



# Birnam Arts Impact Report

April 2023 - March 2024

[www.birnamarts.com](http://www.birnamarts.com)



Birnam Arts is a Scottish Guarantee Company (Company No. SC402171). Recognised as a Scottish Charity under Charity No. SC024975.

# WELCOME

At the centre of the work that Birnam Arts delivers is the ambition to improve the quality of the lives of the communities we serve. To increase inclusion, foster enablement and offer opportunities to improve mental wellbeing and connectivity through art, entertainment and community facilities, we seek to enhance people's lives. In addition, Birnam Arts strives to be a place that provides opportunities for employment, volunteering, artistic expression and development as well as performance, education, stimulation and inspiration.

Emerging from a post-pandemic world, 2023-24 was all about building resilience and improving sustainability as well as breathing arts, self-expression and connectivity back into an ever-increasingly vibrant community.

We have re-connected, re-engaged and inspired our community and wider audiences by providing them with an affordable, accessible and thought-provoking cultural programme of performances, workshops, exhibitions and more. Due to our extensive community engagement, marketing and programming efforts, audience and participation figures have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

However, the work doesn't stop there. We hold ambitious plans to build on this solid platform to develop two new festivals and broaden our community engagement activities in pursuit of *Art Beyond Boundaries* - our artistic vision for 2025-28.

Giles Conisbee  
General Manager  
Birnam Arts



# VISION

## **Birnam Arts at the heart of the community**

Birnam Arts is a multi-purpose arts, community and conference venue in the twin villages of Dunkeld & Birnam, Highland Perthshire. Originally founded by a group of local residents as 'The Birnam Institute', it has operated continuously since the building opened in 1883, adding a modern extension in 2001 and changing its name to Birnam Arts in 2011.

The community feels a strong sense of ownership over Birnam Arts and it is a lively gathering place and focal point for local people.

Our venue comprises of a 200-seater (400 standing) auditorium with hybrid tech to allow for live streaming of performances and events, 2 mezzanine level art gallery spaces, a visual arts studio with kiln and a performing arts/dance studio.

It also has an office, a meeting room, a permanent Beatrix Potter exhibition, a gift shop, a community kitchen, a 60-seat cafe, a community education office and a library.

Image: Rehearsal in our performing arts studio, Birnam Institute Players (BIPS)



# PURPOSE

To enrich people's lives with creativity, inspiration and different perspectives

# AIMS

- Offer our existing, rural and visitor audiences the opportunity to engage with accessible, high-quality and adventurous cultural experiences
- Remain a valued community resource, a central hub which brings people together through our exciting activities, our welcoming spaces and our support for local groups
- Develop new audiences and increase engagement with our local, semi-rural communities
- Celebrate our unique location in Scotland through engagement with its people, natural spaces, traditions, history, crafts, culture and language
- Develop a sustainable organisation with appropriate ongoing resources to deliver our activities

Image: Birnam Arts Ballet School



# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



32

Performances



36,000

Conversations over cups of coffee in our cafe space



361

Days open to the public



12

Conferences and weddings



9

Free exhibitions



40

Workshops and classes

# PARTICIPATION AT A GLANCE



23,812

People attended a show, talk, film or exhibition



38

Valued volunteers supported us



831

Community members participated in workshops and classes



288

Artists and creatives employed



5,500

Visitors to our Beatrix Potter Exhibition



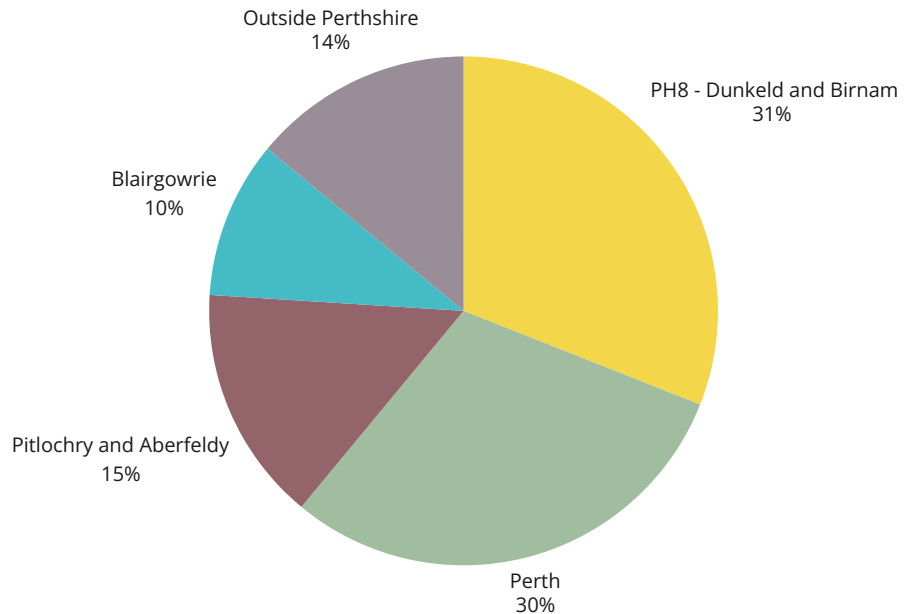
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Organisations benefiting from community room hire discounts

# AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

We estimate that **85,000** people - audiences, participants and visitors, came through the doors between April 2023 - March 2024.

**11,900** visitors came from outside Perthshire, adding a potential spend of nearly **£500,000** into the local economy.



21% of audience members and participants were under 18, and research shows that there is a demonstrable correlation between schoolchildren's grades in maths and literacy, and their involvement with drama or music activities - called the 'Mozart effect'.

## ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

We carefully programmed to accommodate all our community. For adults, we offered regular daytime creative and wellbeing sessions as well as evening and weekend classes and events.

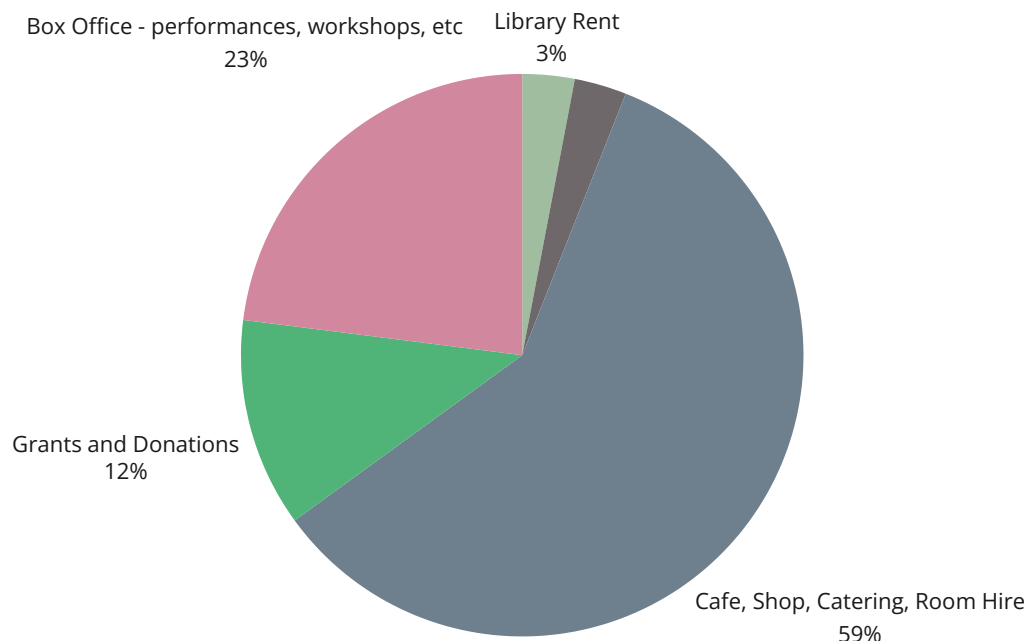
We ran specialist projects such as Free Film Fridays and Autumn Voices for older people and hosted Just Singin, a community choir open to everyone, and accessible to people with dementia.

We offered after-school and holiday activities for children and daytime sessions for pre-schoolers. Term-time blocks of sessions as well as one-off activities were available. We worked closely with the local primary school and families to deliver activities they suggested.

We are particularly proud of the opportunities offered by our ballet school. We offered after-school and holiday activities for children and young people, as well as daytime sessions for pre-schoolers.

# INCOME SOURCES

As we continued to recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and dealt with the cost of living crisis and rising energy costs, 2023-24 was another financially challenging year for Birnam Arts. We had to make significant inroads into our reserves to be able to continue operating and serving our local community.



# USERS OF OUR SPACES

We offer bright, welcoming spaces which are booked by a variety of non-profit and private organisations when we are not using the spaces for our own, or community, activities. We provide technical support and catering for conferences, weddings and private hires such as birthday parties. Our offer is unique in the local area and we attract customers from far and wide.

Corporate organisations who used our meeting and conferences spaces included Forestry Policy Group, Scottish Venison, Mountaineering Scotland, Jacobs, Atholl Estates, Nature Scotland and Scottish Forestry, Crown Estate Scotland and The Arts Society. We also hosted two ceilidhs, one wedding and many celebration parties!

Community organisations included Dunkeld and Birnam Climate Cafe, PH8 Community Trust, Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland,, First Responders, Horticultural Society, A9 Community Group, SWRI, Dunkeld and Birnam Repair Cafe, Bridge Club, Dunkeld and Birnam Angling Club, Young Farmers and Dunkeld and Birnam Junctions Action Group.

**23,812 audience members attended events and performances and 831 members of the community took part in workshops and classes – with all the attendant benefits to their health and wellbeing from participating in arts and other community activities.**



# BEATRIX POTTER EXHIBITION

Our interactive Beatrix Potter exhibition is on the ground floor of our building and is well-loved by families. The exhibition contains replica letters, artefacts and drawings relating to Beatrix Potter, as well as children's play zones such as a Victorian school room and market stall.

**Approximately 5,550 people attended the Beatrix Potter exhibition this year.**



## GIFT SHOP AND CAFE

Our gift shop sells a range of Potter-inspired gifts, as well as providing a platform for Perthshire-based artists and makers to sell their work, including Scents of the Wild, Ben & Lilly Creations and Fern River Jewellery.

In our cafe, we seek to source ingredients that include Scottish grown and harvested produce wherever possible. We work with local producers including the Taybank Growers Coop, Stewart Tower Dairy and ARAN Bakery. The Field community growing project also sell their seasonal fresh produce at Birnam Arts.

**The gift shop and café sourced products from 20 local suppliers and makers to a value of £28,200**



# ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

4 Festivals

32 Performances

9 Exhibitions

## THEATRE and DANCE

National Theatre of Scotland  
Vanishing Point  
Clydebuilt Puppets  
Indepen-dance  
Shaper / Caper  
Uni of Birmingham / RSC  
Raw Material

## MUSIC

Heidi Talbot  
Blazin' Fiddles  
Yulya Lonskaya / Lulo Reinhardt  
Jill Jackson / Boo Hewerdine  
Chamber Philharmonic Europe  
Just Singin' 20th Anniversary Concert  
Scottish Chamber Orchestra  
Amos and Jauncey and Friends  
Singing and Rainbows Xmas Concert  
Mike and Ruthy  
Keith James  
Kris Drever

## EXHIBITIONS

Jos Mahon: The End to End Trail  
Gender Equality Perth: Safety Mapping  
Mat Dugard: I Wasn't Prepared  
Perthshire Open Studios Summer Show  
Alison Price: Drawn To  
Yunior Aguiar Perdomo:  
Ashes on my Fingertips  
Local Artists exhibition: Winter Moonlight  
Heartwood Artists: Transitional Space  
Esther Kent: Play

## FESTIVALS

Niel Gow Festival  
Birnam Book Festival  
(postponed to 2024)  
SCDA Perthshire  
Festival of One Act Plays  
Living History Weekend

## FILMS

Cuban Bees - The Organic  
Revolution  
Where Olive Trees Wept

## TALKS

The Power of  
Music Therapy

# PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME

## WELLBEING and LEARNING

Spanish for Beginners  
Pilates  
Thai Chi  
Ballet for Wellbeing  
French Conversation

## VISUAL ARTS WORKSHOPS

Safety Mapping workshop  
Jewellery Making classes  
Fragments of the Tay workshop  
Cyanotype photography  
Totem Pole Making  
Creative Cardboard Construction  
Pattern & Play  
Expressive Drawing  
Pottery Taster class  
Pottery Weekend  
Creative Kids term time art

## THEATRE and DANCE

Kids Musical Theatre  
Birnam Ballet School  
Birnam Institute Players  
Tiny Tunes

## MUSIC CLASSES

Beginners Guitar  
D&B Traditional Music Youth Group  
Instrument Tuition  
D&B Youth Trad Bands  
Blow and Blast  
Just Singin'  
Pete Clark fiddle  
masterclasses

## SCHOOLS WORK

Drama Workshops with  
Shaper/Caper at Royal School  
of Dunkeld

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

Free Film Fridays  
Film Club  
Autumn Voices  
Perthshire Plays  
Easter Egg Hunt  
Autumn Pumpkin Hunt  
Jamie Jauncey  
writing retreats



Image: participant of Making Little Books Easter workshop

# ARTIST DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## **THEATRE**

Supporting partner on Perthshire Plays playwriting project alongside Pitlochry Festival Theatre and Perth Theatre

## **ARTIST IN RESIDENCE**

Jessica Ram  
(see case study below)

## **FREE MUSIC REHEARSAL SPACE**

4 local musicians took up this opportunity

## **ARTIST TALKS**

Jessica Ram  
Yunior Aguiar Perdomo  
Esther Kent

## **STORYTELLING**

Autumn Voices Project for over 50s

## **ARTIST DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**

Preparing a strong application  
Application Feedback  
Big Think-In

**FREE FRIDAY STUDIO ACCESS**



Image: Yunior Aguiar Perdomo delivering a talk about his exhibition and wider practice.

# CASE STUDY: JESSICA RAMM

## Artist in Residence July – Sept 2023

For our July 2023 artist in residence, (AiR), call out, we targeted artists having to balance their care responsibilities with their practice. Everyone who applied fitted the requirement – 16 people applied who are caring for partners, parents or young children.

We chose Jessica Ramm (fine art performance, sculpture, multimedia) because of her strong application, her work being risk taking, high end, with a strong sense of excellence and who is rapidly becoming acclaimed. Throughout the residency, Jessica explored working with local rocks, considering their implication of time, vibration and layers of experience. Her proposal was in tune with our environment curatorial line, engaging with the local landscape.

Jessica lives locally (within 20 miles of Birnam) and was a new mum with an 8-month old baby (at time of application). She was breastfeeding so we bought a fridge to enable her to express and store her breastmilk, following Scottish Government guidelines on how to support a breastfeeding mother.

Although there is no expectation of a finished outcome for our AiR opportunities, Jessica carried out research and development work for the sonic art piece which enabled her to create a finished piece which she presented at Dusk Art Festival, 18-21 June 2023 in Lisbon. Jessica expressed interest in bringing the 'rock concert' to Birnam – and accepted a solo exhibition at BA from 27 April - 2 June 2024, where she performed a site specific scratch 'rock concert'.

The main challenge of this AiR was for Jessica to carve out the time to come to do her work at BA, due to her caring responsibilities. We offered her 10 days use of the studio, but she could only manage 8 days. This was not a problem though, as both sides were happy with how the residency went.

We discovered that there is strong demand for AiR opportunities. The format and support we gave was just right and we will use this model again.

We aim to develop our next opportunity - AiR#3 - to increase accessibility for visual and applied artists based in Scotland with protected characteristics.

This project will provide access to a dedicated artistic space outside of working hours, recognising the challenges of balancing paid work and/or family/caring responsibilities whilst developing a growing artistic practice.



Image: Jessica Ramm delivering her scratch 'rock concert' at Birnam Arts, 27th April 2024.

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Birnam Arts is home to several local community groups and festivals which are supported by us through reduced studio, auditorium and meeting room rates (our subsidised community booking rate), marketing promotion including poster design and distribution, social media across multiple channels, in print and on our website, staffing, box office and wider promotion (for festivals).

Our community hire rate is available when a class or group is a not-for-profit organisation or if the class is for wellbeing activities, is made affordable to participants, and is open to everyone.

## **This year, we hosted more than 18 community activities, including:**

- Birnam Institute Players – local amateur dramatic society
- Just Singin' Community Choir

- Blow & Blast woodwind ensemble sessions
- Creative Kids programme of weekly visual arts workshops
- Pottery Classes with Kiln Creative
- Pete Clark Fiddle Masterclasses - week-long music courses in Scottish fiddle tuition held twice a year, which attracts international students
- Neil Gow Festival (March '23) Celebration of the 18th-century local fiddler and composer through workshops, classes and concerts.
- Scottish Community Amateur Drama Festival and Scottish Youth Community Amateur Drama Festival
- Dunkeld and Birnam Repair Cafe
- Wellbeing and learning activities included Thai Chi, Pilates, French Conversation Cafe, Bridge Club and Tiny Tunes (pre-school singing sessions)
- Birnam Book Festival (Oct '23) - A collaboration between Birnam Arts and the Birnam Reader Bookshop, showcasing literature from Scotland and beyond (cancelled this year due to storms.)

Image: Just Singin' community choir concert



# WIDER COMMUNITY IMPACT

During 2023-24, we employed **5 full time and 13 part time staff**, drawn from local residents as well as throughout Highland Perthshire, including 4 young people from 4 different Perthshire schools.

30 people volunteered their time, skills and energy in areas such as front of house, working in the shop and assisting families attending the Beatrix Potter exhibition.

Our Board of eight trustees also give their time voluntarily and continue to play a key role in overseeing our effective governance and financial accountability.

Political parties use our venue to connect to the communities they serve through surgery days. In July 2023, we hosted Humza Yousef (pictured), then First Minister of Scotland.

**38 members of the local community volunteered with us, which amongst other individual and societal benefits, helps to build a more resilient local community.**



*"BA as a community arts hub for local groups is the crux of our being, as it has been for decades"*

Birnam Institute Players (BIPS)



# CASE STUDY: RUARAIKH MACPHEE

Ruaraidh (22), from Dunkeld, studied Higher Music Tech and Advanced Higher Music at Breadalbane Academy and always had a passion for the arts. Ruaraidh started his career, however, working as a butcher in his final 2 years of school and during the pandemic.

Deciding he needed a change, he started working as a Front of House Assistant at Birnam Arts in June 2021. A year later, responding to a staff shortage, the enterprising young man started assisting with touring shows in the venue, doing set ups, helping musicians with get-ins, stage lighting, basic sound and assisting at conferences. Ruaraidh officially became Operations and Technical Support Officer at the end of 2022.

*"I love the diversity of the role. My favourite moments are doing gigs for bands like Talisk and Tidelines - bands I've grown up listening to."*

*"If I hadn't got this job, I would have had to move to a bigger city to pursue better opportunities. Due to the connections I've made and the skills I've learnt at BA, I've been able to secure a part-time job as Venues Technician at Perth Theatre and Concert Hall and now work between the two venues"*

His job at BA also introduced Ruaraidh to the local drama group BIPS and he has since taken on many roles - including working backstage, playing the drumkit in the band and playing Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

*"It's a great place to work, it's taught me a lot. Anyone can benefit massively from working here."*



Ruaraidh (right) with colleague Calum Colley



# CASE STUDY: DUNKELD AND BIRNAM TRADITIONAL YOUTH MUSIC GROUP

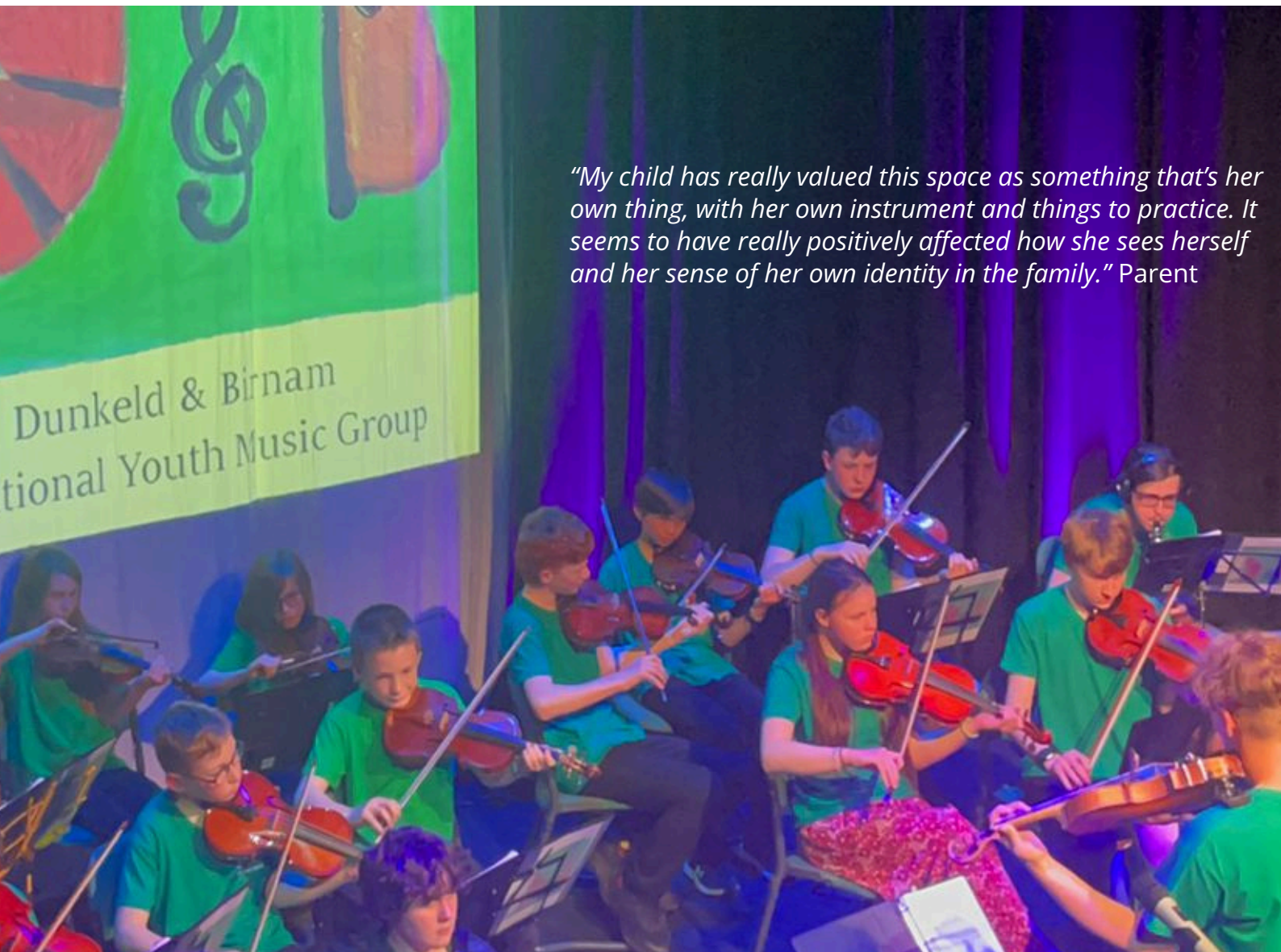
Believing in the power of music education to transform lives, in October 2022, local musicians and educators Karys Watt and Gill Hunter ran traditional Scottish fiddle and accordion taster workshops in schools in Blairgowrie, Aberfeldy and Pitlochry, followed by 2 taster weekends at Birnam Arts.

Gaining lots of interest, they secured funding to run free term-time weekly music tuition from Spring 2023.

The project runs weekly during term time and is open to those aged P5 – S6 . The project currently has 34 members - 20 children join the tuition groups and 25 take part in the Junior and Senior bands.

*“As a central hub, our young members and their families have access to facilities and areas to wait safely, as well as be welcomed by the friendly, helpful and professional staff of Birnam Arts.” Karys Watt*

Image: Dunkeld and Birnam Traditional Youth Music Group



*“My child has really valued this space as something that’s her own thing, with her own instrument and things to practice. It seems to have really positively affected how she sees herself and her sense of her own identity in the family.” Parent*

# CASE STUDY: BIRNAM ARTS BALLET SCHOOL

Birnam Arts Ballet School was formed in 2003 as a response to requests from the local community for children's ballet lessons to be included in the programme at the newly built Birnam Arts centre.

The School aims to build confidence, develop fitness and performance skills and encourage interest in dance and offers the chance to make new friends and connect communities.

**71 children and 31 adults are currently enrolled and attend classes on Monday - Thursday evenings.**

Image: Birnam Arts Ballet School performance

Royal Academy of Dance examination sessions are held annually and regular performances featuring all dancers continue to be enjoyed by the local community.

*"As somebody who didn't always enjoy my school life and did not see much of a future for myself academically, I don't think I would be in college following my passion without Birnam Arts.*

*The classes of ballet were the highlight of my day and often an escape from my school life. They helped build my confidence in performance and socially and they helped me in many other ways."*

Mickey Jenkins, Ballet School pupil 2022-2023.  
Student of Contemporary Dance at Dundee and Angus College (HNC)



*"Throughout a messy and traumatic divorce, it provided a space in the week where my focus was only on dance and was so important for my mental health.*

*Ballet brings me joy! I cannot over-emphasise the value I put on my weekly classes."*  
Adult learner

# 2023 BIG THINK IN

In this exhibition, we dedicated our gallery space to the voices and opinions of our users and visitors. We asked what people wanted to see at Birnam Arts, what they had enjoyed the most and what we can improve on.

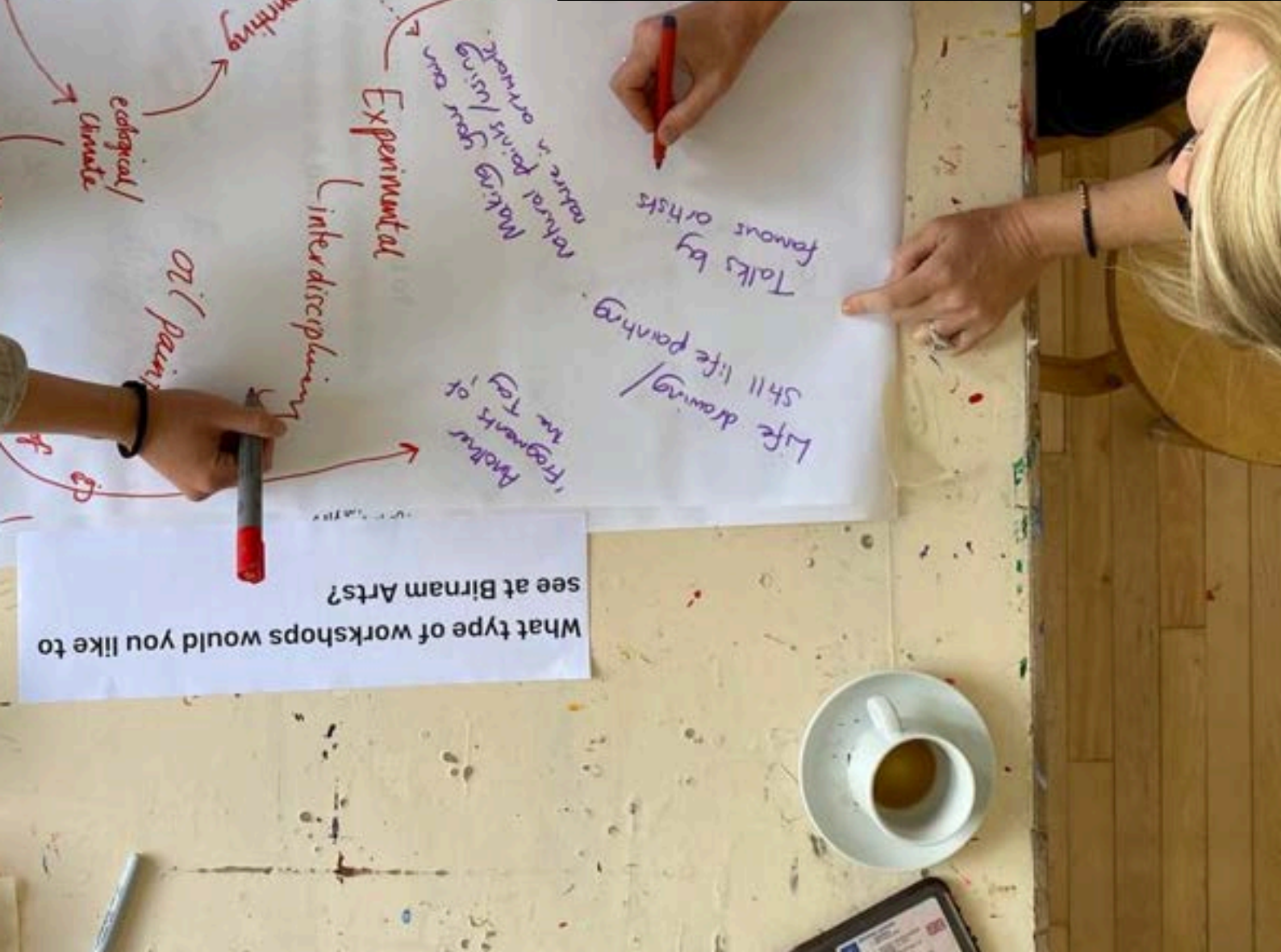
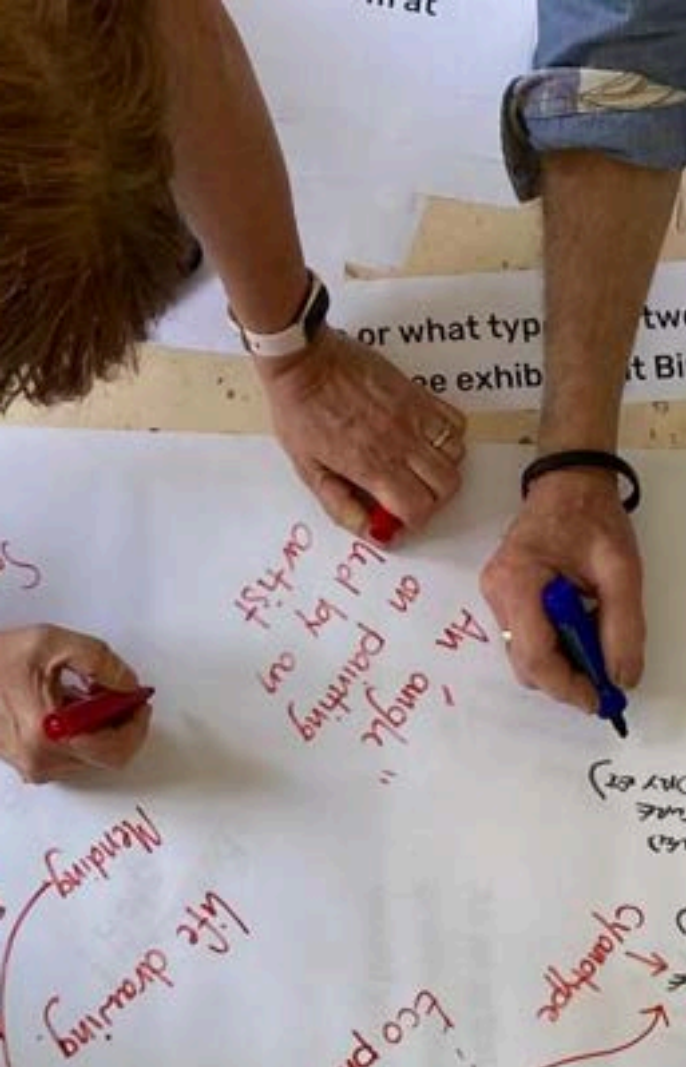
**98% of respondents said they would recommend BA to a friend**

**98% said that their visit to Birnam Arts impacted positively on their physical and/or emotional wellbeing**

**79% said their visit to BA helped them to feel connected to/within their community**

**95.6% of respondents on post-performance online surveys last year rated performances they have seen as either excellent or very good.**

Image: Workshop as part of the Big Think In, 2023



# COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

53 participants from Just Singin', Creative Writing and Adult Ballet groups were asked how they felt about taking part in these groups.

**70%** felt the group benefited their wellbeing

**50%** saw it as a place to exchange knowledge and skills

**42%** experienced increased confidence and self-esteem

**90%** said it made them feel happy to be involved

**87%** said it gave them a sense of achievement

**60%** said their class was the social highlight of their week

**95%** said they would continue to take part

*"You are my home from home... you have always been available to me in my trickiest times and my happiest times."* Local resident

*"Birnam Arts is a brilliant, dynamic, engaging community resource for locals and for our many international visitors too!"* Local resident

*"We as a family have so much to be thankful to Birnam Arts for - a wonderful community of friends, opportunities for employment and creativity, and a network of support through some tough times."* Local resident

Image: Artwork from visual arts workshop participants

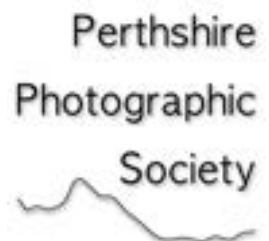


# WITH THANKS TO:

## Our funders



## Our partners, including:



Many thanks also to our donors, volunteers, staff team, trustees, contractors and the community for their invaluable support.