



CLOUGHJORDAN
CIRCUS CLUB

OUTREACH PROGRAMME 2022

EVALUATION REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to everyone who gave their time to reflect and comment on these projects. Your openness, honesty and generosity with your expertise have been invaluable in making sense of and evaluating the work.

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Nenagh Childcare Centre staff

Helen Taffinder, Centre Manager
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Joanna O'Farrell, Early Years Educator

And, last but not least, to all the participants and their parents who gave feedback, it was a pleasure to meet you and observe you having fun at the circus!



CONTENTS

• INTRODUCTION	5
• PROJECT SUMMARIES AND OUTPUTS BY AREA:	
◦ LITTLE MIX TEMPLEMORE	7
◦ BORRISOKANE YOUTH GROUP	9
◦ EARLY YEARS, FIRST STEPS AND NENAGH CHILDCARE	11
• OUTPUTS	13
• OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS	14
• LEARNING FOR CIRCUS TUTORS AND CLOUGHJORDAN CIRCUS CLUB	21
• LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BY STAFF FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS	25
• PARTNERSHIP WORKING	27
• CONCLUSION	31
• FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION	32
• APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DELIVERY COSTS	33
• APPENDIX 2: ON EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS	34

INTRODUCTION



Cloughjordan Circus Club was founded in 2010 by Artistic Director, Joanna Williams.

The Club provides a social and creative outlet to young people aged 8 – 25 years using circus activities to create and strengthen human connections and encourage physical health and wellbeing.

Over the past twelve years, Cloughjordan Circus Club has evolved and grown in both its delivery and organisational capacity. It provides weekly circus activities in Cloughjordan, creates performances for parades, festivals and theatres, involves young people in trips and exchanges, and provides peer education and work experience opportunities for older members.

The Irish Youth Circus Gathering, most recently held in November 2022, takes place annually in Cloughjordan, thanks to Joanna Williams and Cloughjordan Circus Club. This Gathering brings together young people from Youth Circus Organisations across the island of Ireland with pan-European circus artists and has become a part of the calendar of Cloughjordan.

Developing social circus trainers is another part of the work that Cloughjordan Circus Club has been undertaking during 2022, through membership of CARAVAN, the European Network for Youth and Social Circus Organisations, in partnership with Galway Community Circus, Cork Circus Factory and Dublin Circus Project. These organisations collaborated to deliver a training programme to 20 youth circus facilitators in Ireland [1]. The programme involved four modules of five days and one of those was hosted in Cloughjordan. Four Cloughjordan Circus Club tutors completed the programme, Molly O'Brien, Maria Corcoran, Joanna Williams and Selene Murphy and they all worked on the outreach workshops considered in this report.

Alongside the development and running of Cloughjordan Circus Club, Joanna Williams creates interactions and sensory performances for Early Years and Diverse Audiences. Recently she has been undertaking training in Circus Activities for Early Years and Diverse groups, supported by an Arts Council bursary, to explore how these two areas of artistic practice might combine. The bursary allowed Joanna to undertake a series of mentoring sessions with Diane Quate, an Early Years Circus expert with Belfast Community Circus and training in adaptive circus methods with Alex Allison, specifically 1 ball and table juggling. The scope of this report considers the broad impact that this cross-practice training and development has had.

Cloughjordan Circus Club has increasingly worked beyond Cloughjordan, offering circus arts to children and young people from surrounding towns and villages. It is elements of this outreach programme that this evaluation report considers, looking to provide insight to Cloughjordan Circus Club on how its activities can be more impactful through work with community partners.

[1] This training is based on CARAVAN Network's [Guidebook for Social Circus Trainers](#).

INTRODUCTION



The scope of the evaluation takes in three distinct partnership projects, as follows:

GROUP	PARTNER ORGANISATION	VENUE
Little Mix, a social support group for young people with Down's Syndrome.	Youth Work Ireland Tipperary Templemore Youth Project	Templemore Youth Centre
Borrisokane Youth Group	Youth Work Ireland Tipperary Rural Outreach Youth Project in Borrisokane	Borrisokane Community College
Early Years Childcare / Pre-school	First Steps Community Pre-school, Cloughjordan Nenagh Childcare Centre, Community Early Years and Pre-school, Nenagh	St Kieran's Hall, Cloughjordan

All of these projects took place during 2022 and were supported, in the main, by an Arts Council Arts Grant awarded to Cloughjordan Circus Club. Creative Ireland (Tipp Co Co local grant) supported the project specific costs for the Project in Borrisokane.

This evaluation considers:

- outcomes for participants,
- learning for Cloughjordan Circus Club artists and peer support workers,
- outputs on who got involved and for how long,
- analysis of resources used per project,
- an examination of the partnership working processes involved.

It will situate the work in relation to the aims and priorities of the partner organisations involved, as they intersect with Cloughjordan Circus Club. It also situates the work within the wider context of research and evidence on the use of social circus as a tool for the development of physical, mental and social skills and other positive human outcomes.

PROJECT SUMMARIES BY AREA

LITTLE MIX: TEMPLEMORE



Little Mix is a social support group for young people with Down's Syndrome. Cloughjordan Circus Club worked with five young women, all longstanding Little Mix members, who regularly meet up with youth workers and volunteers on Tuesday evenings at Templemore Youth Centre.

This set of eight workshops was a second collaboration with Little Mix members who had participated in online circus activities, supported by equipment in the post, in spring 2021, during Covid restrictions.

Eight circus workshops were planned by Cloughjordan Circus Club, Youth Work Ireland Tipperary youth workers and members of Little Mix. A shared decision-making process led to aims and hopes for the workshops being collaboratively defined, as follows:

Physical Skills

- Improved physical skills

Social Skills

- Improved social relationships between members of the group
- Improved social relationships between members of the group and members of the wider community.
- Improved sense of belonging

Emotional Skills

- Developing Resilience, taking on and sticking with the challenges
- Improved levels of self-confidence

Creativity

- Express ourselves through circus
- Play and have fun!



OVERALL AIM
To improve participants' physical, social, emotional and creative skills.



This aim was approached by the practice of a range of circus skills and through opportunities for creative exploration and expression.

The workshops with Little Mix were devised and led by Joanna Williams and Ria Corcoran, an experienced circus tutor and performer. They took place during January, February and March 2022. Four workshops were planned in advance, with the remaining four left open to allow space for response and adaptation to suit Little Mix. Covid-19 intervened to mean that only seven of the eight planned sessions happened.

The final workshop was extended to double time and Little Mix members and circus tutors performed for and were celebrated by the members' parents, youth workers and the project evaluator. This was a truly creative and joyous event.

OUTPUTS

LITTLE MIX



3
YOUTH
WORKERS

3
YOUTH WORK
AND STUDENT
PLACEMENTS



1
PERFORMANCE

2
CIRCUS
ARTISTS

5
YOUNG
WOMEN

33
INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION BY
YOUNG PEOPLE

**LITTLE MIX:
TEMPLEMORE**

6
PARENTS
SUPPORTING
FROM THE
AUDIENCE

27
INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION BY
YOUTH WORKERS
AND VOLUNTEERS

12
HOURS
OF CIRCUS
ACTIVITY

7
CIRCUS
WORKSHOPS



PROJECT SUMMARIES BY AREA

BORRISOKANE YOUTH GROUP



Borrisokane Youth Group is supported by Youth Work Ireland Tipperary's Rural Outreach Programme, whereby local adult volunteers lead on delivering group activities in consultation with young people who choose to be involved. They are supported to do this by a Youth Worker who works across County Tipperary.

Membership of the Youth Group had declined due to Covid19 and the circus workshops were seen as a way of both re-growing membership and providing an opportunity to bring together existing teenage members of the Group with young people who were relative new arrivals in the village, living at the Direct Provision centre in Borrisokane. Some of the young people involved had previously attended other Cloughjordan Circus Club activities like wire walking and four had received bursaries to attend a previous summer camp.

Cloughjordan Circus Club agreed with Youth Work Ireland Tipperary that they would provide eight sessions for a maximum of 24 young people, to take place between March and May 2022. A showcase for the work at a community event celebrating Africa Day in May was discussed at project outset. Aims for the workshops were defined as follows:



Physical Abilities

- Coordination: Improve fine and gross motor skills
- Balance: Explore, develop, improve our Balance

Social Skills

- Team Building
- Confidence Building for those who are withdrawn or shy

Emotional Skills

- Developing Resilience, taking on and sticking with the challenges

Creativity

- Explore our creativity and express ourselves through circus
- Explore Circus as an Art Form
- Play and have fun!



OVERALL AIM

To improve physical skills and catalyse social connections for the young people involved with their peers and wider community.



This aim was approached with the offer of fun, positive, exploratory, creative circus skills workshops.

Eight workshops took place in Borrisokane Community College's sports hall. They were led by Joanna Williams and involved three other circus tutors. Attendance was significantly lower than predicted. Cloughjordan Circus Club facilitated juggling-ball making at a community Africa Day event in Borrisokane and Hakuna Matata Acrobats, a group known and recommended by Joanna, performed.

OUTPUTS

BORRISOKANE



PROJECT SUMMARIES BY AREA

EARLY YEARS: FIRST STEPS AND NENAGH CHILDCARE



Two community childcare centres worked with Cloughjordan Circus Club to bring the fun of the circus to 36 three and four year olds and the early years workers supporting them, during September and October 2022.

First Steps, a community childcare centre in Cloughjordan involved two groups of nine children who walked from their centre to sessions in the church hall close by accompanied by two childcare workers.

Nenagh Childcare has an existing relationship with Joanna Williams through artist residencies and taking children to sensory interactive performances devised by her. For these sessions, they brought the children the 19 kilometres from their centre on a minibus to take part. They too involved two groups of nine children accompanied by two workers. Each group of nine children participated in two workshops.

Joanna Williams facilitated the workshops in collaboration with Ewan Fox Powell, an assistant tutor who has taken part in the Club's Peer Tutor programme, helping with younger classes and summer camp programmes. Ewan joined Cloughjordan Circus Club as a youth member when he was 10 and has joined in enthusiastically ever since, he is now 19.

Aims for the Early Years workshops were:

Fundamental Skills

- Improved verbal and non-verbal communication
- Improved ability to interact with objects
- Improved cognitive skills

Physical Skills

- Improved balance
- Improved physical literacy
- Improved motor skills

Emotional Skills

- Improved self-confidence
- Improved ability to try new activities

Creativity

- Express ourselves through circus
- Play games and have fun!



OVERALL AIM
To improve children's fundamental social, emotional, physical and creative skills.



This aim was approached through fun, playing games and the exploration of a range of circus objects.

OUTPUTS

EARLY YEARS



1
EARLY YEARS
TRAINEE

1
PEER
TUTOR

1
CIRCUS
ARTIST

7
EARLY YEARS
WORKERS

22
INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION
BY EARLY
YEARS STAFF

**EARLY YEARS /
PRE-SCHOOL**

8
CIRCUS
WORKSHOPS

72
INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION
BY CHILDREN

36
YOUNG
PEOPLE

8
HOURS
OF CIRCUS
ACTIVITY



OUTPUTS



1

PERFORMANCE

1

PEER
TUTOR

5

TRAINEES,
STUDENTS AND
VOLUNTEERS
TAKING PART

8

YOUNG PEOPLE
CONNECTED WITH
THE WORKSHOPS
ATTENDED THE
CIRCUS FILM

1

COMMUNITY
EVENT

5

CIRCUS
ARTISTS

6

PARENTS
WATCHING
A PERFORMANCE

11

PARTNER STAFF
TAKING PART

34

HOURS
OF CIRCUS
ACTIVITY

59

INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION
BY PARTNER
STAFF

160

INSTANCES OF
PARTICIPATION BY
YOUNG PEOPLE

23

CIRCUS
WORKSHOPS

53

CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
TAKING PART

50+

PEOPLE MAKING
JUGGLING BALLS
AT AFRICA DAY

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



The age and stage at which the participants engaged with Cloughjordan Circus Club varied for each of the groups involved. There were however, common outcomes across all participant groups and this can be attributed to the flexibility built into Joanna Williams' working practices and the ability she and her team have to connect with workshop attendees of all ages, at a playful and often non-verbal level. Flexibility, review and development are built into sessions to account for individuals, their abilities, their preferences and intrinsic motivations. This thoughtful and fundamentally human approach is evident in what participants, support workers, parents and carers reported about being involved.

The evaluator visited workshops at all three venues, where tangible concentration and effort was observed, alongside fun, creative responses, surprise and joy. The games and skills-based activities generated smiles, laughter, self-expression and pride.

Common outcomes across all participant groups can be broadly defined and included the development of:

- Physical Skills
- Social and Emotional Skills
- Creative Ability
- Understanding of Circus Arts

The following quotes show specific examples where aims and outcomes were met by the workshops, as related to the three projects.



OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



OUTCOMES SPECIFIC TO LITTLE MIX

Attendance at workshops speaks volumes about Little Mix members' enjoyment and engagement with the practice of circus and the tutors. Just three occasions of sickness prevented young women from attending and Lucie, a youth worker, reported:



"They liked everything, they thought it was fantastic, just super!"

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

Improved physical skills were observed, and even over a relatively short number of workshops, physical strength, confidence and new skills were gained. At project end the young women were asked what they'd found most challenging and where they thought they'd improved. They highlighted rola bola, pyramids and tightwire as the skill areas of most significant learning, all these require balance, strength and physical awareness.



"In the Pyramids we could see how their ease with us and how their confidence has really come a long way.

By the final weeks and the performance they were happy to make pyramids between themselves, previously they always needed us (circus or youth workers) to be a physical part of the pyramids."

Joanna Williams, on working with Little Mix

In terms of resilience and self-confidence among participants, the workshops gave those involved the chance to test themselves and be brave. Youth workers and circus tutors both reported an increased willingness and confidence to participate among all members of the group that grew over the lifetime of the project.



"[Young person A] would take a while to try something, been a bit more reticent, one try and then leave it... there was a time towards the end where she was volunteering to get involved straight away.

And [Young person B] used to have little balance, so to see her do all the skills and pick it up so quickly is very special."

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



Little Mix have been meeting as a group for four years, although most of the past two have seen social interaction curtailed by Covid-19. Youth workers were looking for opportunities for the group to interact physically and socially after a period of social distance and agreed that circus helped in this area. They reported higher levels of comfort and confidence in how willing the young women were able to interact as part of a group, with one another and with the adults, during the circus workshops.



“One of the young women became more confident in giving feedback, she couldn’t say her name in the group at the start, but took part in full and at one point, volunteered to be first to take part.”

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

Parents came to see their daughters perform at the last session and reported how much their daughters wanted to be involved as part of the group, how they anticipated and looked forward to the workshops and how they practiced their new skills at home between sessions.



“I think this group has had great team spirit, includes the participants and has increased confidence.”

Parent, Little Mix



“She looks forward every week to the circus and practices her hula hoop at home.”

Parent, Little Mix

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



OUTCOMES SPECIFIC TO BORRISOKANE YOUTH GROUP

Attendance at the workshops in Borrisokane was more sporadic and less-consistent than at Little Mix. The sessions had been predicted by the supporting Youth Worker to be more popular than they actually were and this meant that the ratio of circus tutors to young people involved was higher than it needed to be. Multiple challenges arose in the partnership working process and will be returned to, but outcomes for the young people involved were still many and positive. After a slow start a few young people started to attend and they came back, by week 5 everyone at the session had been along before.

“Joanna was very good to adapt to work with whomever she had each week. She needed to have a very flexible approach as young people would come and go, attendance was low and a bit on-off.

The results were just amazing in such a short period of time, what the young people achieved and learned.”

Angelica Santander, Circus Tutor

Physical skills were developed and improved in even a few attendances and some young people found ways to practice at home. Self-confidence and confidence in particular activities grew.

“[Young person B] ... is very nervous, she is very reluctant at first, she goes under with me (Jo), we linked arms... by the end she is jumping rope like everyone else which is great, it was a big challenge for her.”

Joanna Williams, on working with Borrisokane Youth Group

Opportunities for the young people to use their creative imaginations were as important as the development of practical skills and confidence. One great example of this occurred when a young person suggested a juggling-ball making activity for Africa Day, rather than a performance. This creative solution took the pressure off everyone to provide a performance, as had been originally planned, and it meant that a wider group of community, friends and family could be involved in a making activity and could take away circus tools to use at home later. This is a brilliant example of how a less than ideal situation was turned on its head to make a positive impact. It demonstrates how these social circus activities contributed to a sense of place and helped catalyse social connections for the young people involved with their peers and wider community.

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



Both William, the Youth Worker, and Immaculate, the volunteer, working in Borrisokane reported that they had seen the young people who were involved grow in confidence over the course of the workshops. They talked about how keen those involved had been to learn, there was talk of “great determination” and “persistence to unicycle”. These comments speak to the aims regarding Emotional Skills such as resilience and the willingness to try new things. William and Immaculate both acknowledge that the workshops had not been as well-attended as they had hoped, but they still felt that the goals they’d had for young people to make new connections with one another had been met to a certain degree by the sessions.

“Friendships definitely grew, it wasn’t a school context, more an informal piece, so the young people were more open to one another and to developing relationships.”

William Dunne, Youth Worker



OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



OUTCOMES SPECIFIC TO EARLY YEARS CHILDREN

Staff, children and parents from the two community childcare centres gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about the experience of having worked with Cloughjordan Circus Club during Autumn 2022. Staff from both Nenagh Childcare and First Steps made connections between their everyday work which aims to develop fundamental skills in children and the circus workshops. They saw the sessions as a brilliant addition that was entirely compatible with their approach to child-centre learning and encouraging child development through for example, trying new things or taking risks.



“Joanna always pitches in just right, she just has it, she really engages them. It can be hard to find things at their level.”

Helen Taffinder, Manager, Nenagh Childcare



“The sessions helped the children with coordination, balance, with climbing and motor skills, with their fundamental skills like interacting with adults or with objects. They were just copying everything Joanna did.”

Kathryn Armstrong, Preschool Leader, Nenagh Childcare



“On the way back they chatted about it... I want to be a clown, or I can't wait to show my mammy, it suited them, lots of physical activities. They loved the skipping rope.”

Kathryn Armstrong, Preschool Leader, Nenagh Childcare

The evaluator observed children being given the chance to improvise, be physical and to try things out. Use of an obstacle course with different “activity stations” including plate spinning and hula-hoop, meant they could move on from things they found difficult or if their attention span waned. The stations were connected by hoops to jump into, a rope to balance on, bricks to step across, a tunnel to crawl through.

This approach was progressive, repetitious and the children were extremely engaged. What stood out on observing the early years workshops was how the children seem to be able to follow instructions and know what to do very intuitively, even though they appear to not be paying attention. They are in it, engaged with every fibre of their small beings. They have joined the circus!

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS



Joanna Williams uses storytelling and sets scenes in the way she describes and plays with objects. She turns scarves into jellyfish or clouds, she invites children to be the ringmaster and acrobat. This narrative approach means that the children have their imaginations activated, they are making a circus together, it is organic, riotous and joyful.

"The parents thought it was brilliant and the children really enjoyed it. They used balance and coordination skills, their concentration was good and they were able to remember the things they'd done the previous time. The way that Joanna described things was perfect for that age group, she was almost telling a story and this really engaged them."

Collette Alexander, Centre Manager, First Steps

Early years staff reported that the workshops worked especially well for children who they knew to be reluctant to try other team activities such as dance or team games and this surprised them.

"One of our children is very shy and doesn't normally participate in group activities, but found circus club very engaging and enjoyed the activities."

Lisa Costen, Early Years Educator, First Steps

"The shy children participated so much better than expected."

Sinead Rowan, Early Years Educator, First Steps

"Within the ECEC setting some children don't often like group activities such as dance/animal movements or musical chairs however within the circus session I was pleasantly surprised with how they moved from reluctance to mastering and achieving new things."

Kathryn Armstrong, Preschool Leader, Nenagh Childcare

LEARNING FOR CIRCUS TUTORS AND CLOUGHJORDAN CIRCUS CLUB



Learning and development is embedded within the work of Cloughjordan Circus Club. Peer education and CPD is one of four pillars that make up the programme of activity as set out in the organisation's Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 [2]. Joanna Williams and the tutors collaborating with her were actively engaged in training, development and learning while they were undertaking the outreach workshops considered in this report. Pillar 2: Peer Ed and CPD of the Club's programme overlapped with Pillar 3: Outreach and both were evidently connected in practical and theoretical ways.

When Joanna Williams talked about the learning she takes from working with Little Mix, she mentioned the need to be adaptable and her process places this at the centre. This approach was seen in each setting with the different participant groups and it became a theme that ran through the review responses given by everyone involved.

"This has felt like a very creative and positive exploration for me as a circus tutor."

"The challenge and enjoyment of this project is communication. Finding ways to communicate with the young women and be understood, has been key to giving them access to the skills. They process information differently and so long winded explanations don't work as effectively as finding playful ways or exercises that help them "feel" what we are doing."

Joanna Williams, on working with Little Mix

"Sometimes in sessions we can find ourselves spending time persuading participants to give things a go, reassuring them, being playful, saying we'll do it with them. I learnt that sometimes it is also good to give participants space, that if they have time to observe and see what is going on first then they will feel more confident about giving something a go."

There was one participant in the Little Mix group for whom this approach really worked."

Maria Corcoran, Circus Tutor, on working with Little Mix

[2] <https://cloughjordancircusclub.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/4604-Strategy-05-LR.pdf>

LEARNING FOR CIRCUS TUTORS AND CLOUGHJORDAN CIRCUS CLUB



Working with Little Mix members meant that Joanna and Ria both reported feeling more equipped with the best ways of communicating and collaborating with young people with Down's Syndrome. Joanna said she'd enjoyed finding new games and tricks to play with the group, changing the ways she usually does things to suit the young women, for example by developing table juggling and other juggling exercises that don't rely on 'throw and catch', or shaking hands with a participant to help them learn 'wrist hooping'.

In Borrisokane, adaptation and flexibility was equally necessary as circumstances for workshops were often less than ideal. The Youth Worker and Volunteer supporting the group were sometime late or did not arrive at all. Attendance by young people was low at first, Covid meant tutors had to take time out and small matters like a cupboard where the acro' mats were stored being locked, meant that each session was bespoke and adapted to the circumstances and who was in the room. This takes experience and skill.

"I've been doing circus workshops a long time, but I learnt a lot from this work with Joanna. You always know you are in safe hands working with her. She has great knowledge and willingness to pass on her skills. I learned lots of new games and adapted my approach because the classes were longer than my usual. That meant young people got to try lots of different things, the longer classes were a good length. The young people were excited, but not exhausted."

Angelica Santander, Circus Tutor, on working with Borrisokane Youth Group

The learning taken from the work with early years children was also rich, particularly as this was a new exploration. Joanna and Ewan made post-session notes that show a reflective practice resulting in practical learning that is transferable. These notes demonstrate how many small considerations were made in thinking about the workshops being as impactful as possible for the children, for example in considering where to place particular pieces of equipment, to engage but not distract, or how much structure to combine with free sensory play. They adapted their ball throwing technique to help the every young children understand how to do it:

"We talk about throwing with your hand up the sky to explain to them about how to throw a ball. They usually, just naturally, want to throw it to the floor."

Joanna Williams, Circus Tutor

LEARNING FOR CIRCUS TUTORS AND CLOUGHJORDAN CIRCUS CLUB



"I notice that I am not allowing games etc to go on for too long, keeping things short and snappy seems to work."

Joanna Williams, Circus Tutor

"I would do the finger work for plates before giving out plates as once they had the plate they couldn't focus on anything other than that."

Ewan Fox Powell, Peer Tutor

"Thought: There's a comment today from staff about children's expectations coming to 'the circus'. Maybe some support materials - visual story or a picture book about children 'learning to do circus' would prepare them better?"

Joanna Williams, Circus Tutor

LEARNING FOR CIRCUS TUTORS AND CLOUGHJORDAN CIRCUS CLUB



ADDITIONAL LEARNING

Other points worth noting as learning for Circus Club are reflections with the evaluator that considered:

TRANSPORT

- How transport is an issue in rural areas like Cloughjordan, where it's not possible to get young people from Borrisokane only a few kms away to attend Circus Club by public transport. This led to a reflection on the success of engaging people online, outdoors and by post, during the pandemic. This work might be built upon with regard to what is on offer to community partners in outreach locations in the future.

TUTORS

- Transport challenges also affect the ability of experienced tutors to work in Cloughjordan or rural Tipperary. By investing in training and support for local peer mentors, like Ewan Fox Powell and Molly O'Brien, Cloughjordan Circus Club is proving successful in expanding the local talent pool of Social Circus Tutors and is providing youth opportunities that in Molly and Ewan's case have led to employment and transferable experience. This approach to CPD is worthy of sustaining and developing.

GROUP SIZE

- That the smaller groups of early years children, nine or half a pre-school class, worked really well and much better than predicted. Early years partners also remarked on this.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BY STAFF FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS



"The workshops inspired me, gave me new perspectives and ideas."

Kathryn Armstrong, Preschool Leader, Nenagh Childcare

"The comfort with the circus tutors by the end was unexpected. We never know if they [Little Mix] will take to someone new. Eight sessions planned, that would usually be too much, but they actually really grew with it. I made a note to myself, that it's important to build things up over time."

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

"It was the first time we've had a performance. From listening to the parents, I thought it would be just another commitment for them. I was surprised at their surprise, they didn't expect it to be what it was. They didn't rush away afterwards."

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

As these quotes demonstrate, the circus workshops provided a learning experience for staff and volunteers from partner organisations. They were surprised by how the activities engaged children and young people in ways that they had not seen before and they cited specific examples of games and equipment that they felt comfortable to use again in their own settings.

"Some of the games they played, like with the big ball, it was so clever because when you were "out" you weren't actually out, this is important because some of them can't cope with that yet, they hadn't "lost", so they were actually trying to get themselves out! I have ordered a big ball so we can do that at the centre."

Kathryn Armstrong, Preschool Leader, Nenagh Childcare

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BY STAFF FROM PARTNER ORGANISATIONS



"Some of the games we can use in class, we have the scarves and we will use the "jelly fish hold" as they liked that."

Lisa Costen, Early Years Educator, First Steps

Collette, the Manager at First Steps, thought the workshops worked best for slightly older pre-schoolers.

"We brought along our three and a half year and four year olds, I'm not sure that the activities would have worked as well with our younger children".

The Youth Worker and Volunteer at Borrisokane reported that they enjoyed workshops and saw the benefits to the young people involved. They sometimes joined in with games, but they did not engage as deeply nor did they reflect on the work in the ways that the workers in Templemore and the early years settings had. The learning was consequently less evident at the organisational level in Borrisokane and highlighted constraints within the model of rural outreach that will be looked at more closely in the next section.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING



All partner organisations, with the exception of First Steps, had prior experience of working with CloughJordan Circus Club. Feedback from every organisation was that they were keen to undertake more collaborative work in the future.

Work with Little Mix in particular demonstrated best practice in partnership working. Planning took place collaboratively and time was given for all staff and volunteers to review sessions collectively after each one finished. Notes from those reviews demonstrate the care and attention given to both the needs of the individual and the dynamics of the group. There was respect and openness from everyone involved and growth in trust over time, for one another and the experience and skills that each brought. There was discussion about roles and responsibilities and space given to make practical adjustments along the way.

Youth workers participated fully in the workshops and were encouraged to do so by Joanna and Ria. Lucie, lead youth worker, commented that it was good to try all the activities so they would know what participants experienced.



“They [Little Mix] are happy that we treat it like one big group of 10 people learning together.”

“The mix of staff and young people worked really well, the fact that the girls could pair up with an adult and learn more quickly.”

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

Lucie also said that her youth work practice includes modeling activities.



“It confirmed to me that youth workers modeling the activity works; actions speak louder than words.”

“[The circus approach] was in line with a youth work approach anyway, empowering young people, respectful of where the participants are at, even the performance confirmed that the programme was for them to enjoy, for no one else. The [circus] tutors were so relaxed and patient, they could adapt appropriately if something didn’t work. It’s been really rich for the youth service, the collaboration worked well with the debrief at the end, the team work felt very strong.”

Lucie Clement, Youth Worker

PARTNERSHIP WORKING



“We really appreciated guidance from youth workers on how we were responding to the members, particularly those who sometimes took persuading to take part.”

Joanna Williams, Cloughjordan Circus Club

Everyone gains with this type of productive partnership approach, whereby both strategic aims and methods of practice align with feasible plans and space for adaptation. Knowledge and skills were pooled, the one to one work it enabled in workshops gave the young people full support as individuals within a bigger group and it enriched the experience for all of the adults in the room too. There was significant learning for both organisations.

In contrast with this, the partnership in Borrisokane worked less smoothly and there were multiple frustrations for Cloughjordan Circus Club in organising the sessions and understanding who was responsible for what, such as promotion of workshops or locating and booking a venue.

The model used by Youth Work Ireland Tipperary in rural outreach is to support volunteers to run groups in their locality. Cloughjordan Circus Club did not have direct contact with the Volunteer supporting the group in Borrisokane and liaised via a Youth Worker who supports a large number of similar volunteer-led groups across the county. It was not communicated to Cloughjordan Circus Club until after the project began that this was the practice and as a result caused delays, glitches and misunderstandings. Communication was slow or lacking and led to lower than predicted participant numbers.

“If we had met with the volunteer leaders in the planning stages we might have identified and addressed the recruitment of participants better. We needed local knowledge to get the message out, we could have done some taster sessions and avoided clashes with other activities locally in how we choose the day.”

Joanna Williams, Cloughjordan Circus Club

In Borrisokane, a key volunteer had recently dropped out and it seemed the group did not have capacity to fully work in partnership. The stage of development of the Youth Group was not compatible with the longer term strategic planned approach that Cloughjordan Circus Club has been developing with other community partners.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING



These issues would need airing with any future staff working on partnership youth rural outreach projects that rely on volunteers in contrast to paid staff. Immaculate, Volunteer in Borrisokane, is keen to encourage more circus workshops and suggests they might include families, with parents and children taking part in workshops together.

“To have fun there is no age limit. Yet, I see families struggling to make fun time for one another. To see parents included in playing these kinds of games with their children that would be so interesting.”

Immaculate, Volunteer, Borrisokane Youth Club

Work with the early years groups was experimental and the partnership relationships seemed more straightforward, in that less shared planning happened as Joanna approached them with a clear idea. Joanna was putting newly learned approaches into practice and was keen to gain feedback from the Early Years Settings on their effectiveness. As outlined, First Steps and Nenagh Childcare staff enjoyed and welcomed the opportunity and could see positive impacts for themselves and the children they support.

There is a great deal of potential in developing this area of work, combining early years and circus, and it is something that Joanna is enthusiastic about:

“I think there’s loads of potential for this kind of work. Ways of using games to encourage skills, like the confidence for the children to say their name in a group setting. I’d build on the *Ringmaster is Coming* game, later in the session I was able to use playful references from that game to get them to sit or stand somewhere when needed. Using a narrative approach to communicate and share the techniques for the circus skills was really key.”

Joanna Williams, Cloughjordan Circus Club

PARTNERSHIP WORKING



“ I also learnt that it is important to combine small children in quite specific ages and to work with much smaller tutor to participant ratios ie 1:4, so it could be quite expensive to deliver more work like this.”

Joanna Williams, Cloughjordan Circus Club

Cloughjordan Circus Club could meaningfully develop more work in partnership with the organisations here. In some cases, like with First Steps, the relationship is nascent and will require tending, but with Nenagh Childcare and in some Youth Work Ireland Tipperary settings, deeper, more developmental and collaborative work should be possible. There are plenty of shared areas of interest and models of engagement that usefully intersect. The involvement of Cloughjordan Circus Club in the new Tipperary Youth Arts Hub [3] should help to consolidate work with Youth Work Ireland Tipperary.



[3] An initiative of Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, Tipperary ETB and Tipperary County Council to develop more youth arts participation opportunities and to facilitate youth work and artist partnerships.

CONCLUSION



The work reviewed here broadened horizons for individual children and young people. It brought joy, fun and specific skills. The work clearly demonstrates how fundamental, physical, social, emotional and creative skills can be improved and developed by the practice of circus.

This type of work takes time and adequate resources to be done well. It also takes an openness to collaboration and skill in practice, to allow for a personal, interactive approach.

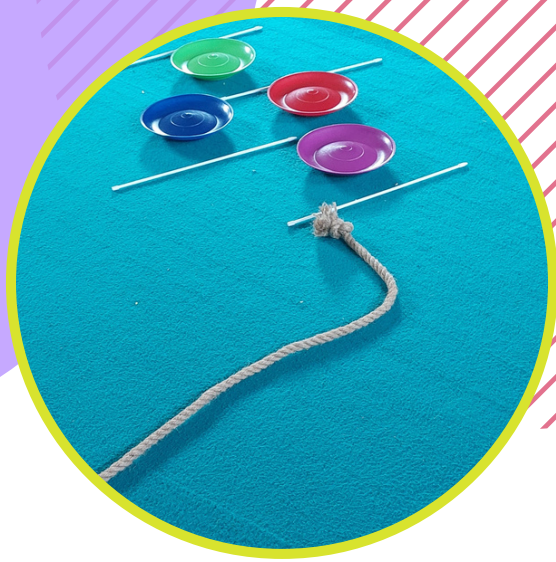
Cloughjordan Circus Club has grown through a strategic planning process, as referenced earlier, that resulted in its 5 year plan. This planning and the hard work that followed has resulted in more opportunities for collaborative working, more positive impacts on young people and more Social Circus Tutors being trained.

Joanna Williams and the team she has developed have had a significant and positive impact on the community in Cloughjordan, bringing vibrancy to the place, audience opportunities and participatory activities that give fun, focus, fitness and strength to many young people who live there.

The three projects detailed here are small in scale, however good documentation of activities and processes provided a richness of information that, distilled down, points to the role Cloughjordan Circus Club is playing within the wider Social Circus sector and the “offer to” “development of” quality arts provision in the Youth and Community settings in Tipperary and the wider Midlands area.

These outreach projects demonstrate an impact and ambition that reaches well beyond Cloughjordan.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



CARAVAN Network's Guidebook for Social Circus Trainers

www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/media/CTF-Guidebook.pdf

Cloughjordan Circus Club Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025

<https://cloughjordancircusclub.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/4604-Strategy-05-LR.pdf>

National Youth Council of Ireland Youth Arts Programme

www.youth.ie/programmes/youth-arts/nycis-youth-arts-programme/

Circus Moves, a collection of academic papers that consider the work carried out by Social Circus Tutors

www.circusmoves.com/circademics

American Circus Educators, an organisation that provides professional development, networking, and information about circus education

www.americancircuseducators.org

Arts Council's "Outcome Measurement Guidebook"

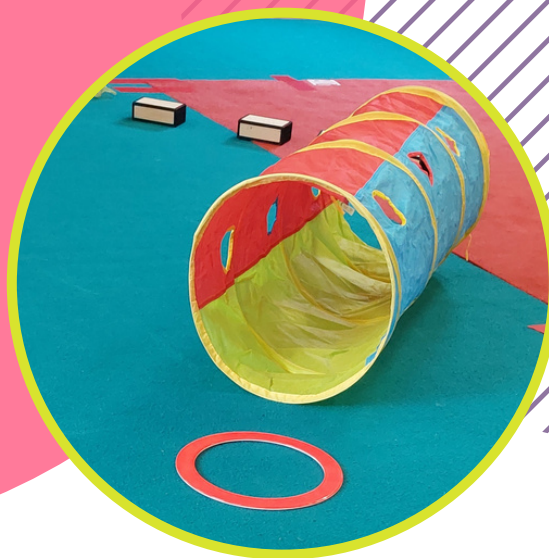
https://author.arts council.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Strategic_Development/FINAL_2022_AC_Measurement_Guidebook.pdf

"Capturing Magic: A Tool for Evaluating Outcomes in Youth Arts Projects" by the National Youth Council of Ireland

<https://www.youth.ie/articles/capturing-magic-a-tool-for-evaluating-outcomes-in-youth-arts-projects-2/>

APPENDIX 1:

PROJECT DELIVERY COSTS



Expenditure on circus tutor time to deliver all of the workshops, travel expenses for tutors and participants in the case of Nenagh Childcare, and a nominal fee for circus equipment maintenance, was as follows:

Little Mix: Templemore	€2,770
Borrisokane Youth Group	€2,390
Early Years	€1,655
TOTAL	€6,815

These figures do not include project management and administration or review and evaluation of this work.

Income for these projects and their development, coordination and evaluation came, in the main, from an Arts Council Arts Grant awarded to Cloughjordan Circus Club. Creative Ireland funding contributed towards the costs of the workshop programme in Borrisokane.

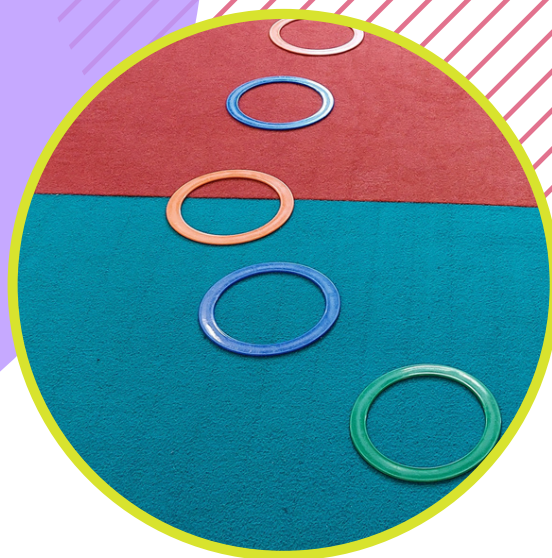
Youth Work Ireland Tipperary contributed €1,000 in income, split between Templemore and Borrisokane youth projects.

Each Early Years project partner contributed €200 each, calculated at €50 per session. In the case of Nenagh Childcare this cost was subsidised by their service, whereas First Steps passed the costs of €5 per child per session back to the childrens' parents. The budget for this project includes the transport costs for Nenagh Childcare.

A financial value has not been estimated for in-kind support of the project which includes staff time for planning, delivery and review of the work, plus venue space.

APPENDIX 2:

ON EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS



A LOGIC model for the evaluation was devised, as advocated in the Arts Council's "Outcome Measurement Guidebook" [4]. The model considered skills-based, physical, social, emotional and personal outcomes for participants as outlined in "Capturing Magic: A Tool for Evaluating Outcomes in Youth Arts Projects" by the National Youth Council of Ireland [5]. The evaluation also considered unintended or unexpected outcomes alongside those that were aimed for.

The LOGIC model informed tools devised by the evaluator to capture participant feedback and progress towards aims and were used by her, the circus tutor team, youth workers and early years workers. End of workshop notes made by the circus tutors and workers were reviewed. The evaluator visited each group to observe at least one workshop and in the case of Little Mix, two.

Participants' opinions were sought and considered at various stages in the process, where practical, during the workshops through conversation and observation, and at the end of some sessions where they were asked questions, for example, about what they had enjoyed, not enjoyed, or thought they'd learned.

Parent feedback was considered where available, via conversations and a survey. Workshops and the performance were documented with photography.

Joanna Williams and her colleagues sometimes used visual cues combined with questions at the end of sessions to gauge feedback from the young people involved. They were, for example, asked to rate their favourite circus activities, using pictures of each one, and to "bin" the activities that they found more challenging. This feedback has been considered too.

This evaluation takes into account a small scale intervention and aims to take an independent, measured and human view, from which the work can be understood within a professional and social context and recommendations about working practices can be drawn.

[4] [https://author.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts in Ireland/Strategic Development/FINAL 2022 AC Measurement Guidebook.pdf](https://author.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts%20in%20Ireland/Strategic%20Development/FINAL%202022%20AC%20Measurement%20Guidebook.pdf)

[5] <https://www.youth.ie/articles/capturing-magic-a-tool-for-evaluating-outcomes-in-youth-arts-projects-2/>

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