



WHERE THE WILDFLOWERS GROW



Creative Ireland Creative Climate Action Spark Fund FINAL REPORT October 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Where the Wildflowers Grow (final title, working title at time of application: *The Greenhouse*) was a fun-filled, interactive and climate-conscious show for all the family by Nicholas Kavanagh (Curious State Theatre Company) which entertained capacity audiences at Theatre Royal Waterford in June 2024.



The show featured *Pockets O'Hara*, who brought the audience on journey from his specially-constructed house within the Theatre Royal building out into the glorious urban garden he created in the nearby streets. On the way, there was live performances at several sites in the streets of the Viking Triangle, as *Pockets* and the audience met *Mig* and *Ma*), mischievous, musical magpies who spend their day scavenging for food and collecting shiny trinkets discarded or misplaced by Waterford's citizens. Audiences discovered magical installations created by visual artist Agnieszka Krym, who specialises in living art, and South East Technological University (SETU) horticulture lecturer Yvonne Grace, the show's horticultural designer, as well as taking part in some planting within this glorious urban garden.



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Using live music, song, puppetry and lots (and lots!!) of craic, this enchanting journey through nature delighted little and big children of all ages, with 440 audience numbers enjoying the show during a ten-day run.

BACKGROUND

Since 2018 Theatre Royal's 'Green Team' of dedicated staff members have been carrying out a series of energy efficiency and climate adaptation changes throughout the building, focused on the circular economy, waste management, biodiversity, climate conscious production adaptation and upgrades as well as renewable energy technologies.

- In partnership with production companies and artists TR creates and sources high quality climate action activity with the intent to create awareness among practitioners and the communities who navigate through and around the venue.
- The organisation continues, with its landlord and stakeholders, to adapt a sustainable approach in all of TR's activities, house management and maintenance, production and purchasing.
- Through its community engagements, schools, audiences and practitioners we actively promote TR's sustainability & bio-diversity programme.
- The development of artist-led, sustainability focused productions and workshops continues.
- Installation and maintaining the urban biodiversity garden adjacent to the theatre is a centre piece to creating a focal point and curiosity.

Theatre Royal has carried out the following Climate Action projects enabling the organisation to highlight a positive climate action narrative.

- As a member of **Green Arts Initiative Ireland** and in collaboration with Catriona Fallon in 2019/2020 developed its Green Policy and identified its Short, Medium & Long Term Goals.
- Delivered its public facing '*All the worlds a climate stage*' urban biodiversity garden through the support of the **ESB Brighter Future Arts Fund** and **Business to Arts 2021/22**.
- Delivered the *Green Shoots garden workshops* to communities and schools in Waterford city through the **Creative Waterford Open Call 2022**.
- With Artist in Residence *Nicholas Kavanagh* created and presented *The People's Parade* with 4 primary schools in collaboration with **Cruinniu na nOg**, June



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2023. And created and presented with two emerging Playwrights and 8 primary school classes, *The Climate Stage is Yours* in collaboration with **Creative Waterford**, October 2023.

- Successfully secured, with landlord **WC&CC & 3cea**, **SEAI funding** to upgrade infrastructural energy systems from gas to airtowater system, 2024

Since 2023 Nicholas Kavanagh of Curious State has been artist in residence at Theatre Royal.

The purpose of the residency for the creative artist and Curious State, is to form a strong working relationship with Theatre Royal and to use the building, its personnel and its resources to shape the artists' creative thinking going forward. In partnership with the Theatre Royal Nicholas as AinR provides the organisation and its team with opportunities to continue as a creative climate house and develops work that engages with makers, participants and audiences through the creation of activity relevant and connected to the venues greening arts ambition.

Through the delivery of *Where the Wildflowers Grow* (The Greenhouse) Nicholas, Curious State and Theatre Royal successfully took a step forward in the organisations transformational 'green journey' and aligned with our partners Waterford City & County Council's Climate Action & Bio-diversity teams.

Theatre Royal's green journey continues to prioritise the reduction of the theatre's carbon footprint and looks to promote sustainable artistic performance and community engagement.

OUTLINE OF TEAM & KEY PARTICIPANTS

WTWG written & directed by **Nicholas Kavanagh**, a project for *Creative Ireland's Creative Climate Fund SPARK*.

An unplugged, climate conscious theatrical experiment by Theatre Royal and AinR Nicholas Kavanagh featuring a site-responsive, interactive theatre production.

Production in collaboration with Nicholas delivered by

Josh Elwell (Puppeteer), **Aga Krym** (Visual/moss Artist), **Deirdre Dwyer** (Costume Design&Make), **Dermot Quinn** (Set Design), **Yvonne Grace** (SETU Horticulturalist) **Marina Mulligan** (WC&CC Bio-diversity Officer).

Actors/musicians **Cilian Jacob**, **Killian Browne** and **Kate Powell**, **Niamh Fennessy** (stage-management) and a team of **14 young actors** from **Jack Cunningham Productions**, **Waterford Youth Arts & Music Generation Waterford**.



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Five Designers/Makers were financially supported through the *Creative Ireland Climate Action Fund* along with **three Actors/Musicians** and **one Stage Manager**.

The production was produced and supported by the Theatre Royal team.

Producer: **Mary Boland**

Marketing & Communications: **Michelle Clancy**

Production technical support: **Heather Troy Whelan**

Administration, Box Office & Front of House team: **Deirdre Jordan, John Fitzpatrick, Nicola McGrath.**

KEY OUTCOMES

The Project provided the following key outcomes:

1. Supported the development of artistic practice and residencies that promote environmental sustainability.
2. Used key messaging to promote a greater understanding of biodiversity in an urban setting and the environmental sustainability of performance, by exploring how theatrical spaces can be adapted to create sustainable and climate-conscious methods of working within indoor and outdoor theatre settings.
3. Captured the public’s attention and impacted on how they interact with the theatre environment; capturing imaginations, generating discussion and creating a vision of how Theatre Royal is embracing an eco-friendly future. This in turn provided our audience with an impetus to creatively reconsider urban biodiversity and climate change needs.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

DIRECT AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION	
Total audience numbers	440
Audience numbers who participated in planting activity during shows	400
Estimated visitor numbers who viewed set/ artistic installation in theatre foyer	1000
DIGITAL REACH	
INSTAGRAM ANALYTICS	
Total Reels	8
Total views	16,127
Most watched Reel – 7 th June 2023	4,015 views

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FACEBOOK ANALYTICS	
Total Reels	8
Most watched Reel – 7 th June 2023 https://fb.watch/uOj9ZBK1Rh/	6,000 views

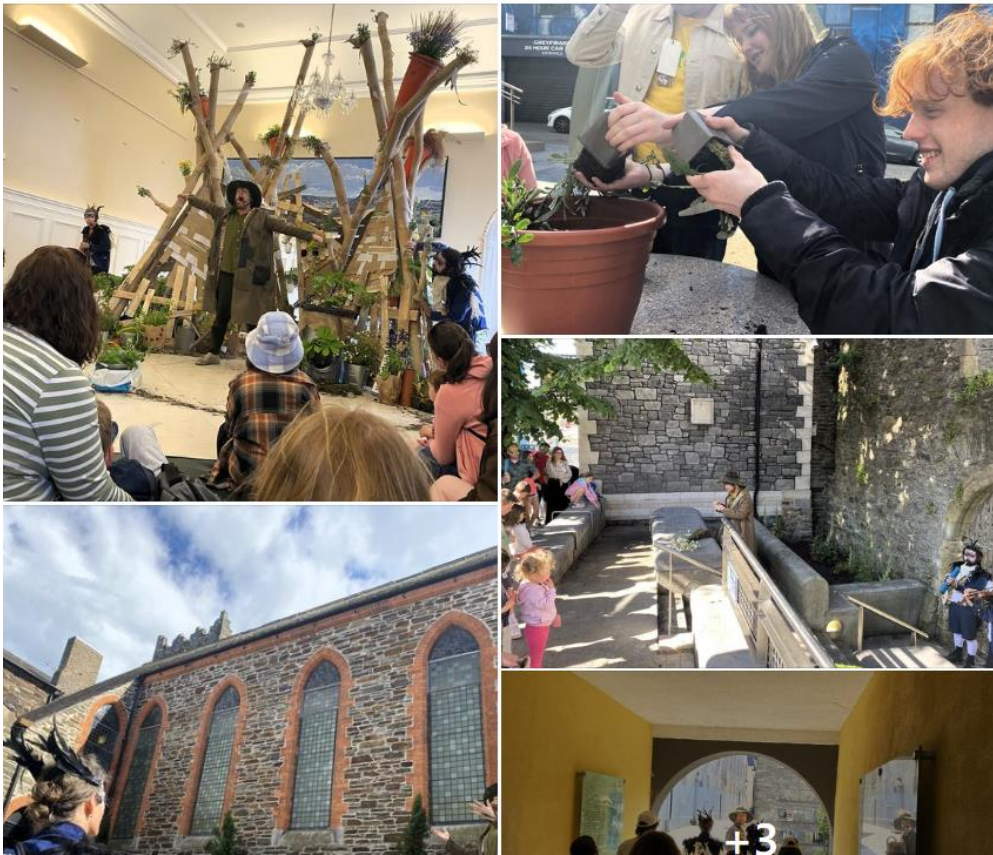
SAMPLE SOCIAL MENTIONS BY AUDIENCE MEMBERS



Fiachra Ó Céilleachair

16 June · 🌐

Well done to everyone involved in "Where the Wildflowers Grow" (by Nick Kavanagh) at (and around) [Theatre Royal Waterford](#), the last performance of which we caught this evening.



WEBSITE ANALYTICS

Unique website visits	
Announcement of successful funding application https://theatreroyal.ie/creative-climate-funding-for-theatre-greenhouse/	12,475
Callout for young performers for show https://theatreroyal.ie/young-performers-needed/	8,746

MEDIA CLIPPINGS

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT EVALUATION & KEY FINDINGS

QUESTION 1: To what extent did we meet our key goals?

Key goals	Key activities undertaken
<p>Capture the public's attention and impact how they interact with theatre environment/ climate change message</p>	<p>Creation of script, production and staging of climate-focused, outdoor theatre show</p>
	<p>10 public performances Saturday 1st June up to Sunday 9th June, audience 440</p>
	<p>Cruinniú na nOg performances and workshops, 15th June</p>
	<p>Audience members given a lanyard at the start of the show and asked to share a 'Wish for Mother Earth' on it and hang it on the Wishing Tree at the end of each performance, encouraging them to reflect upon the content of the play, and their role within climate change.</p>
 	
	
<p>Installation art (eg Growing Jacket) within Theatre Royal building, May and June 2024, further encouraging audiences and visitors to the theatre to reflect on the show's key message. QR code brought viewers to further information about the show, the native species used and theatre's climate message on the theatre website.</p>	

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The 'Growing Jacket'

This is the boyhood jacket of Pockets O'Hara. He has long since outgrown it but cannot bear to part with it. This jacket holds the memories of climbing trees, rolling in freshly-cut grass, picking blackberries, and going on adventures through the wasteland at the back of his house. Pockets has decided to return this woollen jacket to the wild.

Watch as, day by day, the jacket is slowly overtaken by wildflowers and other growing things—it has become an incubator for new life in a place where memory is fused with nature. Watch it grow!

'Where the Wildflowers Grow' is a charming interactive family show by Waterford playwright and Theatre Royal artist in residence Nick Kavanagh (Curious State Theatre Company) that comes to Theatre Royal on 7th, 16th June.

Using live music, song, illuminations and aural reimaginings, this enchanting journey through nature is sure to delight children of all ages!



SCAN ME

'Where the Wildflowers Grow' is a recipient of the Creative Climate Action Fund, an initiative from the Creative Ireland Programme. It is funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. The fund supports creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around climate change and empower citizens to make meaningful behavioural transformations.



Professional photographer engaged to capture and promote performances

Dedicated Communications and Marketing campaign to promote show and key message, using PR, social media campaign (eg Instagram Reel of team visit to SETU greenhouse to create awareness about artists' use of sustainable materials to TR followers: Facebook-18K; Twitter-5k; Instagram-4k; 20, 000 visitors per month to website). Use of partner channels (eg Curious State/ Waterford Council for promotional activity, eg

<https://www.curiousstatetheatre.com/theatre-productions/>)




Clár Éire Iddánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



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	<p>Invitation of primary school class to theatre show</p>
<p>Promote greater understanding of biodiversity in an urban setting</p>	<p>Installation of 50 different tree, shrub and herbaceous species within and outside the theatre, which featured prominently in discourse of play.</p> <p>For the outdoor street locations, 90% of the plants used were propagated by division and seed and collected from local sources. No rare or threatened species were used but native and localised species were identified and prioritised for the different street locations. These plants were grown on in an unheated glasshouse in SETU West Campus. The protection boosted spring growth and ensured aesthetically pleasing plants on display for the duration of the play.</p> <p>The remaining 10% were donated by Waterford City and County Council as part of their bedding display supply for the city, pollinator-friendly planting was requested and supplied. For outside the theatre and the foyer, mature containerised plants were loaned to by a local nursery.</p> <p>Having large trees and shrubs close to entrances and windows along the street gave maximum impact and promoted the project to the public. The diversity and colour appearing overnight was a talking point and helped create awareness of the different species which can survive very well in the urban environment.</p> <p>Audience participation in planting during show to increase awareness and knowledge of urban biodiversity.</p>  <p><i>“Our goal was to take the community on a creative journey. Allowing them to sink their fingers into the soil, sow seeds and grow fresh ideas about the gardens of the future. We guided them around their environment and changed their mind about what was growing there, renaming weeds as wildflowers and unkept edging as places of refuge for precious insects, who garden on a micro level....” – Nicholas Kavanagh</i></p>

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Use of outdoor spaces in vicinity of theatre to further facilitate audience engagement and participation, eg a stage area where audiences could plant seeds or pot a seedling; incorporation of naturally-growing plants, wildflowers within urban footprint into the story of the play to encourage further audience reflection on the ‘hidden’ urban garden within Waterford’s inner city



Hence the play’s setting was not a ‘silent space’, with constant interaction between audience and the space.

Support the development of artistic practice that promotes environmental sustainability

Twelve climate-focused artists and consultants engaged in the project from early-stage development to final stage performance and delivery.

Recruitment of the show’s ‘Gardeners’ through an open callout to teenagers with an interest in theatre-making and the environment. The ‘Gardeners’ attended rehearsals and performed in shows, thus providing the next generation of climate-focused arts practitioners with the opportunity to work with and learn from more experienced theatre makers working on a ‘live’ project to promote environmental sustainability.



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Activities the 'Gardeners' engaged included a flower-pounding workshop with costume designer Deirdre Dwyer to make their own ethically-sourced costumes for the show.



Use of acoustic and hand-cranked musical instruments during the show, which did not rely on amplification



Use of recycled and recyclable materials in set construction by set designer Dermot Quinn, eg cardboard carpet tubes to construct Pockets' house in theatre building



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Installation art materials sourced through eco-friendly means, where possible, eg Aga Krym (Visual/moss Artist), used naturally growing materials such as blackberry bush vines to create structures, gathering of wildflowers which were due for disposal from nearby Mount Congreve gardens.



What other impacts did the project have?

Messaging legacy: Pockets' story continues to be told - excerpts from the show were recently performed at the Funtropolis Festival in Dublin.

Urban biodiversity: Planting during the show – during Cruinniú nan Og, audience members took part in a workshop with Aga where they created their own 'living art', a Japanese kokedama, that they were encouraged to take home and care for.





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Brand awareness: Through dedicated branding of the show, awareness of the ‘green’ agenda of Curious State and Theatre Royal has been established with a broader audience. This provides an opportunity to develop this audience through future productions

Policy alignment: The project aligns with partner organisation/ landlord Waterford City and County Council’s intention of achieving carbon neutrality by 2040 (Waterford 2040 plan). Through collaboration with SETU land science lecturer Yvonne Grace, the project also aligned with SETU Strategic Plan 2023-28 (Connecting for Impact) Strategic Objective 7 to ‘Lead and deepen strategic partnerships with government, local authorities, education sector, public sector, enterprise, culture, voluntary and community organisations within the south east to maximise regional cohesion and impact, enhance capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers, and to enhance regional productivity, growth and sustainability’.

Thus, the project has created pathways for future climate-focused collaborative projects with institutional stakeholders. For example, throughout the development process the team engaged with the Climate Action team and the newly appointed Bio-Diversity Officer of Waterford Council. The interest and support shown by these teams has led to the development of a collaboration between the theatre and local authority which aims to install a living wall on the theatre building that will enable an extension of the city’s ‘nature corridor’ by linking the current bio-diversity garden to the old city wall (as highlighted in the Wildflowers project) and beyond to a living wall that supports insects and wildlife as well as providing the city with a cleaner air environment for the community to benefit from. This ambition is in line with WC&CC’s *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Goal 7* which aims ‘To protect biodiversity from the impacts of climate change and manage ecosystems so that they deliver services that increase the adaptive capacity of people and biodiversity’.

How the project could have been improved/ key learning

This was our first dedicated attempt to source eco-friendly materials for theatrical productions. It was discovered that some of those materials are simply not available locally. Further research is needed by the project team to investigate alternate means of sourcing these materials as locally as possible.

There is still disinterest in climate-focused theatre amongst certain demographics and it was notably difficult to attract a schools’ audience to daytime shows. This might have been due to the timing of the production (June, when schools are preparing to finish for the summer break). Future productions should take into account the school calendar.

The audience particularly engaged with the planting sessions of the play, and feedback suggests they would have enjoyed an extension to this. Future productions should provide more extended time for ‘hands-on’ activities such as these.



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BREAKDOWN OF COSTS

Find attached Project Budget for *Where the Wildflowers Grow (The Greenhouse)* as an attachment.

CONCLUSION

Where the Wildflowers Grow was a hugely successful site-responsive project, which brought together an innovative team of multidisciplinary artists, a horticulturalist, a bio-diversity officer, organic gardeners, performers, and an ambitious admin team. Our aim was to challenge ourselves to make a piece of theatre that was environmentally sustainable and promoted biodiversity within an urban setting. In collaborating and sharing our expertise, the performers gave voice to the wildflowers; the horticulturalists inspired the artists to embrace the natural over the synthetic; and, the administrators dug deep in the soil and allowed this project, by and for the community, to flourish. Thus, the project has transformed the creative and production teams; as artists, performers, makers, and administrators, we are more inquisitive about our environment.

Our project aimed to challenge the way in which planners and architects cleanse our urban settings of natural growing things to create cold, concrete, shining, human-made surfaces and parking spaces. We celebrated and highlighted places for the community to stop, to bear witness to nature flourishing, to take the time to find the beauty within the pavement cracks, and to look up.

We swapped electric light for sunlight,

Amplified sound for acoustic,

Nature for synthetic,

Community for professionals,

Wild spaces for sanitary.

The community responded with heartfelt words, laughter, and song. The seeds sown will flourish, in gardens, classrooms, windowsills and cracks in pavements in the months and years to come. The project evinces that multidisciplinary teams can reclaim the urban environment as a place ‘where the wildflowers grow’.