

Interim report (March-Oct 2020)

In March 2020, Scotland went into lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Like so many others, we were forced to change our plans at very short notice. The Edinburgh International Children's Festival which was to take place in May was cancelled and many of Imagine's schools and artist development projects had to be reimagined.

Following an initial period of reflection, we decided to focus our efforts on supporting our community of artists, providing alternative ways to engage with schools and delegates as well as providing some inspiration for children in lockdown at home.

Most of our projects were moved and re-developed for an online audience. In that period, our website attracted 22,885 users. This compares to 30,745 users in the same period in 2019. Given the fact that the Festival usually generates substantial online traffic, with 80% of the audience booking online, retaining 75% of our online audience is a real success.

This report covers the period March to October, when our focus has been on planning for the Festival 2021, while delivering a year-round programme working with schools, artists and the wider young audiences sector.

Working with Artists

Ideas Fund

This one-off funding was established to develop creative projects for children and their families to do at home, while supporting artists in the sector with paid work at a time when most of their jobs had been cancelled. Ideas were selected from a series of open call-outs and distributed online to families. These ranged from street art and fort building in bedrooms to stop motion animations and creating your own colourful shadow-box theatre.

Children affected by digital poverty and unable to access online content were also catered for with specific projects such as providing art material and instructions to create street art.

Many of the projects reflected on the situation children were facing during lockdown.

For example, in *Outside of My Window I See*, artist Alice Cooper made a short film combining the voices, stories and artworks of young people from Edinburgh, the Isle of Iona and Kolkata, India. She asked children to draw an image based on what the children in another area had described when asked "What do you see outside your window?" (eg. a child in Iona would draw the view described by a child in Kolkata). [This moving film can be watched here.](#)

The Ideas Fund generated a total of 8,000 views and gave a platform to 15 artists based in Scotland that went beyond what we are usually able to offer. For example, emerging Deaf artist Petre Dobre created a short online visual story about a Lighthouse, complemented by a simple BSL tutorial, which was noticed by one of our international partner in Thailand. As a result, Petre was invited to take part in a panel discussion at the BICT Festival in Thailand and was showcased alongside a number of international artists. This was particularly exciting as this was the first time that Imagineate had been working with a graduate from the Conservatoire's BA Performance in BSL and English programme.

Imagineate also collaborated with National Theatre of Scotland by recommending artists' ideas which they could include while curating their programme Play Dates.

Ideas Fund projects

Fort Building – Niamh O'Loughlin

Small, Small Rainbows – Siân Bevan

Granny Fenella – Zoe Bullock and Christine Urquhart

My Auntie's a Vandal – Heather Marshall, Jamie Rae and Jamie Tonner

Making Stop Motion Animations – Tim Reid

Search for the Lighthouse – Petre Dobre and Alice Muir

Colourful Shadow-Box Theatre – Lisa Wilson

Outside my Window I See – Alice Mary Cooper

Buff & Sheen – Alex McCabe and Suzi Cunningham

Arty Packs – Kate Temple

Elsbeth Chapman – Letter Writing

PUSH+

Our Creative Europe funded co-operation project PUSH+ was in its second year when the crisis hit with restrictions on social distancing and travel making activities for the year ahead impossible. As a result, all planned activities have been rescheduled to 2021/22.

In the meantime, we are offering a year-long programme of online initiatives to keep the project partners and artists connected with time for further research into the three topics of **Home, Failure and Different Bodies**. This began in May with a two-week online mentoring workshop for PUSH+ artists facilitated by experienced artist Luke Pell. This mentoring offered time and space to reflect while connecting the artists from different Labs with each other. All the artists selected for the Different Bodies Lab have also taken part in a half-day session to get to know each other ahead of the live Lab next year. This new model will be evaluated at the end of the project and may well be incorporated in future projects if we find that online connections before an international Lab is indeed a positive add-on.

We have also commissioned a series of PUSH+ artist blogs and will continue to do this in the year ahead.

In a New Light

In a New Light is a collaboration between artists and children who face barriers accessing the arts in Scotland, Bangladesh and Singapore. It connects children and artists across borders, celebrating diverse stories, cultures and experiences through contemporary performance. Young people from each country have started working together with three experienced artists (Gudrun Soley Sigurdardottir in Scotland, Kamruzzaman Shadhin in Bangladesh, and Renee Chua in Singapore) and are discovering each other through emails, letters and videos. Together they will explore their response and collective voice in relation to the current ecological crisis. The project will culminate in the creation of a performance using original text, movement and song.

The project has been developed as part of the Singapore International Foundation (SIF)'s Arts for Good Projects 2020.

Digital Delegate Encounters

In order to mark the cancelled Festival, Imagineate organised a series of free online encounters to bring the children's theatre and dance sector together. As well as providing rich content to our loyal audiences, *Digital Delegate Encounters* gave us the opportunity to trial online events and get feedback from delegates on their experience. 557 industry professionals from 34 countries joined the two-day digital event which included discussions with artists, panel talks, networking events and even an online disco! The Digital Encounters created a friendly space to share anecdotes and observations amongst global peers and was very well received by delegates. They also enabled us to reach more widely within the sector and we are now considering including an online delegate programme to future festivals.

"Considering you pulled this together in record time, the thinking that you put into it and the care you took over curating the programme to make it fresh and relevant was just brilliant."

"I really appreciate Imagineate offering this delegate program for free, online. It helps break down barriers to those not tied to organizations that can support their attendance. The opportunities for accessibility and inclusion across the sector are HUGELY valuable!"

Following the success of the first Encounters, we decided to hold monthly digital events to gather industry colleagues from around the world and discuss the things that interest and matter to us all. This [series of 6 events](#) from September to March 2021, will include panel discussions as well as in conversation events with artists. All events are live captioned and BSL interpreted and are available to watch online for a month after the live event.

The first event welcomed an international panel of programmers who shared their challenges and successes in regard to welcoming back audiences into their theatre spaces following COVID-19, while the second was a conversation with three talented and internationally renowned disabled artists who have made dance and theatre performance for young audiences.

Both events have attracted an international audiences of artists, programmers, producers and other theatre professionals.

Working with Schools

Immerse Idea Fund

The lockdown interrupted some of the Artist Residencies taking place within the schools. In order to provide continuation and closure, artists created a range of content including films, magazines and photographs representing the outcomes of their residency.

Instead of their visit to the Festival, schools were provided with resources designed by artists that were both joyful and educational, and suitable for at-home learning. These included a series of workshops on Stop Motion Animation, letter writing and art design project. Teachers also used some of the projects from the Ideas Fund which were specifically designed for children at home. For children without digital access, we recruited artist Kate Temple to design 150 quality art packs and inspiration guides and worked with the schools and local partner North Edinburgh Arts to ensure the packs reached the children at home.

Theatre in Schools Scotland

Following the cancellation of two TISS tours in Spring due to the closure of schools in the summer terms and the restrictions on live performances since then, we have been working with performing companies, schools and local authorities IT specialists to defy these challenges and maximise the opportunities of blended learning.

Keeping the essence of live performance at the heart of our plans, we have been exploring various models whereby pupils watch some parts of a performance through live stream, interact with the director or performer afterwards, and experience some elements of the performance, in the classroom or at home.

We are currently working with Orkney Islands Council to present an exciting new digital adaptation of *Potato Needs a Bath* by Shona Reppe to pre-school and P1 classes this autumn. The format will allow children from 19 schools, varying in size from 500+ to less than 10, to connect and interact with the production in their classrooms (or at home if isolating). Each class will be given access to a new filmed version, made from the original story, followed by a livestreamed party for the performer and children to enjoy together, complete with party hats and dancing.

Teachers Theatre Club

Earlier in 2020, ten teachers were recruited for Year 2 of Teachers Theatre Club and were ready to start watching performances including at the Children's Festival and Edinburgh

Fringe. Following Covid-19 restrictions, we have rethought the way the programme works. Firstly, we moved sessions online, with teachers watching some of the plethora of digital performances made available over the lockdown and then meeting on zoom to discuss their responses together. Secondly, we decided to combine the new Year 2 group with the ten teachers from Year 1 and enable them both to enjoy the benefits of being part of the club.

Since March, the group have watched and discussed the following shows:

- National Theatre of Scotland's Scenes for Survival
- Bubble by Kieran Hurley and Theatre Uncut
- Invisible by Kabinet K
- Don't we deserve grand human projects that give us meaning? By Robert&Frank Frank&Robert/CAMPO

And in November, the group is meeting to discuss *The Lament for Sheku Bayoh* by Hannah Lavery, Imagineate's new 2020/21 Accelerator artist.

The online move also enabled us to widen our reach by opening up some of the events to teachers all over Scotland.

Sector Support

Anti-racism working group

As part of its ongoing support for the sector, Imagineate has facilitated regular discussions with organisations and individuals from the Young Audiences Sector in Scotland. Recently, the group has met online to discuss the impact of the COVID crisis on the theatre sector, and look at ways that it can recover and thrive. The lack of diversity in the sector (in particular the lack of representation from people experiencing racism) was highlighted as an issue that needed to be addressed urgently. A working group has been set-up to review and develop some ideas including traineeships and sector-wide training. However, given the lack of diversity in the group itself, a consultation with those underrepresented voices is now underway to inform the next stage.