



# House of Imagination Annual Report 2021

House of Imagination is an arts research charity that improves children's life chances by helping them to explore and express their ideas and develop creative skills for life. House of Imagination creates places and spaces to research, share and celebrate the power of imagination in children's lives. This is achieved through exceptional and exciting creative partnerships with artists, schools, cultural centres, higher education and creative industries. House of Imagination is a home for improvisation, creativity and innovation and a place to make those things visible to an international audience through research. Our ambition is that the benefits to society of investing in the development of children's creative thinking will be universally recognised.

## Objectives

The objects of the Charity are the advancement of education and in particular:

- working in partnership with educators and artists, and with museums, galleries, theatres and other artistic and cultural settings to support children in their exploration, communication and expression of creative ideas;
- producing and disseminating research and guidance on creative values, relationships, dispositions and environments in order to help develop children as confident, creative thinkers; and
- providing integrated training and mentoring for educators, artists and cultural centres.

During 2020-21 we have continued to develop the Vision and Strategy for the House of Imagination, now an award-winning charity (Creative Bath, Action for Children's Arts) providing cultural and educational infrastructure to Bath, Bristol and the SW region.

The charity also directly supports a wider creative ecology through co-ordinating a number of key multi-sector and multi-partner networks, including Bath Cultural Education Partnership (BCEP), the South West Creative Education Network, RSA Bath and What Next? Chapter West.

## Research activity overview

House of Imagination is a research organisation with a focus on children's and young people's creative and critical thinking. In practice House of Imagination uses action research to plan and deliver innovative programmes that enable children to shape their lives through creative engagement and schools to change their practices through professional development and school-based activity. At its heart is co-enquiry between children, teachers and creative professionals. Over this last year we have continued working closely with schools and early years settings both online and in person to develop and integrate a creative and reflective pedagogy with research at the heart of the process.

House of Imagination places children and young people at the heart of its work as co-creators, co-enquirers and co-learners. This creative collaborative learning approach helps develop critical thinking and communication skills. Crucially, it places value on the process of learning rather than pre-defined outcomes. The charity anchors its work within robust, academically underpinned research married to live case-studies and dynamic cross-sector partnerships. Programmed activities develop directly from this nexus responding to findings, need and lines of enquiry. This positioning enables it to operate fluidly without boundaries across local, regional and international spheres, attracting artists and creative talent from the UK and overseas. The charity's expertise in Creative Pedagogy is well documented and established over 20 years, with its credibility and rigor mirrored in an array of successful collaborations.

## Highlights of our research activity

**Bath Cultural Education Partnership:** supports the development of cultural education provision for under-served children and young people in Bath and North East Somerset with House of Imagination working in partnership with Bath Spa University, the egg theatre, Bath Festivals, Holburne Museum and Mentoring Plus. BCEP produced a vision statement as an invitation to all cultural organisations in B&NES to focus on access and provision for creative and cultural education for all children and young

people. BCEP partners are scoping the possibility of establishing a Bath Cultural Education Trust as a future National Portfolio Organisation. BCET will incorporate and manage a coordinated approach to creative and cultural learning with children and young people across the region.

**School Without Walls:** Staff meetings with educational and cultural partners have informed future funding bids in collaboration with University of Dundee and the Big Draw.

**Forest of Imagination:** This is normally a five-day contemporary art and architecture event and joint initiative with Grant Associates funded by Grant Associates, Bath Spa University and Arts Council England. Forest of Imagination 2020 pivoted to a digital platform and generated a Virtual Forest of Imagination 2020, alongside local and international artists and designers. This involved 10 weeks of excellent creative activity with diverse audiences, in collaboration with the Big Draw team, Children's Art Week, Clayhill Arts and Bath City Farm. Virtual Forest 2020 culminated in an international online event on 10.10.20 with Ted Countdown, TedxBath and Bath Spa University. Travelling Forest 2021 transformed 5 locations across the city into spaces for creativity (Bath City Farm, Beckford's Tower, American Museum, Batheaston Secret Garden and the Holburne Museum), engaging schools and families in creative learning over the course of two weekends.

Berlin based artist Andrew Amondson shared his Living Tree concept, a community activated installation, co-created with artists and collaborators in Bath. The installation was the focus and inspiration for public performances and exploratory sessions led by artists for families and groups from schools, Theatre Royal Bath and Mentoring Plus. Living Tree Forest was dedicated to Sir Ken Robinson who challenged us all to Imagine If.

**Forest of Imagination Creative Learning Invitation:** Drawing upon the success of last year's creative learning offers, Learning Invitations were designed to support the co-enquiries of children, educators and families, drawing upon the inspirational offerings of the artists in relation to the themes of Travelling Forest 2021. These creative enquiries aimed to connect with the landscape and nature on our doorsteps, in local communities and across the city using these locations as outdoor classrooms as well as studio-based collaborations within classrooms and homes.

**SW Creative Education Network:** professional development learning opportunities for educators and creative professionals draws on existing and emerging clusters of educational practice and expertise who provide outstanding creative education for children and young people. Partners include Bath Spa University, University of Bristol, University of Gloucestershire and Plymouth College of Art, plus regional creative industries including Knowle West Media Centre, Cheltenham Festivals and local education partnerships in Bath, Bristol, Cheltenham and Gloucester. The focus of network meetings with heads, teachers and creative partners in 2021 has been to co- design relevant professional development for teachers in response to need, especially in the light of COVID19.

**Re-imagining Libraries:** House of Imagination has continued to play an active role in the vision group Re-Imagining Libraries, with representatives from Bath Spa University, University of Bath, Bath College and B&NES. The group seeks to develop ways to re- imagine the city centre library in Bath as a space for thinking, creating and innovating, and links to the WECA-funded iSTART (Innovation, Science, Technology, Arts, Research and Training) project and Restart. In 2021 the group worked towards a public engagement and consultation project to take place in mid 2022. With community engagement specialists Rising Arts Agency, this will explore how our local libraries can respond more effectively, inclusively and creatively to priorities in education, the climate emergency and civic engagement.



**Bristol and Bath Creative R&D Expanded Performance:** the Rabbit Holes Collective has a focus on co-designing adaptive podcasts with young people in collaboration with BBC Creative R&D. The Rabbit Holes Collective involves a group of artists and creative professionals exploring adaptive media to create unique content and invite (especially young) people to metaphorically 'fall down a rabbit hole' to connect more deeply with nature. Individuals discover how they can use adaptive technologies to create podcasts unique to the listener and their context. Rabbit Holes Collective is a community of practice that prioritises openness of delivery, creative consumption and co-creation.

**Thinking Differently:** work with Neurodiverse and Special Needs Children in Worcestershire, Hertfordshire and Shropshire, with online mentoring and professional development for artists and educators from HOI. Thinking Differently is a 2-year project run by Meadow Arts, with funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation in partnership with House of Imagination and the Educational Research department at the University of Worcester. The project aimed to explore to what extent/how the visual arts supported the SEND children/young people to explore and express themselves in their own unique ways? The project had to adapt to the COVID pandemic but artists and educators found the power of the arts supported the young people as they returned to in-school learning. Initial findings indicate it helped them to rebuild confidence, work through their anxieties and improved receptibility and attitude to learning, social interactions, to make sense of where they were and improved their well-being

**Continuing professional development** courses in 2020-21 with Bath Spa University, Tybed and Sightlines Initiative addressed themes around creative and cultural education, creative pedagogy, arts and play.

### Future aims and activities

We continue to refine our strategy with the intention of focusing on the central aspects of our charitable work.

Our aims over the next three years are:

1. to continue our research alongside children and young people, educators, policy makers, creative professionals and families to improve children's life chances
2. to support children in exploring and expressing their ideas and developing creative skills for life through the themes of children's voices, creative communities and a hopeful future
3. to establish House of Imagination as a thought leader in the national and international dialogue about creative education in order to contribute to shaping a more humanitarian and democratic society
4. to seek longer term funding to ensure steady growth
5. to engage young people in co-governance and co-leadership.

*This report was prepared by Penny Hay, Director of Research; Liz Elders, Mentor; Maria Santelices, Creative Producer; Emma Endicott, Finance Officer.*