# **STARCATCHERS IN WESTER HAILES** 2023 - 2024



starcatchers.org.uk





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# **O1** SUMMARY

Starcatchers is Scotland's arts and early years organisation. We advocate for creativity to be at the heart of every childhood and create magical, playful experiences for all children, wherever they live, alongside the professionals and communities who nurture them. Arts and creativity for 0-5s and their adults supports positive wellbeing, strong relationships and helps give children the best start in life.

Starcatchers has had a presence in Wester Hailes for over a decade, with the pilot of **Expecting Something** being situated in the community from 2013/14. This group engages with parents under 25 and their babies in creative arts activities, helping to support and encourage parent-baby bonding and, importantly, create a sense of connectedness between these young families and their community. It has continued to run consistently and for free since the pilot.

**Starcatchers Saturdays** took place almost every week during 2023/24 in the Westside Plaza, offering drop-in creative play sessions for children under 5 and their carers, led by a magical team of artists and performers across multiple artforms.

In November 2023 we launched **The Baby Studio**, our first public space dedicated to artistic practice. Two new pieces of theatre performance were developed with babies and nursery children in Wester Hailes, **Float** and **Laaaunch!** As well as attracting lots of families, the studio welcomed the local nurseries for artistic explorations within a dedicated Early Years space.

During 2023-24 there were over **807 unique engagements** with babies, young children and their grown ups in Wester Hailes. We identified several opportunities to deepen our engagement with families who were encouraged to attend multiple Starcatchers' activities in the area.



# **02** THE BABY STUDIO

In June 2023 we opened Starcatchers' Baby Studio space in the heart of Westside Plaza. This was a deepening of our ambition to become a fullyembedded part of the Wester Hailes community. Wester Hailes has been the home to our Expecting Something project since 2013. As part of our 15th birthday actions in 2021, Starcatchers made the decision to move into a new office space at Whale Arts in Wester Hailes.



Over the year we've run pop-up events throughout Wester Hailes in partnership with organisations and early years settings, and began our popular weekly Starcatchers Saturdays sessions at Westside Plaza's Community Wellbeing Collective in Autumn 2022 in response to the findings of our community consultation. Starcatchers artists Kerry Cleland and Katy Wilson noted that one of the central gathering points for the community was Westside Plaza. After a bit of creative thinking and consulting the community, the idea of a dedicated baby studio space was born.

Through Outer Spaces, an organisation working to build an alternative infrastructure for the arts, we were able to transform a once-empty shopping unit in Westside Plaza into the welcoming Baby Studio. This space is a dedicated place for families in the community to come and enjoy free creative play activities together with their wee ones, including Starcatchers Saturdays and pop-up play events.

In November 2023, we organised an official launch of the space. It was a week of free, creative play sessions with artists Kerry Cleland, Katy Wilson and KJ Clarke-Davis, and saw lots and lots of children and grown ups come explore the magic, joy and wonder together.

"We wanted to create a play space, where people can come to connect, to have a good time together, to feel inspired, relaxed and cared for – we will create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere led by the creative interests of those who use it. The space will change all the time – it will transform and bring energy and ideas"



# **03** EXPECTING SOMETHING

Operating out of WHALE Arts on Thursdays, this is a welcoming group for babies under 2 and their grown ups. A wide variety of arts-based activities are facilitated by the artistic team and a range of guest artists. Babies enjoy bonding with their adults and peers while accessing the arts in their local area. Watch this <u>short film</u> to hear why families love it!

#### **Lead Artists**

#### **Kerry Cleland**

Kerry is a performer who is passionate about play, both in performance and in everyday life. Over the last 11 years Kerry has focussed on making and performing theatre for the early years and children with complex needs. Kerry enjoys transforming and creating spaces that spark and ignite playfulness for those who enter the room. As a performer she has a keen interest in the world of clown and the power of connection that comes with this practice. Kerry admired Expecting Something since its beginnings in

Wester Hailes in 2013. She is delighted to be part of the Starcatchers team, helping to co create exciting and vibrant work in Wester Hailes with families in the community.

Kerry creates and delivers the Starcatchers programme of activities in Wester Hailes with Katy Wilson.







#### **Katy Wilson**

Katy Wilson is a visual artist. Her residency at Tramway, creating work for early years, generated great interest in the community and a wealth of new and exciting ideas and collaborations between artists. Katy likes to create new worlds and environments for people to feel good, relaxed and inspired in – often sophisticated and far from conventional baby friendly spaces – she likes to shake things up.

Her work for Starcatchers includes <u>Icepole</u>, <u>Multi</u> <u>Coloured Blocks from Space</u>, <u>Will you be my Guinea</u> <u>Pig?</u>, <u>Sparkalator</u>, <u>Sprog Rock</u>, <u>Blue Block Studio</u> and <u>Mixed Up</u>. Katy has been a lead artist on Expecting Something since 2015.

Katy creates and delivers the programmes of activities in Wester Hailes with Kerry Cleland.



#### What we delivered

40

Expecting Something sessions took place from April 2023 to March 2024 **39** 

Families were on the Expecting Something roster in 2023/24

In 2023/24, the demand remained high for non-clinical services like Expecting Something to provide support and a safe space for families raising children in a costof-living crisis in an area of poverty.

Providing this consistent, accessible support has introduced a more multicultural demographic to the group, representative of the diversity of the Wester Hailes area.

The Participant Committee sessions provide valuable insights into the impact the work has and how Starcatchers can provide what is most needed for families. "I mean when I came, when my baby was 3 months old, I was so low, I'd gone from working full time to just nothing! It was very hard! And then when I came [to Expecting Something], they were just so lovely and welcoming."

**Expecting Something Participant** 







## Visiting artists and visiting places

In response to the interests of our participants, and seeking to provide as many high-quality cultural experiences as possible, we have continued to invite visiting artists to our Thursday Expecting Something sessions, including Bigg Taj, Dirliebane Theatre, Tinderbox musicians, Sprog Rock, Morgan Njobo, and Soundplay projects.

We have also continued to take the group on visits to explore the local area and into Edinburgh, including to The National Museum of Scotland, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Edinburgh Christmas Market and to the Botanic Gardens. These visits address issues of access and transportation and contribute to our participants' familiarity with and ownership of their local areas. As the costof-living crisis continued to affect our community over winter 2023-24, these visits also provided a warm, safe space for participants, with cost-free, nutritious snacks and meals provided. The positive experience of these visits post-Christmas contributed hugely to group bonding and helped bridge the gap between periods of outdoor play.

> "It was my first time there. We went for the Christmas lights, and the market to see Santa. It was very good! She [Participant's child] was right in there taking the book from him and stuff." Expecting Something Participant

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"Thank you again for sharing with the amazing Narnia experience with the practitioners and children within Smile Childcare Under 3's. Our praise for Starcatchers is huge, the experiences you provide add real depth to our curriculum and staff remark on the thoughtful, non intrusive interactions you have with the children."

Smile Childcare

### **Connecting with the Wester** Hailes community

We achieved We delivered engagements with sessions across our babies, young activity and with our children and families partners

Launching the Baby Studio as a public space dedicated to babies has transformed how we engage with the community. 696 babies, young children and families connected via that space.

There was a demand for creative play sessions specifically for local nurseries. These supported the early years curriculum, providing art experiences for young children who wouldn't otherwise have the access of their more affluent peers.

We are actively working together with local partners to ensure that, together, we are providing holistic relational support for families:

- Gate 55
- With Kids
- WHALE Arts
- Edible Estates
  - Calder flats residents' association
- Bethany trust
- Space at Broomhouse
- Westside plaza
- The Community Wellbeing Collective

- **Big Noise**
- Health Centre
- Hailesland
- Smile Childcare
- Canal View
- Wester Hailes **Community Trust**
- Sighthill Early Years
- Calderglen Nursery
- Clovenstone **Community Centre**
- The Health Agency

During 2023/24, a group was started by a local early years setting with the aim of connecting with other services, groups and organisations in the community for effective signposting services in the area that can help support families with young children aged birth - 5 years. Starcatchers will continue to work together with this group to connect services to families. 7



# 04 STARCATCHERS SATURDAYS

#### What we delivered

82

different families have attended Starcatchers Saturdays 49

Starcatchers Saturdays sessions took place over the course of the year

Play activities are different every week, with our team of artists inspired by the interests of the wee ones who come along to create sessions that make everyone feel welcomed and involved. Our artists have created magical, interactive sessions around themes like Ice Kingdom, Carnival, Little Detectives, 70s, Little Bugs, Squeaky Clean, Cardboard City, Clubland, Yellow, Pom Pom Land...

#### Artists

At the beginning of the year, Starcatchers were able to support local artists to develop their practice to work with early years audiences, enabling us to increase our team of to local artists.

#### Starcatchers Saturdays team 2023/24:

- Kerry Cleland
- Katy Wilson
- Amie Burns-Walker
- Bigg Tajj
- KJ Davis-Clarke
- Sam Jameson
- Conor O'Donnell
- Michelle Jameson
- Noah Tomson
- Lesley Howard
- Hannah Edie
- Madeleine Wood
- Hailey Beavis,
- Claire Docherty,
- Sound play (Euan Sinclair and Bal Cooke)
- Daniel Padden

The findings of the community consultation in 2022/23 showed a clear demand and need for weekend delivery. Starcatchers started offered ad hoc Saturday creative arts sessions for babies and their grown ups and the positive feedback from families encouraged the company to take on its first public-facing space.

The Baby Studio can be found in a disused retail unit in the Westside Plaza: everyone goes to the plaza! It is a neutral location in the heart of the seven localities of Wester Hailes with lots of services families use regularly. Having a beautiful space dedicated to babies that is visible in the community has been transformative for Starcatchers as a company.

Operating every Saturday has enabled Starcatchers to increase the diversity of families engaging in the programme. A decision was taken to have a drop-in format on the weekend, rather than asking families to register or book in, recognising that this can help to make it easier for people to cross the threshold for the first time.

The wider age-range we apply to Starcatchers' Saturdays events allows for whole families to come together for bonding time as a group. Several of the young participants also have additional support needs, and families view Starcatchers' Saturdays as a safe space for all these different play styles, needs and interests to interact. The artists have found that there are challenges in creating sessions that cater to each different age and stage; however, considering the huge benefits of this approach and the impact for the families, it feels important to continue offering this whole-family experience.

A positive outcome of the pop-up format and the central location at Westside Plaza is that Starcatchers' Saturdays has encouraged a far more diverse demographic from around the area. Dads and Grandparents, including those who are in formal and informal kinship care arrangements, are more represented at the Saturday sessions. The diversity of families' experiences, cultures and expectations has been another challenge for the artists to address, and the learning has been of huge benefit for future planning and delivery.

In fact, the learning that has come from ensuring a smooth welcome for all has led to important conversations around accessibility and inclusivity and we hope to roll out new processes across all our community engagement projects. For example, utilising an app that will let a participant choose their language for sharing their details will remove those initial barriers that may be an obstacle for to new audiences coming through the door.

Feedback from parents:

*"It's a great initiative because there is nothing else like this in Wester Hailes!"* 

"He [Child] loves coming here! Everytime he passes it [the Baby Studio] he waits outside and cries because he wants to come in and play!"

"This place is wonderful and great for the kids! I love how you set up the space."



### **O5** WHAT DIFFERENCE DID OUR ACTIVITY MAKE IN WESTER HAILES?

#### **Outcome For Babies**

Greater socialisation and stimulation which in turns helps physical, cognitive social and emotional development

Strengthened relationships with their parent/carer(s) improves the early years experiences of young children

Increased confidence, wellbeing and development through successful engagement with and participation in creative activities.

#### **Outcomes For Adults**

Greater emotional wellbeing Increased parental capacity Strengthened attachment Community Connectedness

## **CASE STUDIES**

Participants and their babies are at the centre of everything we do. Expecting Something offers safety, a non-judgmental environment and a space our participants have ownership of. Our knowledge of the community, and the partnerships we have developed allow us to support families in a friendly, informal artistic setting. Through a relationship of trust with our artists, and a strong peer-support network, families are nurtured and supported, both as new parents and often as they navigate difficult moments in their lives.

Mum P was referred to Expecting Something by her Health Visitor as they had concerns for her mental health after having her baby. She wasn't wanting to leave the house – she speaks openly about her feelings of isolation and lack of motivation at this time. She came to our group and they were immediately embraced and loved by the whole group. Through our creative and outdoor sessions she developed a beautiful bond with her baby and also other babies in the group – who are drawn to her and adore her. She feels now a real sense of ownership of the group – she feels how much it has done for her and her now two year old and she wants to welcome new parents in, stop them feeling isolated, alone and uninspired – she serves them lunch and looks all ages in the eye with real interest. She is aware of including everyone and actively embracing different cultures. Now no matter all the difficulties going on in her life, she goes out of her way to look after other mums and their babies. I think she feels a real sense of purpose and community at our group. She plays with all the babies and takes on all creative ideas with gusto and a great humour - laughing warmly and supportively with everyone. I think the group has provided her with an opportunity to remember who she is as an individual, to grow as a mother and be the centre of a supportive community for mothers and babies. She doesn't go to other groups as she doesn't like sitting in a circle being told what to do – she enjoys the freedom of our group.

"I love it! I mean when I came, when my baby was 3 months old, I was so low, I'd gone from working full time to just nothing! It was very hard! And then when I came, they were just so lovely and welcoming. Even though a lot of them have disappeared now because their kids are all grown up! So, it's nice now to see more babies coming in and they're getting that relationship, all the kids together and which is lovely! Like it's so hard! When you are coming to something like this, it's like aw, they [the young children] all know each other, they've got their wee buddies! So it's nice to welcome them all. [other mums]. You know, come and join this crazy bunch!" **Participant**  The group helps wee ones enjoy creative experiences they might never come across otherwise, and the joy and freedom found in creative play strengthens the bonds between adult and baby, helping each find new ways to play together and also express themselves as individuals.

"I've been coming along with my youngest for almost a year, since he was about 4 months old. It's really nice to meet out in the garden, and gives me confidence to try more activities outside. Rain or shine we always have lots of fun. The atmosphere is always really welcoming and the group makes sure to engage the little ones at multiple ages, adapting activities to suit all of the ages present. S really seems to enjoy the flexibility of the sessions, and the freedom to make a mess (or cause chaos) as well interacting with the other young ones. Having a group meal afterwards also encourages S to try some different foods as he sees his peers trying them too. I also really enjoy that the group doesn't just focus on activities for the children, there's activities there for parents too. It helps to remind you that you're still you and not just a parent. Most groups I've known tend to focus just on the kids, so it's nice that there's also consideration of the parent/carer and signposting to other support if we need it. The group is definitely one that I wish had been around when my older children were little as I think it's fantastic and helps make my little one more curious and willing to interact with the world in different ways."

#### **Expecting Something Participant**

"Me and my son R have been going to starcatchers since he was 8 months old R is now 2 this year. What I love about starcatchers is that the group is based about little kiddies exploring their inner selves through nature, sensory play, imaginative play, messy play, and so much more. R has benefited so much from starcatchers I feel like if I never took R to this group he wouldn't be as developed as he is. I love playing with my son and starcatchers gives us that freedom of playing out side and also meeting other parents. R has took a big interest in music, while he's been at starcatchers he has had the chance to express himself in the way he loves through music, playing the drums having different musicians coming along and playing with us. R loves this. We love starcatchers and have been going every week since we started." **Expecting Something Participant** 

At Starcatchers' Saturdays, our participants enjoy whole family bonding time and the freedom to come and go thanks to the drop-in style. The inclusive nature of the group allows wee ones to play with older siblings, forming bonds across ages and stages, while the central location and weekend time slot encourages families from all different parts of Wester Hailes to come along and get to know each other, facilitating community bonding.

"At home he's on the screen alot, that's what he does. Here he gets to try out all these incredible things and it's really nice to see him play in this way" Starcatchers Saturdays Participant

"She's had so much fun! When we are home she is alone, so it is good for her to come to the group and play" **Starcatchers Saturdays Participants** 

## **1.**Greater socialisation and stimulation which in turns helps physical, cognitive social and emotional development

Many Expecting Something participants in particular report that without the group they would find it hard to leave the house. Sometime this is because of feelings of social anxiety and under confidence; sometimes parents of multiple children find transporting wee ones and older siblings back and forth between sessions too daunting. However, we consistently see parents respond to the freedom and enjoyment their wee ones get out of sessions and become consistent attenders. This in turn builds strong peer bonds between adult participants, and families as a whole, while tackling feelings of social exclusion and anxiety. In one instance, a participant and her neighbour, who had no pre-existing relationship, joined the group and they are now good friends.

#### Case study 1

J has arrived and is raring to go, he is the oldest of two children under 36 months and is a super active and outgoing toddler. M finds it hard to get out of the house and quite often will not come if she has to bring both children – bringing them both out is too much of a stressful challenge so she tends to avoid it if she can and today the younger baby has been left with dad. J runs to N who is his friend at the group and the two toddlers jog around each other before heading off into the wooded area to jump on every different surface they can find, dried up leaves, rocks and tree roots. J stamps each of his feet back and forth on a tree root, N watches and when there is space he responds with a stamp of his feet in a faster more wobbly version. J spots the array of materials we have laid out across the tarpaulin and chooses to explore each one slowly, N follows and they throw the cloth pieces up and watch them float back to the ground.

A friendship has been struck up between these two little ones with communication through sounds of stamps, experiencing textures and giggling grins of delight. The combination of art and outdoors allows these two toddlers such a chance to explore on their own terms, choosing the art materials if they appeal and seeing how they fit and work in the natural surroundings.

## 2. Strengthened relationships between babies and carers, increasing wellbeing for both

With a high adult to baby ratio, a well-managed space, and many activities to try, Starcatchers sessions are a really positive environment for facilitating parent-child bonding. Parents are well-supported by artists, and feel happy playing with their wee ones or, in turn, allowing the artists to interact with the kids whilst they get some valuable adult time. Neither children nor the adults feel under pressure to succeed or produce anything – Starcatchers sessions are free creative play, and therefore encourage babies and their grown-ups to interact in whatever way suits them and their style of play or self-expression. This freedom and support allow participants to concentrate on exploring their own likes and interests, building confidence and strengthening relationships in a relaxed, pressure-free way that is individual to every family.

## 3. Increased confidence, wellbeing and development through successful engagement with and participation in creative activities.

Frequently, families report that the activities at Starcatchers are a first for them and for their children – whether this is messy play, outdoor play, or visits to galleries. Lack of options and a high level of social deprivation in Wester Hailes means many young babies don't have access to creative activities day-to-day, and also that parents don't feel confident in engaging in these kind of activities with their wee ones. The laid-back, supportive atmosphere of Expecting Something allows both carers and wee ones to engage how they like, to explore new activities and challenges and experience locations they might otherwise feel excluded from. Being part of the group helps participants feel more confident in what they're doing, emotionally and socially supported, which in turn contributes to self-confidence and greater emotional well-being for families.

#### Case study 2

W is a toddler who has been attending sessions since he was born along with his older sibling. W was born at the start of lockdown. His Mum has been anxious about Covid, if it was not for this group, W would not socialise with other children and adults outside his family. W is a shy child, his Mum voices her concern about how 'clingy he is'. W would follow his sibling and engage in activities only when his sibling did so. Several months ago, W's sibling started nursery.

W seemed lost without his sibling. His mother was concerned he was more clingy. Slowly over sessions W formed a trusted relationship with one of the artists, and they played together weekly, W being enabled to take the lead. W's confidence developed. He started walking independently into group rather than clinging to his Mum. Slowly he has begun playing with other children and adults who attend the group, including Dads. W has become more confident and playful and more willing to explore new things.

W does not sleep well and Mum states she is exhausted and that is it easier to keep him in his buggy or indoors. There is no garden at home. She finds it too stressful at the park as he runs off. The group provides Mum and W with a safe supportive outdoor environment for W to be active. Mum states that 'the kids love being outdoors. They get to experience all the mud and the sticks and they get to run free. Rather than be couped up inside and be like, no you can't go in there'.

Mum also reports that she values the support of the group 'It's great, you feel yourself here and you can be yourself and talk about anything you want. Something could be troubling you or you could be suffering with depression. We've all been there and we all try help when we can.' In addition to supporting Mum, the group has enabled us to support her with W's healthy eating. His mum has food texture phobias which include almost all healthy food unless it is liquidised. This can have an impact on the food she prepares and buys for her children. By providing lunch at the group, W has tried many new fruits and vegetables and hot healthy meals.

"It's really, friendly, laid-back group for you to have your own time and your babies to develop. Be outside and just have some fun. Let your baby create and yeah. Just come and see and you won't be disappointed." **Expecting Something Participant** 



# **06** FINANCIAL SUMMARY



**Staff costs:** £54,970 Katy Wilson, Kerry Cleland



Additional artists: £10,822



Project costs: £3,570

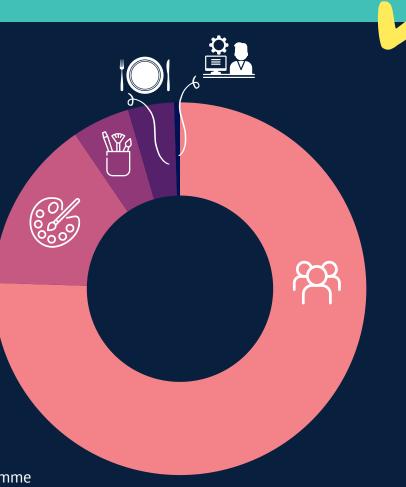


Catering: £3,248



Admin overheads: £299

It cost **£72,909** to run the 2023-24 programme *not including theatre production or nursery work.* 





# **07** CONCLUSIONS & LOOKING AHEAD

Over the past year we have seen the benefit of having two dedicated Starcatchers' spaces in the area through a deepening of the engagement with the families we see weekly at Expecting Something and Starcatchers Saturdays. We want the next year to build on this momentum and have identified four areas of focus to meet new families and strengthen our relationships with existing participants.

**Baby and parent consultations** - weekly delivery will continue with an added focus on artists and participants creating together: we plan to work with the families at Expecting Something to create a festive trail or show and to create an artistic installation on brain development. Longer blocks of time will be offered to guest artists for Starcatchers Saturdays to trial this for the community and a structure will be set based on families' responses later in the year. We will continue to meet new local families and respond to growing numbers by exploring how to develop our offer.

**Artistic focus** - we will develop artist peer support within Starcatchers for development of shows in Baby Studio and to explore ideas and practice. This will ensure we are always bringing fresh, exciting, and magical ideas that will ignite curiosity in the babies and parents we see every week.

**Building relationships with early years settings** - we will work closely with settings by inviting them into the Baby Studio and also visiting settings with the intention of consulting with the children using a variety of creative play offers and art forms. We will explore what the children are interested in and what they would like to see at the Baby Studio.

**Continue work with partners in the community** to build a strong network and platform for early years families in Wester Hailes to enable them to access groups and support. We will continue pop-up play at community events, ensuring there's always an offer for the youngest babies in the community, and to bring Starcatchers' creativity and artistic focus into events and celebrations in the area. There will be a focus on building partnerships with local statutory and health services to aid referrals to our sessions for families who may face multiple barriers to access.





414kg of carbon: Expecting Something Artist travel



506.3kg of carbon: Starcatchers Saturdays and pop ups artist travel



70% of session materials in Wester Hailes are reused

Environmental sustainability is at the heart of Starcatchers' strategic priorities. We recognise that a socially-just operational model puts the welfare of both people and the planet at the centre of decision making, and that now more than ever we meaningful action is needed to protect our planet and Scotland's future generations as we play our part in the City of Edinburgh's net-zero target by 2030. Read our Environmental Sustainability Policy on our website.

Our sustainability practice in Wester Hailes focused on three key areas this year:

**Transformation:** A once-empty shopping unit in Westside Plaza is now a welcoming central point for families. Our Baby Studio is local and convenient for our audience, and accessible by public transport from the areas in Wester Hailes we seek to engage.

**Reinvention:** Our Baby Studio has become a central storage point for project materials. Our artists are now less likely to buy new, instead reusing or reinventing materials for other sessions. This year, we have been able to train more local artists to take part in our Wester Hailes programmes which has meant less carbon produced by travel.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration is at the heart of Starcatchers' environmental sustainability. Over the past year we worked with local partners in our delivery of events and training, for example The Community Wellbeing Collective and Whale Arts, which enabled more local opportunities and support for the community in Wester Hailes, while encouraging resource-sharing between organisations. Starcatchers is now a trial partner of Arts Resource Management Scotland (ARMS) supporting us to continue to share resources with other organisations and minimise waste.

Thank you to our partners, WHALE Arts, The Community Wellbeing Collective and Outer Spaces, and to our funders:

- Cattanach
- Children's Lottery Trust
- City of Edinburgh community grants
- Community Grant Fund Baillie Gifford
- Henry Duncan
- The National Lottery Improving Lives
- The National Lottery Young Start
- Perinatal Infant Mental Health Fund
- Ponton House Trust
- The Robertson Trust
- University of Edinburgh community grants
- William Grant Foundation
- William Syson
- Youth Arts Fund