

CircuSful

End of Year Report 2023-24



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Our Purposes and Activities



Circusful is one of the leading circus arts and street theatre organisations in Northern Ireland – delivering participatory circus, professional performance, training, and professional development.

The charity changed its name in Autumn 2021.

Circusful is a charity registered with HMRC and with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission whose purposes are set out in the Articles and Memorandum of Association as follows:

- The advancement of education and for the development and promotion of circus drama and performance skills in Northern Ireland.
- The provision of management and facilities for the training of young people and others who desire to learn skills in arts, drama, circus and physical entertainment without distinction of sex, age, colour, political or religious opinion
- For the advancement of the education of people the organisation comes in contact with.
- For the provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare, for the recreation and leisure time of people with the object of improving their conditions of life.

Since 1985, the charity has been successful in its ambition to work with young people and adults from from all backgrounds across Northern Ireland to deliver life enhancing skills, designed to improve the resilience and mental and physical wellbeing of young people and adults. The organisation also gives the opportunity for young people to demonstrate skill development on the local, national and international stage. These activities are accessible and can be enjoyed, by participants and audiences alike irrespective of background.

During the year 2023-24 we continued to notice some ongoing impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, most particularly in the engagement, the behavioural and emotional responses of the young people in our classes and how much uncertainty our freelance trainer team are continuing to face.

2023-24 – A Picture Timeline

April Highlights

- Easter Aerial Special
- Festival of Fools Preparations



May Highlights

- Circusful Corner, Festival of Fools and Bricolage
- Compagnie XY Rehearsals
- Youth Circus attend Galway Mayhem Festival



June Highlights

- Itty Bitty and Youth Circus End of Term Showcases
- Circus Explored – Circus Picnic Cruinniu na Nog Arts and Business Event – Celebrating Creative Partnerships

2023-24 – A Picture Timeline

July Highlights

- Youth Circus Members attend Cultural Bridge project in Germany
- Summer Classes Commence
- New and Returning Artists for Rehearsals and Residencies



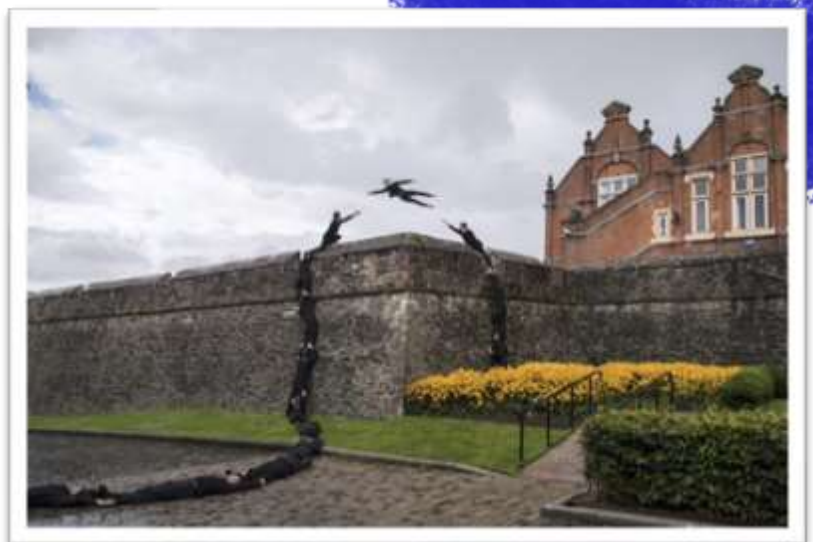
August Highlights

- Circusful at Eastside Arts Festival
- Compagnie XY – After The Rain – Rehearsals and Shows
- Mike Maloney Award Opens



September Highlights

- Our first international Rope Meeting
- Circusful AGM



2023-24 – A Picture Timeline



October Highlights

- Circusful attends One Young World
- Mike Maloney Awards Announced



November Highlights

- Cathedral Quarter BID Showcase
- Youth Circus attends Irish Youth Circus Gathering
- Adult Circus Cabaret 2024

December Highlights

- Jenna at Caravan's General Assembly and 15th Anniversary in Brussels
- Youth Circus Gingerbread Cabaret



2023-24 – A Picture Timeline



January Highlights
- Circusful hosts
Vertical Play 2024



February Highlights
- Circusful and Young
at Art Childrens
Festival presents
Tabula Rasa
- Our first Scratch Night



March Highlights
- Circusful at St
Patrick's Day
- The Big Circusful
Fundraising Quiz



Classes at Circusful

Over the year we delivered a range of in-person workshops/classes and events for children, young people, adults and families.

Our in-house classes for children (aged 2 years up), young people and adults in Circusful's main building in Gordon Street, Belfast took place over four terms. In 2023-24 we also offered Easter Intensive programmes for both adults and young people for the first time.

In numbers, between April 2023 and March 2024 we delivered:

- 160 Itty Bitty + for over 70 children aged 2 – 7 years.
- 277 Youth Circus classes for over 160 young people aged 8 – 25 years.
- 325 Adult Circus classes for over 140 people aged 18 years plus.
- Together these classes offered over 11,200 opportunities for engagement!

We know our programmes inspire young people because the young people, their parents and our trainers tell us:

“Circus class is my daughter’s favourite activity of her week. She enjoys it so much and I love the confidence it gives her.”

Circus Parent

“__ really stepping up in aerial. He has always been too scared to get on a trapeze. Today he was really brave and just went for it. So good to see.”

Itty Bitty Trainer.

“I just wanted to say thank you for the lovely opportunity __ had to take part in the parade. She loved all the training on stilts, and it was amazing to see her beaming as she took part. Such a super opportunity for her and so nice to see her so happy and thriving.”

Circus Parent.

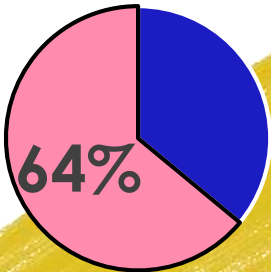


The Impact of Circus

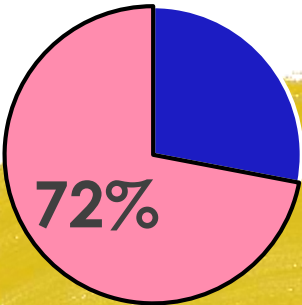
We've continued to survey parents and young people about their experience of Circusful and our classes/events.

From surveys in 2023-24, the following observations were noted by parents along with the percentage that agreed with the statement

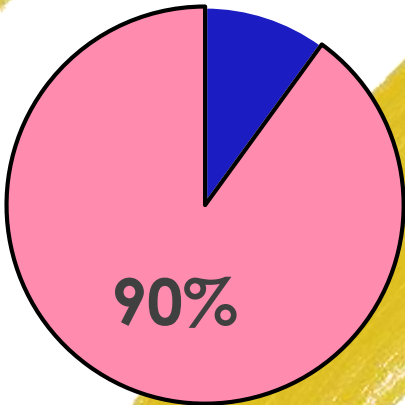
A positive change in their child's imagination



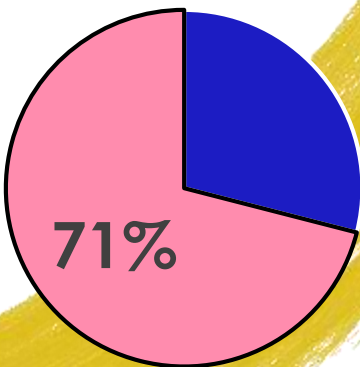
A positive change in their child's attitude to exercise/physical activity



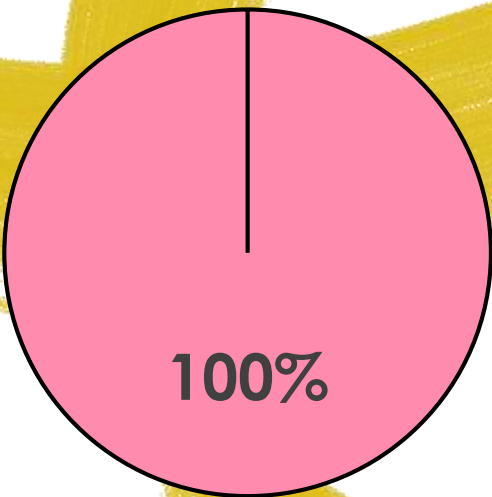
A positive change in their child's confidence



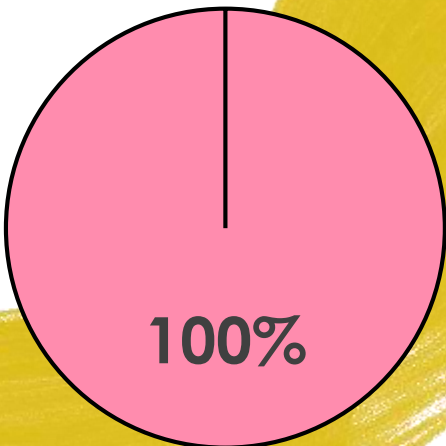
Their child had made friends through Circus



Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they trust our tutors to keep their child safe at all times



Their child's circus class was an important part of their week



Outreach/Social Circus

Sadly, due to reductions in funding, we had to restructure our Outreach Team in Spring 2023. As a result, we moved from a model of having two dedicated outreach team members to sharing the responsibility for this work across other team members.

In spite of this, we delivered a range of brilliant and impactful projects over the year as a whole.

In numbers, between April 2023 and March 2024 we:

Delivered around 130 outreach workshops, offering almost 2,500 opportunities for engagement for up to 800 children and young people.

We worked with around 30 partner organisations.

Workshops took place right across Northern Ireland.

Particularly successful programmes were our:

- RTÉ funded projects focused on young people with disabilities and/or with experience of the care system.
- ACNI rural project funding – working with a group in Glenravel.
- Nationwide funded programme working with Action Deaf Youth and Fleming Fulton School through which we used circus to build confidence and peer-led support/learning.



My class absolutely loved it! They were so proud of themselves for balancing on the globe, a lot of my class are very anxious about new things but they couldn't wait to do it! ...

I couldn't believe how much they got out of it and the change in the children afterwards. OT, PE, personal development, confidence were just some of the benefits they got...we can't wait for next week!"

Teacher, Harberton Special School.

Showcasing our Work

Throughout the year we offered young people nineteen opportunities to perform and/or showcase their work to public audience and/or their friends and family. These included Festival of Fools 2023, our Christmas Cabaret, St. Patrick's Day Parade, end of term showcases and much more besides. We also took part in the Mayhem Festival organised by Galway Community Circus School and the Irish Youth Circus Gathering, which took place in Cloughjordan.



"My sons love their weekly circus class and specially when rehearsing for a show! I think it keeps them motivated to focus and practice their skills and even one of them is shy ... he wasn't shy in their show! It gave them a lot of confidence thanks to their amazing tutors! We love that is not a competition (like most of sports) and everyone shines with their different abilities."

Circus Parent

We also offered professional and emerging artists eleven different opportunities to engage in development programmes/projects including our Rope Meet, Vertical Play, masterclasses and more.

Both Local and International artists have fed back how much they have enjoyed these experiences.

"Great classes again today! Great movement and sequencing piece from Monika. Just a wonderful masterclass"

Rope Meet Attendee



Showcasing our Work

On the 10th June 2023 we hosted a family fun day to celebrate Cruinniú nan Óg. This formed part of the Circus Explored programme supported by Creative Ireland and ISACS. It formed part of a much wider programme of activity that took place over a number of months and included dance workshops, peer-led circus workshops and much more besides.



In 2023-24 we also invested in the development of our [YouTube channel](#) and social media presence – where we share and capture both promotional videos and evaluations of our work.

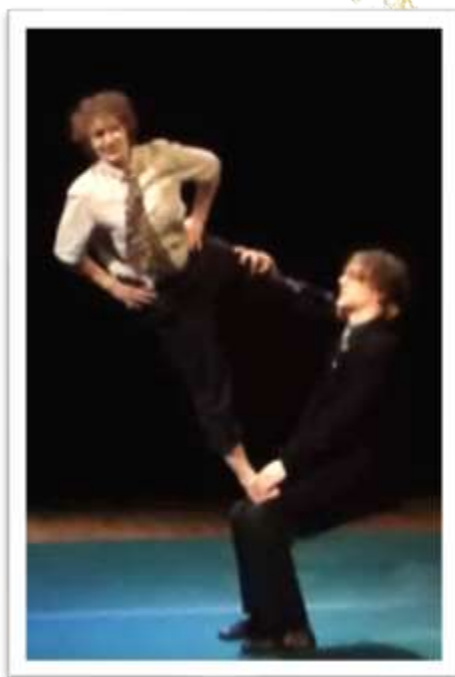
In November 2023 we hosted a Showcase (organised by Festival of Fools) where some of our professional artists performed both new and very established pieces of work for an invited audience of local businesses, funders and investors. It was great to be able to show off our talented team and the versatility of our space to a new



Developing our Circus Artists, Trainers and Building

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland established a grant programme called the Mike Moloney Award for young people aged 16 – 24 who wanted to develop their circus practice. The award was in memory of Mike Moloney, a founder of Belfast Community Circus School (Circusful as now). Applications for the award had been dwindling, so Circusful were asked to take over the management and administration of it with the intention of building interest and awareness.

The process was refreshed and a new iteration advertised in summer 2023. Applications were received and reviewed by a panel comprising of Circusful, Streetwise, Tumble Circus and In Your Space Circus. Four young people benefited from awards. One used their grant to support their full-time training in England, another used it to develop their own personal skills and has since been accepted onto a full-time course and the other two used the funding to visit a festival, improve their skills and then organised a scratch night.



In addition to this, we received funding from Department for Communities to support two young people (aged 16-24 years) to gain employability skills and professional experience. The job title is Start Up Trainer and Events Assistant. Post holders will gain both practical and administrative skills and knowledge. Our first Job-Start employee joined the team in March 2024 and our second will join in June 2024.

Over the year we invested in the development of our space and our physical surroundings, thanks to funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The changes we made included:

- Bean bags to help the young people, team to relax/be comfortable in-between classes, at training events etc.
- New curtains to help us to turn the space into a 'black box' – helping to create a broader range of ways the space can be used.
- Some other small investments like the purchase of a new kitchen table and chairs etc.

Local and International Activity

Our Chief Executive Officer has continued to be involved in several forums, boards, partnerships and networks during the financial year 2023-24, including but not limited to:

- Arts Collaboration Network – NI wide
- Cathedral Quarter Trust – Belfast, NI
- Belfast Festival and Events Forum, Co-Chair – Belfast, NI
- Caravan Social Circus Network, Vice President – International
- The Gymnastics and Trampoline Network - NI

The above activity has enabled Circusful to continue to develop as an organisation in profile and quality as it's been able to learn from other organisations working in the same sector and across culture more generally.

In 2023-24 Circusful was involved in an Imperial War Museum (IWM) 14-18 NOW Legacy Fund commission in partnership with Ulster Presents at Ulster University, it was co-produced by In Your Space Circus in Derry City and delivered in association with Circusful and Institut Francais. This specially commissioned production was led by the globally acclaimed French circus collective Compagnie XY accompanied by a 50 plus strong local ensemble of musicians, choirs and local acrobats and took place in August 2023 in the Guildhall Square in Derry~Londonderry and culminated in the World Premiere of *After the Rain*.

After the Rain was Inspired by the people and communities of the city in sustaining 25 years of peace-building since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, *After the Rain* explored physical and spiritual resilience in the face of obstacles through a mass collective acrobatic act of lifting each other up. It is Compagnie XY's first ever work produced on the island of Ireland and is one of only two new works produced by this 40-strong collective of acrobats. The other for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



Local and International Activity

The international work with Caravan has been particularly beneficial, not only to increase the interest, experiences, and awareness of Circusful's work but also to ensure NI based trainers are able to access high quality learning and development opportunities, such as a course to support trainers to develop their pedagogy skills when working on social circus programmes. Brexit has impacted on the ease with which our trainer can participate in these programmes, despite that the team work hard to share resources, documentation and insight into the programmes.

We also supported two emerging artists to engage in the Boost Programme, organised by Dublin Circus Project.

In a typical year, Circusful meaningfully engages volunteers to ensure we fulfil the mission and vision of the organisation. As an organisation we appreciate and value the vital support of our volunteers to underpin many of our activities. We will continue to provide opportunities for our volunteers to be involved where we can.

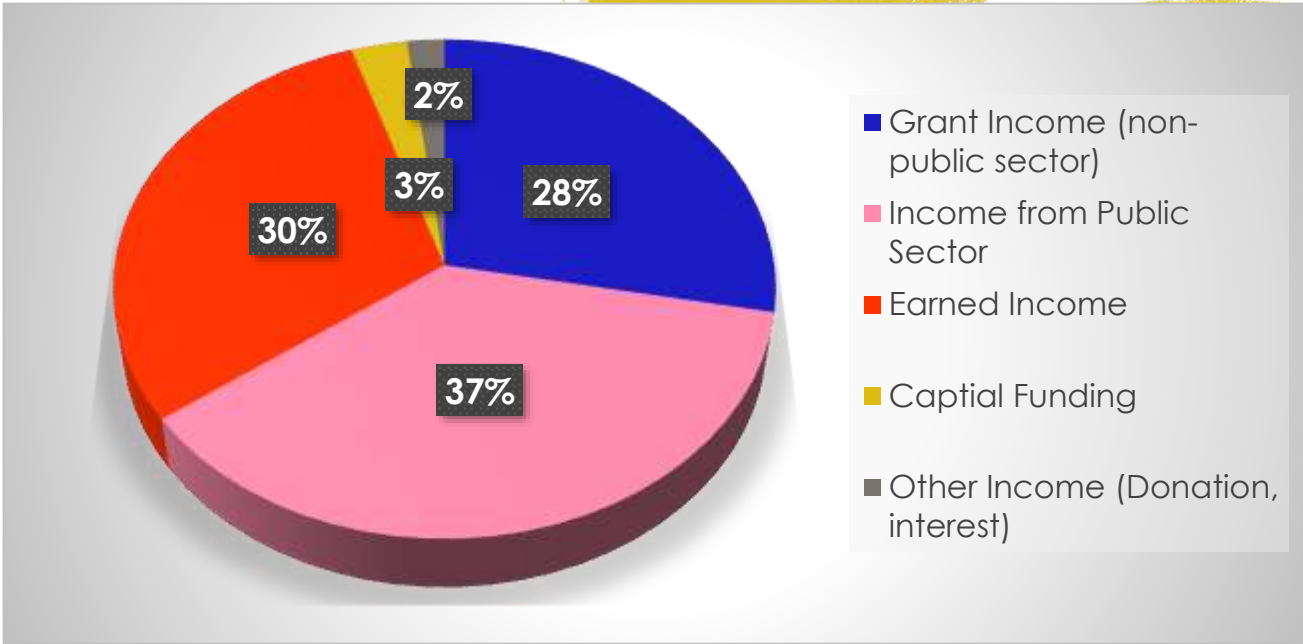


One of the team secured a Belfast City Council Scholarship place at the One Young World Summit that took place in Belfast in October 2023. Over four days, Anna attended talks on the food crisis, education, climate emergency, peace and reconciliation and mental health. She also took part in action sessions, workshops and met so many inspirational, young leaders from all over the world! Image here

Financial Activity – An Overview

The gross annual income for Circusful in 2023-24 was £543,762, this is £14,932 lower than in 2022-23. The primary reason for this difference is that in the prior year the charity received funding for a new, replacement vehicle.

Over the year 2023-24, Circusful secured income from a range of sources. Income generation for 2023-24 can be broken down as follows:



The income from parents and participants towards the cost of classes is a significant income stream. We are increasingly working to deepen and broaden our range of funders and supporters and in 2023-24 were successful in starting some new relationships. Circusful are pleased to have been able to add to their unrestricted reserves in recent years.

Total expenditure in 2023-24 was £524,076 compared to the prior year of £517,030. The expenditure across the year was determined in the first instance by the need to remain stable and to ensure a solid foundation from which to build over the year.

Year	2023-24	2022-23	2021-2022
Total Income	£543,762	£558,694	£414,477
Total Expenditure	£524,076	£517,030	£419,176
Surplus/Deficit	£19,686	£41,664	- £4699

A year on year breakdown of income, expenditure and surplus/deficit

Future Planning – 2024 and Beyond

Our strategic plan (2021-25) has continued to set the direction for 2022-23 and will continue to do so for 2023-24. We have also signed off three new strategic aims/priorities for 2024-28. Work towards these will commence in earnest in April 2024.

1. (re)Becoming artistically led to better use circus as a tool for social change

2. To increase the ways in which participants and artists of all ages play a role in our decision making and governance

3. Improving our approach to achieving equity, diversity, access and inclusion

Our commitment to building even stronger partnerships locally, nationally and internationally is stronger than ever. However, the funding environment remains challenging for both revenue and capital income and with the ongoing and uncertain nature of the economy and political landscape both locally and globally we are anticipating ongoing challenges for another few years.

We will continue to work across the sector with all arts organisations to ensure that the arts in Northern Ireland can continue to build and develop and assume its rightful and important place in the cultural and creative aspects of the lives of our communities.



Thank You

Thank you to all our funders for helping us keep hearts and minds filled with the colour and wonder of Circus. We tip our hats to you!



PRINCIPAL FUNDER



FOYLE FOUNDATION



ULSTER GARDEN
VILLAGES LIMITED



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION

Since 2021, we have also been supported by:

**Shared Island Initiative
Department for Communities
Future Screens NI
Children In Need
Esmee Fairburn Foundation
Halifax Foundation
Nationwide
RTE Toy Fund**

And finally a huge thank you to our entire Circusful family – freelancers, young people, parents, volunteers, staff and so many more.

Here's to another successful year!

