

Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust & SoapBox Islington

Annual Report 2022 to 2023



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Chair of Trustee's REPORT

The trustees have reviewed the sustainability of the charity in conjunction with the Risk Register and have identified areas where the establishment of Designated Funds would be advisable. Uncertainty over future funding in a changing and challenging funding landscape necessitates the need for an effective and considered growth strategy. This includes revision of the mission statement, exploring donor patterns, expanding fundraising tactics, optimising marketing, and establishing further development work with other charities.

Designated Fund for Research & Development: Allocate £40,000 - This Designated Fund will help us research, understand and address the root causes of social problems and develop innovative solutions to address them. It is the natural and necessary expansion of innovative work and sector expertise which Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust has developed since 2012. Research will consider the effectiveness of our programmes and services and help us to identify areas of development which improve the breadth, scope and quality of our provision.

Social and Digital Exclusion - since 2012, CGHDT has supported the most socially and the most digitally excluded children, young people and over 55s. Building on our nationally recognised work in this area, research will explore the access to skills, knowledge, resources and connections that socially excluded people require to avoid or minimise the double helix of exclusion (where the most socially excluded are also the most digitally excluded) and then develop provision which moves people towards social and digital inclusion.

Health & Wellbeing - this element will see research into, and development of, Early Help, Intervention and Prevention approaches across CGDHT's work (from children up to older people), with a particular focus on promoting positive mental health, encouraging healthy behaviours and creating partnerships and pathways that support individuals and/ or groups who face multiple or complex needs

Learning for Life - employing research and participatory engagement tools/approaches to examine and then co-produce solutions that support:

- the key transition points from primary to secondary education and from adolescence to adulthood;
- those who are underrepresented in the workforce and/ or specific sectors (disabled people; care leavers; over 55s etc)

to build the requisite workplace capabilities, soft skills and resilience;

- the use of digital technologies to facilitate the development of specialist and higher level skills;
- staff to understand and use innovations eg Artificial Intelligence, that reduce workload pressure and enhance the effective and efficient delivery of services;

Alleviating localised deprivation issues - there are a number of key areas of need and/ or deprivation which are particularly relevant to the geographical area that CGDHT supports:

- the lack of affordable community, education and leisure facilities;
- the lack of green spaces;
- overcrowding and associated housing issues.

This strand will focus on research which highlights the key drivers that created these issues and then co-designs CGHDT programmes and services which begin to address them.

As noted above, these represent (when viewed through both internal and external lenses) recognised areas of knowledge, experience and expertise. And, in focusing on these, the Trustees acknowledge that there is an opportunity to invest in them further, with a view to future income generation and long-term sustainability.

Sinking Fund, Training and Legals: Allocate £140,000

We also need to re-calculate the following exceptional costs and set aside Designated Funds to cover them:

- Maintenance (Sinking Fund) for two dedicated delivery locations (Dragon Hall in Camden and SoapBox in Islington)
- Front of building
- Boiler and air conditioning replacement
- Main Hall Floor
- Legal & Professional:
- Lease renewal
- Recruitment Fees (Director etc)
- Staff Training

These are in addition to the four months core costs.

Sue Vincent
Chair of Trustees and Local Councillor



Sue Vincent

Chair

Holborn & Covent Garden ward Councillor for LB Camden and local resident



Jeff Hopwood

Treasurer

Former Camden council officer and supporter of the voluntary sector.



Tim Lynn

Secretary

Sound Engineer in West End Theatres and former resident of Covent Garden.



Alex Lloyd

Trustee

PhD student in Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London researching when and why teenagers take risks.



Claude Asgill

Trustee

Experienced fundraiser and mental health advocate working in the construction industry.



Gerrard Knowles

Trustee

Local resident, NHS practitioner, has a special interest in the strategy and development of partner organisation - The Phoenix Garden



Simon Breugger

Trustee

Local resident, merchant banker. Used to be a teacher & continues to support young people.



Kate Matheson

Trustee

A local resident in Covent Garden, member of West End Women's Institute, retired.



Francis Go

Trustee

VP of Engineering at Distributed Ltd, a Technology Startup changing the future of work.



Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust

Delivering a wide range of social, educational & recreational activities & events, developed & delivered in partnership with users, to serve the needs of our diverse communities.

Aims

To benefit the inhabitants of Inner London by associating local authorities, voluntary organisations and such inhabitants in a common effort to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure-time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants.

To promote any charitable purposes for the benefit of the said inhabitants and in particular the advancement of education & skills (with particular but not exclusive reference to technology & the arts).

To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area and to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of buildings or features of historic or public interest in London to enable them to be enjoyed by the public.

To establish or secure the establishment of community centres and to maintain and manage the same in furtherance of the above objects.

Youth Team

Keeley Reed - Youth Manager

Last year we said we were looking forward to extending our services and this year, that is exactly what we did!



We Started running 3 new sessions, separate boys and girls clubs and a new coding session, as well as our After School Clubs, Transitional youth clubs, Intermediates youth club, Homework club and Coding clubs.

After School Club this year really found its new rhythm, we reached our capacity on all days and were engaging young people in new activities every week.

We are open for three days a week: Monday are groups games and creations; Tuesdays have been based around STEAM team activities; Fridays are homework and open play. This has been a joy to run with young people, seeing their creative ideas come to life - from making an App for under 11's, how they would survive a deserted island and creating their own healthy snack - these have all been incredible things to witness and we cannot wait to continue similar activities in the next year to see what the young people can create.

The development we saw from running these new sessions has been astonishing, young people's communication skills developed, presenting their ideas to the whole group, standing up and speaking in front of people, their confidence grew. They show strong team work skills in working together to create these ideas. We really have been witness to some amazing development this year.

The Holidays were very busy for young people in Primary and Secondary school. We were funded by Young Camden Foundation to run the Holiday Activities and Food scheme (HAF), aimed at young people in receipt of free school meals, during Easter and Summer breaks. This enabled us to provide 80 hot meals a week for young people for 6 weeks. Through this project we have worked with over 30 new young people who have come via the Young Camden Foundation.

The project also saw the young people taking advantage of our community garden - The Phoenix Garden - learning about plants, the environment and urban wildlife.



Finally, as part of this project we were able to attend trips to Urban Farms, Clacton on Sea, trampoline park and Ice Skating all thanks to the funding we received.

During October half term we took 21 young people aged 13-16 on a 3 day residential to Hindleap Warren, an activity site belonging to London Youth, where young people had the opportunity to take a break from the city, try new activities and support their relationship building with the group.

These were 3 days away that the young people and staff will never forget. People pushed themselves beyond their boundaries to achieve things they thought they couldn't. One of the highlights was seeing the young people be proud of their achievements, and the way they supported each other, cheering, encouraging, doing the activities together and sharing the support roles.

Our intermediates have had some wonderful opportunities for life skills development. We worked with Eat Club to provide them with skills for cooking for yourself, as well as

cooking for others. They developed their own menus and prepared and cooked a three course meal. Alongside this they received the opportunity to gain work experience for 2 weeks at a restaurant in Kings Cross to understand more of a working environment, and gained essential work experience as hosts, baristas, chefs, waiters/waitresses and bar staff. They have also been involved in becoming young volunteers. Some to work on their Duke of Edinburgh award, for others to boost their CV and support their local community.

So far this year we have had 15 young volunteers come and support our After School Club for more than 30 hours at a time.

The benefit we see is incredible, young volunteers who have grown up in this area, attended the same schools as the After School Club members and have experienced the same problems and challenges that influence the area. They are role models for their younger peers, bridging the gap between age groups and being supportive and reassuring, and sharing information about going on to secondary school.

For 23/24, we will continue the work we have been doing this year, build on the successes of the STEAM activities, encourage and support young people into volunteering and strengthen our relationships with local schools and parents.



My children love Dragon Hall. It helps them with their development and they feel very safe. The leaders are all amazing and teach them invaluable tools to become independent.

Dragon Hall has provided my son with a supportive, safe space to have fun and socialise with other children outside of school...especially important to an only child.



Boys Club

Elliot Hughes - Youth Worker

Champion! Our Boys Only Club from ages 11 to 16, developing life skills through sessions on budgeting, cooking and school study support



Our Boys Only club is where we run weekly activities, on and off site, and discuss topics in a safe environment while allowing young people to develop into young adults.

The sessions have been able to provide a wonderful opportunity for the young men to develop their friendships/relationships in a different setting. They have set goals for themselves, considered what they want to achieve, developed life skills through our sessions on budgeting and cooking, and received school support with their studies.

We have had 25 young people come through the group, with the young men bringing their friends along.

In recent months, the Boys Club has been a breath of fresh air, due to the younger members who have been incorporated into the group to help with their transition into secondary school. This has not only brought energy and enthusiasm to our activities, but has allowed our older members to develop responsibility and leadership skills while helping and advising on this difficult period for those in year 6.

An example of this was our Secondary school Q&A sessions, in which the year 6s were able to ask all types of questions to our older members about what secondary school is going to be like and what they can expect. This was not only very informative but great to see the young men opening up about their experiences and giving honest answers.

Our volleyball tournament was also one of the highlights, as all age groups formed mixed teams to compete against each other which showed great confidence for the year 6s, who may have previously been nervous to join in with the older group.



The after school club service provided is important, it keeps children and youth engaged and helps their development physically and mentally. They're able to socialise within an environment where they can grow, strive and mature into young adults.

Girls Club

Eugenia Da Silva - Youth Worker

A safe space where girls can have a voice and explore their goals, hopes and dreams



The Girls Club started on International Women's Day March 2022, this was a significant date for the group as it really highlighted the importance of having a Young Women's group and what it would stand for.

The vision for Girls Club is to have a safe space where girls can have a voice, explore their goals, hopes and dreams with support to navigate and make a difference in their community.

The girls attending Girls Club at Dragon Hall are aged between 11-16. The sessions take place every Tuesday between 5.30pm and 7.30pm. During this time they have the opportunity to develop new relationships, a general catch up with one another, talk about different experiences, brainstorm and contribute their ideas towards their vision for the group and participate in different activities where they are able to learn different skills.

Between 6 and 20 young women attend sessions each week, that include a wide variety of different activities -

Discussions - The girls have various discussions on issues and topics which affect them as young women. The topics include current affairs, body image, employment, careers, politics, well being and mental health. These discussions enable them to articulate their thoughts, share their opinions in a safe space and hear other Young Women's views in a safe environment.

Cooking and Baking - A lot of the girls attending have really enjoyed creating something as a group, tasting and sharing it together afterwards along with learning how to cook and bake which is a skill they can pass on and share with their family.

Movie Nights - Some of the movie nights the girls have attended had a discussion element to it afterwards which explored the roles women play in movies and has enabled them to discuss their thoughts on how women are represented and portrayed in the film industry.

Arts and Crafts - The girls have had the opportunity to try different arts and crafts activities. Some of the activities we have had previously include, making slime, flower pressing, jewellery making, painting and more. A young woman was also involved with creating a logo for the YW's group as she really enjoys art.

Homework, Exams and Revision - As a few of the Young Women were preparing for exams we ensured that we created a space at Dragon Hall for them to revise and have support during their exam periods. They also use the space to do their homework.

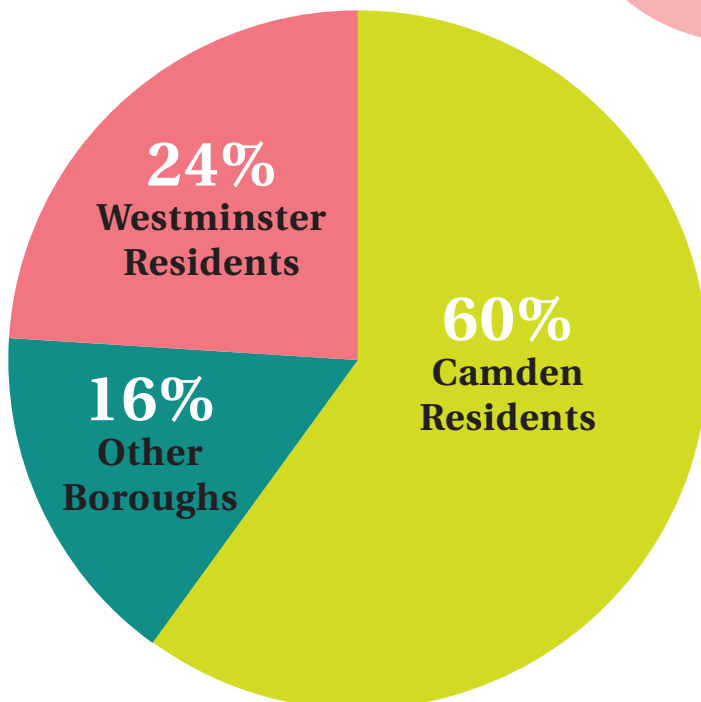
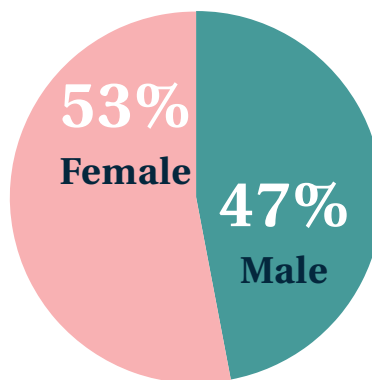
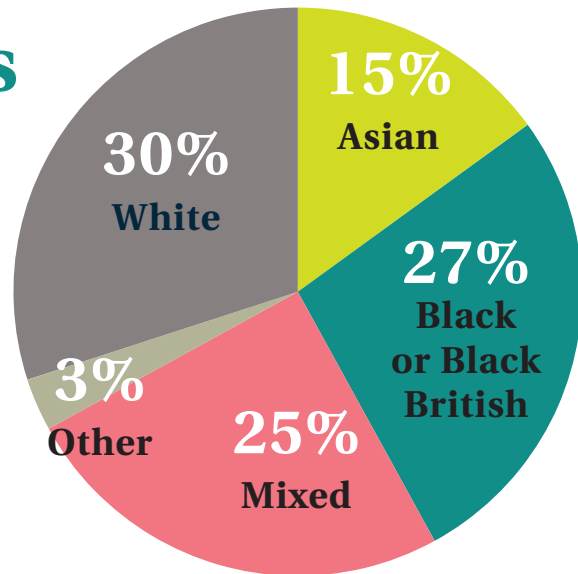
1-1 Support -

Young Women have been receiving 1-1 support sessions which involves them being supported with CV's, job searches, career options and self development.

We look forward to seeing this group's continuous development and growth.

After School Clubs Statistics

370 Sessions
11,335 Attendances
280 Young People
35 Young Volunteers
4 Jack Petchey Winners



Food Provision & Advice Sessions

In partnership with Covent Garden Community Centre and based at the Seven Dials Club, the Covent Garden Pantry has been building relationships and endeavouring to meet the needs of the local community since it began running on Friday 10th February 2023. The reopening of food provision was made possible by a grant from the Julia & Hans Rousing Trust.

Prior to the Pantry opening, a food bank ran from the Club during lockdown and the decision was made to reinstate this model of community support in response to the current cost of living crisis.

The Pantry at present serves families and individuals with food and hygiene parcels being distributed each Friday. Each individual who comes feeds between 1 and 6 people from their parcel. We estimate that since the Pantry began in February 2023 our donated food parcels have cooked 5925 meals!

The demand for assistance is steadily increasing and it is becoming more difficult to fill the need - we constantly require donations of food and hygiene products and would like to thank the businesses and individuals that meet that need, by collecting donations from staff, friends and families and deliver to the Pantry each month. Clients fill in a referral form each week in order to receive a parcel of essential food and hygiene/cleaning products. Appointment slots are made and preferences for food stuffs can be requested, with no solid guarantees given as we rely on donations for our food parcels.

The atmosphere at the Pantry is one of friendly inclusivity. We provide a safe space where residents can not only collect essential food but also chat and combat any feelings of social isolation and worry.

The Pantry has made strong relationships with local businesses and individual givers which enable food donations to be good quality and varied. A wish list is circulated to those organisations who request and this enables us to try to meet the food needs of our culturally diverse residents.

In addition to food provision we offer Advice one-to-one Sessions with an advisor from Mary Ward Legal. Each appointment is for one hour and we can cover debt, benefits, & housing plus budgeting advice and assistance.



“The Covent Garden Pantry has been a huge lifeline for so many of us locally struggling with the cost of living crisis. Not only does it help with putting food on the table, but creates a feeling of belonging to something which is developing between the regulars who support each other during these times. This is beautifully orchestrated by Natalie who is both welcoming, warm and supportive of our individual needs” Pantry User 3

Over 55s - 2022 to 2023

John Hayes - Community Development Manager



What a difference a year makes! In May 2021, older people were still hesitant to mix and socialise with other people. Travelling on public transport, shopping and going to the theatre were Herculean tasks to be carried out. Twelve months later, Dragon Hall timetable for the over 55's represents something of the new 'normal world'.

During 2022 our telephone befriending scheme started to wind down, online classes were no longer as popular as before. Older people re-started their adult education classes, participate in group exercise sessions and our monthly tea dances were, once again, hugely successful.

Last year, sessions were taking place at The Phoenix Garden. Smaller groups and a desire to be out in the open were the priority. This year sessions were attracting more people and we needed larger spaces to accommodate everyone, Dragon Hall became our default location for most of the larger group sessions.

During the summer there were many 'coming out of lock down celebrations' including a summer tea at the British Museum that attracted hundreds of people from the community. Our own Summer BBQ at The Phoenix Garden was equally successful and enjoyable.

Our partnership work remains at the heart of our timetable and this year saw the number of different partners grow and our variety of sessions broaden. During the summer, 2 Temple House hosted a number of different half day workshops with different themes; including working with ceramics, watercolours and textiles.

The Garden Cinema offered older people a lifetime membership and over the last few months, members have taken advantage of reduced ticket prices and have seen a host of films on the big screen (including Chinatown, Brazil and An age of Innocence). Many of our group are looking forward to the Alfred Hitchcock season that is coming up in June 2023.

Another hugely successful partnership has been working with the Community Access Scheme at the English National



Opera. Over the last year, Dragon Hall members have been offered free tickets to eleven operas (including Carmen, Tosca and Akhnaten) as well as been invited to three weekend workshops (one of which focused on juggling and singing). Nearly two hundred members were able to participate in this wonderful scheme.

One of the biggest challenges that the over 55's project has faced is the increase in demand to join. Last year membership stood at 385, currently it stands at 575 an increase of 186 (an average of 3 new requests per week).

We have continued to expand our activities (especially evening and weekend sessions) which have included health walks, herbal workshops and creative writing.

Our work with the Covent Garden Community Centre at 7 Dials Club remains the jewel in the crown. The Friday Lunch Club is extremely popular. Over 2000 lunches have been served during the past twelve months. Our numbers continue to grow each week and the feedback has been amazing. Thanks to Phil Walls who manages the venue and Karol - our fantastic chef.

Our annual report cannot be completed without mentioning our Annual Christmas Lunch - attended by the Mayor of Camden. As always, it was an extremely busy and popular

time. Close to 250 traditional Christmas lunches, with all the trimmings, were served over two days.

A brand new community space has also been made available for over 55's projects at Covent Garden Community Centre, and during the last six months, workshops and social activities including bridge, tai chi, video editing and a monthly pub quiz have taken place.

The future of our project remains positive, but as always, we are reliant on funding and donations. The current cost of living crisis has followed on the heels of the COVID crisis and many more people are in need of support - directly or indirectly.

Reducing loneliness and isolation remain the core of our work and I am grateful for the support of the youth team (Keeley Reed and Elliot Hughes, both of whom continue to play a huge role in the expansion of our project.

Dragon Hall Trust provides over 50 activities each month. Without the wonderful support of our volunteers, who have contributed hundreds of hours last year, we could not have planned and delivered the activities we do without them.

I am grateful to Sarath Thenabadu, Pearl Wong, Caroline Dowdell, Helena Lee, David Andrews and Richard Wilson.

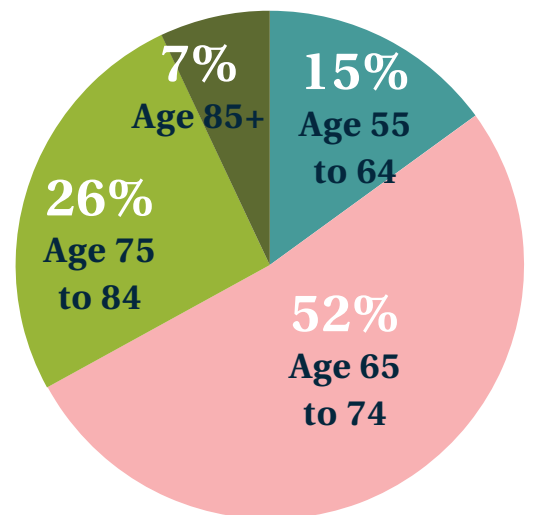
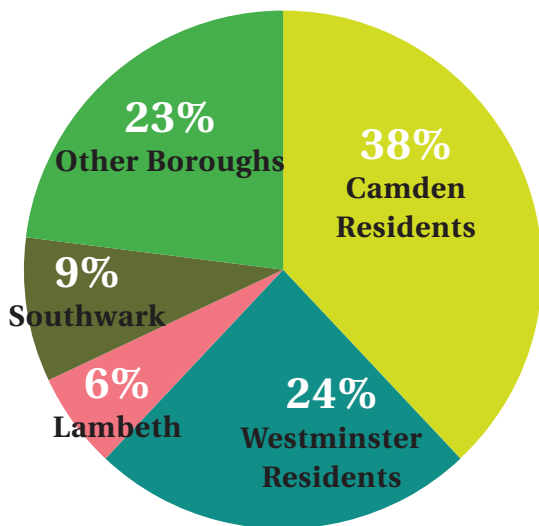
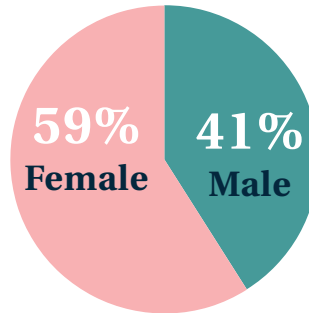
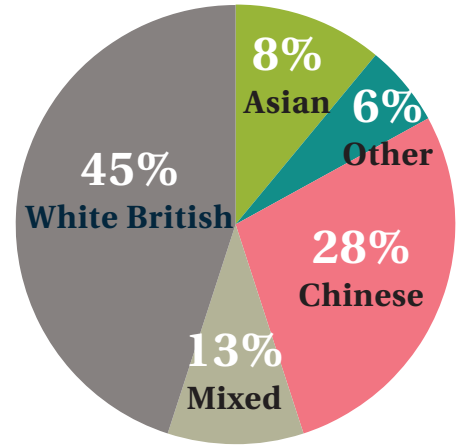


As I get older, sadly, old friends die or move away so that it's easy to feel a bit isolated and lonely at times. It is so important to my well being to have the opportunity to socialise during visits to places like Kew where the calm, relaxed setting provides an ideal opportunity to make new friends.



Over 55s Project Statistics

385 Members
584 Activities
5671 Attendances





SoapBox Islington

Overview

This year, as we began to truly move away from the Pandemic, SoapBox staff were determined not to return to 'normal', because that was not what lots of young people needed, but instead to pose (and find answers to) the question of 'what comes next'? In doing so, we tried to draw on the best bits of pre- and during Covid and then to add new things which could engage, excite and inspire the young people that we support.

What we didn't fully know was, having turned the corner with Covid, and Austerity, and Brexit, that a new problem was around the corner. The Cost of Living Crisis loomed large in this period and, with the residual impact of the three previous challenges still in evidence, this period represented significant issues for our organisation, for staff and for young people.

Nonetheless, the charity can be proud of the way everyone responded to this crisis through hard work, empathy and maintaining a commitment to delivering the very best work possible at the centre. Below are some of the highlights that staff and young people have chosen to share during 2022/ 23.

SoapBox Live

One aspect really took hold as we moved online, were our Live Events, curated and delivered by young people. Starting off with live music and performance at the centre, these evolved during 2022 into a broader range of both internal and external activities.

SoapBox Live is our flagship event series, where young people organise every aspect of the events from locating the performers to promoting the shows right through to hosting and sound engineering on the night. This is one of our most visible examples of putting young people right at the heart of what we do, as they work with staff to develop and deliver opportunities for their peers to have a regular space to perform and be creative. This year we have been wonderfully supported by SoundSkool, the music industry college partner which calls SoapBox home. Over the course of the year, 37 events took place, with a team of 10 organisers and over 300 musicians, performing to an audience of 1,110+ people.

SoapBox also offered an Event Space for young people to put on their own activities, workshops and showcases. As with all of our work, we believe passionately in partnerships, so it is a logical step for us to also provide young people with the chance to use the centre to host their own events. For many, it is the first time that they have done something like this, so having a venue which is available for free, where they don't have to meet any expectations (apart from their own) and with a supportive team of youth workers behind them, means they can put all the effort into making their 'thing' the best it can be, without fear or worry.



In 2022/23, 20 young people took advantage of this opportunity, putting on 13 events, attended by over 270 people.

With SoapBox Live a group of young people now have professional event organising experience which they can take elsewhere. SoapBox's Event Organising Team has been busy this year.

Delivering the main stage at the Whitecross Festival has become a fixture in the SoapBox Calendar. But this year was different, as pulling the 2 day event together now fell to our Event Organisers, who took control of liaising with the Festival organisers, stage management, working the technology, budgeting, networking, being an artist liaison & performing. Whitecross is a brilliant example of positive endeavour leading onto further opportunities, with the team and performers doing further work at two events for the Queen's Jubilee, Local Village Network's Annual Event, Discover SoapBox sessions with Toffee Park Adventure Playground and St Luke's Community Centre and a series of Health & Wellbeing events with Break Comms.

After School Clubs

Drawing on the experience and success of Keeley's work at Dragon Hall, SoapBox developed and honed our own after school provision. Delivering three weekly sessions during term-time, we focus on an exclusive version for young women on Mondays and mixed groups on both Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Whereas Dragon Hall delivers work from 8 years old, we focus on young people who are 10+.

In keeping with our wider work, these clubs have a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths, with programmes including coding, Virtual Reality, 3d Design, Music Production, Digital Content Creation and STEAM Mentoring. We also include activities which focus on health & wellbeing, with weekly cooking sessions delivered by our partner Eat Club and a mixed football group.

Having piloted work with 1 school previously, we built a network of 5 primary schools in the immediate area around the centre. We currently offer a 'walking bus' from one school and are in discussions with other schools about how we can add other schools in the coming year.

Finally, one of the most exciting developments has taken place with Eugenia's Young Women's 'No Ceilings' group. A pivotal reason why we started doing after school activities in the first place was to offer young people an organisation, professionals and friends who continued to be around whilst they were going through the tumultuous transition from Primary to Secondary School, where young people can lose

the security of so much that they have grown up with.

This year has seen that being realised, with the group of Year 6 young women who attended in the summer of 2022 returning as Year 7 students in September. Whilst this meant that Eugenia quickly needed to offer a new Year 7 group, it showed that the intention of genuinely supporting young people on both sides of their transition was being realised. That doesn't just have implications for young women, but also gives us a template for the rest of the after school work going forward.



SoapBox Programme Highlights

Employment, Mentoring & Soft Skills

During Covid, SoapBox really got to grips with the need for us to provide support for young people who were transitioning from adolescence to adulthood and from school to the workplace. Work by the amazing Sally Rush was our first foray into that and then Jordan Sterling, of Loud Futures fame, really picked up the ball and ran with it through the Peabody Young Ambassadors programme. This set the scene for developments in 2022/23 through two pieces of work, UK Youth's Dream It Real initiative and the Greater London Authority's New Deal for Young People : STEAM Mentoring programme.

Dream It Real

Dream It Real, funded by Coach, was a programme led by Nick, Jordan and Kase, seeing 60 young people completing a 12-hour employability and soft skills course, which included a SWOT analysis, financial management, managing mental health and networking. Out of the 60, 20 young people won grants totaling nearly £20,000 to purchase tools, software and vocational courses for their future professions.

Leading on from this work the 60 young people are currently still developing skills internally and externally covering employability, new digital technologies, as well as building personal development programmes.

STEAM Mentoring

The Greater London Authority's STEAM Mentoring programme is one of the charity's most important pieces of work of the last decade, impacting on almost every aspect of work at SoapBox. Set across two projects, it delivers both group and individual mentoring support in Primary, Secondary, Further Education and Community settings for socially excluded young people aged 10-25 years old.

The Primary element (First Steps) in Project 1 is delivered to whole Year 5 class cohorts in 5 local Primary Schools, involving 6 sessions where STEAM industry leaders provide an introduction to various STEAM sectors and disciplines and participants capture their learning and progress through a bespoke workbook. In Project 2, we have added a community aspect, with young people who attend SoapBox's after school provision accessing weekly mentoring support in small groups of 7 each.

The Secondary School programme is called 'Power of a Virtual Hour' and this involves small groups of Year 10 students accessing mentoring and networking support through the medium of Virtual Reality. Here, a bespoke platform and VR games, provides participants with a distinct vehicle through which to engage with mentors.



SoapBox Programme Highlights

Get Ahead

Our post 16 work is titled 'Get Ahead' and this includes 3 specific approaches:

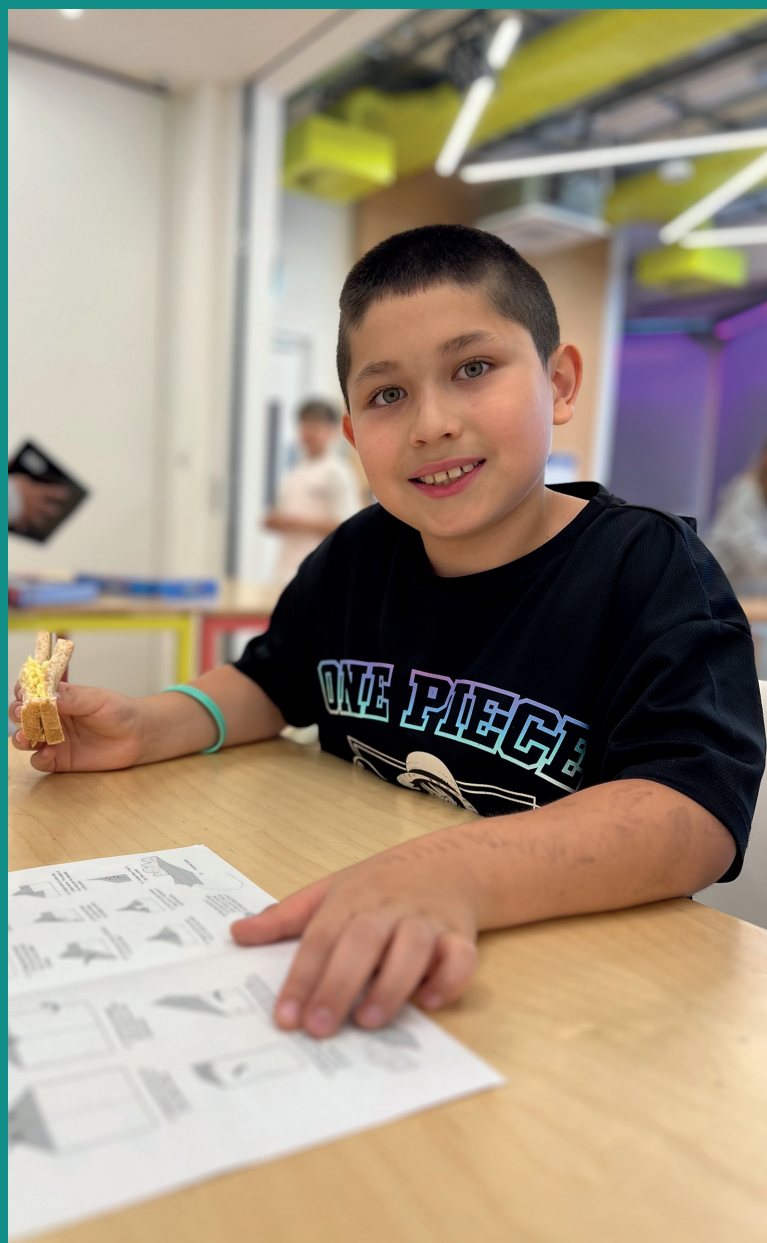
A purpose-built Bootcamp Model: 3 x 8 hour Bootcamps which include Industry Spotlights, Mental Health & Wellbeing, Networking, Q&A and Next Steps, alongside self-assessment impact measurement to explore distance travelled and journey undertaken;

Coaching: both small group and individual coaching. The group coaching programme takes place over 3 months, including 4 x 1 hour sessions, out of session support and follow ups from SoapBox staff for a further 3 months, whilst the individual support involves 3 months of coaching, including 5 x 1 hour sessions, plus out of session support and follow ups;

1-2-1 Mentoring: young people receiving 6 months support from STEAM industry professionals to explore their personal/career plans, expand their professional networks and set future goals.

This work is being delivered in Further Education, Community and online settings, and to targeted groups of young people (either by area of interest or type of exclusion). To date, this has included games design students from Westminster Kingsway College, young people with SEND from Elatt College, a cohort from Royal Mencap, 2 groups from Music Industry College SoundSkool and online cohorts of young women and young people from racilaised communities.

We exceeded the whole participant target for two years of Project 1 in our first year, a truly remarkable achievement, one which highlights not only the quality of the offer, but the fact that young people don't get this anywhere else. It was so successful in its first year that the GLA invited us to deliver a second project...



SoapBox Awards

We wanted to finish off by celebrating two specific individuals who have really captured everything that is good and positive about SoapBox. Firstly, Edward Campbell, who in 2022 won Islington's Young Volunteer of the Year Award (the second consecutive year that a young person from SoapBox had been selected for one of the two most prestigious awards for young people in Islington) and secondly, SoapBox's Deputy Centre Manager, Nicholas Crivello, who from a list of over 30 nominees, was one of 8 people selected for Islington's Civic Awards which "recognise people who are making an outstanding contribution to life in Islington".

Starting with **Edward**, he joined SoapBox in October 2021 via Royal Mencap's Supported Internships programme, which supports learning disabled young people aged 16-24 years old to move onto the next stage of their lives. As part of this programme, Edward had to complete a 300 hour volunteer placement and because of his great passion for music, he chose to do that at SoapBox. It was for this work, from October 2021 to July 2022, that Edward won his Young Volunteer of the Year Award, which included:

YoVR: a co-produced project that supports young people to develop employment and soft skills using virtual reality. Initially delivered to a group of 4 learning disabled young people, Edward joined as a participant, but quickly moved into supporting his peers to engage with the sessions;

Music Production Sessions: SoapBox runs a variety of music activities throughout the week and Edward supported both masterclass activities and studio sessions, using his skills and abilities to help other young people to make music. At the start, he acted as a support worker, but as he became more confident and other young people started to recognise his abilities, his peers began to request that he lead on supporting them;

Music Course for Autistic Young People: not only the highlight of his volunteering, but also of all of the work at SoapBox over the last two years, this saw Edward, as a learning disabled young man, supporting and then leading on a weekly music course, delivered to six autistic Year 13 students from Courtyard School. The reason why SoapBox was delivering this course in the first place is that autistic young people do not get opportunities like this elsewhere. But for that to be led by someone with a learning disability, and led with distinction, showcases the very best of what youth work can be or achieve;

General Building Support: As Edward became more settled at SoapBox, he sought additional ways to help and support staff at SoapBox. As a busy building with a high footfall each week, Fridays present an opportunity to reset and prepare for the following week. Seeing that there was an opportunity for him to assist beyond the activities listed above, Edward offered to stay on after the music course and beyond his usual volunteering to help staff get things in order. This demonstrates that he is willing to muck in and help out with the important, but unglamorous tasks that keep a centre going.

At the end of July 2021 Edward's volunteering with SoapBox

came to an end and by that time it was clear that he had been through a transformational experience. He had developed immensely as a person, with improved levels of confidence, agency, leadership and reflective abilities. It was therefore an easy and unanimous decision, once his volunteering was finished, to offer Edward a paid role. He accepted and started this new role in September 2022. To give this context, only 5-7% of learning disabled people are in employment, so the fact that he is now working for us is important for himself, but also sends a broader message about the importance and impact of employing those who are furthest from the workforce.

To conclude, Edward's journey is the quintessential youth work story: young person joins a centre, often lacking belief, but in search of direction, gains confidence, develops skills, begins to excel, sees the importance of giving back, becomes a role model and then finally secures the opportunities that they were seeking in the first place.

And finally, for those who were fortunate enough to be with Edward when he received his Award in front of 200 people, including a local MP and Islington's Mayor, the memory of the roar of appreciation that he received will live long in the memory.



SoapBox Awards

And turning to Nick, we interviewed him about his Award, what he received it for and what it meant to him...

So, Nick, can you tell us what you received your Award for?

I received Islington's Civic award for "nurturing and supporting children and young people at Soapbox Youth Centre".

This includes;

- Development of our after school provision
- Weekly live showcases and performance opportunities involving over 1000 young people
- Online offer from 2020-2023
- Summer activities
- Digital Media & Technology Offers

How did you feel when you heard that you were nominated?

Extremely grateful, its not everyday you get acknowledged for the work that you do. There are so many people in the charity that do amazing work and it felt like it was a nomination for Dragon Hall as a whole!

Tell us about the Awards night itself.

The award night was absolutely fantastic, we had organised 3 young people to perform on the night of the awards lead by Alex Tihomirova. It was a pleasure to be a part of an event that celebrates some of the honourable work that all the nominees were a part of. The awards were given by the Mayor of Islington alongside various council members and commissioners, it was a surprise to see local news and reporters on the night, made it feel like a very special occasion.

To be one of the eight people who won, from such a long list of nominees must be really pleasing?

All of the nominees were doing some amazing things in the borough, it was great that the work we are doing at SoapBox was highlighted in this way, it was an extremely proud moment and a wonderful acknowledgment.

What do you think this says about the work you are doing at SoapBox?

It highlights the wonderful work we are doing with young people and gives us the opportunity to be proud. As for me, it has reassured the quality of work we are doing at SoapBox, It has also given me the confidence to develop in my personal and professional career.



Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust

Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust also runs SoapBox Islington on a 15 year contract with Islington Council to deliver youth services for the young people of Islington, sharing strategy, resources and staff members, administration tasks, maintenance and fund raising initiatives.

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Therapy Dog

Funding Support

The work that we do at Dragon Hall Trust and Soapbox would not be possible without the support of all of our funders. We are very proud to be considered for their support - this year, in past years and, hopefully, in future years.



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