



# Final Report

## Youth Arts Open Fund

### 2024-2025

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**“As a freelance artist in Shetland, I want to say a huge thank you for funding a project which brought young people from all over the isles together to celebrate each other and the wonderful place that they call home. Thank you so much on behalf of all the artists and participants of 'Putting Shetland on the Map!'” (funded organisation)**



## Executive Summary

Round 2 of the Youth Arts Open Fund (2024–2025) enabled **56 freelance artists and organisations** to deliver high-quality, youth-led creative activity for children and young people across Scotland. Administered by YouthLink Scotland on behalf of Creative Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government, the fund supported projects designed to reach young people who traditionally have the least access to arts opportunities, while strengthening the role of youth voice in decision-making.

Demand for the fund was high, with **162 applications** requesting over £2 million. Following Creative Scotland’s initial assessments, 58 applications were shortlisted and passed to the newly introduced Youth Panel, who received accredited training before undertaking full assessment responsibility. Their decisions resulted in **34 initial awards totalling £446,795**, followed by an **additional £30,000** from Scottish Government that enabled young people to fund a further **22 projects**, bringing **total awards to £725,310** across 22 local authority areas.

Funded projects reached **3,385 children and young people**, many of whom experience multiple and intersecting barriers including disability, neurodivergence, experience of poverty, care experience, mental health challenges, and social isolation. Delivery spanned a wide range of art forms—primarily multi-artform, theatre, digital, music, visual arts and traditional arts—offering structured, accessible, and creatively ambitious opportunities.



Projects reported strong evidence of positive impact. Young people showed improvements across key developmental outcomes, including self-expression (1,987 CYP), mental health and wellbeing (2,072 CYP), confidence and transferable skills (1,154 CYP), and connection to peers and community (1,578 CYP). Capacity building outcomes were also notable, with 40 strengthened partnerships between youth work and arts providers and 55 youth workers reporting increased confidence in embedding creative practice.

The quality of evaluation across the fund was consistently robust. Projects used mixed-method approaches combining reflective practice, participatory evaluation, and the National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework. Feedback from funded organisations highlighted YouthLink Scotland's strong delivery and support role, including clear guidance, responsive communication, and valuable training.

Overall, Round 2 of the Youth Arts Open Fund demonstrated substantial reach and deep impact for young people facing the greatest structural barriers. The introduction of a youth panel strengthened both the credibility and integrity of the fund's youth-led ethos, ensuring decisions were grounded in young people's priorities and experiences. The model offers a strong foundation for future investment that centres equity, participation, and high-quality creative opportunity for Scotland's children and young people.

## Overview

The Youth Arts Open Fund was administered by YouthLink Scotland (the national agency for youth work in Scotland) and is part of Creative Scotland's wider support for children and young people, funded by the Scottish Government. The purpose of the Youth Arts Open Fund was to support freelance artists or organisations seeking small amounts of funding to deliver arts activity for children and young people, prioritising those who have traditionally found it hardest to access such opportunities.

Funded projects were expected to engage children and young people in high-quality and accessible arts activity that empowered them through self-expression, enhanced their health, wellbeing and personal development, and built their confidence and skills.

Freelance artists could apply for funding up to £8k and organisations, for funding of up to £15k, to deliver up to 12 months of arts activity, and a total of £726,795k was available.

## A youth-led approach

The Youth Arts Open Fund is underpinned by a commitment to youth voice, empowerment and participation. Applicants are required to set out how young people will be involved in the proposed projects – not just as participants but as partners in designing the programme and their own learning outcomes. In round 2 of the fund, we introduced a youth panel to strengthen this commitment, giving young people responsibility for assessing applications and ensuring that youth-led principles shaped both the projects being funded and the mechanism through which funding decisions were made.



Youth panel members took part in a structured preparation programme—including accredited grant-making training, facilitated exploration of fund criteria, and ongoing support—so they could make informed and confident decisions.

The youth panel focused particularly on the strength of youth-led practice, inclusion, and likely impact for young people. They assessed all short-listed applications and made final funding decision. This level of autonomy was described as “empowering,” with young people noting that being able to shape the assessment approach themselves “made a significant difference” to fairness and relevance.

Overall, the youth panel enhanced decision-making quality, reinforced the integrity of the fund’s youth-led ethos, and delivered strong developmental benefits for participants, who described the experience as “truly meaningful, worthwhile and enjoyable.”

## Fund timeline

**31st July 2024** - Fund opened for applications

**5th September 2024** – Deadline to submit applications

**9th September – 6th October 2024** – Creative Scotland Assessment period

**5th/6th and 21st of October 2024** – Youth panel training

**22nd October – 15th November 2024** – Youth panel assessment period

**16th/17th November 2024** – Youth panel meeting

**20th November 2024** – Youth panel decisions communicated to applicants

**1st December 2024 – 31st December 2025** – Delivery of funded projects

**31st January 2026** – Project reports submitted

## The reach of the fund

- There were **162 applications** to the fund with a total ask of over £2m.
- **58 applications** were short-listed by assessors from Creative Scotland and passed to the Youth Panel for consideration.
- The Youth Panel made **34 awards** totalling **£446,795**.
- A further **£30k** was made available by Scottish Government following the youth panel process and the young people were able to fund a further **22 projects** bringing the amount awarded to **£725,310**
- **51** of the successful applications were led by organisations and **4** by freelance artists\*
- Awards were made in **22 local authority areas**.

*\*All arts activity was delivered by qualified and experienced artists.*

## Type of arts experience

Art form	Number of projects
Crafts	1
Dance	2
Digital	2
Film	1
Literature	0
Multi-art form	34
Music	Not applicable
Theatre	7
Traditional arts	1
Visual arts	7

## Beneficiaries

The fund reached **3,385 children and young people** with lived experience that means they are less likely to access and benefit from arts opportunities. The following table describes this lived experience. Please note that the figures given below far exceed the total number of young people reached and illustrates that many of the young people face more than one of these issues in their lives (intersectionality).

Priority Groups	Number of Young People Supported
Children and young people residing in areas of social and economic deprivation	2,389
Children and young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing harm and neglect	412
Care experienced children and young people	279
Children and young people in the early years (0-5) of their life	182
Children and young people who are of the global majority and/or ethnic minorities	678
Children and young people with disabilities/ learning disabilities	536
Children and young people who are neurodivergent including autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourette's syndrome	1,020
Children and young people who are experiencing mental health illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, bipolar, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders and addictive behaviours	589
Children and young people with experience of the criminal justice system	88
Children and young people who are carers	220
Children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, or who have been homeless	120

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Number of Children and Young People</b>
1 -5 years	182
6 -10 years	930
11-15 years	1,142
16-20 years	613
21-25 years	237

## Impact

In addition to prioritising children and young people (CYP) who have traditionally found it hardest to access such opportunities, funded projects were expected to support at least four of the following outcomes.

### a) developmental outcomes for young people:

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number of CYP</b> (reported by projects)
CYP facing additional barriers have equal opportunities to access artistic and creative activities.	2,088
CYP develop wider transferable skills through involvement in youth arts provision.	1,154
CYP are empowered through their involvement in youth-led activities and their voices are amplified.	1,392
The mental health & wellbeing of CYP is improved through their participation in artistic and creative activities.	2,072
CYP feel better able to express themselves through involvement in arts activities.	1,987
CYP feel better connected to their peers and communities.	1,578

## b) capacity building outcomes:

Outcome	Number of partnerships (reported by projects)
Partnerships between youth work and youth arts partners are strengthened.	40
Youth workers are more confident in embedding creative and artistic projects in their delivery.	55

## Support to freelance artists

The fund reached **3,385 children and young people** with lived experience that means they are less likely to access and benefit from arts opportunities. The following table describes this lived experience. Please note that the figures given below far exceed the total number of young people reached and illustrates that many of the young people face more than one of these issues in their lives (intersectionality).

## Evaluation

YouthLink Scotland offered 2 evaluation support workshops. These were optional but attended by 33 of the 55 funded organisations.

Projects self-evaluated with young people against the outcomes they selected using a variety of methods and specialist methods where required. A review of the evaluation methods across funded organisations suggests that the reported data is robust and that evaluative practice is of a high quality across the fund.



## Examples of approaches to evaluation

### Organisation – Creative Stirling:

*“We evaluated the project using a range of methods, combining quantitative data with qualitative feedback and observations to assess the scale of impact and the depth of participant experience. This approach enabled us to evidence how many participants achieved wellbeing, self-expression, skills, and confidence outcomes across taster workshops, courses, and long-term volunteering. At workshops/courses and tasters, participants were asked to complete feedback forms designed to capture measurable outcomes, alongside personal reflection.*

*Quantitative analysis showed that participants experienced an average 30% increase in well-being as a result of participating, with sessions rated an average of 9.5/10 stars. In addition, we identified that 92% of participants felt more confident expressing themselves, 81% reported improved well-being, 83% gained new skills they could use in the future, 87% made new connections and felt a positive impact within their community, and 82% felt more empowered/had their voice heard.*

*Qualitative feedback provided important context for these outcomes and demonstrated how the project supported positive change. Volunteer outcomes were monitored through regular feedback, one-to-one reflection sessions, group discussions, and action planning. Using the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework, we recorded a baseline of skills at the beginning of each volunteer’s involvement and reviewed progress over time. This allowed us to track what skills YP felt they had before volunteered and regularly measure which skills were developed and the extent of progression. Through this process, we were able to show whether volunteers achieved key outcomes, including increased confidence, communication skills, leadership, and self-reflection, with clear progression observed across the group.*

*Volunteers were also supported to reflect through blog writing, with three volunteers writing and delivering their own speeches at the opening of the Hate Crime Exhibition. Ongoing staff observations, structured group and one-to-one discussions further contributed to our understanding of individual and collective impact. YP were regularly involved with current and future programme planning.*

*To conclude the year, we used zine-making as a creative evaluation tool with volunteers and regular participants. This approach proved particularly effective, allowing participants to express outcomes in their own way, whether visually or through words. Key themes included increased confidence, communication, resilience, self-belief, stronger sense of belonging, development of creative skills, and feeling more comfortable being themselves."*



### **Organisation – North United Communities:**

*"Our evaluation approach was shaped around the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework. We made sure everything we captured reflected the real journeys of the young people, such as their learning, confidence, creativity, and how they participated. We used a blend of data collection and reflective youth work practice, giving us a clear picture of progress across each outcome.*

*To understand how our partnership between youth work and youth arts strengthened, we planned together, co-delivered and kept communication open throughout. Regular check-ins and shared reflections helped us build an integrated approach. While we recorded evidence in Upshot- session notes, attendance and delivery patterns, much of the insight came from conversations between youth workers and creative practitioners. Partners told us they felt more connected and coordinated, with a clear understanding of how youth work values enriched creative delivery. Staff skills also grew through Youth Arts Scotland training and shared practice strengthened the partnerships even further.*

*To explore how young people expressed themselves, we used simple before and after surveys that asked about their confidence, social skills, communication and creativity. Each week, we held reflection circles where young people could talk about what they had learned or how they felt they were developing. Staff observations also highlighted big shifts in young people sharing more ideas, stepping up in performances, and taking creative risks they wouldn't have considered at the start. Our "Star of the Week" approach helped us recognise individual achievements and link them directly to specific skills or learning moments, which gave young people a real sense of pride.*

*When it came to evaluating youth voice and leadership, our Youth Board played a key role. Young people took on meaningful roles such as wellbeing friends, assistant directors, dance captains, stage managers, and information gatherers. Through these roles we were able to track how their leadership, responsibility, and peer support skills grew. We gathered evidence through conversations, group discussions, and observation logs.*

*We saw young people influencing creative choices, shape group agreements, and lead the project. Their ideas directly shaped our session plans, wellbeing approaches, and artistic decisions. To make sure young people facing additional barriers had equal access to creative opportunities, a key part of our approach was ensuring the group was free of charge and open to young people from across North Glasgow, including those referred to us through family support services, schools and community partners. This helped remove financial and social barriers and ensured the project was accessible.*

*Our wellbeing friend system played an important role, offering peer support and helping young people with additional needs feel safe, included and valued. Over time, we saw clear development in confidence and communication, particularly from those who struggled with anxiety/social interaction. Strong attendance and sustained engagement showed us that our strategies were working effectively. Across all outcomes, our evaluation brought together participation data with the voices and reflections of young people, staff, and partners. This youth-centred, reflective approach has given us strong, meaningful evidence and clearly demonstrates the impact of the project."*



## Finance

Grant payment	+£730,160
Grant payment	- £725,310
Balance (to be carried forward to round)	+£4,850

## Monitoring

Each funded project submitted an end of project report and short case study. Project visits were also carried out during the delivery period to build relationships with funded organisations; to see first-hand what was being delivered; whether any adaptations had been required and to assess any ongoing support needs.



## Project visits

Organisation	Area	Date
The Big Project	Edinburgh	15/05/2025
Rock Trust	Edinburgh	25/07/2025
Govanhill Baths Community Trust	Glasgow	02/08/2025
Strut Kids	Glasgow	28/11/2025
National Autistic Society	Glasgow	12/12/2025

## The role of YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland was responsible for all aspects of grant administration, recruitment and support of assessors and support to applicants and funded organisations throughout. We asked funded organisations to give feedback on the support received. 21 organisations responded giving very positive feedback (full feedback attached as appendix)

*"We found the support from the Youth Arts Open Fund team at YouthLink, genuinely fantastic. The workshop on using the National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework was really helpful and gave us practical clarity that we could apply straight away. Thanks to this funding, we were able to launch a new strand of work that was badly needed in our community — something we simply wouldn't have been able to deliver without this support. We are incredibly thankful for the guidance and investment in our work."*



*"This has been one of the best funders I've worked with in my four years of involvement in funding applications. The support has been excellent, and responses have always been quick and helpful. My only suggestion for improvement would be allowing more space to upload photos and videos, as we have a lot we'd love to share. Thank you for the great support."*



*"We have found the experience of receiving funding from YouthLink fantastic for many reasons. The team are incredibly helpful and always responsive to any support or enquiry questions. They also provide valuable training and networking opportunities, which have been extremely beneficial. YouthLink are brilliant funders who are genuinely invested in and interested in the work being delivered through the Youth Arts Open Fund. Thank you!"*





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