

IMAGINE BELFAST LTD TRUSTEES REPORT 2022/2023

The Trustees present their annual report together with the financial statements for the year ended 30 September 2023. The Trustees confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements of the company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the company's governing document and the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Objectives

The company's objects as set out in its Memorandum of Understanding are as follows:

To promote the arts and culture, and to promote religious harmony and equality and to promote the benefit of the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland without distinction of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic identity, political or religious opinion by associating the statutory authorities, community and voluntary organisations and the inhabitants and in particular:

- (a) to encourage appreciation for, the active participation, and to stimulate the artistic creativity of people, in the area of benefit;
- (b) to present, promote, organise, manage and produce talks, debates, comedy events, tours, exhibitions, cabaret, film screenings, seminars, conferences, workshops and street theatre;
- (c) to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

Activities for achieving objectives

The company exceeded all its targets in this reporting period having organised a successful festival in March 2023. In planning our activities, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit to ensure that our activities will help to achieve the charity's objectives and provide a benefit to our beneficiaries as detailed in the following sections.

The 9th Imagine! Belfast Festival proved to be a very successful project involving 141 events and 257 speakers & performers during 20-26 March 2023. The eclectic week of talks, podcasts, workshops, theatre, poetry, comedy, music, exhibitions, film and tours attracted a record audience of 37,397 online and in-person attendees - an amazing increase of 306% from the previous offering. The festival explored the theme 'Brain Food: A Feast of Ideas for A Better World' with an attractive range of food related events.

Most of the events (54%) were free as the festival rolled out a huge programme including headliners such as the world-renowned intellectual Noam Chomsky; American political

scientist Francis Fukuyama; British environmentalist Jonathon Porritt; author and transgender activist, Shon Faye; campaigner George Monbiot; visual artist Colin Davidson; journalist Sally Hayden and satirist Oliver Callan and a host of other exciting arts, heritage and cultural events with many sold out or oversubscribed.

Musicians included the legendary performer, John Otway; alternative punks, Wood Burning Savages; the acclaimed Australian song writer, Robert Forster; and a special politics and poetry event with leading politicians taking to the stage. Comedy was well represented with Tiff Stevenson and Fin Taylor alongside poets such as Henry Normal and Medbh McGuckian and cabaret performer, Paddy Cullivan.

The unique festival also examined the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the run up to the local government elections with the premiere of 'Agreement' a new play by Owen McCafferty at the Lyric Theatre; *Five Days* by Joe Nawaz and *Reunion* by Julie Dutkiewicz with Kabosh.

A special 'Democracy Day' strand on 24 March focused on citizen activism and the role of local changemakers with a focus on the forthcoming local government elections. We also commissioned a large scale public participation project examining the 'Forgotten Spaces' in the city and Stephen Beggs, as our artist in residence, to deliver a humorous provocation encouraging voter registration. The festival also broadcasted a number of podcasts recorded in front of live audiences, which proved quite successful. These included the BBC Northern Ireland Red Lines and Lesley Riddoch podcasts.

Other events discussed touchstone issues such as how to stop violence against women; climate change; the prospect of a united Ireland; Scottish Independence; regeneration initiatives and poverty themes. Leading commentators such Professor Linda Bauld considered how to prepare for the next pandemic and Professor Jon Tonge discussed why we have so much political instability in Northern Ireland. In addition, we even had a politics quiz and a special poetry and politics pub crawl to wet the creative appetites!

In developing this festival we hoped to deliver the following outcomes and we are pleased to confirm that we exceeded these targets:

1. A greater appreciation, understanding and exchange by people and communities in Northern Ireland and beyond of local and international political, cultural and reconciliation issues through the organisation of over 100 webcasts and public talks, debates, training workshops, performances and exhibitions for at least 10,000 people
2. Greater public support for reconciliation, cultural diversity, civic activism and deliberative politics in Belfast and Northern Ireland through our festival programme.
3. The promotion of good relations, cultural diversity and the participation of under-represented groups in civic society through the organisation of festival activities, public participation events, blogs, and workshops.
4. The greater facilitation of political and cultural discussion through the engagement of at

least 200 keynote speakers and performers sharing perspectives and learning on a range of contentious and difficult issues such as dealing with the legacy of the past, diversity issues, the climate crisis, and other keynote issues.

We conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the festival through an audience survey involving 401 returns (1% sample). Our survey found that 99% of respondents felt the festival satisfied their expectations. It was particularly pleasing to find that 57% of audience members were attending a festival event for the first time and 48% of the sample had never been to the festival venue before, which confirms that we were able to reach new audiences and introduce them to new venues and partners. We also asked whether respondents considered themselves to be disadvantaged and found that 34% of the sample considered themselves to fall into this category which suggests we were able to significantly engage with vulnerable and less well-off sections of the community.

We also found that 23% of our sample were visiting Belfast and Northern Ireland with 8% stating they lived in Ireland, 4% came from GB, 5% from rest of Europe and 2% from rest of world. For these 'out of state' visitors, 21% said that attending the festival was the main reason for their visit to Belfast.

We are also delighted with the quality of the performances in our programme, confirmed by audience feedback and media reviews. Several commentators applauded the quality and diversity of our programme and the quirky, innovative range of events we put together. Our unique selling point, as a civic participation festival in Belfast, was recognised in media coverage and our speakers and performers were very appreciative of the platform we were able to provide for them. The festival employs a mixture of curated and distributed programming models and supports partner organisations to deliver a range of performances, screenings, exhibitions, tours, workshops, conferences, debates and discussions. An advisory group of experienced event organisers and planners assisted with event and speaker suggestions. Over 67 partners were involved in this year's programme and we would like to take this opportunity of thanking them and our funders for helping to make the festival such a success.

We invited the public, artists and partner organisations to suggest and organise events in October 2022 and received a record 114 proposals, most of which we were able to support. We also curated 31 events, managed by the Festival Director, constituting 22% of the total programme.

The following organisations and venues were involved in the 2023 festival:

Amnesty International; Atheism Ireland; Alexandra's Bakery, Artcetera, Ballynafeigh Community Development Association Bbeyond; British Academy; BBC Northern Ireland; Canadian High Commission; Collaboration for Change; Duncairn Arts Centre; Ulster University; Queen's University Belfast; End Deportations Belfast; The Open University Northern Ireland; Accidental Theatre; Black Box; Blackstaff Press; Cathy Title Media; Carnegie Oldpark; Crescent Arts Centre; Crumlin Road Gaol; the Deer's Head; Democracy

Collaborative; Europa Hotel; Involve UK; Feisty Productions Scotland; Future Screens NI; Glasgow City Council; Grand Central Hotel; the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the John & Pat Hume Foundation; Kabosh Theatre; Linen Hall Library; Linen Quarter BID; Mick Perrin Worldwide; Northern Visions /NVTv; Northern Ireland Foundation; Oh Yeah Centre; Queen's Film Theatre; Inside Ireland; Limin-Alley; Lyric Theatre; Manchester University Press; No Alibis Bookshop; Politics in Action; Open Government NI; Irish Secretariat; Irish Pen International; Scribe publishing; Shared Future News; Shoot Photographic Gallery; Sheffield Methods Institute; Show & Tell Productions; Slugger O'Toole; Social Change Initiative; South Belfast Eco-Quakers Group; Stratagem; 50:50; The Scoop; Sunflower Bar; 1798 walking tours; Sound Healing Spa; Creative Tours Belfast; Historical Walking tours; Social Farms & Gardens; University of Liverpool; and Vault Studios.

We are very appreciative of the funding provided this year by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund; VSB Foundation; the Arts Council for Northern Ireland National Lottery Project Fund; Future Screens NI; Linen Quarter BID; Queen's University Belfast; Belfast City Council; Open University Northern Ireland and the Community Relations Council. We were pleased to attract a new funder this year in Linen Quarter BID and to increase our ticket income.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

The public benefits that flow from the promotion of religious harmony and equality through the organisation of our inclusive festivals are increased social cohesion, improved good relations and economic conditions. These benefits are evidenced by audience evaluations and box office returns from participating venues.

The public benefits that flow from promoting the benefit of the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland through the organisation of events at the Imagine Belfast Festival include improved recreational, social and economic conditions. These benefits are evidenced by our audience sampling and through increased attendance at our events. There is no private benefit resulting from the activities of our organisation. The sole beneficiaries are our performers and audiences.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial position

Key financial performance indicators

The company continues to deliver a high number of events on a modest income. Over 141 events were organised in 2023. Total income received in the year was £133,468. The surplus for the year was £3,019 after deducting expenditure of £130,449.

Going Concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the trustees have a reasonable expectation that the company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements.

FUTURE PLANS

The trustees are closely monitoring future plans in a difficult funding environment and have decided to run another festival during 18-24 March and a number of other signature events during 2024.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

The company is registered as a charitable company limited by guarantee and is registered under the Companies Act 2006, as a private company, limited by guarantee (Company number N1614137). It is also registered with HMRC and the Charity Commission Northern Ireland (NIC101004).

Methods of appointment or election of Trustees

The management of the company is the responsibility of the Trustees who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the Trust deed. The company has taken the opportunity to develop a new strategic plan and refresh its risk assessment framework.

Organisational structure and decision making

The Trustees met six times during the year with a quorum of at least 4 members. All meetings were minuted with decisions recorded and reviewed at subsequent meetings.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Registered company number

N1614137

Registered charity number

NIC101004

Registered office

46 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LB

Trustees

Mr Don Leeson, Chairperson

Mr Ian Fraser, Treasurer

Ms Julie Williams-Nash, Secretary

Mr Ciaran Hanna
Mr Martin Magee
Mr Paul Maxwell
Mr Paul Mulgrew
Ms Julianna Taylor

Company Secretary

Mr Peter O'Neill

Approved by the board of trustees on 22 January 2024 and signed on its behalf by Mr Don Lesson, chairperson

Don Leeson

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D Leeson', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.