Education** – contributing to the acquisition of skills and knowledge by improving access to and participation in culture within schools, promoting the value of artistic education and creative abilities for learning, attainment and skills development, as well as appreciation of cultural diversity and providing spaces for intercultural dialogue;
- **Decent Work and Economic Growth** – providing opportunities for skills development and training, increasing creativity, innovation, employability and entrepreneurial skills;
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities** – offering activity in public, easily-accessible spaces making our city more attractive, creative, inclusive and sustainable;
- **Responsible Consumption and Production** – contributing to more sustainable tourism through improving our own practices and showcasing local culture to local audiences;
- **Climate Action** – understanding better how our activities contribute to climate change and taking action to reduce that impact; and
- **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** – our child-led approach promotes the voices of children by providing avenues for creative expression leading to better representation of their views in public discussions.

23/24 was the first year our new Environmental Sustainability Action Plan was implemented. Our cross-organisation Green Working Group, led by our Green Champion and General Manager, Kelly-Anne Collins, agreed action for the year and reviewed progress. Sustainability was made a standing item on our Board meeting agenda ensuring accountability.



Key developments for the year included:

- Improving our Green Tourism accreditation from Bronze to Silver felt like a reward for our concerted efforts to engage with and address the environmental impact of our work;
- Becoming an active member of Green Arts NI;
- Delivering our Young People & Wellbeing project using an arts-based intervention to help young people discuss their mental health and well-being;
- Delivering our Creative Child and Creative Teacher projects in Belfast nursery and primary schools building skills including self-confidence, self-expression, imagination, opinion forming, critical thinking and problem solving, and amplifying the voices of children;
- Delivering our Access All Areas project to make the arts more accessible to children and young people with diverse needs;
- Opening up participation in the arts in our city, through the free and accessible Festival Family Day Out events offered across city centre public spaces;
- Pivoting our service delivery offerings to clients and partners to be more 'sustainable' and explore environmental themes e.g. workshops decorating reusable tote bags made of sustainable materials;
- Halving the carbon footprint of our Education & Engagement Programme over the previous year by artists committing to:
 - car-pooling/using active/public transport to travel to activity; and
 - an 'Avoid/Reduce/Reuse/Recycle' approach to materials purchase/use supported by the provision by YAA of a new 'Sustainable Materials Allowance' which financially acknowledges the additional time needed to make these improvements and recognises the value of reusing props/materials;
- Reinforcing our 'green' story by more regularly including news about our efforts in our newsletter and social media; and
- Ensuring that all air travel by staff is approved only after a comparison of options. Decisions are made on balancing impact with cost and travel time and programming needs.

Despite these efforts, YAA acknowledges that our overall carbon footprint increased this year because of the increased travel of artists invited to perform in Belfast Children's Festival and the distances travelled by the international delegates visiting the festival invited by YAA and supported by Culture Ireland and British Council.

Overall, our CO2 emissions remain modest for a festival of our size and scale in comparison to like events in the UK and Ireland. Travel is by far the largest contributor to our carbon footprint making up 96% of the total. It is the main area where discussions around our impact focus with the key challenge being how to balance the social and cultural value of the festival's international programme with its environmental impact. This is particularly challenging where financial support is limited to make the transitions needed. Despite this, YAA is committed to overcoming these challenges and improving the sustainability of our work.

2024 BELFAST CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL



BCF24: All the Best Bits!

BCF24 OVERVIEW

Our favourite annual event in Belfast! Absolutely adored all the shows we saw and were only sorry we couldn't squeeze anymore in!
-Audience Feedback



10 days



118 Events



32,002 Children & Adult
audience
members/attendees



129,340 listeners to live
BCF24 Outside Radio
Broadcasts



48 Schools



Over 50% of events free to
attend



TYANI Showcase with 30
international delegates



18,287 Festival Family Day
Out visitors

BCF24 INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME

DUTCH FOCUS

BCF24 had a special focus on performance work for young audiences from The Netherlands, generously supported by Performing Arts NL and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The focus included two Dutch performances, panel discussions, and networking events.



I... um I

Het Houten Huis (NL)

I... um I was a powerful performance exploring what it's like to lose your grip on reality. This astonishing show was set within a rotating box where the main character performed his daily routine which slowly started to unravel. We became witness to our main character's battle with time and reality... and a giant fish!

"That was the best piece of theatre I have EVER seen! Totally transcendental and beautifully reflective of a neurodivergent mind!!!" - Audience Feedback

BullyBully

Maas Theater en Dans (NL)

What do a toddler and the average world leader have in common? In *BullyBully*, two world leaders met in no man's land. What followed was an awkward encounter between two childish but powerful adults who gradually got used to each other and learnt to meet in the middle. This madcap musical about childish grown-up men, featured songs, funny quarrels, a bit of bickering and, eventually, a happy ending.

"Amazing! It went so fast & my son was absolutely hypnotised! Brilliant, funny, creativity at its best." - Audience Feedback



Club Origami

7 Circles (UK/JPN)

Club Origami was an immersive and interactive dance show inviting family audiences to imagine, create and explore whole new ways of thinking, playing and moving. Dance, fashion and live music met the magic of origami in this spirited and inspiring adventure in a land made of paper and play.

"FAB! Absolutely loved it. My daughter, who often struggles to sit through theatre performances, didn't want to leave. Very engaging. A beautiful piece of work." - Audience Feedback



Little Top

Starcatchers & Superfan (SCOT)

Little Top was a magical first circus experience for babies and their adults. It invited babies to experience spectacular balances, astonishing tumbles and inventive juggling in a specially designed set, that miniaturised the magic of the Big Top! Babies and adults alike were transported into a playful, joyous, upside down, topsy turvy world where people can fly, patterns fill the air and anything is possible.

"Absolutely loved the show - our baby was mesmerised! Parents loved it too! Great to have events for under 18 months. Brilliant festival programme as usual." - Audience Feedback



Grand Soft Day

Branar and NIE (ROI/UK)

Grand Soft Day, predominantly non-verbal with some English, Irish and Italian, was a curious and charming show that celebrated the wonder of the world around us. This was a playful show of all seasons about always being prepared even though you do not know what the day will bring.

"A really lovely play made magical with the introduction of live music. Such a clever way to engage young children, my son mesmerised the entire time and said 'Mummy I could just watch this all day!' Thank you for a brilliant show" - Audience Feedback



TYANI SHOWCASE



30 International Delegates



18 nations

The BCF24 TYANI (Theatre for Young Audiences NI) Showcase at this year's festival profiled the best in exciting, cutting-edge performance work for young audiences from artists and companies from the island of Ireland, supported by Culture Ireland and British Council.

"The Delegate program, nestled within the vibrant tapestry of the Belfast Children's Festival, embodies excellence in every aspect. From its meticulously and expertly curated performances and events to its unparalleled networking opportunities, this initiative ignites passion and fosters growth in the hearts and minds of its global participants."

- BCF Delegate Feedback



Making Waves

Jess Rowell (ROI)

Making Waves was a magical sea voyage in which the audience and performers set sail in search of hidden treasure. The adventure transported us through the ebb and flow of the ocean, to meet the school of fluorescent fish and see the swooping gulls. This immersive multi-sensory dance theatre performance was designed specifically for disabled children and young people ages 8 to 13 years with mild to complex needs. Designed to be inclusive, audience members were seated in pods representing boats on stage, allowing everyone to be part of the adventure.

"Moving and incredibly special. It felt as though [Child] was in a magical, special and freeing space. I am so happy that she has theatre/dance opportunities as an active audience member - that has been tailored for PMLD audiences. Thank you." - Audience Feedback



Hollow

Replay Theatre Company (NI) in association with The MAC

Hollow was a non-verbal inclusive theatre adventure inspired by the mysteries and sensations of subterranean exploration and was performed to one autistic and/or neurodivergent young person per show within an immersive setting. Created by Replay Theatre Company, a world-leader in inclusive theatre.

"Those guys are so awesome!!! Thank you again for a great show." - Audience Feedback



Tabula Rasa

Emmen Jude Donnelly/Circusful (NI)

Tabula Rasa, curated by aerial artist Emmen Jude Donnelly specially for the Belfast Children's Festival, mesmerised the audience as bodies effortlessly flipped, floated and flew, filling air and ground with colour and awe. This one-off festival treat connected young audiences with circus, modern movement and physical performance.

"Absolutely amazing show!!! So brilliant to bring contemporary circus to kids." - Audience Feedback



MEGAPHONE

Fighting Words NI

Fighting Words NI's latest Young Playwrights project was a collection of solo performances written and performed by Belfast writers, ages 14-18 years. The group worked with professional mentors to explore their personal histories, deepest wonderings and bravest imaginings to each create and perform their own brand-new piece of writing for the stage.

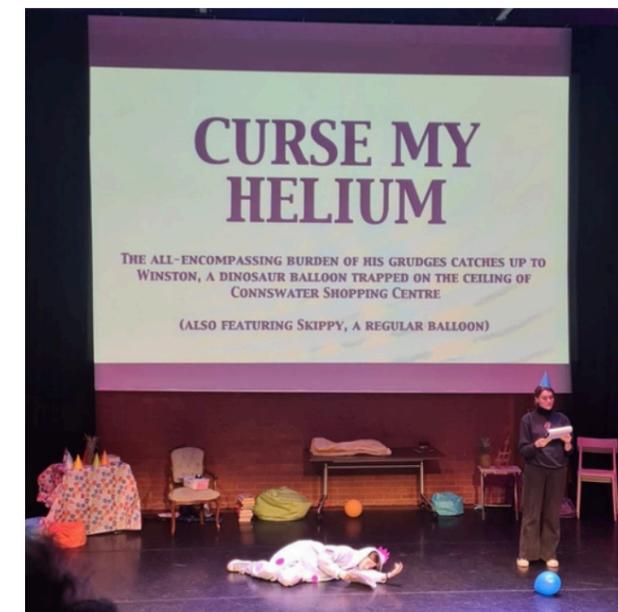


Work-in-Development: Doughnut

Stephen Beggs (NI)

This funny, fast-moving work-in-progress for ages 6+, followed the story of The Inventor who discovered a wonderful thing that could solve everyone's problems. Unfortunately, some people wanted it for themselves - should The Inventor share it or grow it?

"The show was a great insight into economics for children and was put into a beautiful metaphor. I really enjoyed the interactive parts and thought they were so fun." - Audience Feedback



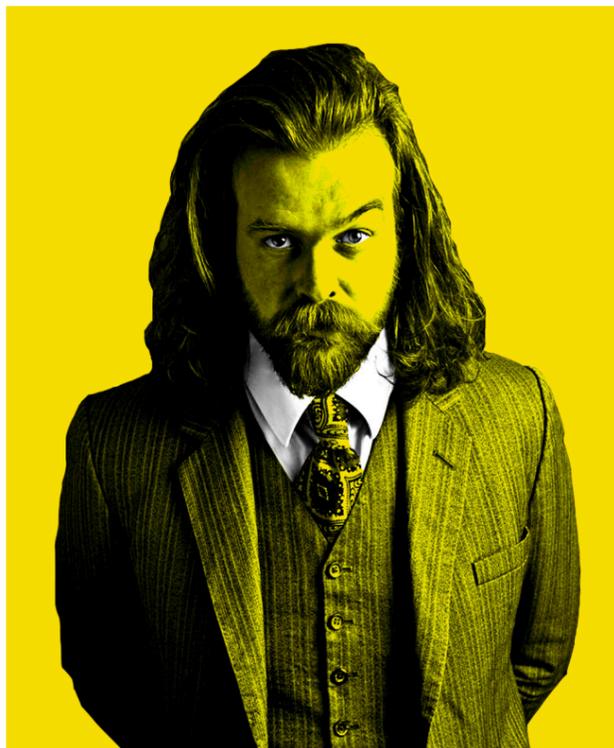
A Children's Guide to Anarchy

Dumbworld (NI)

This collection of seven musical animated video posters explored 'anarchical' thinking such as autonomy, kindness and human connectivity from a child's perspective. *A Children's Guide to Anarchy* was developed in a year-long process of co-creation involving pupils and teachers of Oakwood Primary School in Glasgow and artists and musicians from Red Note Ensemble.

Call to mind**Maiden Voyage Dance (NI)**

Call to mind explored themes of memory, perspective and the past's influence on the present. Performed by a trio of dancers and a trio of live musicians, *Call to mind* was a collaboration created by choreographer, Sarah Golding, and percussionist, Steve Davis, which navigated discordant times and moments in our lives using movement and sound.

**Paul Currie's DADA DOJO****Paul Currie (NI)**

Paul Currie unleashed his unique style, fusing traditional stand-up with everything from mime, crowd participation, puppetry, clowning and sheer untethered exuberance in this original and refreshing comedy performance for families. *DADA DOJO* was a pioneering family comedy club that went straight to the funny bone.

MUSIC PROGRAMME**Baby Rave: Rave in The Nave****Young at Art (NI)**

The original, and the best, *Baby Rave* was back in its spiritual home at Belfast Cathedral with the specially curated playlist from Young At Art's resident DJ Kwame Daniels. *Baby Rave* is a participatory dance event for children under 4 years and their grownups, encouraging baby and big person to dance and explore rhythm and music together.

"It was just amazing from start to finish. Baby Rave is fantastic." - Audience Feedback

Kiddy Céilí**Young At Art and An Droichead (NI)**

After its hugely successful debut at last year's festival, we were thrilled to welcome *Kiddy Céilí* back for BCF24, in partnership with An Droichead. The audience was steppin', swinging and sliding with Múinteoir, Ciara, and An Droichead musicians. Grownups and little ones experienced all the fun of a céilí, learning some classic céilí dances and fun moves, with the help of céilí dancers and live traditional musicians.

"Thanks for an absolutely brilliant event. The kids had the best time, genius idea to have it in the cathedral, and fantastic musicians, leaders and vibe. Excellent! Many more to come hopefully 10/10." - Audience Feedback



BCF24 AT OH YEAH! MUSIC CENTRE

We once again teamed up with the Oh Yeah! Music Centre to bring a diverse range of music gigs and events to younger music fans.



Open Mic showcased the work of young artists (aged under 18 years) and offered them a safe and welcoming environment to perform in. *Open Mic* was set up by the Oh Yeah Music Centre in response to feedback from young artists who couldn't access traditional open mic nights in pubs and clubs due to their age.



Volume Control showcased young, new bands curated by a team of young promoters, as part of Oh Yeah's youth mentoring programme. Part of our festival programme for older young people, this event was a chance to see the next generation of talented and passionate young people emerging both as performers and event organisers.



Acoustic Picnic is a firm festival favourite, and is always one of the festival's hottest tickets! Families enjoyed an afternoon of live music from the OTH Collective, along with crafts, games and activities for all the family - the perfect place to relax and have fun with loved ones in a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment.

"Thanks for an amazing fun-filled musical extravaganza. We had a brilliant day. Great venue, great stuff and great times." - Audience Feedback

IRISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME



Babaithe Cultúir

Young at Art in partnership with Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich (NI)

This interactive and imaginative experience supports young children's creative expression by enabling them to try new things. *Babaithe Cultúir* (Culture Babies) gives very young families the freedom to explore art and get as messy as they wish in a safe, fun and welcoming Irish Language environment, with all levels of Irish welcome.

An Slipéar Gloine

Paddy Donnelly and Fearghas Mac Lochlainn (NI)

A literary and creative workshop for families with Irish Language author, Fearghas Mac Lochlainn, and artist and illustrator, Paddy Donnelly. This fun, interactive session, based on *An Slipéar Gloine*, a retelling of Cinderella, written in rhyming verses, was full of storytelling, drawing and craic!



"Fabulous. Such a lovely way to spend a morning. So creative and interactive." - Audience Feedback

FESTIVAL FAMILY DAY OUT

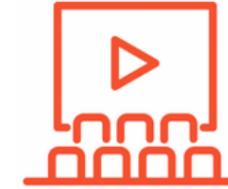
Our ever-popular Festival Family Day Out just gets bigger and bigger! This year, it took place across the Cathedral Quarter, with the rain not dampening anyone's spirits!



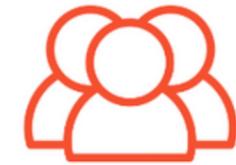
With an exciting and varied selection of pop-up performances, workshops, walkabout characters, storytelling, circus, comedy, music and so much more, there really was something for everyone. And what makes it even better? It was all totally free to attend!

"An incredible day out for families. My children absolutely loved the activities and performances and the staff were all amazing, welcoming and made the day magical." - Audience Feedback

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BCF24 Industry Events - For the Grown Ups



9 Events



669 Participants

Our Festival Industry Programme featured some of the best and brightest minds in the industry on some of the foremost themes in creating work for young audiences, through our series of workshops, industry events, discussions, and symposiums.

These events included:

Creative Conversations

A series of talks and panel discussions including artists and producers that have benefitted over the last two years from **Branar's Meitheal** programme, a support initiative for artists and producers creating work for young audiences across performing arts disciplines. In this Creative Conversation, Branar shared their learnings and findings, and we heard from some of the individuals about their experience of the programme.

This year's Belfast Children's Festival proudly presented two inclusive performance pieces specifically created for children and young people with additional needs. **Inclusive Practice** was a Creative Conversation with Andrew Stanford (Director of Replay Theatre Company's *Hollow*) and Jess Rowell (Choreographer of *Making Waves*). Both Jess and Andrew shared their practice, approaches and the unique challenges and highlights of making work for this very important audience.

A **Creative Conversation with Rhona Matheson**, Chief Executive of Starcatchers, Scotland's arts and early years organisation and pioneers in the development and creation of work for early years, was hosted in partnership with QUB Drama. Rhona was joined in conversation by Dr. Ali Fitzgibbon to discuss Starcatchers' unique approach to making work for babies and children ages up to 5 years, and Rhona's recent work exploring children's rights and participation.

BCF24 Dutch Focus Masterclass: Playing like a 'Bully'

In this physical theatre masterclass, participants were introduced to the embodied learning method used by Maas Theatre and Dance, taking their performance *BullyBully* as inspiration. Participants got to know 'the actor in yourself' and discovered how to make theatre for small children, whilst taking them as seriously as they would an adult audience. The masterclass concluded with short presentations and performances of participants' own *BullyBully*.



BCF24 e QUB: Peacebuilding: Arts and Participation of Children and Young People

This event, hosted by the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, Queen's University Belfast, brought together practitioners and researchers working with children and young people to explore the contribution of children and young people's participating in the creative arts to peacebuilding.

It explored questions such as how the creative arts can facilitate the expression of children and young people's experiences of conflict and post-conflict societies; whether it empowers them to participate in processes of social justice, transformation and commemoration; and how can listening to children's creative productions across diverse cultural contexts help us better understand the contribution they have made and can make to peacebuilding, historically, now and in the future.

INTERNSHIP AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Student Placement Programme

YAA welcomed two students from Stranmillis University Primary Teaching Course as they took part in their Insight Placement. For two weeks, the students assisted the Education Co-ordinator with preparations for the Creative Child programme and building teacher resources to accompany Festival visits.

YAA also hosted a Festival Intern during their Industry Placement year, a BA Fine Art student from Loughborough University joined the Education team for four months to assist with the running of the BCF24 Engagement Programme.



Volunteer Programme

Young at Art welcomed 16 student volunteers from Ulster University's International Hospitality Management course to join the BCF24 events team. Students received advance event management training from YAA's General Manager and Creative Producer, learning about festival roles, safeguarding, and an overview of the festival events. During the Festival Family Day Out, the volunteers assisted the festival team in event set up, welcoming visitors, collecting audience feedback, signposting visitors to the wide range of festival events, assisting the public with general queries, and event take down. In post-event feedback, 100% of the students said they had a positive experience volunteering at BCF24.

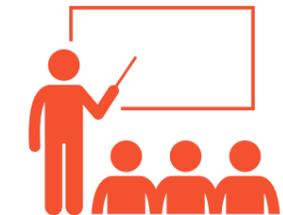
EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME



48 Schools



16 Artists



195 Classes



**2,370 Children/Young
People**



143 Workshops



47 BCF24 Visits



**20 Schools in top 20%
Deprived Areas**

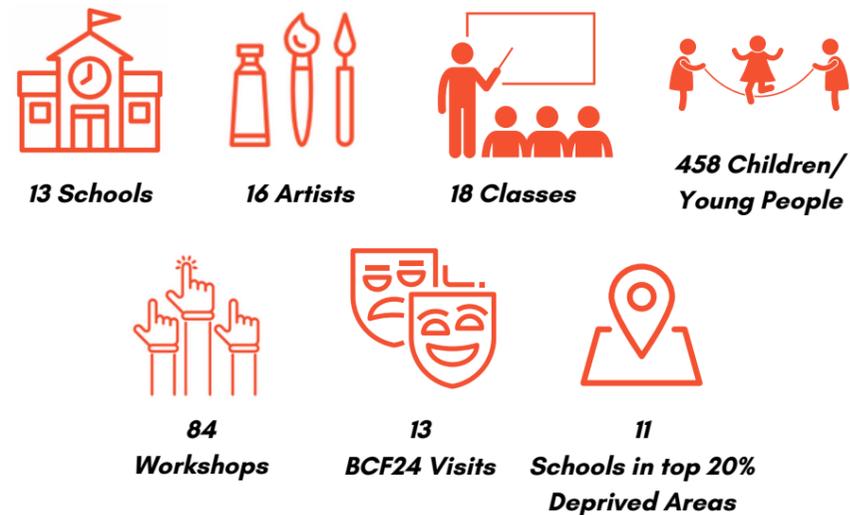
Our Education & Engagement Programme delivers a range of projects and initiatives to connect children and young people to the creative arts and ensure quality arts engagement is accessible to all, building confidence, imagination, critical thinking skills, resilience...and of course they had fun too!

This year, we delivered a hybrid programme of workshops and creative experiences in nursery, primary, and secondary schools in some of Northern Ireland's most deprived areas in person and online.

We engaged with 2,370 children and young people from 48 schools across Northern Ireland, providing workshops across a wide range of art forms, as well as creative materials for the classroom, resource booklets and access to the Belfast Children's Festival.

Projects delivered as part of the Programme included Creative Child, Creative Teacher, Access All Areas, Irish Language Author, Young People's WellBeing Project, Young at Art Collective and Children's Books Ireland Author Sessions.

CREATIVE CHILD



Creative Child, Young at Art's flagship Education & Engagement project, has now finished its 11th year. In 2023/24, artists and support staff delivering the project worked with children ages 3-5 years from 18 classes in 13 Nursery schools in some of Belfast's most economically and socially deprived communities. By providing a range of creative and artistic experiences, the project not only aimed to introduce children to different art forms but also encourage them to give voice to their ideas and opinions and explore their creativity. The project is designed to increase children's confidence, imagination and critical thinking skills and address some of the barriers to accessing the arts.

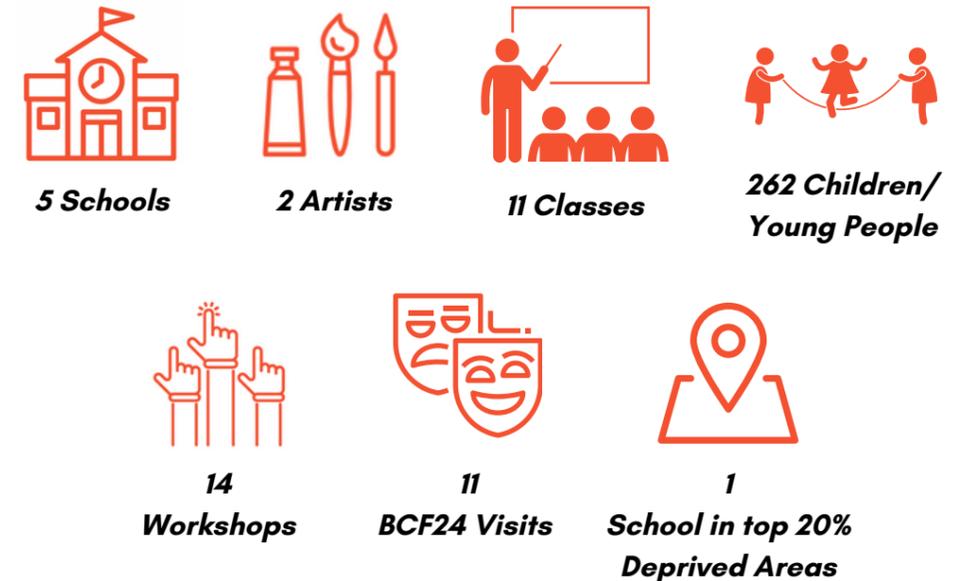
Each child participating in the project received five creative experiences, including two pre-festival and two post-festival workshops in two art forms: drama/dance and visual art. These workshops explored themes addressed in a BCF24 performance that classes were supported to attend. All workshops were delivered by trained artist facilitators with experienced support staff.

In addition, Foras na Gaeilge supported our Irish medium Creative Child schools with two additional creative experiences and participants and their adults were invited to attend a parent/child creative workshop together. Teachers were provided with an educational resource pack and 'prop box' of materials linked to their festival performance to further encourage creative play, critical thinking and recall. There was also a 'behind the scenes' visit to a local arts venue near the participants, Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich.

"The workshops really allow those children who do not normally express themselves or their ideas verbally due to English as an additional language or SEN, are able to express themselves creatively through what they create through Visual Art or contributing in the drama. Even for the younger classes at the start of the year, they don't have the confidence to express themselves or work together, but as the year goes on they begin to creatively work together and express and grow their confidence with the creative skills they learn throughout the workshops."

-Teacher feedback

CREATIVE TEACHER



"It has helped every other aspect of my teaching" - Teacher feedback

Creative Teacher is our multi-year arts skills development project for Primary school teachers designed to encourage, mentor and support teachers in creative learning techniques that can be applied to curriculum teaching. This year, the two remaining primary school teachers each received one-to-one mentorship from YAA artist facilitators throughout the year providing activities and ideas that embed arts-based learning across the curriculum. YAA artists worked with the teachers in their classrooms and observed how pupils are responding to the creative techniques they have developed as teachers.

As the project reached its completion, all teachers who participated in the project over the last three years came together to share best practice and support each other in ensuring the project learnings become embedded in the schools beyond the life of the project. And thanks to Paul Hamlyn Foundation's incredibly generous support for the project, all participating schools also benefitted from a BCF24 festival visit.

"I had a student teacher in this year and it was even really helpful for her to see what we had learnt from CT, because the paper plate, templates and printouts method is really encouraged in the teaching college and it was really good for her development to see there actually is other ways of doing things..."

-Teacher feedback

ACCESS ALL AREAS



4 Schools



7 Classes



4 Workshops



95 Children/
Young People



7 BCF24 Visits

Access All Areas is a festival access project designed to overcome the barriers to engagement with the arts for children and young people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and additional needs including those with neurodiverse and/or autistic spectrum conditions and other sensory or communication needs. The project offers special 'relaxed' performances for families across the festival, including bespoke visual story packs, adjusted lighting and sound levels and access to 'chill out' spaces and anxiety aids. The project also offers five special schools fully subsidised performance visits, including festival ticket and transport to the venue.

This year, one of the performances on offer to special schools was Jess Rowell's *Making Waves*, which included a schools-based residency. During this, the show's cast spent a day at the school to meet the class that would attend the show, and delivered a workshop with pupils. All attending teachers received a resource pack to accompany the show that their class enjoyed, providing example activities on how to continue exploring creativity in the classroom.



"Great experience for our SLD pupils who often don't get to the theatre.... Highly recommend - inclusive and fun for all"

-Special Educational Needs Teacher

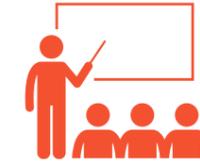
IRISH LANGUAGE AUTHOR PROGRAMME



6 Schools



5 Artists



6 Classes



174 Children/
Young People



5 Events



4 Schools in top 20%
Deprived Areas

Our Irish Language Author Programme, curated by author Máire Zepf, delivered a series of events with authors/illustrators including Paddy Donnelly and Fearghas Mac Lochlainn, Muireann Ní Chiobháin, and Máire Zepf and Andrew Whitson for children/young people in the Irish language. The project offered five events for schools and one public event as part of BCF24. All events were delivered in Irish.



"That was a great day." " Can we go back to that soon?" "I loved that." As the teacher I can't praise the staff highly enough. They were great with the kids and very understanding. They spent time engaging with the kids and making sure the kids had a great experience which they did."

- Teacher Feedback

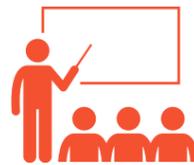
YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING PROJECT



6 Schools



4 Artists



6 Groups



356 Children/
Young People



21

Workshops/
Gallery Tours



6

BCF24 Visits



4

Schools in top 20%
Deprived Areas

Our Young People's Wellbeing Project used arts-based engagements with children and young people in six secondary school-aged groups to open up and discuss mental health and wellbeing in a safe and non-judgemental space. The project aims to build children and young people's self-confidence and resilience by providing them with tangible, creative opportunities to explore themes of mental health and wellbeing.

Each participating group attended a hand-picked BCF24 performance, which explored mental health and wellbeing themes, and participated in drama and visual arts workshops delivered to them by a trained YAA artist facilitator.

"Each pupil took away something different and enjoyed discussing their different interpretations with each other. As a teacher, I felt that the performance provided pupils with an excellent example of 'show don't tell' and how they could achieve this in their own performances."

- Teacher Feedback

YOUNG AT ART COLLECTIVE



12

Children/
Young People



11

Artists



21

Workshops/
Creative Sessions



5

BCF24 Visits

Year Two of the YAA Collective launched in September 2023 with 12 new participants ages 7-11 years. They kicked off with an induction session in which they drafted their own 'code of conduct' for the group and told us what they were interested in, what types of art activities they would like to try, and what they wanted to get out of their experience with the YAA Collective. Project Lead Artist, Jazzmin McClure, and YAA's Creative Producer, Jackie Fauteux, curated a diverse range of cultural experiences and creative sessions for the group, co-designed with the Collective and taking their interests, suggestions, and opinions into account.



The cohort explored circus skills, stage and screen make-up, puppetry, historic cinema, directing and devising techniques, and magic, with each session delivered by a professional artist/facilitator. As well as cultural visits to the MAC's Galleries, the Lyric Theatre's Christmas show, *Hansel & Gretel*, and BCF24 where they enjoyed a range of festival performances and events including Maiden Voyage Dance's *Call to mind*, Het Houten Huis' *I...Um I*, Branar's *Grand Soft Day*, and a work-in-development by Stephen Beggs, *Doughnut*.

The Collective also devised, directed and costumed their own performance piece, *Spark Steals the Show*, performed at the BCF24 Festival Family Day Out! The Collective participated in 'think-tank' sessions, led by Jazzmin, to ensure the Collective's input and feedback could be gathered. Some were attended by YAA Board's Children's Champion, who ensured their opinions and reflections were reported to the Board.

"I LOVE the YAA Collective, I wish it was every day. My favourite thing so far was seeing I...Um I, and I love doing drama and getting to learn about magic." YAA Collective member

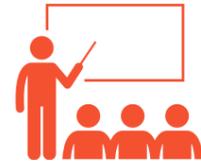
KPMG CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR AUTHOR SESSIONS, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CHILDREN'S BOOKS IRELAND



14 Schools



7 Artists



40 Classes



**1,012 Children/
Young People**



**15
Workshops**



**1 School in top 20%
Deprived Areas**

Children's Books Ireland partnered with YAA, to deliver the KPMG Children's Book of the Year Author Sessions. Seven authors from the KPMG Children's Book of the Year Awards shortlist, Clara Kumagai, Serena Molloy, John Dougherty, Jenny Ireland, Patricia Forde, Isla McGuckin, and PJ Lynch, delivered sessions to classes in seven Primary and Secondary schools throughout Northern Ireland (in person and online). These sessions provided pupils an opportunity to interact with these highly acclaimed authors and illustrators in creative writing, storytelling and illustration workshops.

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES



SERVICE DELIVERY

MAC x YAA



10
Sessions



297
Child and Adult
Attendees



8
Artists



8
Support Staff

Our collaboration with the MAC continued with four creative weekends:

I DON'T NEED A BAG, THANKS

We celebrated World Environment Day with a sustainable tote-bag making workshop. *I Don't Need a Bag, Thanks* invited children and young people to discuss plastic waste, explore 'top-tips' for reducing our use of plastics, while designing and branding their own sustainable canvas tote-bag to take away. The workshop for children and young people aged 7+ years was delivered *AT THE TABLE*, the installation in the MAC's Upper Gallery.

POLICY PICNIC

Children, young people and their families were invited to an 'ideas picnic' to share their thoughts, ideas, and ambitions for making a difference. Working with a visual artist and a drama facilitator, the group was led in discussions to create a collective manifesto for social change, represented visually and added to the Upper Gallery as part of the MAC's *AT THE TABLE* exhibition.

LOVE, PRIDE

After a very successful Pride celebration in the MAC in 2022, we were back for Pride 2023 for a drop-in workshop where children, young people and their families were invited to make *LOVE, PRIDE* hearts, ahead of the PRIDE parade to wear their rainbow heart on their sleeve. Some rainbow face painting ensured everyone was 'pride ready'.

'NOT QUITE MIDNIGHT FEAST' STROLLER TOURS

In this fun and accessible immersive performance, suitable for families with very young children, our colourful characters, Ebb & Flo, led babies and their families through Louise Wallace's *Midnight Feast* exhibition. Through engaging drama games and props, babies and their families were encouraged to engage with the artwork.

BAG PRINTING for BELFAST MARITIME FESTIVAL



12 sessions



500
participants



1 artist



4 Support
Staff

As part of the Belfast Maritime Festival, YAA delivered a tote-bag printing workshop focused on sustainability and marine life for Belfast City Council. Especially designed for children aged 7+, the workshops ran over two days of the Maritime Festival giving participants the chance to design and decorate their own sustainable canvas bag to take away.



STRATEGY CONSULTATION SESSION for ARTS COUNCIL NI



2 sessions



29
participants



1 artist



4 Support
Staff

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland engaged YAA to deliver a consultation with young people on their new strategy. Working with our YAA Collective and lead artist, Jazzmin, we designed a child-focused creative evaluation session to gather the children's feedback on ACNI's new strategic aims from a young persons' perspective. In conjunction with this session, YAA Director, Eibhlin de Barra, ran a parallel session with the young people's parents/carers to gather their parental perspective on the strategic aims. We compiled two reports for ACNI with the findings and feedback from children/young people and their parents/carers.

BRUSH WITH TECHNOLOGY for NI SCIENCE FESTIVAL



1 session



**122
participants**



1 artist



**3 Support
Staff**

As part of the NI Science Festival, YAA delivered *A Brush with Technology* in the Ulster Museum. Taking inspiration from paintings created by David Hockney using the iPad app, *Brushes*, participants drew inspiration from surrounding permanent exhibitions in the museum to create their own digital masterpieces.



CARDBOARD CASTLE CITY for NI MUSEUMS COUNCIL



1 session



**50
participants**



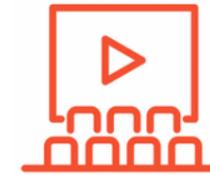
1 artist



**2 Support
Staff**

As part of NI Museums Councils' Playful Museums Festival, YAA delivered *Cardboard Castles* at Carrickfergus Museum. Participants were invited to drop in and take inspiration from Carrickfergus' rich medieval history and add to the growing Cardboard Castle city in the foyer of the museum.

BABY RAVE



4 Raves



425 Ravers



**8 Artists and
Support Staff**

The original, and the best, *Baby Rave* is a popular participatory dance event for children under 4 years and their accompanying adults encouraging parents and babies to dance and explore rhythm and music together. With classic rave tunes and pumpin' beats, babies and their big people can get lost in music together, with a playlist specially curated by *Baby Rave's* resident DJ, Kwame Daniels. But a rave is not just for festival. We also delivered this ever-popular event in Elmwood Hall, Queens University Belfast in October 2023.



MARKETING, PR & COMMUNICATIONS



41,000 Visitors to the YAA Website (January-March 2024)



5,630 BCF24 digital brochure views



9.8m BCF24 Media Coverage Reach



23 local/national print features



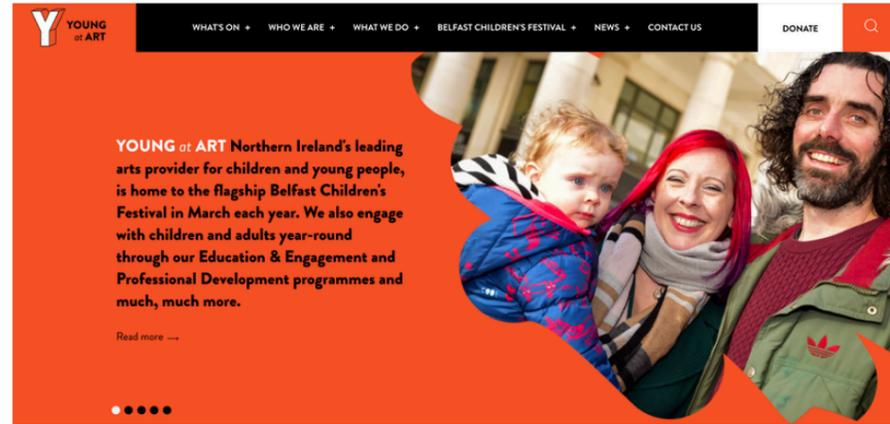
17 broadcast items on radio/TV



75 online articles

Website

Our new website (launched in 2023) had 59k views and 41k users between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. As in previous years, the majority of site traffic was between launch (26 January) and festival (9–16 March) with 44k views and 31k users visiting the site during this period. (versus 7.3k users for the same period in 2023)



BCF24 Brochure

In response to audience and venue/partner feedback from the previous year, we produced a short print run of 3,000 brochures for BCF24. This ensured accessibility and inclusion for those who prefer a printed copy.

The short print run of recyclable brochures means we're adhering to our Environmental Sustainability policy. (We achieved Silver Green Tourism status in December 2023)

In tandem with this, we published a digital brochure to our website using digital platform ISSUU, which we integrated with our online box office.



BCF24 Launch

We held the BCF24 launch at the Crescent Arts Centre, a new festival venue partner. In keeping with the strong circus flavour of the festival programme, the launch event had a circus theme and was attended by children from partner Nursery and Primary schools, festival performers, theatre companies, media, artists, freelancers, funders and partners. Audience members were introduced to the BCF24 programme and highlights video.



Video

Video featured strongly in the BCF24 Marketing campaign. The festival highlights video produced for the launch was posted to all YAA social platforms, the website and newsletter and shared with partner venues.

As in previous years, we added BCF branded intros and outros to all event and performance trailers and posted these to event listings on our website.

Responding to current social media trends, we created multiple reels in the run up to, and during BCF24, which ensured increased visibility across Meta platforms.

To enhance our video portfolio this year, we captured vox pops, feedback and reactions from audiences as they exited events and performances.

Our launch video and festival trailers were viewed

- 1,550 times on YouTube in Jan to March;
- 20,919 times on Meta.



E-newsletters

Almost 6,000 subscribers receive our regular e-newsletters (monthly from April 2023 to January 2024, and fortnightly from late January to mid-March 2024). Our newsletters achieve an average open rate of 25%.

Social Media

During January to March, BCF24 organic content had a reach of:

Facebook: 114,952 organic reach – 136 new followers; and
Instagram: 14,923 accounts reached – 302 new followers.

As in previous years, we invested in advertising spend on Meta (Facebook and Instagram) targeting families in NI and ROI, resulting in an extra reach of 103,894 and 6,176 link clicks across six traffic campaigns.

We introduced a LinkedIn profile to our social media portfolio in 2023 and will continue to focus on growing follower numbers in 2024-25.

(Note: Analytics no longer available on X, formerly Twitter)

Outdoor Advertising

To maximize visibility with a reduced marketing budget for BCF24, we focused all spend on outdoor sites (48 sheet billboards and digital adshels) in advertising Cycle 5 (26 Feb-10 Mar).

We secured outdoor advertising on seven 48 sheet sites, and 32 digital adshel sites across Belfast, with BCF24 flags outside Belfast City Hall. Space was made available by Belfast City Council's Festivals Forum. In addition, we were supported with three 48-sheet outdoor sites, also provided by Belfast City Council's Festivals Forum.



Belfast Welcome Centre

Belfast Welcome Centre's display space was a shop window for BCF24, in the week before the festival. This optimal display space, located opposite City Hall is a prime footfall area for commuters and the display included BCF24 branding, ticket booth, brochures and cut outs of festival performers.

Media Partners

Through our media partnership with U105 (253,000 weekly listenership, NI-wide), we ran social media and on-air competitions and interviews with BCF24 artists in the run up to the festival.

For the third consecutive year, the U105 Roadshow featured in the Festival Family Day programme, with a sound desk and presenter based in the MAC. The roadshow was pre-promoted on U105 with a reach of 129,200 and the on-the-day link back to studio featured an interview with YAA's Creative Producer, with a reach of 143,668.



**46,954 reach on U105
Facebook page across four
posts re YAA partnership**



**253,000 Weekly
Listeners**



**41 promotional spots for
competitions and U105
Roadshow at Festival
Family Day Out**



60 spots of 30 sec ad

PR/Media Relations

We engaged Mackle Communications to deliver a media relations strategy for BCF24 in NI and ROI. The campaign achieved coverage for BCF24 in print, online/digital/social and broadcast media, with a reach of 9.8 million.

Multiple opportunities were secured with BBC NI and The Irish News.

Sponsorships & Partnerships

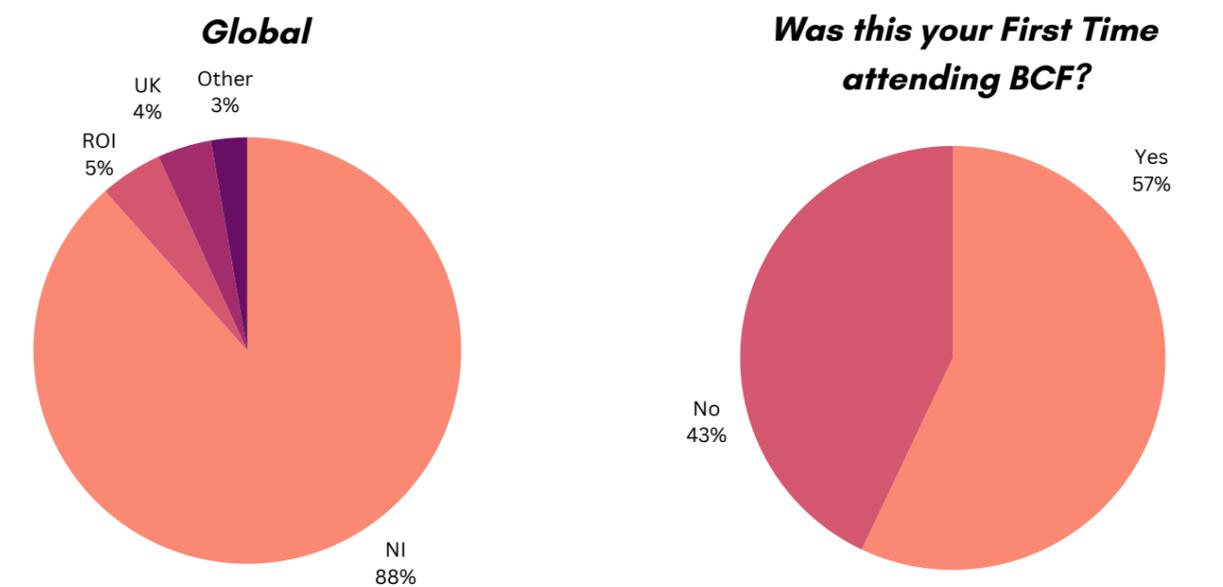
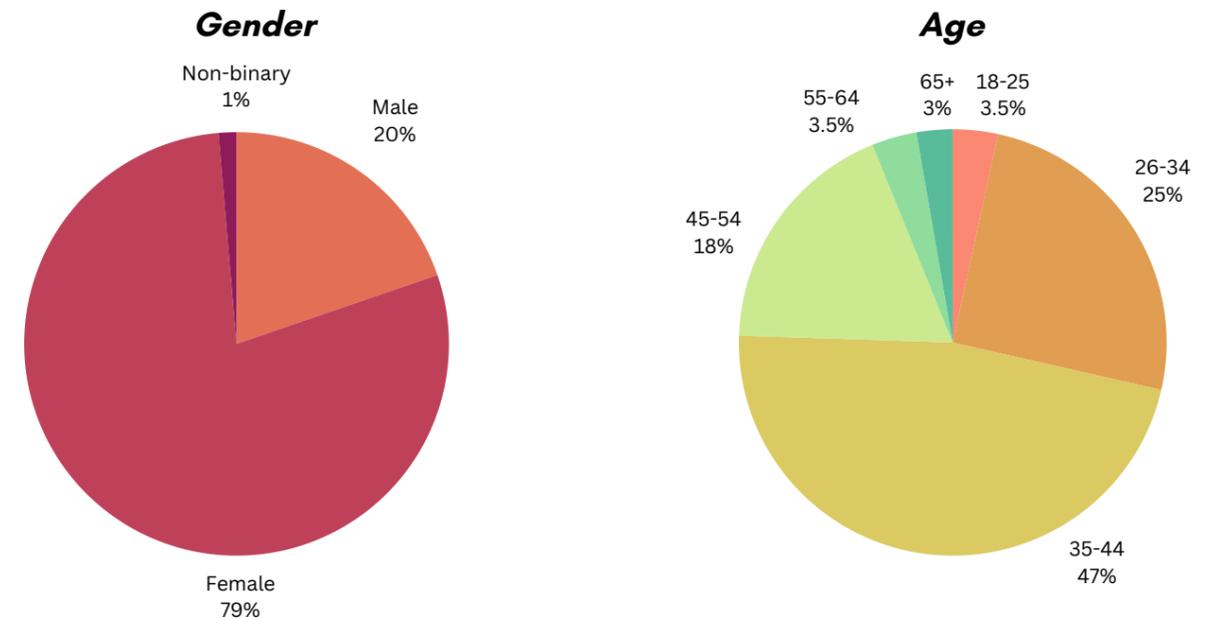
We agreed a new sponsorship partnership with Victoria Square Belfast, and marked this new relationship by hosting a creative workshop in the centre as part of our BCF24 Festival Family Day Out. The drop-in, *Under the Dome* themed workshop, encouraged families to use waste packaging materials from Victoria Square's retail tenants to create a unique, sustainable urban cityscape.

We agreed a renewed sponsorship partnership with CQ BID for BCF24, supporting their 2021-2026 strategy of encouraging family footfall into Cathedral Quarter.

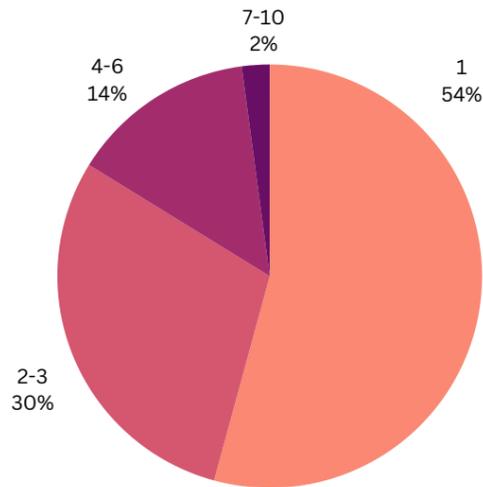
The partnership allowed YAA to develop an extensive and engaging programme of free activity for BCF24 Festival Family Day Out including short events, workshops and performances.

We publicised both partnerships to our audiences through our social media and digital channels.

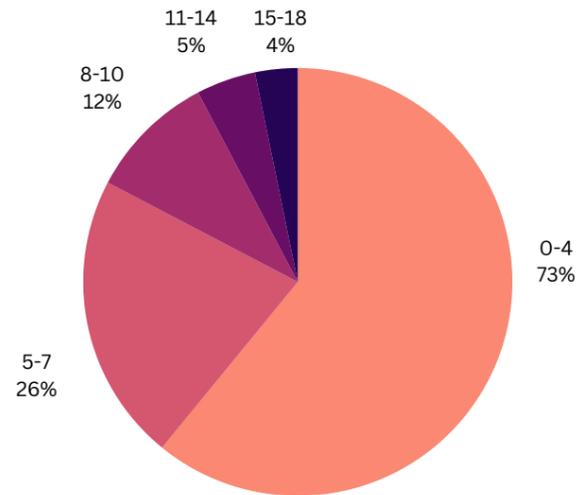
TAKE A GLANCE At our audience



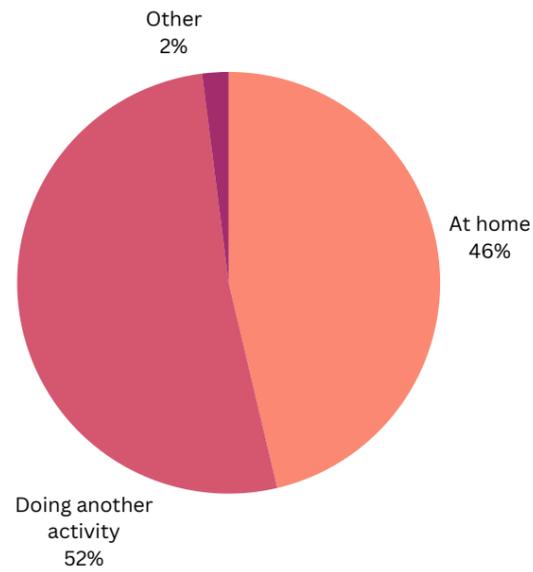
No. of Events Attended



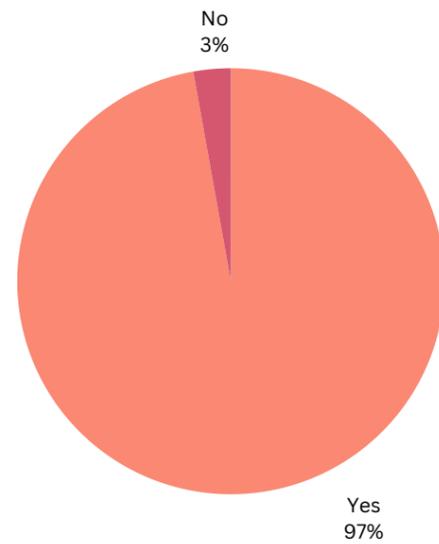
Children's Age



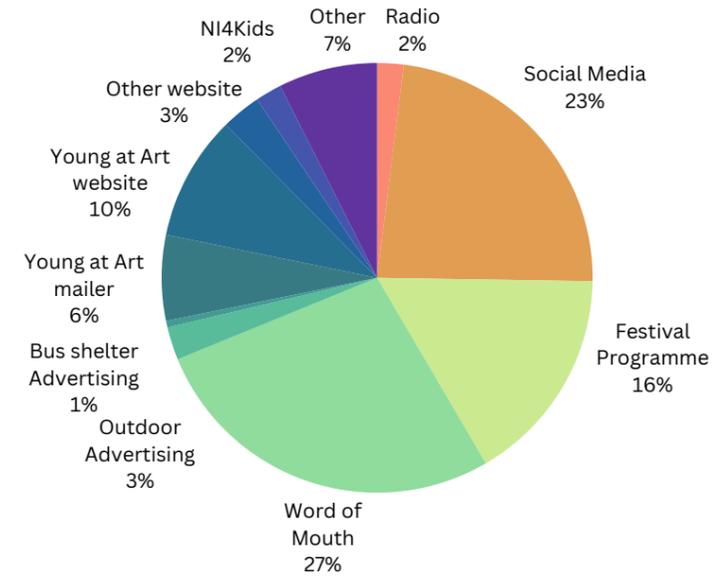
How would you have spent your time if you had not attended BCF?



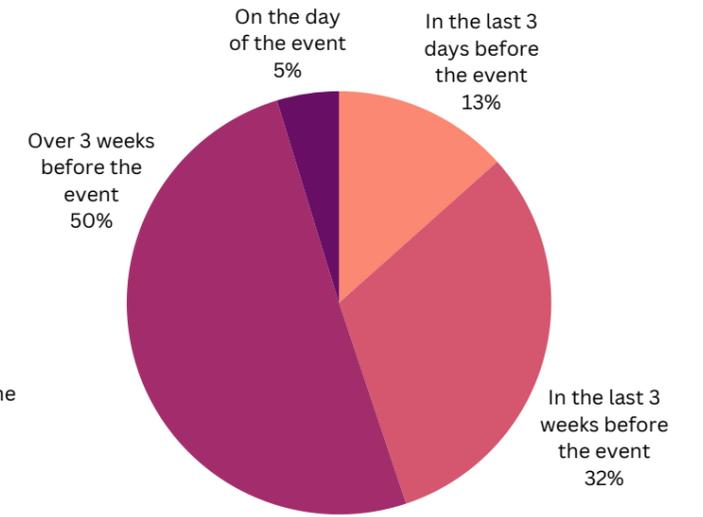
Would you recommend BCF?



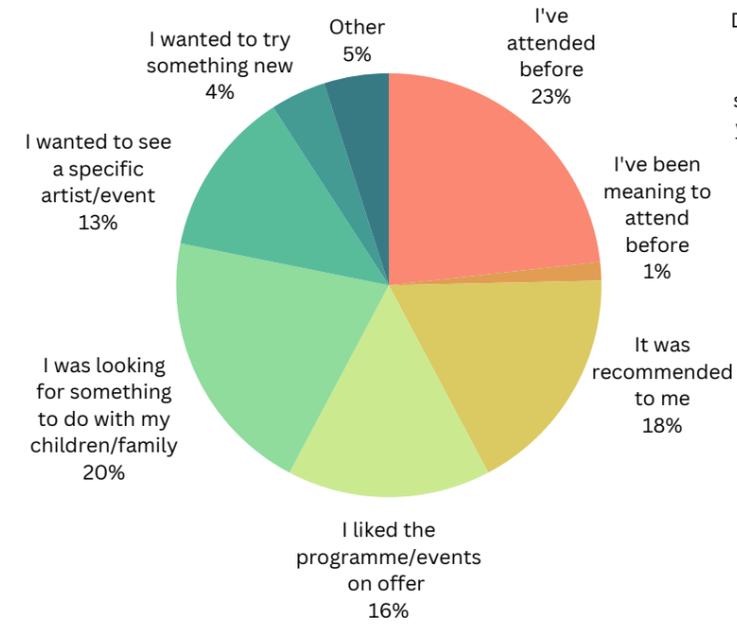
How did you hear about us?



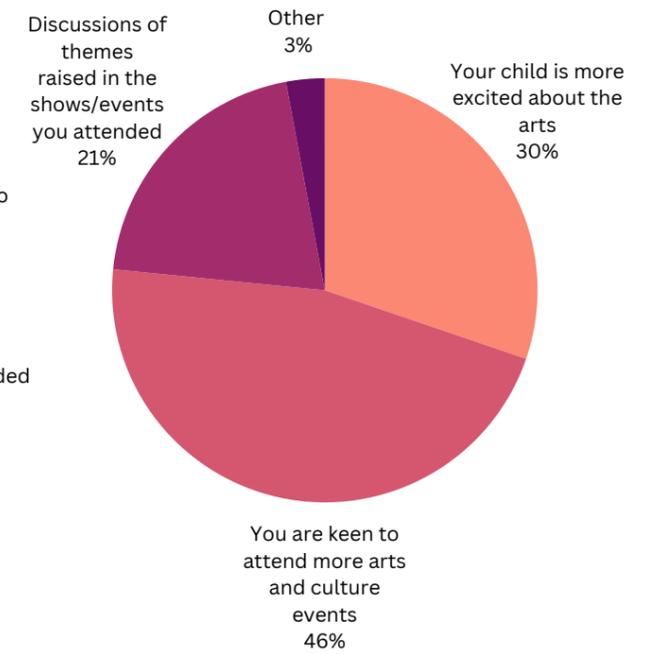
When did you book?



Why did you decide to attend BCF?



As a result of BCF my child is...



WITH THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS, VENUES, SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

Principal Funders:



Funders:



Partners:



Venues and Supporters:



Photographers:

Festival photography - Carrie Davenport
Replay Theatre Company - Neil Harrison
Maiden Voyage Dance - Neil Hainsworth
Fighting Words NI - Hilary Copeland
Oh Yeah! - Caoimhe O'Connell, Carrie Davenport
Dumbworld - Rhian Cooper