



**The Ark**

# **STRATEGY STATEMENT**

**2021-2023**

**Sparking  
childhood  
imagination**

**THIS DOCUMENT SETS OUT THE ARK'S STRATEGIC FOCUS FOR 2021-23. THE OBJECTIVES STATED HERE HAVE BEEN CONCEIVED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR 2017-2020 STRATEGY AND TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE VERY PARTICULAR CONTEXT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS FROM WHICH WE HOPE SOON TO EMERGE.**

The focus of our activity is set out under the headings of our strategic priorities: excellence, engagement, sustainability and advocacy.

Alongside these ambitions, three themes will inform our work: digital capability; equality, diversity and inclusion; and environmental sustainability. Some of this emphasis may be credited to Covid-19. Certainly, the pandemic has expedited a need to enhance our digital capabilities. While we had already committed to putting our equality, diversity and inclusion policy fully into practice in 2021, and to an audit of our sustainability, the upheaval of 2020 makes this all the more urgent and relevant.

# INTRODUCTION

This Strategy Statement is an extension of our previous strategy, "Creating opportunities for children to discover and love the arts". It is also a discrete response to the challenges and opportunities of living with Covid-19.

In presenting our strategic intent for 2021-23, we first reassert our vision, mission and values. These are our North Star. They have guided the work of The Ark – what we do and why we do it – through the developments of 2017-2019 and the upheaval and uncertainty of 2020. Children's right to art and culture is at the heart of all that we do, because we believe in the intrinsic value of the arts at any age and the proven benefit it has for children's personal, social and academic development. Repeated lockdowns and school closures have widened the gap in attainment and aggravated social inequity. Our work to ensure this right is now more vital and urgent than ever before.

Our values of 'always learning', 'being brave', and 'doing our best' took on a new meaning in 2020. We found new ways to 'be friendly and welcoming' and to enable others, and ourselves, to 'have fun' too. We will continue to hold fast to our vision, mission and values in the years ahead.

The Strategy Statement 2021-23 empowers us to look forward. It is inspired by what we have seen over the last year: the steadfast support of our funding and programme partners; the resilience and ingenuity of teachers, parents, artists and children; and The Ark's expertise and dedication. Despite the uncertain times ahead, we will continue to create opportunities for children to discover and love the arts. It is their right.

**Aideen Howard**  
Director

**Brian Lavery**  
Chair

**CHILDREN'S  
RIGHT TO ART  
AND CULTURE  
IS AT THE  
HEART OF ALL  
THAT WE DO.**

# 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 all our lives.

# OUR MISSION

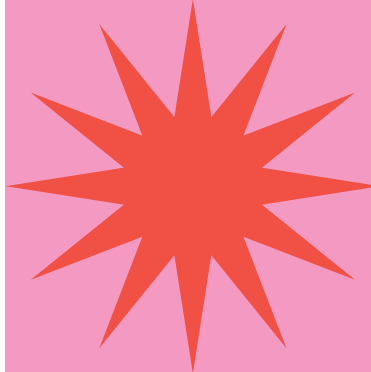
To spark childhood imagination by making and sharing great art for, by and about children, bringing joy and creating a cultural engagement that lasts a lifetime.



# OUR VALUES

## HAVING FUN

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



## 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.



## 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 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 for children by consulting with them

## 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



## **GOAL**

**CREATE BRILLIANT  
ART EXPERIENCES  
FOR CHILDREN BY  
CONSULTING  
WITH THEM**

**The Ark is founded on the principle that children are entitled to great art made especially for them. Children's lives at home and at school have been severely disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As we emerge from the crisis, it is perhaps more important than ever that we create high-quality arts experiences for children that spark their imagination and bring joy. Our particular focus will be on enabling artists to make outstanding and experimental art for children, which takes account of the need to both reach them remotely and prepare to engage safely in-person once again.**



# **EXCELLENCE**

## **OBJECTIVES**

**1**

**We will present the best of Irish and international art for children in a hybrid programme that encompasses both online and in-person experiences, and consult with children to do so.**

**2**

**We will expand our portfolio of commissions, productions and programmes, supporting and resourcing an increased number and diversity of artists, and encouraging them to find innovative ways to experiment with new forms of reaching and engaging children in-person and online.**

**3**

**We will further invest in the development of artists' professional practice, specifically extending their capacity to engage with a diverse range of children within the current dynamic context.**

**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.**

Covid-19 has exposed and amplified the inequalities that exist in children's lives, including their ability to participate in art and culture both digitally and in person. We will make use of all that we learned in 2020, and take advantage of emerging opportunities and the new practices that we are exploring, to extend our reach and ensure equality of access. We look forward to creating exciting and enticing opportunities for more children to make and share art, whether they are at school or at home, working in-person or online with their parents, carers or teachers, or back with us in The Ark.



# ENGAGEMENT

## OBJECTIVES

1

We will work closely with teachers to strengthen children's experience of art at home or in the classroom through remote and online programming, building their skills and confidence to engage online.

2

We will extend and diversify the audience we reach through remote and digital engagement, ensuring we are as inclusive as possible, being mindful of the digital divide.

3

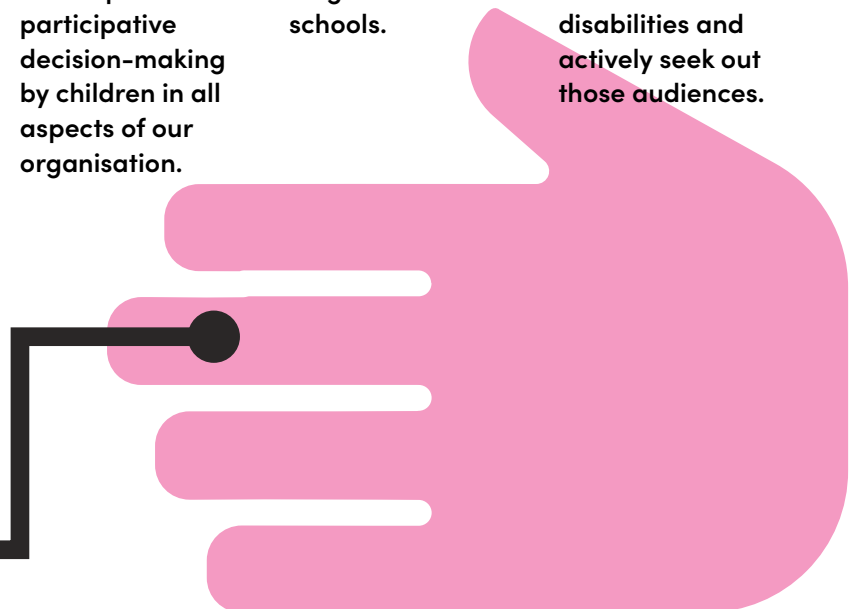
We will continue to listen to children's view of our work and to pioneer participative decision-making by children in all aspects of our organisation.

4

We will build long-term relationships with our neighbourhood schools.

5

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





# GOAL

**BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPABILITIES THAT ENSURE THE ARK'S FUTURE AS A CULTURAL CENTRE AND RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN**

The Ark is a stronger and more resilient organisation as a result of the exemplary governance practices we instituted between 2017 and 2020. We will continue to be ethical and rigorous in our business, and agile in how we respond to public health and other external imperatives. Managing our people is a particular priority: we will invest in our team, supporting their personal wellbeing and their professional capacity to work safely and effectively. We will also develop an environmental policy and advance sustainable practices in our work.

# OBJECTIVES

## 1

We will ensure the capacity of the organisation to meet its governance, compliance and statutory obligations.

## 2

We will develop and roll out a new performance management system to support the development of our team and strengthen how we work individually and collectively.

## 3

We will develop an environmental policy to institute sustainable attitudes, behaviours and practices into every aspect of our work.

## 4

We will fully implement our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, ensuring its philosophy and practices are alive and at work in the organisation.

## 5

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.

## 6

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



# SUSTAINABILITY





## GOAL

**ADVANCE CHILDREN'S  
RIGHT TO ART AND  
CULTURE**

From 2017 to 2020, The Ark worked hard to advance the understanding and activation of the right of children, as full and equal citizens, to experience art and culture. We are proud that we have been recognised for upholding this right, and for positively influencing others to respect and promote this right. We will continue to take a leadership role locally and nationally to advance children's right to art and culture. Moreover, we will ensure that this right is at the forefront of considerations to ensure children's wellbeing during and after the pandemic.

# ADVOCACY

## OBJECTIVES

1

We will continue to raise public awareness of every child's right to culture, advocating for the central role of art and culture in national policy for children and for the centrality of children in arts policy.

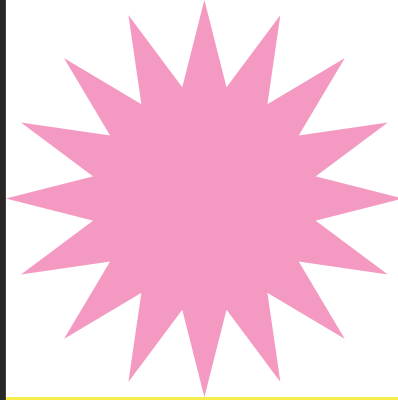
2

We will review and document existing research on rights-based arts practices in order to establish The Ark's research priorities for the future.

3

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





## 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. As we respond to the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis, we are engaging with more children through online and remote channels, and will continue to experiment with new formats and innovative ways to bring art and culture to children as we look ahead to an increasingly digital future.




Child participation is at the heart of our practice and, through our Children's Council, we have spearheaded a robust model of child participation in arts and culture for a diverse group of children who now inform all of the organisation's artistic programming and decision making.

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 curate specific professional development opportunities for teachers and artists, and 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 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.

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Find out more at [ark.ie](http://ark.ie) | 01 670 7788

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