

Jan - Dec 2023  
Impact Report

Think  
CIRCUS



# Who are Think Circus?

We are Edinburgh's community circus, improving lives through play and connection. Based in Leith, Think Circus SCIO exists to share circus arts with the people who can benefit the most. We believe that creativity and playfulness should be possible in everyone's life.

We take circus beyond the Big Top and bring it to people across Scotland. Circus can seem impossible at first, but we make it easy and accessible to learn. This unlocks new levels of confidence, fun and wellbeing for young people and children, and helps people of all ages to build new friendships and skills in a positive and social environment.



## What we are trying to do:

Our mission is to take circus beyond the big top, contributing to a happier, healthier society. We are driven by core values of connection, quality and playfulness. We aim for:

- Circus to be accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic circumstances, experience of arts and sport, or ability.
- Circus to be recognized as a distinct artform - a unique blend of physical skill and visual theatre.
- Scotland to be seen as a place where talent is nurtured, and innovative practice is developed through collaboration.
- Circus artists to be supported at each stage of their journey, from first picking up a circus prop to making their first act, to going on tour or producing their own work.
- Collaboration across our sector, including sharing our business model, learning and practices generously, so that social circus can be delivered across Scotland and the UK.



## How we do it:

Circus is all about creative physicality; pushing the limits of what is possible. Audiences, artists and participants can discover that their perceptions of possibility can be re-imagined, which helps to overcome fear of failure and build confidence. It also leads to regular creative and physical practice, participating in arts and culture, and feeling an increased sense of belonging. Circus is an unexpected way to engage children and young people who might not think the arts are for them, and a much-needed way for adults to rediscover their playful, creative side.



### **Community - Youth and Education:**

Projects based in Leith, Granton and Craigmillar, which are free of charge, or pay-what-you-feel. We run weekly classes for ages 5-11, a Teen Circus Club, Girls Forest Circus, community 'jams', and Sunday Family Circus. We run school circus days and projects. We also offer online courses for adults in juggling, hula hoop, poi and the history of Scottish circus.



### **Artist Development:**

Our approach is to facilitate growth for artists, however small their next step may be, so that they are equipped and supported as they continue in their chosen career. We host workshops, masterclasses and creation sessions, and participate in and run sector events such as festival HoopScotch.



### **Shows and Performances:**

We create circus acts and shows for a variety of audiences, both through public events such as WestFest, gala days and festivals, and for private bookings. We work with over 60 artists and operate as an agency and production house on a small scale to support touring work and circus performance across Scotland. We also make artistic commissions each year.

## Letter from Kat

Kat Borrowdale, Think Circus'  
Executive Director and founder



When I first picked up a hula hoop, I had no idea it would change the next decade of my life, let alone that it would lead to sharing the fun of circus with thousands of people in Scotland. Since Think Circus came into being in 2017, it's grown a lot, but at its core it is still all about helping people to find their confidence, overcoming fear of failure, and connecting with others.

2023 was a year of big transitions, in a challenging landscape. Most significantly, Think Circus became a registered charity. We were previously a Community Interest Company, and in practice we still operate as a social enterprise, using our traded income from events services to make our community programmes less reliant on grants. Becoming a SCIO has made it easier for us to access support, and gain recognition for what we do.

In the light of funding cuts across the UK, and the cost of living crisis affecting our participants, we are concentrating on our core programmes in 2024, to build a firm foundation for the future. We want to keep bringing moments of awe and levity into the everyday.

Thank you for being part of the story so far!

School Workshop

# Highlights

**2,482** unique visits to our community sessions

**10,650** participants in circus workshops



**37**

Girls Forest Circus regular participants

**21**

Teen Circus participants

**34**

5-11s classes and circus camps participants

**11**

artist development workshops hosted

**68**

community groups we worked with

**75**

one-off community workshops delivered



207

Event bookings including galas, festivals and community events

71 clients

53 artists supported

58%

of clients booked more than once



## Community Projects

including Winter Skate and Circus and Parade to the Park

248 workshop participants

270 attended our celebration events



72

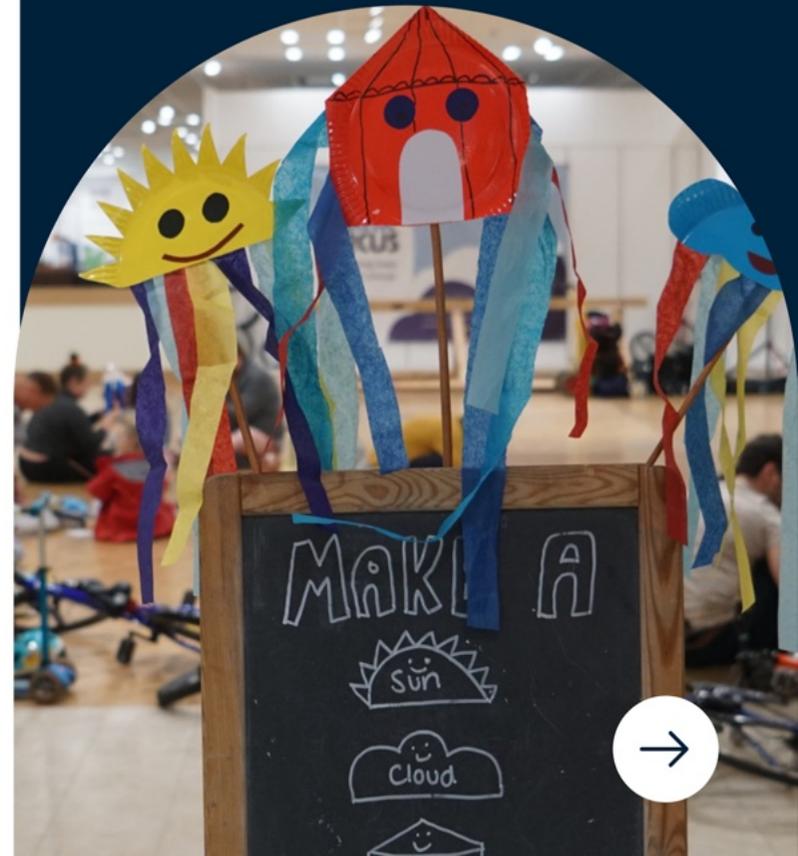
members of community jam group

205

volunteer hours donated

1275

hours of free rehearsal space provided to artists



## What we achieved:

2023 saw many new milestones for Think Circus, including running two circus camps, taking on a Lead Circus Tutor as a staff position, our transition from CIC to SCIO, and management of a community circus space at Ocean Terminal, as part of the Wee Hub community takeover of a former Debenhams unit. The delivery of open circus drop-in sessions made a huge impact in our levels of engagement and ability to reach new audiences and wider demographics. We are enormously proud of our achievements over this year. This will help Think Circus to thrive in the long-term so we are better able to support our participants.

### Winter Skate and Circus:

We delivered 8 sessions for families, including 52 children and 11 adults. 16% of participants came from postcodes listed in SIMD1 and SIMD2. 20 participants attended 3 or more sessions. Parents, guardians and children learned circus and roller skating, and connected to ongoing learning opportunities such as our Sunday community circus session.



### Lead Circus Tutor Role:

Between Jan-Jun 2023 we trialled the position of Lead Circus Tutor as a staff role, with Robert Gallagher-Lyall joining the team. The pilot went well and we are seeking support to reprise this role in the future. Highlights included the creation of a new KPI framework for assessing progress in participants, trialling two circus camps, and improved continuity for classes.



### Cabarets and HoopScotch:

As part of our residency at Ocean Terminal, we delivered four circus cabaret events with 270 audience members, showcasing new material from circus professionals and internationally renowned artists alongside performers from our Teen Circus Club. Tickets were by donation and all events were family friendly, allowing us to reach new audiences.



I love circus class. If I had to choose between a hundred bars of chocolate and this class, I'd choose this class! -  
Nina, age 9

Think Circus has been very well received. We often hear from LGBT young people that sport and physical exercise isn't for them. This often comes from poor experiences at school, or gendered sports. We have seen an increase in confidence and development of new skills in a very short amount of time.”  
-- Partnership Manager, LGBT Youth Scotland

I have seen my child's level of perseverance improve, as well as their creativity, confidence and fun in life!  
Parent of youth class participant



### **New Website and Booking System:**

We launched our new website in November, led by Emily Donaldson (Media Co-ordinator) and digital consultant Jules Derevycka (Gently Created). Jules also built us a bespoke booking system, so we can now support more artists and clients.

### **A Night in the Stars:**

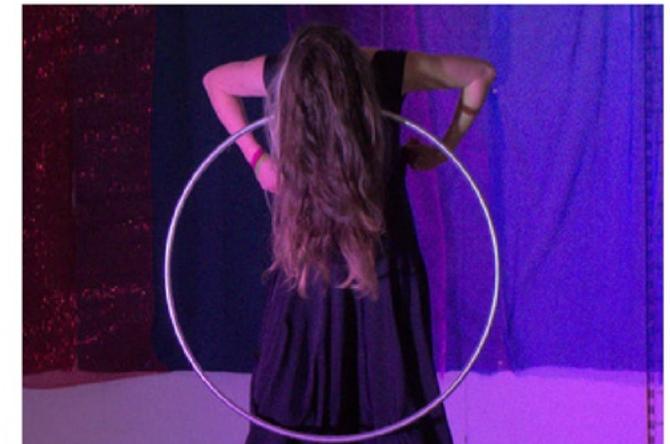
We produced an original piece of circus theatre, featuring Callum Donald (acrobatics) and Antonia Maerker (juggling) in collaboration with Edinburgh Science. This piece was inspired by the James Webb Space Telescope and our research included consultation with an astrophysicist about concepts of time and light. The piece premiered at the Science Festivals Lates programme.

### **Parade to the Park:**

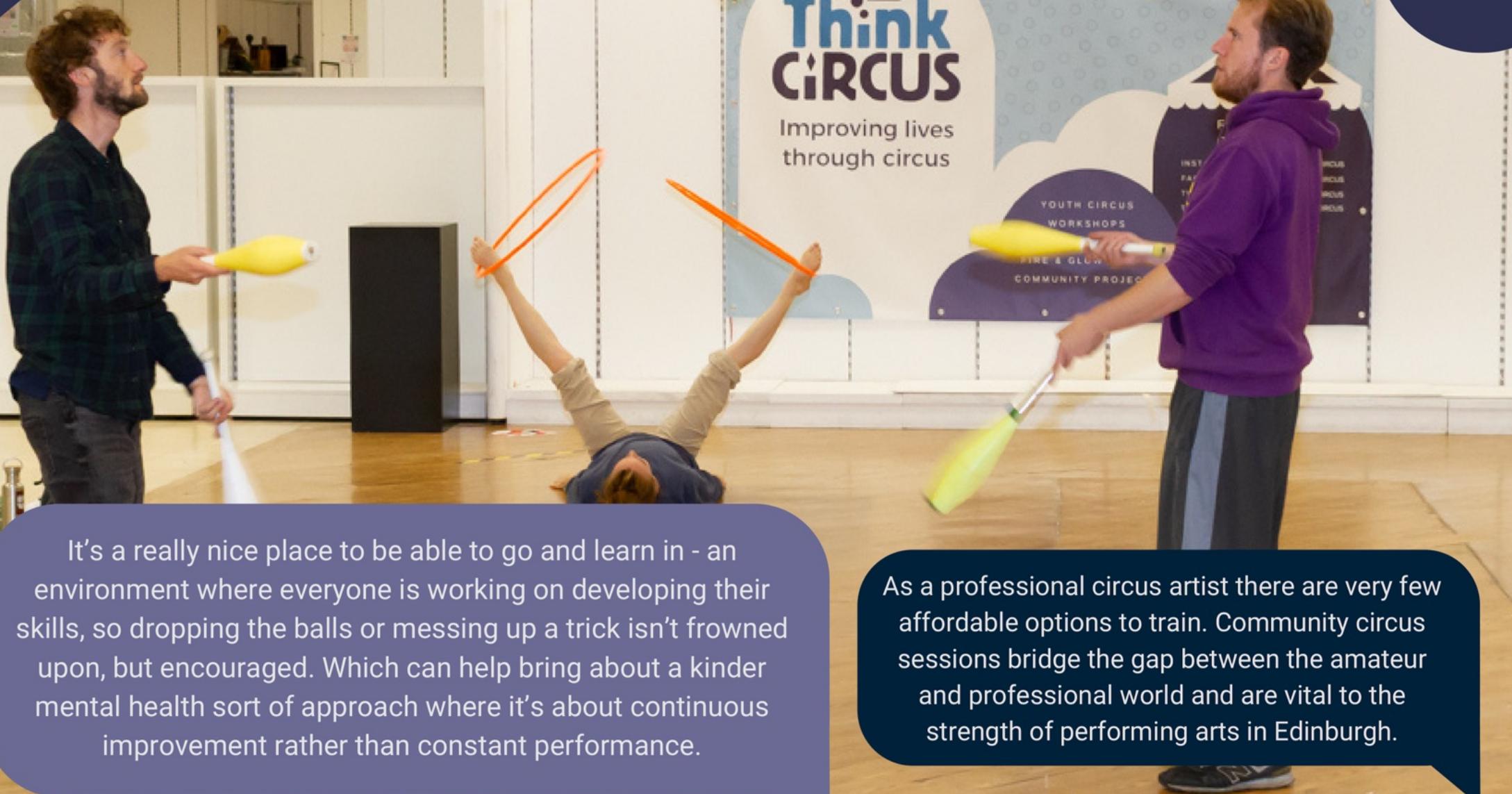
Workshops were delivered to six community groups comprising 270 participants across Leith: Sikh Sanjog, Kin Collective, LGBT Youth, the Wee Museum of Memory and Dnipro Kids. We also created a transportable mural with artist Sarah Wakeford visiting our circus classes for inspiration. The project culminated in a parade to Victoria Park, where workshops and circus shows took place.

### **HoopScotch Hoop Festival:**

The festival invites professionals, hobbyists and beginners to come together to celebrate all things hula hoop. Masterclasses were taught by Marianna de Sanctis, Jusztina Hermann and Jennifer Street. A social Sunday and free community hula hoop workshop encouraged community connections and included artists, members of Teen Circus, family sessions and our volunteer team.



Without community circus jams it would be really difficult to find a space where we could develop new or already existing circus skills with such a level of accessibility and care about community.



It's a really nice place to be able to go and learn in - an environment where everyone is working on developing their skills, so dropping the balls or messing up a trick isn't frowned upon, but encouraged. Which can help bring about a kinder mental health sort of approach where it's about continuous improvement rather than constant performance.

As a professional circus artist there are very few affordable options to train. Community circus sessions bridge the gap between the amateur and professional world and are vital to the strength of performing arts in Edinburgh.

## How we operate:

**Safeguarding:** Working with children and young people is integral to our model and we take our responsibilities extremely seriously. Through consultation with our teaching team and via good practice sharing from CircusWorks and EYCO (the European Youth Circus Organisation) we have developed detailed safeguarding policies and procedures (accessible on our website for all participants and parents/guardians to view). We share these policies with all staff and freelancers, but we intend to produce a short online learning module covering our procedures and providing opportunity for dialogue.

**Safe Practices:** We share practice with youth organisations (e.g YMCA via InTandem) and techniques for keeping participants safe and healthy (ie. Warmups, cooldowns, injury prevention) from CircusWorks and via the expertise of our teaching team.

**Sustainability:** We are currently conducting a review of our Sustainability practices, with the aim of creating a policy which will include travel and materials procedures and incentives for sustainable choices. This is being done as a wide consultation with our freelance team, as our performance work spans across all of Scotland and includes 50 freelance performers.

**Governance:** by early 2024 we will have completed an Equality and Diversity Audit of our Board, staff and freelancers, and intend to identify goals we can work towards over 2024. We anticipate that our next recruitment for both Board and freelancer positions will have an explicit focus on better reflecting the society we live in.





# Thanks:

We are extremely grateful for the kind support of our supporters, volunteers, collaborators, staff members, freelance performers and participants. Special thanks goes to the team at THELMA who invited us to be part of the Wee Hub at Ocean Terminal.

Thank you to our Crowdfunders who supported the development of Cloud Nine in 2022-23. The equipment and engagement you donated to is still going strong.

A huge thanks to our Funders and sponsors for making our community projects possible:



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THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

Circus in Leith



**Think  
CIRCUS**

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