



The Ark

Strategy 2017 – 2020

**CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CHILDREN TO DISCOVER
AND LOVE THE ARTS**



Introduction

THIS DOCUMENT LAYS OUT our strategic objectives for the years 2017-2020, so that our audiences, partners and supporters can join us on the next phase of The Ark's journey. The Ark was born of a deeply-held belief in children's right to art and culture as equal citizens within our society. That radical vision was informed by the principle that all children have the right to artistic and cultural participation just as they have a right to play. Our role is to create opportunities for children to love and discover art as a fundamental part of their childhood, no matter what their background or gender, and our reward is witnessing their boundless capacity for imagination, innovation and fun.

Much has changed in Ireland for children, for the arts and for our society since our establishment in 1995. We have welcomed many new citizens and, despite subsequent emigration, we have seen our young population grow such that recent Department of Education and Skills projections predict a peak of 574,000 children of primary school-going age by 2018, the highest since the founding of the state. Research about the significance of early childhood development has also brought about changed emphasis in our education system and curriculum and in artistic practice for young children. This is evidenced in primary school practice where there has been an increased emphasis on art across the whole curriculum.

Through all that change The Ark has been constant in making and sharing great art for children in the faith that art can transform our understanding and experience of the world. The Ark's twenty first year represents an opportunity to look again at our founding principles, to reaffirm our vision and mission and to consider how best to achieve them over the next four years. This strategy statement is the result of such deliberation with The Ark Board. It has been informed by consultation with key external stakeholders: our principal funders, our members, teachers and regular attenders as well as by

processes of internal engagement with the board, The Ark's Children's Council and staff.

We have considered and sought to align our strategic priorities with those of the Arts Council in *Making Great Art Work* and contributed our thinking to *Culture 2025*. We welcome the publication of *Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study* which will inform our work. Equally, we embrace the rights-based framework of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020* and the city-wide aims of *Dublin City Council's Arts Plan 2014-2018*. After these deliberations and consultations, we have

identified four clear areas of strategic priority for The Ark over the next four years, namely: excellence, engagement, sustainability and advocacy. Each has a distinct goal and set of objectives to deliver on that goal.

In essence, as we journey to 2020, we will affirm The Ark as a vibrant centre of excellence in terms of child-centred arts practice and creative provision and we will focus our efforts on extending who we engage with and enhancing how we engage with them. In addition to attracting our regular attenders, we will seek to reach and get to know the children closest to us, in our local

community, at an early age. We will amplify our voice and work with others to progress the cultural rights of children as well as providing a forum for children to be heard too. We will work to build the infrastructure and capabilities that will enable us to deliver on these ambitious goals.

There is so much to be proud of in The Ark's achievements to date. With this spirit and the clear focus and intent of this strategy, I look forward to leading the organisation into the future as we continue to work with and for children.

AIDEEN HOWARD

Director

The Ark at 21

IN 2016 WE CELEBRATE The Ark's 21st birthday. This coming of age gives pause for thought. It's a time to reflect on what we have achieved over those years and to consider the opportunities and challenges for the organisation, for the arts and for children in the years ahead. This new strategy arises out of this reflection and renews our commitment to art and to children for the period 2017-2020.

When the Irish government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child in 1992 it recognised the rights of children to “*participate fully in cultural and artistic life*” and to “*encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities*”. These principles inspired and governed the foundation of The Ark cultural centre for children in 1995, making Ireland unique in its far-sighted vision for developing and investing in children through a dedicated building leased through a long term cultural use agreement with Temple Bar Cultural Trust.

Since then, The Ark has consistently put children at the heart of its work making a commitment to offer them high quality performances, exhibitions and workshops. The Ark has engaged thousands of artists in this work and has welcomed over 500,000 children with their schools, friends and families through the doors of its landmark building in Dublin's Temple Bar. It has also moved beyond its own doorstep to lead projects in local communities and has connected with children in the classroom by leading professional development in the arts for teachers.

We have been enabled to do all this through funding from the Arts Council and the Department of Education and Skills whose long term commitment to children's

equal right to culture sustains and supports our work. We look forward to continuing to work with both bodies in the pursuit of this new strategy. The Ark has also had a record of significant investment from philanthropic agencies. We will continue to raise funds from such sources, as well as through private and corporate donations, to support our focus on increasing access for schools in our local community and further afield.

The Ark has engaged thousands of artists in this work and has welcomed over 500,000 children with their schools, friends and families through the doors of its landmark building in Dublin's Temple Bar.

Now more than ever, it is incumbent on an organisation in receipt of public money or private donation to have the highest standards of governance and be transparent and accountable in all that it does. I would like to thank our boards for their diligent governance and commitment to meeting The Ark's obligations as a charity and as a corporate body over the years. In the life-cycle of this strategy we will further strengthen the processes and practices by which we govern

and manage the business of The Ark, to better ensure its future.

This birthday is also a fitting moment to thank and acknowledge all those who have contributed to the tremendous success of The Ark over the last 21 years: our artists, our staff, past and present, our current and former board members, schools and teachers and our audiences, some of whom may now have children of their own who now attend The Ark. We look forward to championing the arts for children with confidence and imagination for the next 21 years.

CATHERINE BYRNE

Chairperson

OUR VISION

We believe in every child's right to discover and love art in a society where creativity and culture are valued and enrich our lives.

OUR MISSION

To spark childhood imagination by making and sharing great art for, by and about children, bringing joy and creating a cultural engagement that lasts a lifetime.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We have identified **four strategic priorities** which will guide our decision making and focus our efforts. These priorities correspond to The Ark's founding principles and will support the delivery of our vision and mission. They will be the pillars by which we assess and measure what we have achieved over the lifetime of this strategy.



Excellence

GOAL

Create brilliant art experiences for children

The Ark is founded on the principle that all children, as citizens, have the same cultural entitlements as adults. Children deserve the very best art and culture. We want to encourage and resource artists to make outstanding and experimental art for children through properly supported and remunerated commissions, productions and professional development. We want to work more closely with teachers to further enhance children's experience of art at The Ark.

In order to achieve this goal

- 1 We will continue to commission artists at work in Ireland and abroad to make innovative, ambitious and meaningful work for children who are between the ages of two and twelve.**
- 2 We will invest in artists (and their companies) at various stages of their careers to develop and enhance their long term professional practice for children.**
- 3 We will present the best of Irish and international art for children throughout the year.**
- 4 We will invest in teachers by expanding our continuing professional development programme, in Irish and in English, to enhance their learning in the performing and visual arts and to contribute to their capacity to become arts leaders in their schools.**

How we will know we have achieved this

We will have supported and employed a new cohort of artists to work with children and will have produced new kinds of work as well as re-engaging with already established Ark artists.

We will have delivered a programme of professional development for those who wish to work with or for children as part of their arts practice.

We will have increased our capacity and reputation (nationally and internationally) for presenting and producing great work for children.

We will have increased the number of Summer courses and CPD opportunities for teachers by rolling out a dedicated programme of learning in a wider range of subject areas, both in The Ark and further afield in partnership with the Education Centres and others.

Engagement

GOAL

Ensure that more children experience art through The Ark

In the knowledge that participating in art enhances learning, development, wellbeing, belonging and confidence we want to create more opportunities for children, and those who support them at school or at home, to make and share art. We want to deepen our engagement with those who currently know and attend The Ark and to diversify our audiences by working to address the inequalities and to overcome the barriers that prevent participation by others.

In order to achieve this goal

1 We will listen to children's view of our work and employ participative decision making by children in The Ark in relation to children's cultural needs and our artistic programme.

2 We will increase the depth and breadth of our pre-school and school engagement with a particular focus on teachers.

3 We will build a long-term relationship with our neighbourhood schools.

4 We will deliver more inclusive experiences for audiences with disabilities and actively seek out those audiences.

5 We will reach out to groups, ensembles and partner organisations to promote and facilitate equality of access for marginalised children.

6 In the knowledge that children rely on adults to access our work, we will cultivate our adult audience of teachers, parents, guardians, family and friends.

How we will know we have achieved this

We will have established an annual Ark Children's Council whose members will both participate in Ark programmes and inform and influence our decision making. We will also have mainstreamed the practice of recording active feedback from children.

We will have established a teachers advisory group, and built a dialogue with teachers and principals from a range of schools. We will have increased attendance and engagement from school and pre-school audiences both at home in Dublin and further afield when on tour.

We will have introduced and rolled out a long term city centre school engagement programme and increased attendance from these schools.

We will have increased our capacity for, and attendance at, inclusive events and programmes both in The Ark building and elsewhere.

We will have formalised a regular engagement with community groups as an integral part of The Ark's practice.

We will have developed and rolled out a complementary programme for adults in the area of children, art and culture.

Sustainability

GOAL

Build the infrastructure and capabilities that ensure The Ark's future as a cultural centre and resource for children

We want to put in place the best management and governance practices to enable The Ark to be a thriving cultural organisation for children for years to come. We want to strengthen our financial position to allow us to deliver the best work for more children, to reach out more widely, to retain the best people and to ensure a vibrant, viable future for The Ark.

In order to achieve this goal

How we will know we have achieved this

1 We will work proactively to diversify our income streams to create a broader income base and establish international partnerships that enhance and amplify our output and impact.

We will have increased our support from businesses and individuals and will have established new funding relationships with partners in Europe.

2 We will review and strengthen our corporate governance structures and actively seek out examples of best practice in this area while also paying close attention to our obligations.

We will have completed an audit of our corporate governance and rolled out training for all members of our board and senior staff in the area of corporate governance responsibility. We will have renewed our board membership to be diverse and reflective of The Ark's audience and stakeholders.

3 We will prudently manage and report on our finances paying close attention to the reporting and compliance requirement of our funders in the Arts Council and The Department of Education and Skills.

Our financial and other reporting and communication to our funders will be delivered with efficiency and transparency.

4 We will review our internal policies and HR systems regularly to make The Ark an inclusive place to work for artists and staff regardless of background or gender.

We will have rolled out an annual operational plan committing to training in specific areas of our business and have developed an equality code and practice for staff and artists.

5 We will look after our building, paying close attention to evolving health and safety practices, codes and industry standards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of audiences, artists and staff within it.

We will have undertaken an access audit in tandem with an ongoing health and safety audit of our building. We will have invested in a capital enhancement programme to increase accessibility and to maintain the function, safety and comfort of our building.

Advocacy

OUR FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

GOAL

Advance children's right to art and culture

In the belief that children have a right to art and culture as part of their learning and development, we want to advance this right within our own organisation and in wider society. We want to promote the right of the child to be heard by developing a considered methodology in The Ark and by advocating for its societal value.

The Ark's **VISION, MISSION** and **VALUES** are inspired by Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child [1989] which was ratified by Ireland in 1992.



In order to achieve this goal

1 We will play our part in raising public awareness of every child's right to culture as set out in our founding principles and in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in partnership with other like-minded organisations in civil society.

2 We will make the case for the inherent value of art in children's lives with government and other policy makers.

3 We will promote the voice of the child inside and outside of The Ark.

How we will know we have achieved this

We will be recognised as a champion of children's right to culture by our colleagues in the broader children's area, in the arts in general and by our own audiences and members.

We will have contributed to research to evidence the value of art in the lives of children for dissemination to government and policy makers, educators, funders.

We will have developed an annual public forum for children to contribute actively and vocally to discussion about art and culture in their lives and will have formed an organisational structure and staffing that supports child-centred decision making.

ARTICLE 31

1 'State Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

2 'State Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.'

**OUR
VISION**

WE BELIEVE IN EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO DISCOVER AND LOVE ART IN A SOCIETY WHERE CREATIVITY AND CULTURE ARE VALUED AND ENRICH OUR LIVES.

**OUR
MISSION**

TO SPARK CHILDHOOD IMAGINATION BY MAKING AND SHARING GREAT ART FOR, BY AND ABOUT CHILDREN, BRINGING JOY AND CREATING A CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT THAT LASTS A LIFETIME.

OUR VALUES

Our values are what we stand for. They guide and motivate our attitudes, behaviours and decision making as we put children at the heart of everything we do. They can be shared and expressed by children, artists and staff alike.

DOING OUR BEST

We seek to do our best every day. With a positive attitude and commitment to excellence we encourage all those who engage with us to be at their best too.

BEING FRIENDLY AND WELCOMING

Everyone is welcome at The Ark and we love sharing what we do and how we do it. We treat everyone the way we'd like to be treated ourselves – with respect and consideration.

HAVING FUN

We enjoy our work and take it seriously too! We love creating opportunities for children, collaborators and colleagues to have fun.

BEING BRAVE

We are always open to trying out new ideas and to being adventurous and brave in how we make art. We stand for and speak up for children while also encouraging them to express themselves.

ALWAYS LEARNING

We are constantly curious and always alert to change. We create opportunities to learn for ourselves and from each other. We appreciate what we learn by experience – and by mistakes. We share our learning with others.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We have identified four strategic priorities which will guide our decision making and focus our efforts. These priorities correspond to The Ark's founding principles and will support the delivery of our vision and mission. They will be the pillars by which we assess and measure what we have achieved over the lifetime of this strategy.



EXCELLENCE

Create brilliant art experiences with, for and by children

ENGAGEMENT

Ensure that more children engage with art through The Ark

SUSTAINABILITY

Build the infrastructure and capabilities that ensure The Ark's future as a cultural centre and resource for children

ADVOCACY

Advance children's right to art and culture

About The Ark

Established in 1995, The Ark is a dedicated cultural centre for children. We create opportunities for children, along with their families and friends or with their school, to discover and love art. We commission, produce and present work for, by and about children, from the ages of two to twelve years old. We do so in our architecturally award-winning home in the heart of Dublin's Temple Bar as well as off site or on tour in Ireland and abroad. Through our work with leading Irish and international artists children can enjoy performances in our unique child-sized theatre, view engaging exhibitions or participate in creative workshops. We also curate specific professional development opportunities for teachers and artists.

We work in partnership with others as artistic collaborators and regularly share our resources and knowledge with artists, educators and all those interested in child-centred arts practice. We also work with other like-minded organisations to advance children's rights to art and culture as part of their learning and development.

The Ark is governed by a voluntary board of eight people (including the Chairperson) who are appointed for a term of three years, up to a maximum of nine years.

The work of The Ark is delivered with commitment and zeal by an artistic and administrative team led by the Director, who has overall responsibility for the programming and corporate management of the organisation. The Ark is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital and is also a registered charity.

The Ark,
11a Eustace Street,
Temple Bar, Dublin 2

Find out more at ark.ie
01 670 7788

   Follow us
@TheArkDublin



Company Number: 222774
CHY: 11334
RCN: 20030827