

Oot  
playin



# Report 2022-2023



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# 01 Summary

## Starcatchers

Starcatchers is Scotland's Arts and Early Years organisation. For more than 16 years we have pioneered the development of high-quality performances and creative experiences for children from birth to 5 years, and their grown-ups, in communities across Scotland. Starcatchers' vision is delivered through four pillars of activity all rooted in the arts and creativity and designed to connect with babies, toddlers, young children, parents, carers, and Early Years practitioners. Our advocacy work seeks to advance children's rights to engage with and participate in arts and cultural experiences from birth and, through this, amplify young children's agency and voice.

## Starcatchers Oot Playin'

Supported by Creative Scotland's Cultural Recovery Fund, Starcatchers Oot Playin' was an artist-facilitated creative play-based group for young families with babies under five which took place weekly between April 2022 and March 2023. Established initially with a specific remit to encourage outdoor play during and post-lockdown (14 sessions funded by the Organised Outdoor Play Fund), Oot Playin' delivered 64 play sessions both outdoors and indoors for families around the Carrick area of South Ayrshire, primarily Girvan and Maybole.

## Children 1st

Children 1st is Scotland's National Children's Charity, existing to help children in Scotland live in safe, loving families and build strong communities. Children 1st have been Starcatchers' primary delivery partner throughout the organisation's time in Ayrshire, also partnership successfully with Starcatchers on North Ayrshire group Creative Kin since 2017. Starcatchers' creative programmes support the work of Children 1st, providing participants an opportunity for relaxation, family bonding and self-expression. In the last six years, Children 1st and Starcatchers have established a strong professional relationship which has underpinned the community focus of Starcatchers' activity.

## Starcatchers Out Playin' programme outcomes

### For babies

- Greater socialisation and stimulation which in turns helps physical,
- cognitive social and emotional development
- Strengthened relationships with their parent(s) improves the early years experiences of young children
- Increased confidence, wellbeing and development through successful engagement with and participation in creative activities.

### For parents

- Life Skills
- Greater emotional wellbeing
- Increased parental capacity
- Strengthened attachment
- Community Connectedness

## Financial Summary



Project Staff: £17,700



Guest artists: £9,500

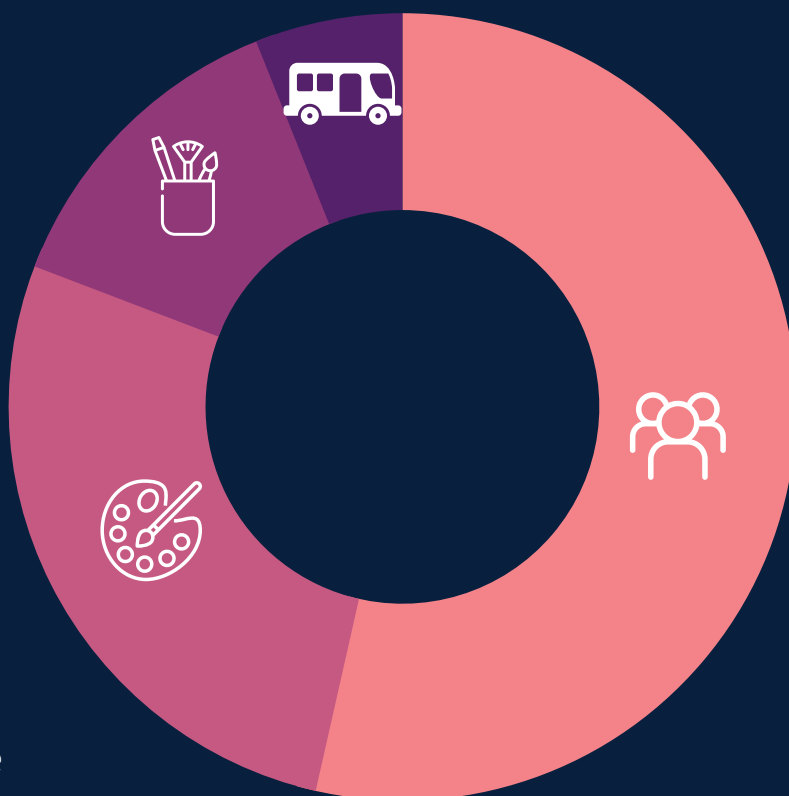


Materials: £4,300



Travel: £2,000

It cost **£33,500** to run the programme





## 02 Background

Oot Playin' was an evolution of earlier Starcatchers' programme, Girvan Creative Babies, which took place in the Carrick area for five months in 2021. Funded by The National Lottery Awards for All, Girvan Creative Babies had a special remit for encouraging creative play during and post pandemic lockdown restrictions easing. The project began by delivering creative play packs to Children 1st families around the area and, after lockdown restrictions were lifted, facilitated doorstep performances and in-person outdoor creative play sessions.

Following this, Oot Playin' was established in April 2022 to expand Children 1st's profile in the wider Carrick area and highlight the natural resources in the community.



# 03 Oot Playin

## What we delivered

64

sessions delivered

3

artists

79

families reached (including pop-up community events)

190

No. of babies (including pop-up community events):

14

No. of families referred by Children 1st

## Artistic team

### Lead Artist: Corrie McKendrick

Corrie is an Early Years Artist who grew up in Ayrshire. He has a theatre background and particularly enjoys leading playful activities for wee ones and their grown-ups that use drama, music, movement, storytelling, visual art and most importantly all kinds of play.

Working with Starcatchers since 2021, Corrie began as lead artist on Girvan Creative Babies, and as such had developed a familiarity with South Ayrshire and the needs of families in the area before developing the project into Oot Playin' in Spring 2022.





## Assistant Artist: Jane Thomson

Jane is a visual artist and designer who lives and works in Ayrshire and is currently assisting with two of Starcatchers' projects: Creative Kin and Oot Playin'.

Jane loves to see not just the wee ones, but also the grown-ups unleash their inner creativity through art and play and the positive impact this has on their personal development and relationships. Jane joined Oot Playin' in September 2022.

## Assistant Artist: Rosi Nyamakanga

Rosi is an artist/educator based in Glasgow who works with children from early years through to teens and adults. She also works with children with complex additional needs through the local SEND school. She is passionate about building creative confidence and individuality through exploration and experimentation of materials and ideas.



The core artistic team of Corrie, Jane and Rosi were supported by a number of visiting Starcatchers' artists, providing new and different creative experiences for the Oot Playin' participants. However, the consistency of the artistic team was paramount in establishing and nurturing the bonds of trust between the delivering artists and participants.

*'I think they're absolutely brilliant. Like really, for the thought that they actually put into it, for the time that they spend, for how welcome they make you feel.'*

-Participant



## What our sessions looked like

### Oot Playin' Outdoors

A core original focus of Oot Playin' was on outdoor play as a continuing response to pandemic health and wellbeing guidance. This outdoor setting, coupled with the classification of Children 1st's provision as an essential service, allowed Oot Playin' in-person sessions to resume a little earlier in 2022 than other play groups in the area. The outdoor sessions were a relief for families who had spent much of the pandemic confined to their homes, and feedback from the sessions showed the children—some of whom had been born during lockdown—really enjoyed the opportunity to play outdoors and explore new environments. As the weather became colder, and in response to families' requests, both the Girvan and Maybole groups moved indoors. Consequently, more families were able to join the groups.

### Non-judgemental space

In both Girvan and Maybole, families reported that there were few other early years groups in the area that they viewed as accessible. Affordability was an issue. Families also reported feeling 'judged' when they attended other groups, on their parenting abilities or the way they played with their children. This feeling was particularly characteristic of Children 1st families, whose experiences could make them suspicious of 'services'. Throughout interviews with participants, many families spoke of Oot Playin' as a non-judgemental space, where they and their children could just be themselves.

A young mum, referred to the group by Children 1st, began Maybole sessions shy and very under-confident in her abilities as a parent. However, after consistently attending for over seven months, she struck up firm friendships with several parents in the group, one whom she now regularly meets with outside of group. Her confidence has grown hugely, shown by the ease with which she interacts with her peers, the Oot Playin' artists and her baby.





*'With this (Oot Playin' sessions), it's nice because we can see what she enjoys, so we can incorporate that in the house. She's more occupied. We've got more time with my other two sons; they can enjoy something with her. And then it's a sense that she's a lot more chilled because we've got a better understanding of how she works.'*

Participant



Another little girl, who struggled at other groups where she was asked to sit down or take part in a 'whole group' activity, found a real freedom in the creative set up of Oot Playin' and thrived each week. Her endless curiosity, high energy levels and tendency to interact with activities in unpredictable ways was nurtured by the team at Oot Playin', and this became a basis for authentic growth and understanding between mum and child.

As a male-led group, Oot Playin' also became a more gender-balanced early years space than some other groups. At Maybole sessions, two dads—both of whom seemed very insular and underconfident when they began coming along — struck up a firm friendship, attending regularly with their children, encouraged by this peer-to-peer support. One dad travelled via bus into the group from outside town, and very rarely missed a session. Oot Playin' was a hugely valuable community space for these participants.

### **Family-led**

Like all Starcatchers community engagement activity, the structure and activities of Oot Playin' sessions were primarily informed by the needs and interests of the families and babies who attended. The Oot Playin' team worked responsively in consultation with families throughout the programme duration, to be sure sessions were fun and engaging for all the wee ones coming along. In doing this, parents and carers felt listened to and identified as experts in their child's lives— an important confidence-builder to some who were unsure of their own skills as parents. Wee ones also had their interests recognised, enabling them to explore and learn in a way that was fun and engaging for them, and recognised their agency. In this way, Oot Playin' sessions felt welcoming and inclusive to all.

## Who we engaged with

### Girvan

Girvan was the primary location for Oot Playin' in the Carrick area, with Children 1st having their base at Girvan Primary School. Girvan sessions were initially based at Ambie Park outdoor space, then in Girvan Primary School as the weather turned colder over wintertime. Girvan hosted a smaller group of families, with 11 families registered to the group in total, but three consistent core families.

### Maybole

The need for a second group based in Maybole was instigated by Children 1st, who had identified potential families in the area who may benefit. The Maybole group began with satellite outdoor play sessions in August 2022, taking place first in the Town Green, then Miller Park in Maybole. Sessions were open to all, as well as identified Children 1st families. Following the satellite sessions, the team made positive links with the Thriving Communities dept in South Ayrshire Council and the local Health and Social Care Partnership. Over the next months, the Maybole group grew to register 13 families, with a core group of 7-8 families, exhibiting a mix real mix of Children 1st families and others who had come across Oot Playin' via different channels. The group moved inside to The Carrick Centre, Maybole over the winter months.

*'Another joy is, I think, how much it [Oot Playin'] has spilled into the wider community.'*

Corrie, Lead Artist





## 04 What difference does Oot Playin' make?

### **Parents feeling less isolated, increased self-confidence**

Oot Playin' adopted an ethos of 'holding a mirror up' to parents and carers, showing them the skills they already had and supporting and reassuring them in their capacity as caregivers, rather than instructing or teaching them 'how to play'. Participants felt empowered by seeing what was possible when they could just 'be' with others in Oot Playin's relaxed, non-judgemental space. This also served to address some participants' mistrust of Children 1st and other services they'd come into contact with. One mum was inspired to continue a childcare qualification after involvement in the group supported her confidence. Another mum, who identified as autistic and was very aware of her own social anxiety, became visibly more confident throughout her time at Oot Playin', comfortable socialising with all the families at the Girvan group, even attending the final, very busy, combined celebration session in Maybole in March '23. When a carer's confidence increases, their confidence in interacting naturally and enjoyably with their children also increases.

## Case study 1: Family A

Family A are Mum T and her wee one S. Members of T's wider family also attend the sessions each week, including T's sister B and both of S's grandmothers.

T is a 22 year old first time mum who felt extremely isolated since having S. She lacked confidence in parenting and was very anxious in every aspect of both her and S's development. When T and S first started attending Oot Playin', T was incredibly shy and unsure of herself in the group setting.

Since attending Starcatchers, and alongside support from Children 1st, T has increasingly grown in confidence, both in the group setting and in the way she encourages and plays with S, both in sessions and throughout the week at home. Her parenting has gone from strength to strength. The positive environment of Oot Playin' has allowed S to interact with other babies and enjoy new baby adventures. S has grown into a confident and happy baby who loves exploring materials (lights and space blankets are favourites) and interacting with other wee ones and grown-ups.

The expertise of the childcare staff at Children 1st has allowed T a better understanding of S's age and stage development; this, as well as interactions with Starcatchers staff, has reduced T's anxiety and she has become a more confident mum. As a result of Oot Playin', T has developed friendships with other local mums in the area, reducing her own social isolation and attending various groups and events for both herself and S.

***'(Mum) feels quite empowered now... It's developed her confidence and self-esteem, her own resilience and things....It's getting that feedback from other mums round about her. It's just been absolutely fantastic for her.'***

Children 1st Support Worker



## Case study 2: Family B

Family B is mum L and baby H. L has struggled with anxiety and has also felt quite isolated. Since attending Oot Playin', L has gained so much confidence in herself: she is a nurturing presence for other young parents in the group, such as S's mum (case study 1), and has become a support to the young family. This has reduced L's anxiety slightly and she has a more positive outlook daily.

*'It's just so nice it's been a positive outcome for them.. the mum, she was really isolated through separation and had a lot of other things going on. And she felt a bit lost, like who am I now?... But now she feels like she has a role because she's now helping other mums. She's got a lot out of it, even though she thought she was going in so that the wee one could play, actually she's got a role.'*

Children 1st Support worker



### **Bonds strengthened between carers and their children**

Oot Playin' welcomed a few children who were in various stages of additional needs diagnoses. The parents of these children had reported feeling excluded from other baby groups, on account of their children being perceived as 'naughty', or unable to follow the rules of the space.

In the Oot Playin' sessions there was no set way to interact with anything and the adult to baby ratio was high, children were allowed the freedom to play as they chose. This allowed the children, and in turn the parents, to feel safe and relaxed during sessions and give parents a chance to observe their children's natural ways of playing and interacting, rather than worrying that they didn't fit into a schedule or task.

### Case Study 3: Family C

Family C are Mum M, Dad A and wee one F. Additionally F has two older brothers who have attended sessions whenever they have been on and school is not in session.

F is a delight to have in Oot Playin' sessions, she loves nothing more than getting covered head to toe in whatever materials we are playing with each week and the rule is the messier the better!

Currently M and A are in the process of getting a formal diagnosis of F based on their own observations and observations of their health visitor. This has been a difficult process and they are facing a great deal of difficulty in accessing services. They have discussed how Oot Playin' is the only group they have been able to attend where F is able (and encouraged) to play in her own way. Other groups have outright excluded her or tried to force her to sit down and engage with specific tasks or activities, which have not provided F with the chance to thrive. Both M and A have expressed real concern over where they can find similar play experiences for the whole family moving forward past March.

F most enjoys playing with herself or with other grown-ups in the room. A key development she has had in her time at Oot Playin' has been her ability to play alongside and share materials and resources with other wee ones. Coming to the sessions each week and having the routine of this kind of play has been so beneficial. M and A have reported that F often gets upset throughout the week if passing by the session location as she wants to come in and play whatever day of the week it is.

M and A have also functioned as a social anchor in the Maybole Oot Playin' group. They will often go out of their way to chat to new members of the group and make them feel welcome.

***'It's been really nice to be able to take her to a group where she can just do what she wishes for an hour and she doesn't need to be corrected: 'You don't do this. No, that's not how it works. No, you've got to sit and play with this'. She can do her own thing, she's happy.'***

Participant

***'The wee one, he's so expressive now, and I think that's come from seeing other babies and being in that kind of social environment. It's been fantastic for him!'***

Children 1st support worker

## Building community

Developing friendships between adult participants became a real focus within the group, particularly the Maybole sessions. New parents – particularly those who had their children during lockdown – had experienced geographical and social isolation. Oot Playin' was a space that addressed this, with many families coming along every week despite transport challenges and describing Oot Playin' as an essential chance for them and their wee ones to socialise and get to know other families in the area.

### Case Study 4: Family D is dad T and wee one C.

Also mentioning Family C.

T is a single dad who lives in a village outside Maybole and relies on public transport. This has led to him often feeling socially isolated and unable to meet and socialise with other parents.

Family D happened across Oot Playin' one week while Dad A and wee one F (from Family C) were having a picnic lunch in the local town green space in the Summer. They came over to see what Oot Playin' was all about and have been back for almost every week since.

Wee one C has had a really transformative time in Oot Playin'. In his first weeks he wouldn't want to be far from dad: now he freely plays by himself, with other children, with dad and other grown-ups and is happy, confident and playful in all situations.

T has developed a continuing friendship with dad A. T and A gravitate towards each other every week to chat and it has had a hugely noticeable impact on T who is now much more confident and chatty with all of the adults in the room, making a point each week to check in with all grown-up participants in the room and asking about how their and their wee one's week have been. It has really lessened T's social isolation and he is noticeably more comfortable and confident (alongside C, who is truly thriving in the group).

**'I specifically remember (a family) coming along to the session at Oot Playin' and being desperate to tell us that they were having another baby. And for, to have that kind of relationship with the families as well, that they want to share the joy with you, is just wonderful.'**

Jane, Assistant Artist



## Artistic development in South Ayrshire

*'Working with the children and seeing the freeness that they have, not looking to do anything in particular, just creating their playing - I think it's really inspiring.'*

Jane, Assistant Artist

Oot Playin' also had an impact on the practice of the artists involved. Oot Playin' was Corrie McKendrick's first project as both Project Coordinator and Lead Artist, and he has been inspired by the success of the group to establish more projects in this way, with the aim of creating a project model that local community can take real ownership over. Corrie also recognised the benefit to the project of his being from Ayrshire. He noted that art and artistic practice often isn't viewed as a viable career option in less affluent communities such as Carrick; so having an Ayrshire-born artist working in Ayrshire was inspiring.

Oot Playin' Assistant Artist Jane also assists at Starcatchers' Creative Kin group in North Ayrshire. Her involvement with both of these groups has led her to pursue, alongside her art, further work with young children, and she is now working as a classroom assistant in an Irvine primary school. In this role, she hopes to continue the play-based approach to creativity and learning she's experienced with Starcatchers.

Assistant Artist Rosi has a well-developed artistic practice, but Oot Playin's focus on process and experimentation over creating an 'end product' has had a positive effect on her practice for older children, and she is keen to incorporate this freedom of learning into her work across age ranges.





## 05 Conclusion

Our evaluation of Oot Playin' consistently shows the positive impact the weekly sessions had on the families who attended.

### **Outcomes for babies:**

- Greater socialisation and stimulation which in turns helps physical, cognitive social and emotional development
- Strengthened relationships with their parent(s) improves the early years experiences of young children
- Increased confidence, wellbeing and development through successful engagement with and participation in creative activities.

As can be seen throughout this report, involvement in the Oot Playin' group has had a hugely positive effect on babies' development. Carers and artists reported observing increased confidence and independence in many of the young participants: in particular, the freeform creative play set-up encouraged freedom of expression and exploration which bolstered physical, social and cognitive development. Relationships were also nurtured as adults observed their children engage in different creative activities, coming to a greater understanding of what children's personal likes and dislikes were, and what kind of play and level of social interaction they most enjoyed. This greater understanding strengthened the relationships between wee ones and their grown-ups.

*'Am I allowed to do this? Am I allowed? Yes, course you are. Yes, yes. The answer is yes. The answer is not going to be no. It's going to be yes.'*

-Assistant Artist Rosi

## Outcomes for parents

- Life Skills
- Greater emotional wellbeing
- Increased parental capacity
- Strengthened attachment
- Community Connectedness

Oot Playin' delivered consistently positive experiences for the adult participants. Many adult participants exhibited a clear growth in self-confidence and emotional wellbeing as a result of the social interactions and relaxed, creative ethos of the group. Relationships were built between parents, resulting in a strengthened local support system, particularly for young single parents who had felt socially and geographically isolated. This support system in turn allowed many parents to observe that Oot Playin' was an essential part of their and their children's weeks; a valued chance to socialise, relax and enjoy quality time with their family and their wider community of peers.

Oot Playin' was a popular, valuable resource for communities in the Carrick area, providing personalised and enthusiastic creative, emotional and social support for families. The relaxed, flexible and non-judgemental ethos of Oot Playin' made a measurable difference to parents' confidence and wellbeing, encouraging them to develop stronger bonds with their children, with other carers in their community, and tackling social isolation. Oot Playin' provided a safe space for children, particularly children with additional needs, and enabled families to interact with their wee ones on their level, without pressure to succeed at a task, or interact 'correctly' with activities. As can be seen by the dramatic growth of the Maybole group, there was a real demand for this kind of free, creative, inspiring play sessions in the more isolated Maybole community, and there is hope that Oot Playin' has seeded the ambition for more groups of similar ethos to be formed in the area.





A huge thank you to the families who came along to sessions in Girvan and Maybole, the wider community, Abby from Children 1st, Andrea and her Team at the Carrick Centre, SA HASCP and Thriving Communities.

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