



# SKYLIGHT CIRCUS ARTS

'STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES' FOR  
DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE IN ROCHDALE  
2018 - 2022

EXCERPTS TAKEN FROM  
YEAR 1 PROJECT REPORT

[www.skylightcircusarts.com](http://www.skylightcircusarts.com)



# SUSTAIN AND DEVELOP

Henry Smith 3 year funding 'Strengthening Communities' has helped Skylight maintain existing services and develop new projects for disadvantaged people in Rochdale. Other projects completed or continuing, may not have run without the financial input into core costs from Henry Smith Charity. The financial year 31 March 2019 ended with us in a more sustainable position than the previous year thanks to Henry Smith, plus Garfield Weston and Foyle Foundation.

## SUCCESSSES

Highlights include:

- Maintaining 'Ropes' unfunded sessions for disabled adults with additional needs
- Secured Sheldon Foundation funding with Henry Smith match
- Started an apprentice in circus training (Sheldon Foundation)
- Created 3 extra regular classes running for young people
- New initiative: sessions for isolated home educated young people
- New initiative: Spotlight Youth Circus. Talented, committed young people, training/performing, for career pathways
- New Initiative: Henry Smith match for Postcode Lottery project 'Time to Shine' with Brownhills Learning Community for excluded, disabled, emotionally disturbed/challenging young people
- Created 2 highly acclaimed community productions
- Secured HLF for circus history research



# NEW PROJECTS PENDING

Several new projects for disadvantaged people in Rochdale are developed with funding bids pending and Henry Smith match funding

- 'Voices' **Young Carers** project
- 'Circus Globe' **Asylum seekers and refugees** project
- A Project for very young **disadvantaged children**
- 'Circus Heads' for adults with **mental health problems**.
- Skylight has reached final part of Reaching Communities (**5yrs, elderly, Silver Circus**)

Skylight has a larger, better trained **artform team**. New posts have been created with additional project funding we were able to attract.

This year, projects have had excellent feedback. Whatever minor hiccups encountered, projects with disadvantaged people achieved most projected outcomes.

## AWARDS



At the '**Sports and Culture Award Ceremony**' Skylight received **two awards**

**'Generations'**, an inter-generational circus theatre production, devised with **Silver Circus** and oldest **Youth Circus**, won **'Cultural Event of The Year'**.

The second for **'Cultural Champion'**, was a Skylight **trustee/volunteer**.

## PERFORMANCES

**'Generations'**, was a moving collaboration, where different ages and abilities/disabilities sensitively supported each other's performance. The older people loved working with young people and vice versa. Several young performers have special needs. We had a great director, **Grania Pickard** "a knockout show!" We enjoyed full houses in **Skylight's theatre** and our participants also performed at **Touchstones, Rochdale, The Lowry, Salford** and excerpts were taken outdoors at **Feelgood Festival** to reach bigger, very diverse audiences. Our audiences also had opportunities to try out circus and aerial skills afterwards which were very popular. Skylight brought colour, excitement and culture to our hard-pressed borough.





Skylight members of all ages performed **'Mr Kite'** in December 2019. **The Heritage Lottery** Funded research into **Rochdale's circus heritage**, provided a fascinating experience for a group of young people, a different perspective on their hometown. Their research fed the devising of an **innovative show** and a big display for the community.

## CIRCUS SKILLS PROJECTS



**'Spring 2'**, **Children in Need** project continues to be effective. The new school this year, **St Johns RC Primary School** has many BAME children, a mix of ethnicities, almost all with some special needs and all a delight to work with. The appreciative school booked extra days (fees paid) in addition to the project time.

The new project **Time to Shine**, with **disengaged/challenging young people is a success**, with good feedback by trainers, teachers and young people. Funding applications are pending to continue, to find out if the improvements in engagement and behaviour are long term outcomes.

## INTERVENTIONS

Unique individuals in Rochdale –  
ie extra people because of Henry Smith funding  
July 2018 – June 2019 (projection for June)

Individuals 871

Interventions 2842

Audience 11,665





# CHANGES

Rochdale BC had further big cuts in government funding for this year. All revenue funding to arts organisations has ended. Skylight will not let this affect our work. Staff and trustees are working hard to replace this revenue. There will be further cuts to services and to many organisations we work with. Inevitably, there will be further pressures on them and us.



Physically, there have been some improvements and regeneration of the town centre is ongoing since the River Roch was opened. The Riverside complex with cinema, hotel, shops and cafes is growing fast.

Skylight staff are currently working to implement the **Theory of Change** and improve the way differences, long term outputs, aims, objectives and outcomes are planned and specified in project descriptions and measured in monitoring/evaluation, making sure the emphasis is on achievements and differences rather than what we do.

As expected, changes in health and wellbeing, **mental health and happiness have seen measurable improvements** in most participants of all projects. Participants improved wellbeing, are more confident and have acquired new skills.

Staff respond to the needs of our users through evidence based evaluation. **The Home Education Group** was set up a few weeks after the Side by Side project revealed the need for it. A creative fun social class that gives the opportunity for home educated young people to experience circus skills. Some of the children in the group are isolated with few opportunities for physical activities and experience emotional difficulties, ASC or ADHD. So far all of the children taking part have said they are enjoying meeting peers and engaging in activities.

**Silver Circus** development enabled participants to volunteer at care homes and dementia sessions, where they shared skills with the elderly. Both aspects of this project resulted in changes. The group that meets every Monday have made notable gains in skill, confidence and well-being. They are very supportive of one another and for several it is the highlight of the week. The Silvers also work with our other circus groups.





The new Summer Project, 'Off the Streets' was another example of inclusiveness, where new, disadvantaged children from the area worked on a performance with some youth circus members. Several went on to join regular classes

One change we still want to make is an **increase in the BAME audience** for shows. We are developing plans to expand our reach. On the other hand, outreach and projects e.g Spring 2 (children in need project) communities do reach BAME targets.

**Side-By-Side** is a successful project for isolated and vulnerable young people. Even though numbers are higher than forecast (very popular), young people are showing changes in confidence and increased interactions.

## CHALLENGES

Lack of success in the Short Breaks tender and changes to CCG criteria, meant that activities this year from April have changed. Silver Circus funding ended 31 March to the disappointment of the Silvers. They pleaded to continue their Monday sessions and, those who could afford it, paid £5 to cover some of the extra staff costs for a shorter session. Other Silver Circus activities in care homes ended. It resumes in mid June. A reduced **Silver Circus 3** will now be funded by **Rochdale's Connecting You Development Funding**, with less ongoing sessions and less activities with dementia and elderly groups.

CCG Side-by-Side has been recommissioned for another year from April 2019. Unfortunately Skylarks, adults with physical and learning disabilities does not fit CCG criteria and applications are pending to resume ASAP.

The Sky High and CircusWOW projects were funded by Short Breaks, Rochdale BC until March, 2019. (Sessions and events, young people from Rochdale, registered disabled). Again users and carers were dismayed it had ended. We are seeking funders to replace Short Breaks and will know results in July/Aug, hoping to resume in Autumn 2019.

## ONGOING

Skylight **regular classes are increasing**. There are now 12 rather than 9 as forecast.

BBC Children in **Need Spring 2** project continues with children from different mainstream and special schools, with disadvantage, disabilities and additional/complex needs.

The new **Time to Shine, (Postcode Lottery)** year long project in Brownhills is a change from the original application to Henry Smith. It is very successful and finishes at the end of July. An application is pending to continue project.





# A LETTER FROM G, SILVER CIRCUS.

"I started going to *Silver Circus* about 2 years ago. I have learned such a lot. Admittedly my juggling isn't the best, but I have learned other skills. I have rediscovered my *love of diabolos*, which I loved as a child. I tried flowers sticks and can 'ticktock' quite well. I still have to master starting my plate spinning with the stick, not twirling it with my hand, but I'll get there, *I've given myself till I'm 100 to master it all!*

I have made *new good friendships*... also with some of the younger 'Skylighters'. I have had the pleasure of being involved in 3 productions. *Generations* (this is when I met and worked with the younger 'Skylighters'), and *Mr Kite*, the production involving most of the Skylight groups, thus meeting new people. I cannot stress how important it is for people in my age group (I'm 70 yrs old) to meet new people, and oh what a joy to be involved in this way. As adults we go to watch and support our own children, then our grandchildren, but what an overwhelming pleasure it is for them to come and see and support us. I never imagined that I would ever have the opportunity to be involved in this, or any, production. The 'Generations' production was special as we performed at Skylight, at Touchstones, Rochdale, and the Lowry, Salford. *I jokingly told my grandchildren that Granny was on tour, they were well impressed.* We also performed the juggling part of *Generations* at *Rochdale's Feel Good Festival 2018* and at the *Royal Exchange in Manchester* as part of their Elders Event 2018. Skylight gives a brilliant start to the week, our group is on Monday morning."

