

Creative Youth on a Shared Island Future Parade Evaluation Report

2025

Creative
Youth

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Shared Island
Initiative

macnas


Féile an Phobail
IRELAND'S BIGGEST COMMUNITY ARTS FESTIVAL

**EAST
SIDE
ARTS**

**BELFAST
INTERNATIONAL
ARTS
FESTIVAL**

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Executive Summary: Future Parade 2024–2025

Project Overview

Future Parade 2024–2025 was a cross-community youth arts project bringing together young people (ages 15–18) from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to explore parade-making as a medium for creativity, collaboration, and envisioning a shared future. The project was led by **Macnas** in partnership with **Belfast International Arts Festival (BIAF)**, **EastSide Arts**, and **Féile an Phobail**, funded through the Creative Youth on a Shared Island initiative.

Over 12 months, participants engaged in weekly workshops, two residencies in **Corrymeela (NI)** and **Galway**, and collaborative parade development. The project focused on themes of place, sustainability, storytelling, and cross-community engagement. Although the final public parade in Belfast was cancelled due to adverse weather, the process-driven approach delivered substantial learning and impact.

Participants and Delivery

- 37 young people participated: 21 from Belfast, 16 from Galway.
- 12 facilitators and youth workers supported the project.
- 70 workshops were delivered, along with two residential weekends.
- Participants collaborated on parade design and creative outputs, developing a narrative combining *Narnia* and *Cú Chulainn*.

Key Outcomes

For Young People

- **Creative Skills:** Significant growth in performance, character work, costume design, and prop-making.
- **Social Development:** Enhanced confidence, collaboration, communication, and cross-community understanding.
- **Resilience & Wellbeing:** Despite the parade cancellation, participants demonstrated adaptability, emotional maturity, and a sense of accomplishment.
- **Agency & Participation:** Youth voices were central to decision-making, fostering ownership and empowerment.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Interaction between Galway and Belfast participants increased awareness of diverse cultures and local histories.

For Facilitators

- Strengthened cross-community facilitation skills and adaptability.
- Developed strategies for managing diverse experience levels and building trust.
- Experienced challenges with scheduling, staffing changes, and participant engagement, emphasizing the need for robust planning and communication.

For Organisations

- Enhanced inter-organisational collaboration and cross-jurisdictional learning.
- Highlighted logistical and administrative complexities of large-scale youth arts projects.
- Identified the importance of project management support and contingency planning.

Challenges

- Cancellation of the final parade limited closure and public showcase opportunities.
- Communication breakdowns among Belfast partners affected project delivery.
- Recruitment and engagement of Belfast participants were more challenging than anticipated.
- Disparities in prior experience between Galway and Belfast participants required adaptive facilitation.

Key Lessons & Recommendations

- **Build Time for Trust:** Extend preparatory phases for relationship-building and skill development.
- **Ensure Equitable Experiences:** Maintain parity across jurisdictions in workshops, residencies, and rehearsal opportunities.
- **Contingency Planning:** Prepare for cancellations and alternative events to provide closure.
- **Flexible Pedagogy:** Tailor activities to participant experience, encouraging experimentation while supporting learning.
- **Project Management:** Recruit dedicated managers for large-scale cross-community projects.
- **Partner Engagement:** Maintain active buy-in and regular communication with all key organisations.
- **Process-Centred Evaluation:** Embed reflective methods prioritising youth voice and feedback.

Conclusion

Future Parade 2024–2025 successfully delivered a **youth-centred, process-led arts experience**, fostering creativity, wellbeing, cross-community understanding, and cultural exchange. Despite unforeseen challenges, the project demonstrated that the **journey and collaborative process can yield meaningful impact**, providing valuable insights for future iterations of cross-community youth arts projects.

Introduction

This is an evaluation report presents findings from **Future Parade (2024/2025)**, a project that brought young people from communities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland together to investigate if parade making can be utilised as a medium for sharing a new vision for the future. The project was led by Macnas in partnership with Belfast International Arts Festival (BIAF), EastSide Arts (EA) and Féile an Phobail (FPh). This project was funded through the Creative Youth on a Shared Island initiative.

Macnas are an award-winning internationally acclaimed spectacle theatre company based in Galway, Ireland. Productions are immersive and spectacular, and repertoire includes parades, theatre shows, installations, film, and performance art. Macnas engage with the public year-round, with a full creative engagement programme including the Macnas Youth Theatre, Macnas Drumming and Macnas Brass. Macnas curate an education programme with freelance artists in partnership with community groups, primary, secondary and third level institutions.

Belfast International Arts Festival is the city's longest-running international arts event. The festival covers theatre, dance, classical and roots music, visual, film and digital arts and literature accompanied by outreach and education events. It takes place every October in venues and locations across Belfast.

EastSide Arts is a part of EastSide Partnership, a regeneration charity that has been delivering a range of projects that make East Belfast a better place to live for more than 25 years. EastSide Arts has a vision of East Belfast as a thriving cultural hub; where the arts are valued, creativity is for everyone, and people are connected with each other and the wider world.

Féile an Phobail was established in 1988 as a direct response to the conflict in the north of Ireland and is based in West Belfast. Féile an Phobail provides a programme of arts, cultural and community-based activities throughout the year with an annual flagship Féile Community Festival.

Over a period of 12 months, Macnas, Belfast International Arts Festival, EastSide Arts, and Féile an Phobail worked together to provide a structured programme of workshops, residencies and performance opportunities for young people, this project enabled the young people to come together to make a parade with a focus on place, sustainability, and story.

The project worked with young people aged 15-18 years from Macnas Youth Theatre in Galway and a newly formed young ensemble in Belfast with members from diverse communities, the young people from Belfast were brought into the project through their connections with BIAF, EA and FPh. A youth centred approach was central to the work with the young people encouraged to take the lead in imagining what a Future Parade could look like. The young people met weekly with their facilitator and then came together to two residencies, one in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland and the other in Galway.

The project provided the youth groups with access to creative practitioners with expertise in a range of disciplines, including sustainable design, placemaking, performance and story creation. Each workshop looked at the concept of a Future Parade from a different creative approach. Participants had the opportunity for cross-cultural and community-to-community exchanges facilitated by the lead partners and facilitators.

Ideas around shared island, placemaking and parade were explored through weekly workshops with the young people in Galway and Belfast and enhanced by residential opportunities in Northern Ireland and Galway. The theme for the parade, devised in collaboration with the young people was Narnia, this was taken from the two stories Narnia and Cú Chulainn, uniting the two stories was the wolf, which was to be the main image/puppet in the parade.

The weekly workshops allowed the young people to gain skill and develop ways of working. The residences offered the opportunity for all the young people to meet, to work together, to create together and to collaborate. The creative engagement approach aimed to foster dialogue and learning through creative activities designed to stimulate the participants' thinking and problem-solving skills.

The culmination of the event was originally designed to take the form of a parade, made and performed by all the young people in Belfast on October 30th, 2025. This did not happen due to adverse weather conditions*.

This evaluation looks at the learning across Future Parade 2024/2025, how the project reached on the stated aims and objectives, and seeks to support the thinking for future projects.

*The impact of this change on all stakeholders is described later in the report.

Methods and Methodology

The Creative Ireland evaluation guidelines for creative youth projects informed the evaluation adopting a formative and flexible approach. Before an evaluation approach and framework were decided on, the evaluator met with facilitators, and young people in Galway and Belfast.

The learning from the discussions with the facilitators resulted in a shared understanding that the work was value based, curious, and young person centred in its approach. Facilitators agreed they would like to investigate and remain curious in their approach to delivery throughout, the following principles lay at the centre of the work;

- 1 That radical care and commitment to the young person's right to create freely is paramount
- 2 That creative freedom will inspire and empower the young people to contribute in their fullness to the developing work
- 3 That facilitators can create a dynamic and innovative opportunity for these young people to build creative programming while providing the boundaries and support they need to do so safely

Facilitators were curious about;

- 1 How they can work together to explore a pedagogy that allows everyone involved to gift one another rather than inform the young people
- 2 How they and the young people understand difference and consensus
- 3 How not knowing the outcome, impacts how they think and feel as the project progresses

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The learning from the discussions and observations with/of the young people resulted in the understanding that the young people wanted to give feedback, preferred to do that in an anonymous form, valued their voice being heard and enjoyed survey and discussion as methods for feedback.

Following this initial phase an evaluation framework was decided on.

To gather ongoing feedback from facilitators, reflective forms were developed to help capture ongoing moments in the weekly sessions with the young people. Interviews with all facilitators were held following the first residential in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland, with additional interviews/focus groups planned for the end of the project.

Feedback from the young people was gathered through three surveys, one after the first residential and the second after the second residential in Galway* and one at the end. The evaluator attended both residentials for observation.

Ongoing conversations and in person/online final interviews were also held with the Creative Engagement Director of Macnas. Interviews were held toward the end of the project with the leader of FPh and artists. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and the survey was both qualitative and quantitative in its approach, to help support the broadest understanding of the young person's experience.

Interview and focus groups sessions lasted between one and two hours and were centred around questions that helped build evidence to speak to the intended outcomes/outputs of the project.

These project outcomes and outputs are listed below:

* A third survey was planned for distribution after the final event in October, but this was redesigned due to the cancellation of this event.

•Empowered Youth:

Young people gain confidence and skills through their active participation in workshops and collaborative projects.

•Enhanced Understanding:

Participants develop a deeper understanding of the importance of consensus-building and collaboration in shaping their shared future.

•Identified Common Themes:

Through creative activities and discussions, common themes of significance to young people emerge, providing valuable insights for future initiatives.

•Cultural Exchange:

The project facilitates cultural exchange among youth groups from diverse backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.

•Community Engagement:

By involving the diverse communities through the project, partners, the project reinforces the importance of youth voices and consensus-building for a collective vision of the future.

•Sustainable Partnerships:

Stronger relationships are forged between project partners, artists, and organisations, paving the way for future collaborations centred around youth empowerment and creativity.

•Transferable Creative Skills:

Youth Groups learn new, transferable creative skills from industry professionals in sustainable design, performance, special effects, and storytelling for spectacle.

•Participation in Creative Workshops:

Young People actively participate in 55 creative workshops throughout the project.

•Residential Weekends:

Three residential weekends for groups from NI and ROI to come together.

•Performance Opportunity:

One final performance event in Belfast

•Meaningful Creative Exchanges: Youth groups from different communities are given time and space to engage in creative exchanges

Overall findings are listed below and categorised, followed by a discussion and observations.

Findings

Outputs



- Two residential opportunities for the young people were held, one in Northern Ireland and one in Galway
- 21 YP people from Belfast participated
- 16 YP from Galway participated
- 12 facilitators and youth workers support the project
- 0 performance opportunities were realised*
- 70 workshops were facilitated

* The final event was planned and ready to be performed but was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions which were deemed a health and safety concern for the YP

Outcomes

Young People

- Most YP gained creative skills
- Most YP gained understanding of others
- All YP were listened to and their voices central to the process
- Most YP increased their understanding of cultural differences in Belfast and Galway
- All YP made a parade collaboratively
- Some YP displayed resilience and grit
- Most YP displayed inquisitive, imaginative, persistent, collaborative, and disciplined behaviours
- YP were disappointed because the original plan for the final parade in Belfast was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions

Organisational

- The project allowed for an enhanced collaborative organisational culture that can inform future projects
- The project allowed for the building of experience and knowledge on working with youth groups across jurisdictions
- Administrative and logistical load was greater than originally imagined, the complexity of the project required extra design, partner coordination, and delivery effort, placing significant strain on operations*
- Recruitment of YP to the Belfast cohort was more difficult than originally imagined

Facilitators

- All facilitators recognised the inherent value of trust as a key success factor in building relationships with YP
- Facilitators enjoyed and valued the support of one another throughout the project
- Facilitators navigated nuanced individual and shared sessions with YP through lenses of expertise, patience, and creativity
- Facilitators displayed high levels of self-awareness evidenced by adaptable and flexible approaches with the YP when required
- Facilitators inspired and fostered open mindedness as tools for new perspectives and confidence in YP to emerge
- Facilitators utilised diverse practices to create comfort and a safe way in for the YP to engage in the project
- Facilitators were disappointed because the original plan for the final parade in Belfast was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions
- Facilitators were frustrated that the young people in Belfast did not have a chance for closure following the cancellation of the final parade

Unexpected Outcomes

- A communication breakdown between the organisations in Belfast resulted in the young people from Belfast not being afforded the opportunity to come together for closure or a rescheduled final event

Discussion

The discussion section is divided in three;

Section 1

Up to and including **July 2025**, this section discusses the data from the young people and facilitators up to and including the first residency in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland.

Section 2

September 2025, this section discusses the feedback gathered from the young people following the second residency in Galway.

Section 3

October 2025 to project end, this section discusses the feedback from young people, facilitators, and organisational leads at the end of the project.

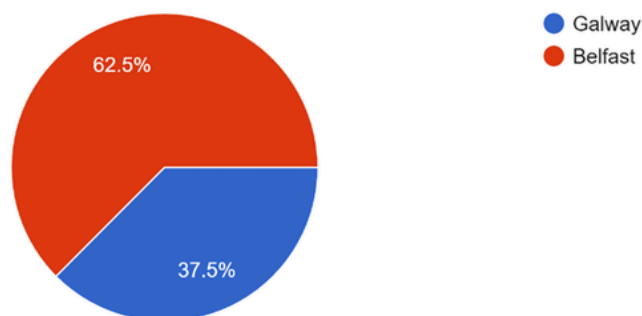


Young People

The survey was designed to gather statistics and perspectives from the young people involved, the opportunity to complete the survey was given to all young people and there was a 100% response rate. Unique codes were applied to each response to allow for tracking of change or impact throughout the project. Participants had the option to opt out of the survey at any stage. What follows is the results of the survey and a discussion of the insight gathered from those results.

The first part of the survey was designed to gather statistics relating to where the participants were from, if they had visited Belfast/Galway before and if they had participated in parades before this project. Results are displayed in pie charts below.

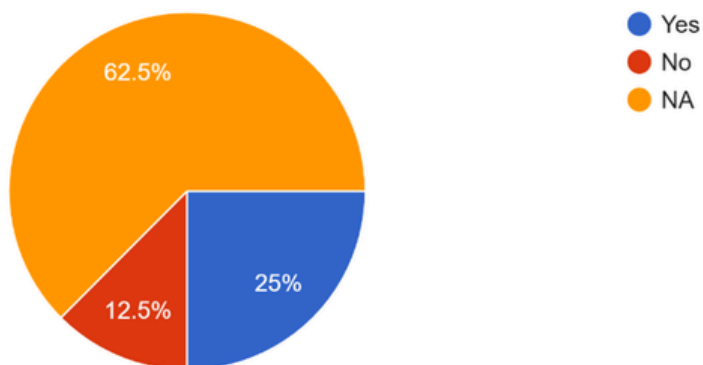
I am from
24 responses



We can see most participants are from Belfast with 25% of Galway young people having visited Belfast before the project compared to 20.8% of Belfast young people having visited Galway before the project commenced. 58.3% of the young people had participated in a parade before the project.

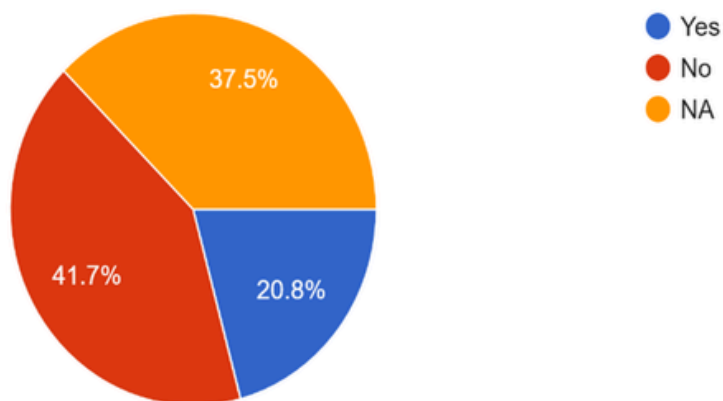
If you are from Galway have you visited Belfast before this project started?

24 responses



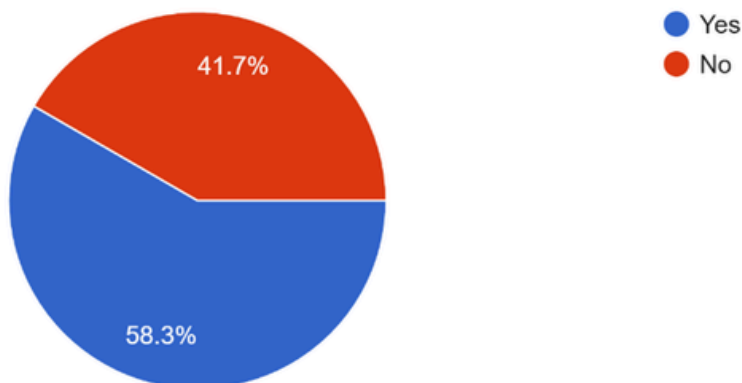
If you are from Belfast have you visited Galway before this project started?

24 responses



Have you participated in a parade before?

24 responses



When asked about the types of parades they have participated in, there were varying experiences and reasons for participating described by the young people which are evidenced in the quotes below.

"Feile parade, along the falls road, I liked being dressed up as a character"

"I participated in the Macnas parade in Galway in 2023. I performed with the youth theatre, and we had a set movement routine as well as improv. I really enjoyed it."

"It was in Belfast, and it was the 12th of July with my band."

"I participated in my local St. Patricks parade, for my school twice. The first time I was with my Irish Dancing group and the second time I held a banner for my school. I really enjoyed it and wish I could participate in bigger parades in the future."

"I have done a movement and vocal piece in Ballina that was my first parade, I did a similar piece for Culture Night in Athenry, I did a big movement piece for Cnámha La Loba that was in Galway and Belfast, and I was in the Turas na Half in Galway last Halloween as a fire holder. I enjoyed all of these parades thoroughly."

"I participated in a lodge which would walk on the 1st and the 12th of July, I would hold the banner for the lodge, and we would walk to Belfast city centre to Shaw's bridge"

"Saint Patrick's Day parade that went through the town in Belfast I walked with my youth club. I enjoyed it."

It is clear from the quotes above, that the experience of parade involvement between the young people from Galway and the young people from Belfast is quite different. The young people from Galway had experience in making parades as a creative process with costume, movement, lighting, and spectacle whereas the young people in Belfast had experience being involved in parades by way of representing and celebrating their place, community, and family culture

We then asked the young people **what was the most important thing for them when making a parade with the other young people and facilitators of this project?** A sample of the young people responses are outlined below under themes that emerged,

Collaboration

"I am not just working with people from Belfast or Galway that we have a mix of people"

"Making sure everyone's opinions are valued, the decisions that we make as a group are respected and that everyone puts in the effort to make it good"

"Creating new friendships"

Respect for the process and art

"It's important to me that everybody in the room respects the art and tries their hardest"

"That the days are planned out by the hour and set in stone and we are kept busy with a small bit of free time to get everything done on time and it's done well"

Safety and inclusion

"I am included and feel it can be practical for the future if I want to do any parades in the future"

"That there is a safe environment and atmosphere for creativity and opinions"

"Building a strong relationship with the other young people and facilitators where everyone feels safe, respected, and included"

"That everyone is included and having fun"

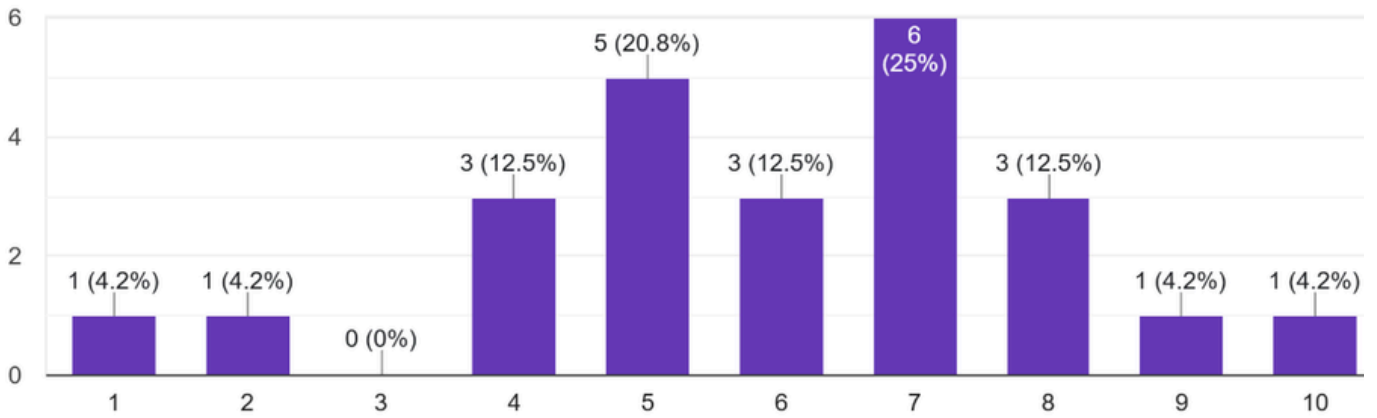
"Making a parade with the other young people and facilitators made me feel included and I felt like I helped a lot. Performing with the other young people was very important to me, and the environment felt safer with them. I enjoy it very much."

"Having a sense of reliability, trust, and safety between everyone- listening and participating and taking instruction well"

To understand more about the development/or not of the YP creative skills we asked the young people to rate their creative skill level before the project started on a scale on 1-10. Results are indicated on the bar chart below. We then asked them if their creative skills had improved because of participating in the project, the results are outlined on the pie chart below. We followed that by asking about their confidence levels to attend creative workshops.

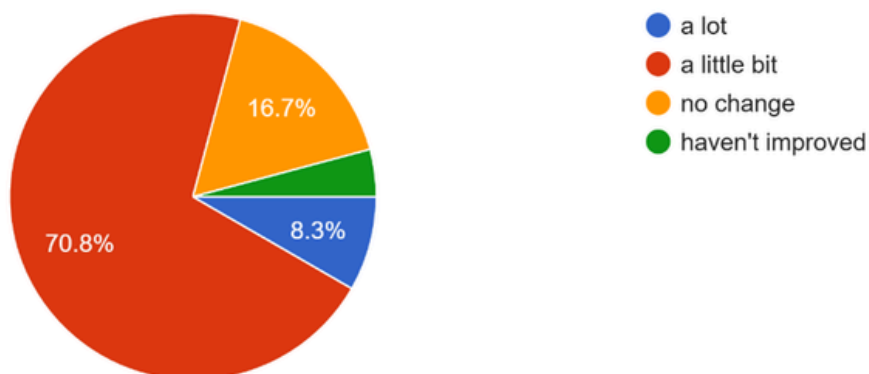
On a scale of 1-10 (1 being very low, 10 being very high) how would you rate your creative skills before this project started?

24 responses



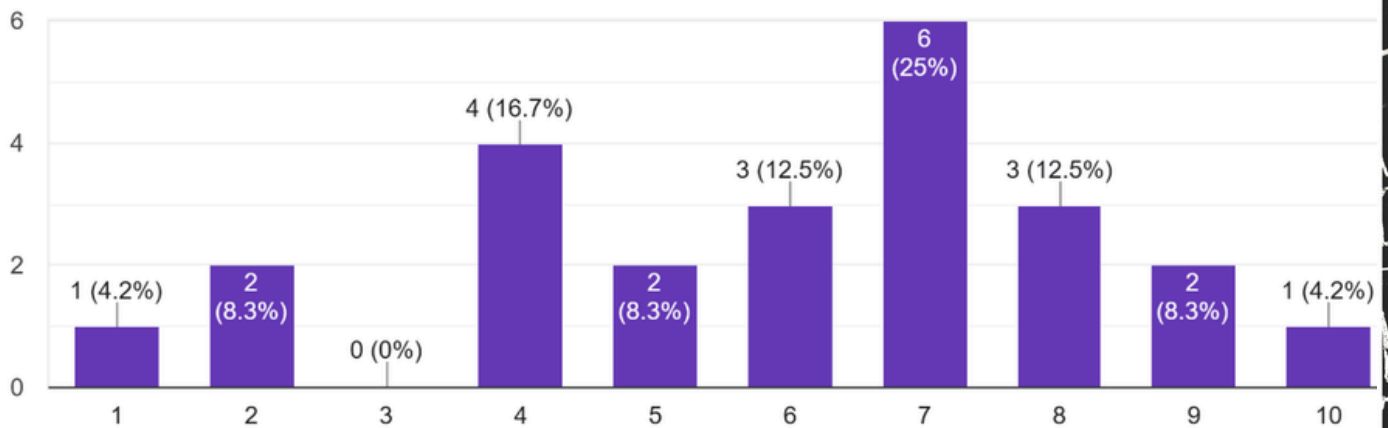
Have your creative skills improved throughout this project so far?

24 responses



On a scale of 1-10 (1 being very low and 10 being very high) how confident were you before this project started to attend creative workshops?

24 responses



We can see that most young people felt their creative skills were above average with only 5 young people marking themselves 4 or below on the scale, in saying that 70.3% of young people noted some development of their creative skills with 8.3% citing a notable change.

9 young people marked themselves at 5 or below on the confidence scale at this first stage of the project.

We asked the young people **what they had enjoyed most about the project so far?**

The answers to that questions are displayed below under thematic headings;

Workshop variety

"The different workshops"

"The residential with my fellow Macnas people and the workshops with Maria"

"Trying on costumes and creating mini performances"

"The drumming workshop"

Meeting new people and socialising

"Working and devising in groups. Meeting new people and facilitators."

"Getting to meet new people and doing the workshops"

"The fire"

"I enjoyed getting to meet the people from Belfast and taking part in new activities"

"I enjoyed the workshops we've done over the weekend and the opportunity to get to know new people on the residential and in Macnas"

The environment created by facilitators

"I really enjoyed doing the workshops, the facilitators were really welcoming and didn't pressure anyone into doing anything they were uncomfortable doing. Aoibhe's workshop was amazing she's so lovely. James is good craic. Maria was a mind reader she could read us all so well."

New skills

"The workshops, and being pushed creatively and confidence-wise"

"I enjoyed the poetry and costume work"

"I have enjoyed learning about acting, theatre and parades."

"The creative writing because I wrote a good short poem which all the leaders said was good"

The YP responded openly and honestly **when asked what has been the most challenging aspect of the project so far?**

Working with new people

"I was kind of nervous to perform in front of new people I have never met before this. I didn't know them well and I was worried they would judge me."

"Stepping out of my comfort zone and talking to people I didn't know."

"Putting on a wolf mask and having to become one but it was very funny."

"The new group that we met with are very different to us as a group and it was difficult at first to navigate how to bond and collaborate"

"Having to work with brand new people I've only met"

"Finding out the different levels and experience in performance in the groups"

"The most challenging aspect has been working with inexperienced performers and facilitators. There were several performers who seemed unwilling to give workshops their all"

"Getting to know new people- the culture difference feels really apparent at times and there are different values in each group"

"Trying to communicate with the xxx group which made it hard to get ideas across and collaborate. I felt that they were quite shy and would ignore us often when we asked questions or tried to start conversation"

Performing/creating through new mediums

"Putting on the wolf mask and performing with it on"

"Feeling light in the performance group"

"The performance group because I found it harder to find how to make myself feel light or quick but after it, I was starting to find my bearings"

To help us know if they were developing a deeper understanding of one another and place, we asked both groups what that developing knowledge looked like for them. We asked the question, **what do you know now that you didn't know before you started the project, about young people in Galway?**

They described that learning in different ways, evidenced in the quotes below;

"They all have different talents"

"That they do performances"

"Young people in Galway aren't as easily influenced as young people from Belfast. They are outgoing and are not afraid to be themselves"

"They all like mixing and matching their clothes"

"That Galway is a very diverse place, and they have a really big music culture"

"That they have their own slang that they make up themselves and use (like obviously there's different slang in different places, but this one is literally made up by the young people, and it's only there not known by everyone else)"

"How to perform properly and how to perform as the wolfs as well"

"That Galway is a diverse place, and they have a really big music culture"

What do you know now that you didn't know before you started the project, about young people in Belfast?

"Their personal views on the city they live in and the differences of life and culture between Galway and Belfast"

*"They love music. They are very passionate about music and play it wherever they can.
As someone who loves listening to music,
I enjoyed being with them"*

*"I was not familiar with their school system,
their common hobbies and fashion,
and the many festivals and performance projects
held in Belfast throughout the year"*

*"I learned that they have heavier accents than I expected,
and that they are more community minded than I expected"*

*"I knew it was divided between unionist and republican,
but seeing the flags everywhere was surprising!
They also have a real sense of community with those they know"*

"Young people from Belfast aren't as embracing of people with alternative styles and they're separated by two communities a lot more than we think"

"There are a lot of festivals and events that young people can be involved in throughout the year"

It is clear from these quotes that the YP are communicating with one another and learning about culture, customs, and place, the YP display inquisitiveness about others and can recognise the differences and commonalities between both Belfast and Galway.

We were also curious to know more about their personal learning and asked **what have you learned about yourself so far as part of this project?** We received a variety of responses that are themed below.

Skill development

"I'm good at acting out characters but I really enjoy the creative writing aspect"

"I now like doing performances"

"That I'm good at drumming"

"That I am good at poetry"

"I am really starting to love parade work"



Social development

"Identity is really different here, and it was a place I was more scared to be myself, initially? I did feel like I was judged negatively by how I dressed and talked, but the experience taught me how to cope with the situation better"

"To respect everyone's views while working in groups"

"I have learned to be more relaxed on the face of problems than I was when I was younger, and I deepened my bonds with my friends from Macnas"

"I'm not very confident and don't like talking to people but on this residential I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and got to know others. I'm very proud of myself for engaging and putting in effort during the workshops"

"I learnt how easy it was to make new friends. I always thought it was very difficult to meet new people and instantly become friends, but this project really helped me realise that it isn't so hard. I'm very grateful for this project"

"To enjoy yourself with the people that u trust and can be yourself with"

Creative identity formation

"I've learned I'm a class poet"

"That I really enjoy collaborating with other people on creative projects"

"I have learned that I really enjoy creative writing during this project"

"That I really enjoy doing acting and dressing up in costumes"

"That I'm willing to do lots of new things"

"That I am a good writer and how to perform"



We can see that by the end of the first residential in Corrymeela the YP, although challenged at times, embraced the process, worked through newness in relationships and process, often stepped outside their comfort zone and were open to new people and new ways of working.

Facilitator feedback

Three individual online interviews with facilitators were completed after the first residential. The experience of the residential and observation of the work by the evaluator helped form the questions that shaped these interviews. The discussion with facilitators in these interviews centred around themes of artistic choice, challenges of the work, and highlights of the work. The following themes emerged across the facilitator feedback.

Relationships

All three facilitators noted the quality of the relationships with the young people and the trust the young people had in them as facilitators as paramount to success over the residential weekend. Two facilitators had worked on a weekly basis with the groups one in Galway and one in Belfast. One facilitator met the young people for the first time in Belfast.

The young people from Belfast had a relationship and trust with one of the facilitators before they travelled to Corrymeela for the residential and the same was true of the Galway group. All facilitators noted that it may have been beneficial for them to spend more time with all the young people even if it were just to meet them before the residential. This would have improved the efficiency of the time spent with them and allowed time for greater skill development during the residential. The facilitators noted that the young people would have benefited from more time with them to develop trust, and trust is a key factor for the young people to feel safely engaged in a creative process as new to them as this one was.

Artistry

Facilitators noted that they were keen to keep a high level of artistry evident and abundant as part of their pedagogy during the project. This at times felt challenging as some of the young people were reluctant to engage. The facilitators held a deep artistic ambition for the project and for the young people that were involved. Facilitators had questions about the suitability of the level of artistic ambition for a group that were new to the work and to one another. Facilitators were curious about the potential of the group and noted that it would take a lot more time to really explore that potential.

Experience of participants

Facilitators noted that the varying experiences of the young people with the skills and processes for parade making was particularly challenging to manage. The young people from Galway were more experienced in the creative processes of parade making than the young people from Belfast and the facilitators noted that this caused frustration for young people from both places at times.

Time

Facilitators stated that although the project was a medium-term project, over 18 months, that more time given to the recruitment and building relationships phase with the young people in Belfast would have enabled the project. Facilitators noted that the young people would have benefited from more time together also, maybe an additional residential option to really build on the trust between one another to enable ambitious creative outputs.

Flexibility

All facilitators stated they needed to be agile and flexible in their approach to the work as the work emerged, very rarely was it that things went to plan and it was a much more common occurrence for things to change regularly. Some young people did not want to engage in the process while others were wholeheartedly involved, this proved challenging at times. The facilitators noted a large amount of time and energy went into navigating the environment between the Galway and Belfast groups while the young people gained knowledge and trust of one another.

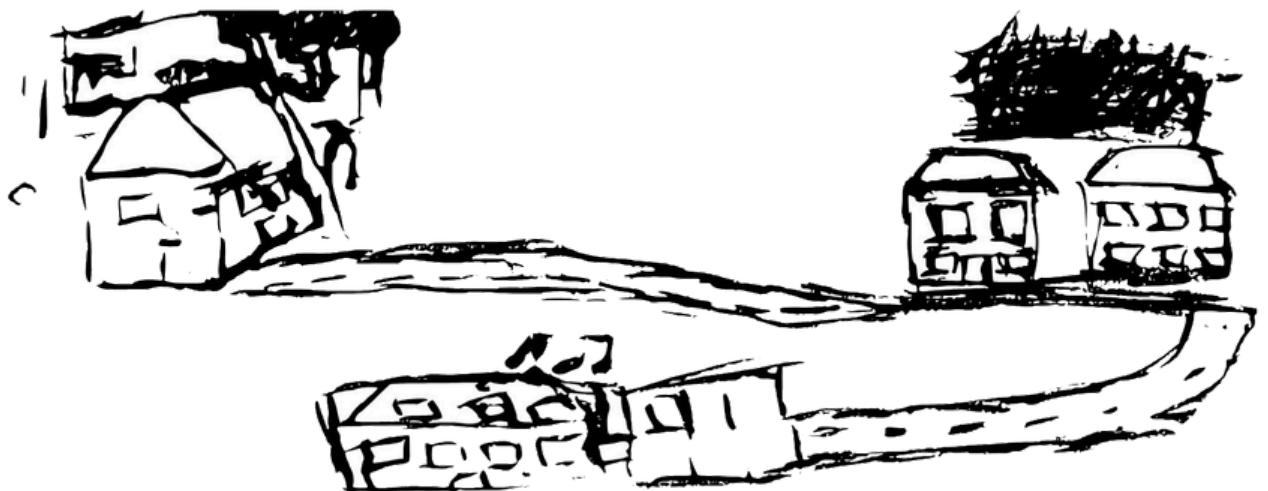
Highlights

All facilitators noted moments of impact throughout the first residential weekend, moments where young people discovered things about themselves, moments when young people started to identify as creatives, moments of understanding, collaboration, persistence, and genuine moments of breakthrough. These moments acted as inspiration for the facilitators. Although there were challenges in the first phase of the delivery of this project facilitators were excited and inspired with and by the young people, hopeful for the next residential in Galway, and the culmination of the event later in the year.

Discussion -Section 2

(following the 2nd residential in Galway,
September 2025)

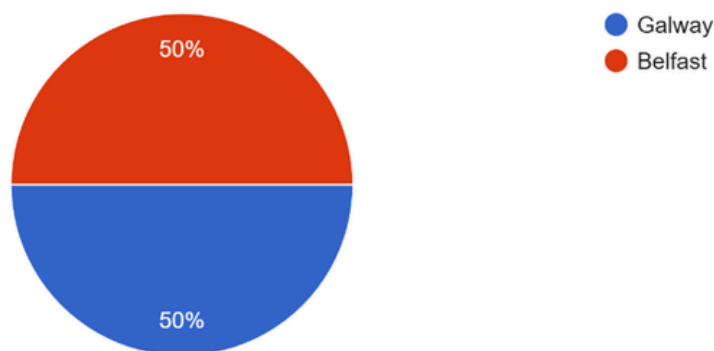
Following a break during the summer months of July and August the groups reconvened separately on a weekly basis in Belfast and Galway, a new facilitator joined the Belfast group as Aoibh went on maternity leave. Maria continued as the main facilitator in Galway and led (alongside others) the residential in Galway in September.



Young People

Feedback was gathered through a survey and discussion at the residential in Galway. During this residential the YP stayed in Galway and worked in the Macnas building in Athenry and in the Macnas space in Galway City. 22 YP attended, and the response rate to the survey was 100%. The group was evenly split between Galway and Belfast participants.

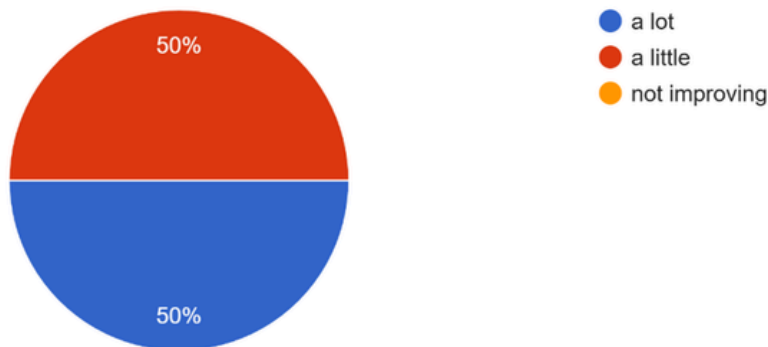
I am from
22 responses



We were curious to map any creative skill improvement/or not for the participants and we can see from the pie chart below that all YP stated their skills had improved.

Are your creative skills improving throughout this project ?

22 responses



Following this we were keen to understand the types of skills the YP had gained and asked, we asked, **what skills have you gained by being part of this project?** We can see from the answers below that the skills listed vary from social skills e.g. confidence to creative skills e.g. prop making.

"Gained more confidence"

"I've become more comfortable with performing"

"Prop making - making props in Athenry with Macnas"

"I feel that I'm getting better with performance and I'm learning more about how parades are organised"

"Acting a bit and socialising"

"I like making the performance and marches"

"Acting and design"

"Parade work and walking in a parade in training"

"Making props and costumes in knowing how to add different fabrics and colours to create it as a whole I have gained more on working as part of an ensemble something that I have already had loads of experience on but learning new things every time"

"I have become more confident with my creative skills"

"Theatre skills when doing this project"

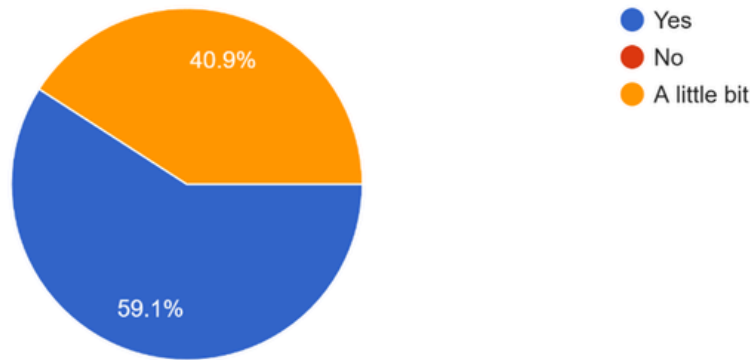
"I've become a lot more comfortable at character work, and moving as a character"

"Branching out into other types of theatre-improving movements and how to portray characters"

Alongside creative skills we were keen to gather data on the development/or not of social skills of the YP. We can see below that all YP noted an improvement of their social skills.

Are your social skills improving by being part of this project?

22 responses



We then asked what social skills have improved for you?

"Talking to new people"

"Meeting new people with different backgrounds"

"I've found that I really like getting to know new people"

"Talking to new people, teamwork, more confident around others"

"I feel that I've been more able to speak to people who feel strange/other to me, the Belfast troupe"

"Getting to hear other points of view and be able to discuss them"

"For me, I'm finding it easier to communicate with new people, and it's become easier for me to make new friends"

"Talking to people I wouldn't usually talk to, enjoying conversations with new people, getting out of my comfort zone"

"Talking to people and putting myself out there"

"Meeting new people from a different place than me"

"I am feeling more confident in talking to new people and contributing my ideas to chats"

"I've been talking more with the Belfast group. Last residential was a little awkward due to it being our first interaction but now there is more comfort. Also, more confidence since I said yes to being the only performer on a float for this parade"

"Being confident in myself and my personality and talking to me"

"Becoming more confident about myself"

We can see from the responses that the YP are recognising and articulating their increased ability to engage with new people with improved confidence.

Following this we discussed what was challenging as part of the project, the most prominent challenge was cited as the performance skills that were required for the parade, the length of rehearsals was challenging for some also, we see that evidence in the feedback from the YP below.

What has been the most challenging aspect of the project so far?

"Being asked to move as a certain character (e.g. villain, hero) and the light/heavy walking exercises"

"The days are long. Going from about 9am to 6pm is tough especially if you're in a group that's travelled far."

"Getting out of my comfort zone- meeting a new group and collaborating with them, doing creative exercises that I haven't done before"

"Getting into different characters and emotions that I wouldn't have experienced as much or have been as comfortable with."

Alongside the challenges the YP had many highlights;

"Staying overnight on residential to Corrymeela it was great to get to hang out with everyone and get to get a feel for performing together"

"Meeting other people and getting to be creative with making different props"

"I really enjoyed the process of making my props in the warehouse at Athenry. The instructors were all really helpful, and I was very happy with the role I was given in the parade"

"I love creating new costumes for the parade and working with new people through it. I find it very enjoyable"

"Being in the workshop in Athenry has been really fun and designing a part of a costume, also performing back at the Galway hub outside on a sunny day"

"The residentials and meeting the people from Galway"

"Practicing the parade with everyone and watching how it is slowly coming together"

"I really really loved getting to go up to Belfast and see a tour of both sides of the city, I learnt so much from the tour of the peace walls. I also loved getting to spend time with the group"

"Having the opportunity to be part of creating a parade rather than just being a performer. Instead of instruction, you're doing this he's doing that type of thing, we have the chance to actually build a parade and be directors"

"Meeting the groups and hanging out together in Corrymeela, visiting the workshop and seeing how puppets and costumes are made"

To understand how the YP were feeling at the end of the second stage of the project but also close to the final event we asked them to describe how they were feeling about the project at this stage.

17 YP replied that they were nervous, the next most prominent reply was excited and other replies included, iffy, anxious, confused, prepared, supported, influential, confident, love, scared, new, different, shy, fun, scared, Alright, Positive, happy, inspired, creative unsure, worried, costume, confident, doubtful, all right and good.

The YP took the time to look toward the final event and convey any worries they had. The quotes below are a sample of the responses;

“Doing the performing”

“Not really worried just more wanting to spend time to get our routines a bit more structured but I know that we will get that done”

“No, I feel confident and I really like the group we have”

“That my performance won't be good and I won't enjoy it”

“Messing up during the parade and ruining it for everyone”

“I'm not really worried about anything, I'm excited to continue working on the project”

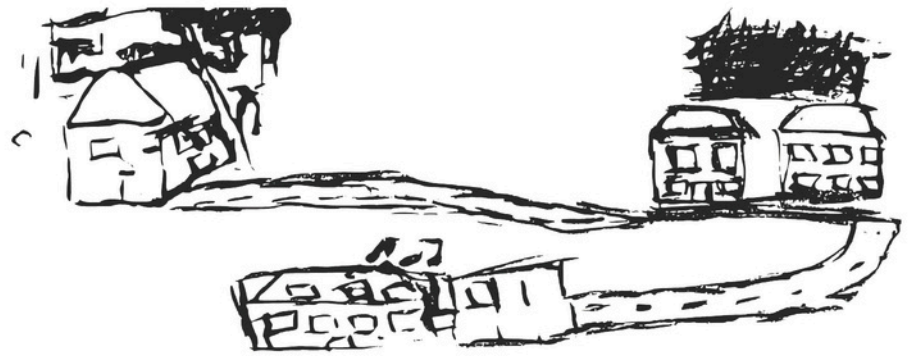
“I feel like we have nothing done and won't get it done in time”

“Doing the parade”

“The parade as I might get the actions wrong”

“Being in sync with rest of the group”

The data from the YP after the second stage of delivery of the project shows that the young people were inquisitive about the work and one another, showing evidence of questioning and reflection throughout. The YP displayed creative and imaginative approaches to the process by embracing playfulness and using their intuition to develop characters and stories. The YP were persistent and disciplined when things were hard, they showed grit and found ways of reflecting and working through problems. The YP collaborated and cooperated with one another and the facilitators and left the second stage excited and nervous about the final event.



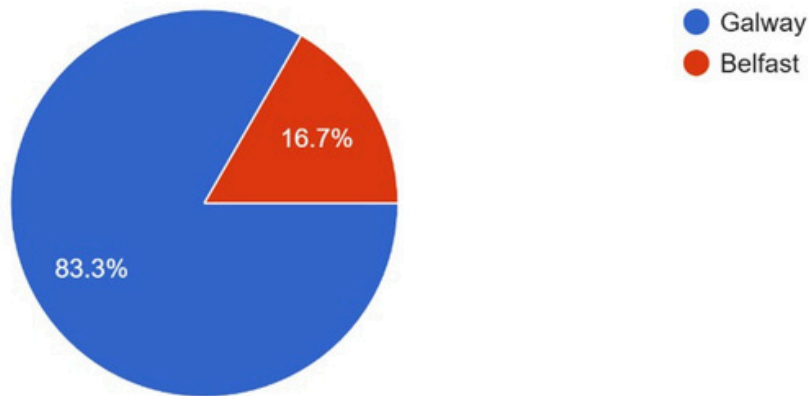
Discussion -Section 3

(the final stage)

Feedback was gathered from young people through a survey, and interviews were held with the creative director of Macnas, the leader of FPh, and the facilitator working with the Belfast group. The final parade was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions and unfortunately, although a huge effort was made by the lead partner, another opportunity for the young people to come together and perform their work could not be rescheduled.

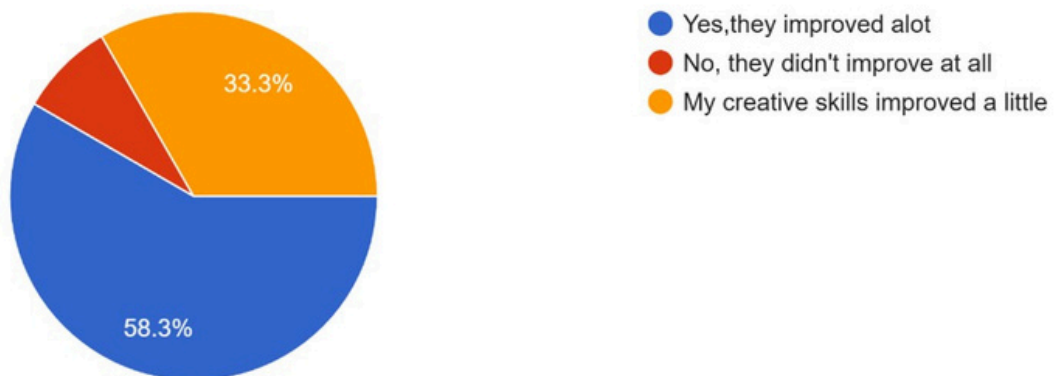
Young People

I am from
12 responses



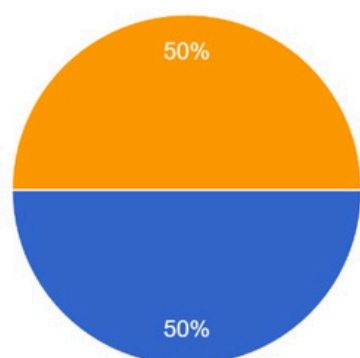
Most responses at the final stage of the project came from young people from Galway with only 2 young people from Belfast responding to the last survey opportunity.

Did your creative skills improve by being part of this project
12 responses



Did your social skills improve by being part of this project?

12 responses



- Yes, my social skills improved a lot
- No, my social skills did not improve at all
- My social skills improved a little

This project delivered strong outcomes across young people's wellbeing, skills development, and cross-community reconciliation, as evidenced through participant feedback from Macnas (Galway) and west and east Belfast. Overall, young people from Macnas (Galway) and west and east Belfast described the project as a highly positive, memorable, and meaningful experience. Despite disappointment that the final parade did not take place, participants consistently emphasised that the process itself was deeply rewarding, socially impactful, and creatively enriching.

Wellbeing and emotional resilience

The project made a strong contribution to young people's emotional wellbeing. Participants consistently described feelings of enjoyment, fulfilment, pride, and gratitude, particularly in relation to the residencies and shared creative experiences. These moments supported a sense of belonging, routine, and emotional safety.

Although the cancellation of the final parade caused disappointment, young people demonstrated resilience and emotional maturity, acknowledging their feelings while still valuing the overall experience.

"I am sad about the end but happy to have done something like this."

"The days were long but always action planned. I'm delighted and fulfilled that I had the opportunity to be part of this project."

"I felt very disappointed that it didn't happen in the end... though I learned a lot throughout the whole project."

Participants also reflected on learning how to manage energy levels, emotions, and personal boundaries in busy group settings, further supporting wellbeing outcomes.

"I learned about my limits and boundaries in social settings and how well I can share a room."

Skills Development: creative, social and leadership Skills

Young people reported significant development in creative skills, including improvisation, performance, movement, character work, and costume creation. Many described increased confidence in performing and speaking in front of others, with several expressing motivation to continue engaging in creative arts beyond the project.

"I've learned that I really love performing — it's opened me up to taking part in other creative projects in my community."

"I learned how to be more comfortable performing and talking in front of others by doing fun stuff and games."

The project also strengthened social and collaborative skills. Participants reflected on learning how to work effectively in groups, adapt to different working styles, and collaborate with people they had never met before.

"I learned how to work with another group that we had never met before... and we all learned how to work together."

"It improved my social skills so much and I feel so happy that I joined."

Leadership development was a notable outcome for several young people, supported by mentoring and structured responsibility.

"I learned that I have very strong skills in leadership. I just needed the right mentorship to develop that skill."

Cross-Community reconciliation and cultural understanding

Cross-community engagement was a defining strength of the project. Young people valued meeting peers from Galway and west and east Belfast, learning about diverse backgrounds, and sharing creative and social experiences across communities.

"I really enjoy learning about other people's background and culture."

"It was so much fun meeting everyone and friendships were built instantly."

Residentials and travel were particularly impactful in deepening understanding and connection, offering informal opportunities for conversation, shared living, and mutual learning.

"We got such a beautiful in-depth tour of both sides of Belfast, and it was really nice to share that with the other group."

"Corrymeela taught me a lot about how I work in a group dynamic and sharing space."

Participants expressed pride in being part of a project that promoted cooperation, shared storytelling, and cross-border collaboration.

"I felt very proud to help promote cross-border cooperation and storytelling."

Participation, voice, and agency

Young people felt actively involved in the creative process and appreciated having opportunities to contribute ideas, make decisions, and take ownership of roles and costumes. The balance between structure and flexibility was seen as supportive of participation and agency.

"I loved being able to create my costume and choose my own character."

"I like planning things and being involved in how it came together."

Feedback also showed that young people felt comfortable expressing honest reflections, including areas for improvement, demonstrating trust in the process and facilitators.

"I wish we would've had more time to socialise with the Belfast group."

Overall impact and legacy

Despite the final parade not taking place, the project achieved its core outcomes. Young people reported lasting impacts on confidence, wellbeing, creativity, and relationships. Many expressed hope for future projects and described the experience as special and valuable.

"Even though the parade didn't happen, I feel very happy with my progress in terms of creativity and social skills."

"It was really valuable and really special for me."

The project demonstrates that process-led, relationship-centred youth arts practice can deliver meaningful, long-term impact aligned with funder priorities, even when external circumstances prevent planned public outcomes.

Facilitator

(The feedback from the facilitator is discussed under themes below)

Youth engagement and development through residential workshops

The facilitator highlighted significant improvements in participants' skills, confidence, and enthusiasm, noting that the Galway setting positively influenced both the Belfast and groups, who had initially struggled to engage. The involvement of a fight choreographer provided structured physical training and maintained momentum for the young people in Belfast. These experiences provided opportunities for increased youth confidence, creativity, and personal development, demonstrating the benefits of immersive arts engagement in fostering skill development and resilience.

Facilitator challenges and relationship-building

Facilitators faced specific challenges with certain groups, particularly in Belfast, where participants were initially resistant to engagement. The facilitator described the pressure of establishing credibility and trust within a limited period, noting that a smoother handover from the previous facilitator and more time for relationship-building could have improved outcomes. This highlights the importance of sustained mentoring and supportive facilitation in cross-community youth projects, reinforcing youth agency and enabling meaningful participation.

Cultural and socioeconomic dynamics

Working with teenagers from different regions revealed cultural and socioeconomic differences that impacted group cohesion. Galway participants often came from more privileged backgrounds with greater access to arts opportunities, whereas Belfast participants faced additional barriers to engagement.

Specific challenges included managing behaviour, fostering inclusivity, and addressing feelings of isolation among participants. These observations reinforce the need for a focus on promoting cultural understanding and equality in arts participation, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches that consider diverse backgrounds.

Project organisation and communication challenges

The facilitator noted that several structural challenges affected the project, including communication issues, unequal skill levels, and resistance from some participants to certain activities (e.g., wearing wolf masks). Facilitators noted that matching similar groups could have improved cohesion. Additionally, a breakdown in communication between organisations in Belfast along with the cancellation of events, such as the youth parade, hampered project delivery. These challenges were unexpected and frustrating for the facilitator and highlight the critical role of communication, buy in and equitable participation in ensuring the process can be trusted for the young people involved.

Impact of event cancellations and youth disappointment

The cancellation of the youth parade due to weather, and organisational tensions left participants without closure and in some cases overshadowed their achievements. Facilitators reflected on the importance of prioritizing young people's experiences over adult conflicts and noted that increased collaboration with participants could have mitigated disappointment. This underscores the importance of fostering youth voice, agency, and engagement in decision-making, illustrating the significance of valuing young people's contributions in arts projects and having clear communication pathways and buy in from all lead partners and people.

Organisational

(organisational feedback was gathered from Macnas and Féile na Phobail and is presented under thematic headings below)

Logistics

Despite extensive negotiation efforts the logistical challenges of managing a project across different organisations and locations contributed to organisational, participant and facilitator frustration at times and especially at the end stage of the project. This experience underscores the critical role of timely communication and collaborative commitment in multi-agency youth arts projects. The project faced logistical, cultural, and weather-related barriers that prevented the full realization of intended outcomes. Reflections highlighted potential improvements for future initiatives, including fostering stronger cross-jurisdictional involvement. These insights demonstrate the value of adaptive project design and responsive planning in delivering meaningful youth arts engagement.

The delivery of this project placed pressure on the lead personnel in Macnas, compromising capacity to reach on day-to-day responsibilities. The project's complexity went far beyond standard operations, driven by intricate logistics, sensitive stakeholder relationships, political dynamics, shifting personnel, and diverse residential organisations. Layered on top were critical safeguarding requirements, alongside the demands of both facilitator and artistic leadership. The cumulative effect of these challenges created sustained operational strain, highlighting the exceptional demands this project placed on leadership and the organisation as a whole. Future iterations of work of this complexity require additional project management support.

Youth program recruitment and participation

Recruitment for youth programs, particularly in Belfast, proved challenging, with limited responses from an open call approach. Discussions emphasized the differences in learning outcomes for participants with and without prior performance experience, highlighting the importance of balancing skill development with inclusive participation. Despite recruitment challenges, the program positively impacted participants from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating that meaningful engagement often requires embracing complexity and tailoring approaches to individual strengths and experiences.

The role of the facilitator

The project demonstrated flexibility in accommodating different participant strengths and roles. The skill of the facilitator was key to success, facilitators faced difficulties due to staffing changes, while external factors such as weather-related cancellations impacted program delivery. These experiences underscore the importance of adaptive planning and robust and highly skilled facilitator support in maintaining continuity and participant engagement in youth arts programs.

Cross-Community youth project challenges

Projects involving young people from different communities revealed the need for additional time to build trust and stronger logistical support. The benefits of residential components in fostering relationships, suggesting that more intensive, camp-style programs with fewer but longer sessions enhanced impact. The discussions emphasised that in cross-community contexts, the journey and relationship-building process are as important as final performances, and that dedicated project management is critical for navigating complex community dynamics and building buy in.

Partnership and collaboration challenges in Belfast

A breakdown in communication between organisations, and the density of Christmas schedules created additional obstacles in the rescheduling of the final parade. Project leaders actively worked to mend relationships and facilitate collaboration, recognizing that historical divides could limit opportunities for young people but unfortunately communication broke down and a reschedule of the finale event was not possible. Reflections highlighted the need for trust-building, transparency, and shared understanding to ensure future cross-organisational collaboration benefits youth engagement and community cohesion.

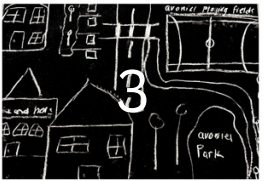
Key Lessons & Recommendations



Build Time for Trust & Relationship Development – allow longer preparatory phases focused on process, learning, and adaptability



Equitable Experience Across Jurisdictions – ensure cross-community parity in workshops, communication, and rehearsal opportunities



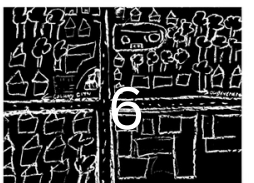
Contingency Planning – plan for performance cancellations and include alternative closure events to maintain participant wellbeing



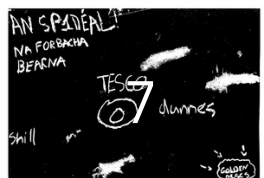
Flexible Pedagogy – adapt workshops to participant experience levels, encouraging creative experimentation while maintaining support.



Project Manager- recruit a project manager for future projects of this scale



Buy in- ensure key people in key partner organisations are regularly involved in planning, reflection, and feedback throughout project



Process-Centred Evaluation – embed creative, reflective evaluation methods that foreground youth voice

Conclusion

Future Parade 2024–2025 successfully delivered a process-driven, youth-centred creative experience, fostering wellbeing, skill development, and cross-community dialogue. Despite challenges, including the cancellation of the final parade, young people demonstrated resilience, creativity, and agency, and facilitators and organisations gained insights into effective cross-community youth arts practice.



The project exemplifies how process-led arts engagement can create meaningful and lasting impact, aligned with Creative Ireland’s priorities for youth creativity, participation, and inclusion. Lessons from this project will inform future iterations, supporting more robust planning, equitable participation, and enhanced creative outcomes for young people across jurisdictions.

Where Culture Cross

*Collaborative Poem with participants from Galway and Belfast – Facilitated by
Aoibh Johnson at the Corrymeela Retreat*

Hues of the sun dance on the waves
We come together through thick and thin
I come from a place where there is an abundance of diversity
But each day more young people spread their wings like birds
We carry on our language, passing it on to the next generation

I come from a place where community is close
I come from a place that has two types of community's

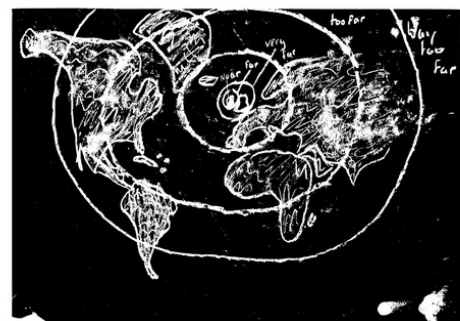
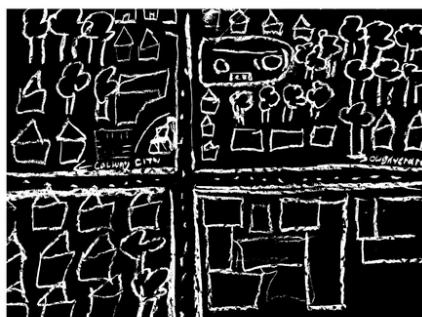
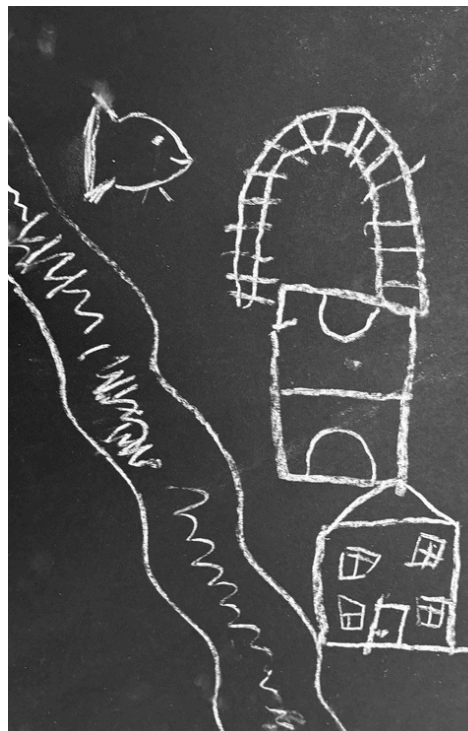
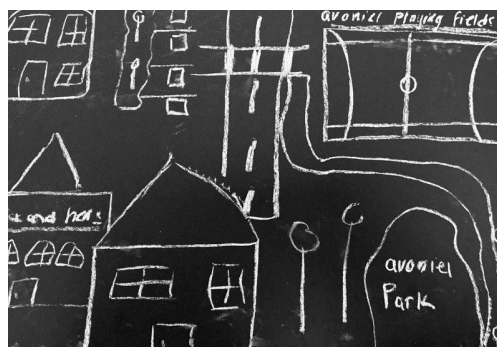
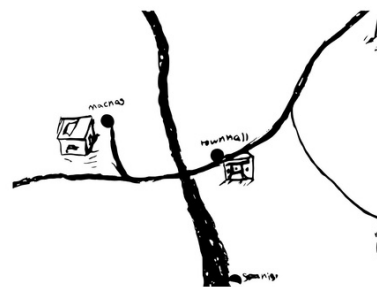
Vibrant
Home
Colourful
Secure
Proud
Dreams
Culture

In Belfast we always remember our history, here we carry it on our backs
Now we come together as a pack
Discrimination happens everywhere
Galway, Belfast it's always there
Although we are an open place sometimes, we tend to judge by face
Many come with troubled minds, but there is always something good to find

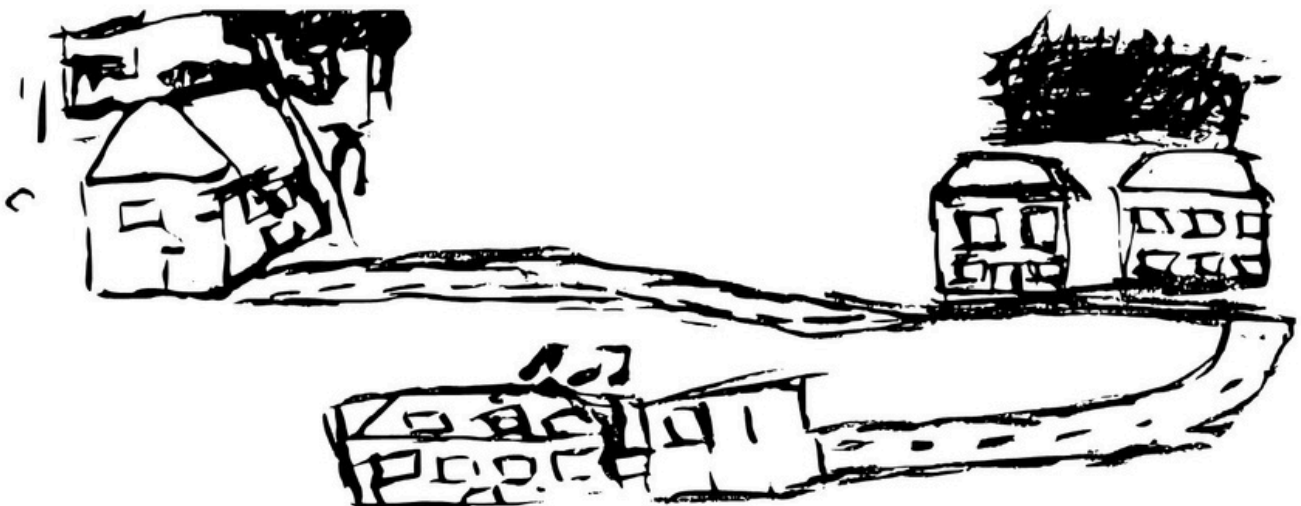
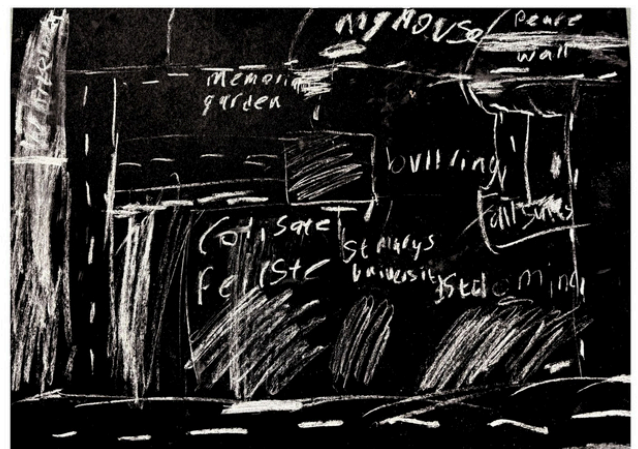
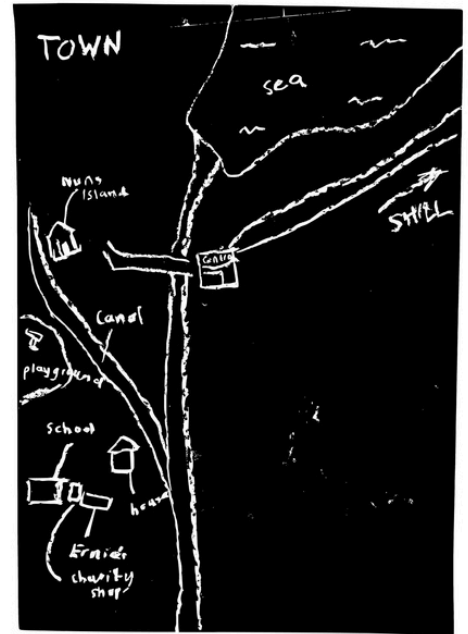
The streets are cobbled with culture and rain
With culture and rain
A city with art and soul the same
I come from a city where music dominates the streets
In Galway and Belfast we feel the beat

With Féile and Macnas people move, up, down, fast
We share the same island but not the same past
Together we're class, united and free.
In community is where we should be.

Postcards created by participants from Galway and Belfast - Workshop facilitated by Starling Start - Amberlea Neely



FUTURE PARADE POSTCARDS



Acknowledgements

Macnas Future Parade partners:

Belfast International Arts Festival, EastSide Arts, and Féile an Phobail

Lead Artists: Maria Tivnan, Aoibh Johnson, Carley Magee, James Riordan, Lisa Sweeney, Philip Rafferty and Starling Start.

Belfast Youth Groups: Newhill Youth Community Centre, Ledly Hall, Lead by youth workers Jodie Floyd, Mick McCallister and Rachel McLaughlin

Postcards created by participants from Galway and Belfast - Workshop facilitated by Starling Start - Amberlea Neely

Collaborative Poem with participants from Galway and Belfast - Facilitated by Aoibh Johnson at the Corrymeela Retreat.

Project Evaluation: Paula Phelan, Traverso

Video by Neo Digital Media @neodigitalmedia9046
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk5PkKQWiDo&t=130s

Creative
Youth

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Shared Island
Initiative

macnas


Féile an Phobail
IRELAND'S BIGGEST COMMUNITY ARTS FESTIVAL

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ARTS

BELFAST
INTERNATIONAL
ARTS
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