

**Think Circus SCIO
Trustees' Annual Report
1st July 2024 – 30th June 2025**



Charity contact information



Think Circus SCIO

Scottish Charity Number: SC052613

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Charity Trustees

1. Emma Collins
2. Gary Weston
3. Freya Pellie
4. Fox Mclavin
5. Kat Borrowdale
6. Tuesday McPhail

Objectives and activities

Founded in 2016, established as a CIC in 2017, and constituted as a SCIO in 2023, Think Circus is an Edinburgh-based social circus, running community-based circus classes and projects across the city, including Leith, Granton and Craigmillar. We deliver a programme of performance, teaching and professional development centred around creating a thriving circus ecology. Activities are designed to promote creativity, create artistic work, improve participants' physical health and skills, build confidence, connect people to their communities, and improve mental health and wellbeing. Working with children and young people in the most deprived areas of Scotland, we run workshops featuring creative play, juggling and spinning (manipulation skills), acrobatics and performance, with most of our projects ending in an opportunity for participants to share their skills. You can find us popping up in local parks and community hubs with our Circus Bike, illuminating the evenings with our spell-binding fire and light performances, and encouraging young people to express themselves and build their confidence and skills through our regular projects. We teach easy to learn ground-based circus arts such as juggling, acrobatics, stilt-walking, hula hoop and balance skills, that don't require expensive equipment and can be continued without us long after the initial spark.

We aim to foster healthy attitudes to learning and build resilience in young people, and equip more people to be active in their everyday lives. We delivered our first extended social circus project in October 2018 in Craigmillar, establishing a community projects model which was successfully replicated as Circus of Lights, Parade to the Park (2023) and Outside the Box (2025).

Our mission is to take circus beyond the big top, contributing to a happier, healthier society. We are driven by core values of connection, quality and playfulness.

Our vision is a supportive, connected society where all humans are seen as incredible, capable and equally celebrated.

Our long-term aims are for:

- Circus to be accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic circumstances, experience of arts and sport, or physical ability.
- Circus to be respected and recognized as a distinct artform which brings a unique blend of physical skill development and visual theatre.
- Scotland to be seen as a place where talent is discovered and nurtured, and innovative, unusual practice can be developed through collaboration and engagement at all levels.
- Circus artists and adjacent artforms to be supported at each stage of their journey, from first picking up a circus prop to making their first act, to going on tour or producing their own work as an established artist.
- Circus training to be a viable option for all children and young people across Edinburgh, and to share our business model, learning and practices generously, so that social circus can be delivered with similar accessibility across Scotland and the UK.
- Circus and multi artform practice continues to develop.
- The establishment of a dedicated circus hub in Edinburgh, in collaboration with local residents and community/arts orgs.

Our purposes (as outlined in our Constitution) are as follows:

4.1. The advancement of the arts, in particular dance, circus and theatre, for artistic merit and the development of these artforms.

4.2 To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Edinburgh and the surrounding area the provision of recreational activities or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants.

4.3 The advancement of education, for the public at large and also for young people experiencing disadvantage.

The mental health and wellbeing of the Scottish population is a major public health challenge, with one in three people estimated to be affected by mental illness in Scotland in any one year. Teenagers (11-14) are reported to experience the lowest levels of life satisfaction in Europe, with this situation exacerbated for those growing up in deprived communities (Good Childhood Report). 20% of adults living in the most deprived areas report two or more depressive symptoms (as opposed to 5% in the least deprived areas). Age is also a significant factor, with young adults (aged 16-24) reporting the highest prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and psychological disorders (Scottish Government Health Survey). Statistics show that three children in every classroom in Scotland experience mental health problems before they are 16 (Mind, 2016). Leith, where we are primarily based, includes the highest population density postcode in Scotland, and many areas are in the country's 5% most deprived. Half of our teenage participants come from Leith's 20% most deprived areas. Factors such as living in poverty increase the risk of poor mental and physical health. Creative and active projects are needed, but are not always affordable. Demand is evident (our 2023 free Skate and Circus sessions were fully booked in 24hrs) but activities are often prohibitively expensive.

The benefits of social circus are documented in research and analysis across the world and include improved resilience, physical literacy, overcoming fear of failure and social confidence. Our evaluations, feedback and research (i.e. the South Australian Circus Centre, which estimated a seven-fold Social Return on Investment), predict that young people who engage in a social circus programme will experience physical, mental and social benefits. Being part of circus activities is likely to have positive effects on confidence, physical health and mental wellbeing, as well as having fun, making friends, teamwork, social skills and learning how to learn. For example evaluation of our Girls Forest Circus showed high attendance rates and all girls who gave feedback said they had fun, learned something new and want to continue. Overwhelmingly, studies show that exercise helps to dramatically improve mental health, improve focus and is also a preventative measure. For young people, there are multiple barriers to accessing healthy exercise and creative activities. Changing bodies and concerns about appearance may also inhibit participation, while those with prior training in football, gymnastics etc. have a significant advantage over those learning the basics. Circus is a great equaliser, attracting people who don't usually engage in the arts, and offering new ways to succeed.

What Think Circus does and why it is effective:

Our approach is a model used across the world (Social Circus) which uses easy to learn skills like juggling, hula hooping and acrobatics, to promote health and wellbeing. Not only are our sessions fun, creative and active, but learning circus can help to manage difficult emotions, learn how to co-operate in a team, and to practice setting and achieving goals; these are transferrable skills which can be used across all walks of life. Our participants tell us that they see improvements to their mental health, physical health, and outlook on life, including boosts to confidence and self-esteem. Circus offers a level playing field, as participants do not often have prior experience. Offering ways of being active which don't feel like prescriptive exercise are key to creating new attitudes. The ability to be creative in a physical way is also very important, providing an outlet for expression and a way to build confidence and esteem. We teach that you can keep trying despite failure, that you always have the capacity to improve and learn, and that physical activity can be fun, rewarding and leave you feeling happier. Through our sessions we embed principles of resilience, build social relationships and encourage physical activity that is non-competitive and fun. Social circus is a uniquely effective approach, as it encourages the development of individuals in physical and mental challenges, and is founded strongly in the principles of community and teamwork. For example, in our Circus of Lights six-week project in Craigmillar, the vast majority of participants reported that they made new friends and increased their confidence.

Research by the Sutton Trust has also shown that extra-curricular activities like dance and theatre have a positive correlation with social mobility, social skills and improving social connections. However, few schools can provide these activities and after school clubs often have prohibitive costs. We carried out a survey of 16 schools in the central belt, of whom 87% had never tried circus with their pupils. Teachers told us that the biggest barriers for students being more physically active were lack of opportunity in their area, financial restrictions, poor role models at home, and low self-confidence. The majority stated that the most likely benefits of increasing weekly physical activity for their pupils would be healthier children (93.7%) and increased confidence (93.7%).

Structure, governance and management

Think Circus SCIO is a registered Scottish Charity governed by a Board of Trustees. Think Circus is a single tier organisation as outlined in our constitution.

We hold Board meetings four times a year and are a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Board meetings determine strategic approach, with the day-to-day operations carried out by our Executive Director. The SCIO model best reflects the activity that we carry out, all of which meets the charities test, our transparent governance system, and our social aims.

Trustee recruitment and appointment

We concluded an Equality & Diversity Audit of the charity in 2025, and have identified skill gaps which could be met by new Trustees. Ongoing Trustee Recruitment is taking place to attract new Trustees. Applications are made via our website and notice of upcoming vacancies shared in our networks and beyond. Appointment of trustees will be by a majority vote at a board meeting. No external organisations are allowed to appoint charity trustees.

Achievements and Performance

Over the last year, the Think Circus team have built projects based on collaboration and community. We became a member of Caravan, Europe's international youth and social circus network, and took part in our first cultural exchange project with Junges Theater Muenster (DE). Closer to home, we have been a key part of efforts to bring a Leith church into community ownership, and formed new partnerships with community hubs across the city with our Sunday Circus Programme. We have been fortunate to receive multi-year funding from several funders, helping us to move towards a more sustainable model of planning.

Over the last year, we have built up our team, bringing on board a new Volunteers Co-ordinator who has supported us to trial out Social Media placements and UpSkill Socials. Our custom-built circus bike has transformed how we deliver our open circus drop-in sessions, and made a huge impact in our levels of engagement and ability to reach new audiences and wider demographics. We also streamlined our booking process, allowing us to better support artists. We are enormously proud of our achievements over this year. This will help Think Circus to thrive in the long-term so we are better able to support our participants.

Flourish Artist Development: We delivered 6 sessions for the freelance creative professionals we work with, including Act Creation with Jusstina Hermann, Therapeutic approach to workshops with Tanya Fourie, and Ensemble techniques with Sarah BeBe Holmes. Local artists are connected to ongoing learning opportunities such as our Sunday community circus sessions and jams.

Sunday Circus and Circus Bike:

We have long dreamed of being able to deliver circus workshops within the city without having to drive, but the challenge of transporting awkwardly shaped circus kit such as hula hoops made it tricky. With support from Cycling UK, we were able to work with XYZ Cargo to commission a custom-built and designed e-cargo bike perfect for circus! It's a big hit so far.

UpSkill Socials:

These sessions, held up to six times a year, bring together volunteers, circus artists and the Think Circus team to learn new skills and build community. The skills covered are chosen in response to regular surveys, and included marketing for circus artists, show production, and act creation. Social activities included painting, a pot luck and a film showing.

Online Learning:

We have continued to promote our free online Learn to Juggle in Five Days course. This is accessed regularly and provides a small source of passive income.

Dive In:

We produced an original piece of circus theatre, featuring acrobatics, lollipop hoop, juggling and theatre, and debuted at Fringe by the Sea in summer 2024. The show was based around a trip to the seaside, beginning in normality and ascending into dreams of kelpies, storms and rescue signals. We were delighted with the reception from the audience and hope to perform this show again in the future.

Outside the Box:

We ran two camps with 15 participants over nine days, the majority coming from the local areas of Leith, Newhaven and Granton. Participants were aged 5-13 yrs. Think Circus attracted new participants to our regular classes. The project culminated in two celebration events at Leith Walk Police Box, where the children's circus showcase took place along with performances from professional circus artists.

Game, Set, Juggle:

Following an idea from our Team Away Day in September 2024, Think Circus artists Bob, Antonia and Keith led on the creation of a new outdoor juggling show, which plays with sport motifs in circus performance, pattern, play and friendly competition.

This fun and playful show has enthralled young audiences at several events from small gala days to larger festivals in 2025.

Operations

Safeguarding: Working with children and young people is integral to our model and we take our responsibilities extremely seriously. Through consultation with our teaching team and via good practice sharing from CircusWorks and EYCO (the European Youth Circus Organisation) we have developed detailed safeguarding policies and procedures (accessible on our website for all participants and parents/guardians to view). We share these policies with all staff and freelancers. We have also produced a short online learning module covering our procedures, with quiz elements to test knowledge.

Safe Practices: We use techniques for keeping participants safe and healthy (ie. Warmups, cooldowns, injury prevention) from CircusWorks and utilise the expertise of our teaching team.

Fair Work: we have published our Fair Work Statement and have produced a Fair Work Policy. Think Circus is a registered Living Wage Employer, pays industry rates above Equity and BECTU minimum, and is committed to upholding the principles of Fair Work.

Sustainability: We conducted a review of our Sustainability practices, and launched a new policy which includes travel and materials procedures and incentives for sustainable choices. We carried out consultation and briefing with our freelance team, as our performance work spans across all of Scotland and includes 65 freelance performers.

Funders

Our work was made possible by the generous support of:

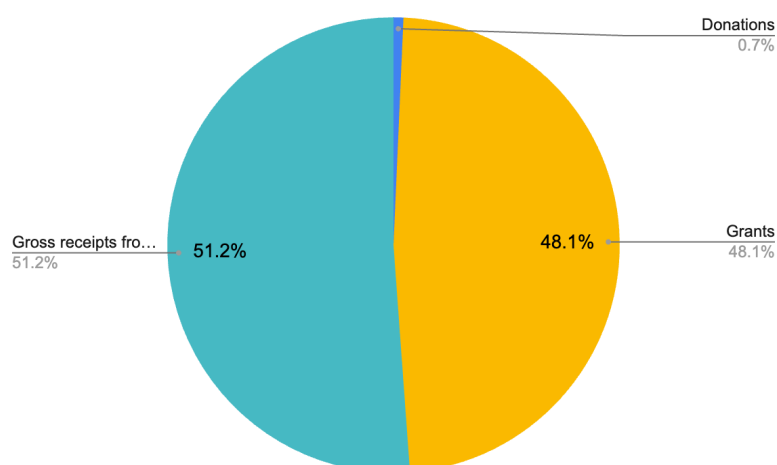
Ponton House Trust
Arnold Clark Community Foundation
The National Lottery: Young Start
The National Lottery: Awards for All
Creative Scotland
Scottish Children's Lottery Fund
Cultural Bridge (managed by Creative Scotland and the Goethe Institute)
Nancie Massey Trust
The Goethe Institute
Leith Benevolent Association
National Association of Girls
Science Ceilidh: Curiosity in Action
Cycling UK

On behalf of the Leith St. Andrew's Trust, we would also like to thank:

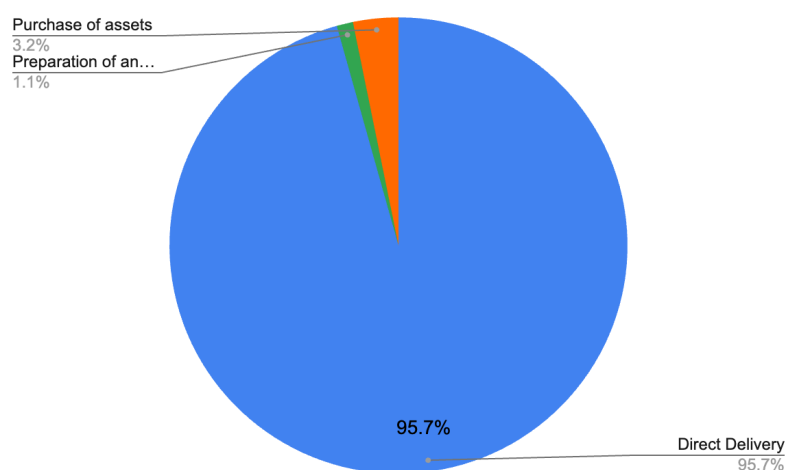
Architectural Heritage Foundation
National Lottery Heritage Fund

Financial Review Period 1st July 2024 – 30th June 2025

Income:



Expenditure:



Income

Donations	£1,255
Legacies	£0
Grants	£85,847
Fundraising	£0
Rents from land & buildings	£0
Gross receipts from other charitable activities	£91,244

Expenditure

Direct Delivery	£172,367
Fundraising	0
Governance	0
Preparation of annual accounts	£2,072
Purchase of assets	£5,759

Statement of the charity's policy on reserves:

In light of the scope, definition and purpose, the Company aims to maintain reserves consisting of

- a) Amount to cover 3 months of operating costs - £17,107
- b) Amounts to meet redundancy liabilities - £5,416
- c) Amounts to cover dilapidation costs - £250

Total required: £22,773

At the end of our accounting period (1st July 2024 – 30th June 2025) the organisation held reserves of £5,563. In accordance with our Reserves Policy we are continuing to build up reserves.

Donated facilities and services

We do not have any donated facilities and services.

Declaration

Signed on behalf of the charity trustees:



Print name

Katherine Borrowdale
Director
23rd March 2026

Designation

Date