

BLACKPOOL CULTURAL STRATEGY 2024 – 2030 CASE STUDIES

April 2024



CONTENTS

- 1 Highlighted cultural organisations in Blackpool
- 2 Case studies

Commissioned on behalf of the
town and its cultural community by



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

With the support of

ctconsults.

The Intelligence Agency

Images courtesy:
Cover – House of Wingz
Back cover – The Comedy Carpet, Gordon Young

1. HIGHLIGHTED CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS IN BLACKPOOL

Abingdon Studios

Since 2013, Abingdon Studios has provided a safe space and ambitious platform for the development of artistic and creative communities in Blackpool through studio, project space and off-site commissioning and partnership models. ABS invests in arts and culture to progress, share and connect contemporary societal and abstract ideas from grassroots level into international education and exhibition opportunities and is a leading independent artist-led provision in the northwest. Members go on to generate self-employed career goals as artists, curators, producers, performers and independent cultural and thought leaders locally and nationally.

Aunty Social

Founded in 2011, Aunty Social is a community arts organisation run by and for local marginalised people. They coordinate various specialist projects and groups focused on visual arts, crafts, film, local heritage, creative retail, arts reporting, and professional development. Among their initiatives are Queer Craft Club, Blackpool Community Darkroom, Blackpool Social Club online magazine, and an annual Film Festival. Volunteers play a significant role, with over 100 individuals contributing to events and activities. Since moving to their new Topping Street venue in 2022 (renovations funded by Historic England as part of Blackpool's Heritage Action Zone), they have been able to provide creative workshop and activity space, support smaller projects, produce new programmes of activity, and reach larger audiences. It provides a home to Reclaim Blackpool, a social activism group that campaigns for women's street safety, and AFRA – Blackpool's African Caribbean Association which is now embarking on building its own community archive.

Blackpool Illuminations and Lightpool Festival

The world-famous Illuminations need little introduction. There are six miles of traditional festoons and tableaux along Blackpool Promenade – commonly known as the greatest free light show on Earth! Lightpool celebrates the Illuminations by bringing contemporary light, projection, performance and fire artists to Blackpool to be inspired by the town's unique relationship with light.

Lightpool is a founding member of the Light Up the North network, where light festivals share their collective expertise to support both the development of the partner festivals and the wider sector. Through regional, national and international networking and collaboration LUTN nurtures artistic ambition through artist and producer development, co-commissioning and joint fundraising. The network is crucial when collaborating on international programming or commissioning new work from UK artists and brings the benefits of joined up thinking. LUTN's Shine programme nurtures and develops new talent, giving artists the opportunity to exhibit or perform new work at a number of Light Up the North festivals.

Blackpool Library Service

Blackpool library service provides a programme of activities and events across all libraries and social media including Children and families' activities and events, Leisure and interest clubs, Life skills and advice drop-in sessions, social and reading groups.

Blackpool library service operates across eight service points across the Blackpool local authority area, providing books, access to computers and Wi-Fi, and a place to spend time for

the local community. In addition, it provides a programme of large and small-scale events and activities including story and rhyme sessions, reading groups, leisure and interest clubs, tech and digital workshops, including VR, advice drop-in sessions and author and other cultural activities.

Current projects and partnerships include the development of an eco-hub at Palatine Library, holding Get It Loud and Libraries gigs and academies, an ACE-funded VR project in partnership with StoryFutures and The Reading Agency and the development of a 'Book Nook' in Abingdon Street Market.

Blackpool Music Hub

Blackpool Music Hub teaches up to 20 hours of music per school every week in 98% of Blackpool schools. We teach over 14,000 children every year in various vocal and music theatre initiatives. Our pre-school programme, Tiddly-om-pom-poms works with 2,300 families and was the first case study to be presented in the National Music Education Plan 2023. We also work in all our SEND schools, PRUs and Education Diversity. Every child in Blackpool is loaned a free musical instrumental and entitled to free music ensemble sessions. We believe that this is unique for any English Music Hub.

Our live music making is extensive at competitions and festivals performed at venues such as the Winter Gardens, Grand Theatre and Tower Ballroom. National delivery partners include the London Symphony Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra and Royal Opera House.

Blackpool & the Fylde College

Blackpool's cultural offer, ambition, and achievements far outweigh its proportions, and this is reflected in its educational offer. Blackpool School of Arts, part of Blackpool and The Fylde College, has attracted young creatives to the town since the 1930s and produced scores of artists and performers of note. Now, with plans for a £65m development for a new town centre Multiversity campus submitted, Blackpool looks to increase its offer and attract more creative students and apprentices who will find opportunities for development and hands-on experience in our cultural venues and organisations.

Grand Theatre

The Grand Theatre is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and plays host to West End drama, musicals, opera, ballet, contemporary dance, and stand-up comedy. The Grand co-commissions and produces new work and is a hub for amateur and community productions. Long-standing partnerships include the Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Opera House, Sadler's Wells Breakin' Convention, Children's Theatre Partnership and National Literacy Trust. The Grand Theatre's internationally renowned Story Led Resilience programme and transformational work with children, young people and families in the town has been acknowledged with the UK Theatre Award for Excellence in Arts Education and The Children & Young People Now Award for Arts & Culture.

The Grundy Art Gallery

The Grundy Art Gallery (The Grundy) is owned and operated by Blackpool Council. It is currently Blackpool's only nationally

accredited museum and has been an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation since 2012. The Grundy's year-round programme of contemporary art exhibitions and events and its award-winning engagement programme is recognized locally, regionally and increasingly internationally for its relevance and impact. In part, this programme is delivered in collaboration with a range of nationally and internationally significant partners such as Tate, Hayward Touring and Bloomberg New Contemporaries, while other activity is self-generated using the skills and experience of Grundy's small but ambitious team, and the community of creatives on the doorstep. The Grundy holds a collection of over 2000 items including works by established artists such as Chila Kumari Singh Burman MBE, Tracey Emin, Gilbert and George, Augustus John, and Eric Ravilious, alongside works by regionally based emerging talent such as Joe Fletcher Orr and Louise Giovanelli. The collection continues to grow via an ambitious and entrepreneurial approach to collection development and has a specific focus on the acquisition of light-based artworks.

HIVEArts

HIVEArts is a grassroots, non-profit enterprise that inspires and supports creatives by providing showcasing opportunities through exhibitions and events. Actively building the inclusive and accessible arts community we always dreamed of. Situated at HIVE Urban Farm Shop, 80-82 Church St Blackpool, HIVEArts continues to be a hub for fostering a dynamic and vibrant art community.

House of Wingz

House of Wingz (HoW), and its charitable arm Skool of Street, provides a cultural home for many people from global majority communities in Blackpool as well as those with multiple barriers to inclusion. The organisation recognises the power of Hip Hop cultural education to empower and transform communities in Blackpool. Skool of Street subsidises classes and runs government-funded school holiday activities and food programmes. It is also incredibly ambitious - seeking out high-quality performance opportunities for communities on both a national stage, e.g. Queen's Jubilee (2022), ITV's New Year's Big Bash (2023), and locally through co-production with organisations that include the Grand Theatre, LeftCoast and The Old Electric.

LeftCoast

LeftCoast is a team of seven creatives (and artistic associates) whose collaborative practice is socially-engaged, socially-useful and artistically ambitious. Established in 2013, it delivers Blackpool's Creative People and Places programme on behalf of Arts Council England, to help more residents take part in arts and culture. In 2023, LeftCoast's Wash Your Words community build was RIBA shortlisted and, currently, the National Lottery Community Fund is joint-funding a 'Permaculture Blackpool' programme across 6 Neighbourhood areas in the Town.

The Old Electric

The Old Electric is Blackpool's newest community theatre, producing bold and inventive productions that have community performers at their heart; The newly converted

building on Springfield Street offers shows to enjoy, activities to take part in, opportunities to learn, develop and grow, plus many more experiences, The Old Electric's purpose is to ensure that arts and creativity is accessible for all Blackpool communities.

Showtown

Showtown, Blackpool's new museum opens its doors to the public in March 2024. It features Britain's first permanent displays of circus, music, variety and ballroom dance, utilising Blackpool's internationally significant collections and loans from national partners and individuals. Located on Blackpool's Golden Mile, it will attract 230,000 visits annually, deliver 39 FTE jobs and provide £14.65m of regional economic benefit. Delivered by the Showtown History Centre, Blackpool's heritage collections, archives and local history resources for the town will relaunch in the beautiful surroundings of Blackpool Central Library.

TramShed

TramShed Theatre Company is a registered charity offering inclusive performing arts to all children, young people and adults, no matter what their background, experiences or needs. TramShed's work has a powerful, life-changing impact on participants, volunteers and audiences. No member at TramShed is excluded, only celebrated.

Tramtown

Heritage trams present a historic presence on Blackpool's seafront enjoyed by residents and holidaymakers alike since 1885. Heritage Tram Tours play a significant role in the tourism offer including the iconic illuminated feature cars that

run during the Illuminations. £10m capital investment is required to realise plans underway to re-develop and repurpose the historic 1935 tram shed into a dynamic heritage visitor attraction 'Tramtown'. This will preserve the nationally significant archive collection of Blackpool Heritage trams in perpetuity.

Winter Gardens

Winter Gardens Blackpool stands as a cultural beacon, its diverse event programme epitomising the rich tapestry of the town's artistic and entertainment heritage. This iconic venue hosts some of the biggest touring productions in the UK, alongside unique festivals that cater to a wide array of interests and tastes such as Rebellion, Soul, and Country. By hosting such a varied programme, Winter Gardens Blackpool reinforces its status as a pivotal cultural hub, attracting visitors from all corners, and contributing significantly to the town's cultural vibrancy and economic vitality.

Winter Gardens Blackpool, in collaboration with Encore Productions, is cultivating local talent, breaking down barriers in the arts, and celebrating diversity. With innovative strategies, including the use of digital technology, and a strong commitment to inclusivity, Encore plays a crucial role in transforming Blackpool's arts scene.

2. CASE STUDIES

ABINGDON STUDIOS

AN ARTIST-LED PLACE AND PLATFORM

Abingdon Studios is an artist-led, contemporary visual art studio / project space in the heart of Blackpool town centre – the only space of its kind within a 30 mile radius. It has 10 artist studios and a dedicated project space, and is a centre for talent development by mentoring artists to develop their practice, apply for funding and exhibit at local galleries, museums and art fairs. ABS artists have gone on to become members of the Royal Academy and have their work acquired by Manchester Art Gallery. The ABS Director is a visibly queer artist, coach and cultural leader in Blackpool exploring and understanding their identity as a result of having time, space and resources to think through their future and their creative making processes.

Kerry Tenbey is a non-binary visual artist and curator, born in Blackpool:

"I related to Abingdon Studios because it's artist-led, ambitious and their programme is of good and critical quality. The right environment for me to develop my work amongst peers. I also felt my identity wasn't going to be a taboo topic or required secret in a workspace, so I felt able to just be me and make my work".



THE OLD ELECTRIC

BUILDING OUR CREATIVE NETWORKS

As Blackpool's newest cultural organisation, The Old Electric is a key meeting place for artists, practitioners and organisations to embrace a spirit of transparency and an approach to sharing that supports a collaborative process for creative planning.

The OE hosts monthly meetings for those working professionally in the creative sector to meet, share ideas and plan future programme opportunities. The majority of attendees join via zoom and others choose to come into the venue; the latter providing an opportunity to continue conversations outside of the meeting format. These networking events mean that large organisations and solo artists can be represented equitably and to gain insight into networks of activity. Each month there are presentations which aim to showcase commissioning opportunities, funding streams, retrospective learning and strategic plans. Presenters have included Arts Council England, Factory International, Blackpool Council on Heritage Action Zones, and more. All details, presentations and links are collated into a Wakelet and shared with the ever-growing circulation list, which also serves as a useful archive of the meetings.

"...brilliant for staying connected and up to date with what is happening in Blackpool."

"Listening to other folks talk about what they do inspires me greatly."

"The network meetings are great for creating a feeling of connection in what can be a very isolated industry, I'm really grateful for them"

"These meetings are so vital, especially in these challenging times, to bring the creative community together. They've been really interesting to hear developments from individuals and organisations, plus also useful for networking and checking in with each other."

Image: courtesy Corey Wong



MULTIVERSITY

SPOTLIGHT ON FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Multiversity the new carbon neutral learning campus for up to 3,000 learners in the heart of Blackpool's town centre will provide a cutting-edge response to local, regional, and national priorities, raising Blackpool and the Fylde College's profile regionally. New courses will be developed with Lancaster University, targeting high-level skills growth, including a focus on automation, mobility, artificial intelligence, data, population ageing and sustainability.

The Multiversity will become an established part of Lancashire's higher education landscape, encouraging new learners to engage in upskilling and bringing new technical and professional learning opportunities to the town, leading to higher productivity and greater prosperity for residents. Creativity will be at the core of the learning programmes delivered and the College's School of Art will be able to provide creative courses that integrate and access the latest innovative technologies.



BLACKPOOL SCHOOL OF ARTS

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF AA2A SCHEME ON THE SCHOOL

The Artists Access to Art Colleges (AA2A) scheme has proven to be a catalyst for positive change at Blackpool School of Arts (BSoA), fostering collaboration, creativity, and community engagement. The scheme ran for the first time at BSoA, between November 2022 and June 2023. Providing access for professional artist, to creative spaces and resources, building community and using this time to support students in their learning.

Over the inaugural year of the AA2A programme the plaudits from participating artists reveal a unanimous sense of appreciation and fulfilment. Norma Foulds, one of the artists, expressed her gratitude for the warm welcome and positive atmosphere at the school.

"I hadn't done any printing for a long time so it was great to use the print room and have the excellent technical help from staff who were on hand to help. The Fashion department too was a great help and very encouraging and enthusiastic about what we were doing."

Norma Foulds

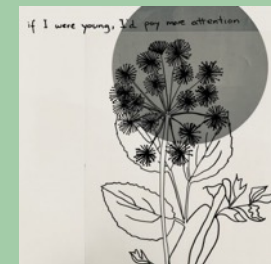
Stephen Lawless commended the accommodation of his needs, emphasising the school's commitment to making the experience valuable. Ian Clegg valued the supportive community, and collaboration emerged as a recurring theme, with Norma Foulds, Jack O'Hara, and Iain Williams all highlighting the positive impact of working with other artists.

The artists' positive experiences were closely tied to the support received from the school's staff. Paula Smithson, who played the key role in implementing the scheme has led the school's delivery to be commended as one of the top 3 programmes in the country in its first year. The technical assistance received in the print room and the Fashion department played a crucial role in enhancing the artists' experience. The utilisation of BSoA's facilities, both physical and online, was instrumental in providing artists like Stephen Lawless with the space and freedom to engage in sustained experimentation.

"I'm very happy with the way Blackpool School of Arts has accommodated my needs. They have gone very much out of their way to make this experience a valuable one thus far. I look forward to continuing my work over the coming year."

Stephen Lawless

The feedback from Joseph Travis emphasizes the personal growth experienced through the AA2A scheme. Travis found renewed confidence in old work that had been abandoned, marking this opportunity as a significant growth experience. He also appreciated the chance to break out of isolation since quitting his last job in 2020, highlighting the positive impact of interacting with students and the wider artistic community.



BLACKPOOL SCHOOL OF ARTS

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF AA2A SCHEME ON THE SCHOOL

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, some challenges were identified. The initial lack of a dedicated space for artists was noted, but the issue was resolved by allocating a section of the degree studio space. Additionally, the desire for more interaction with students and fellow artists was expressed by multiple participants, which was taken on board and planned into the scheme for 2023/24.

The AA2A scheme has undeniably had a transformative impact on Blackpool School of Arts' students and staff, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment between professional artists and undergraduates. The positive feedback from participants highlights the welcoming atmosphere, the instrumental role of staff, and the personal and artistic growth experienced by the artists. While some challenges were noted, i.e. more dedicated project space and more scheduled interaction between artists and students, these areas for development did not overshadow the overall success of the programme. The AA2A scheme at Blackpool School of Arts serves as a beacon of inspiration for the integration of artists into academic communities, showcasing the potential for positive change and creative synergy at Blackpool School of Arts.



Image: *Westside Story*, Blackpool School of Arts and Paul Birtwell.

SHOWTOWN

OPEN UP THE MIC

Showtown is establishing a programme of activity around laughter and wellbeing. Showtown worked with youth organisation *HeadStart* and professional comedian Ruth E. Cockburn to develop and deliver *Open Up the Mic* – a short course supporting young people to develop their resilience and performance skills. The programme increased confidence, enabled strong peer bonds, improved their outlook on Blackpool and future aspirations.

Stand-up comedy was chosen as an art form that is relevant to Blackpool's culture, heritage and Showtown's collections and highly relatable to participants. Working with comedians proved to be a valuable tool for dealing with the young people's neurodiversity and anxieties as many of the professional comedians supporting the course delivery transpired to have ADHD, dyslexia and social anxieties.

At the end of the course the young people presented a stand-up comedy performance, written by themselves and inspired by their lived experience, in the Comedy Station Club for a supportive audience of friends and family.

As a legacy to this project, Showtown piloted a Young People's Steering Group and recruited 6 of the 11 young people through *Open Up the Mic* cohorts. The programme included regular sessions with Blackpool's creative people, visits to cultural venues, co-designing and delivering Showtown events and shaping the museum experience whilst working towards their Bronze Arts Award.

"OUTM completely brought her confidently out of her comfort zone. Blown away, very funny, amazing to watch. Extremely proud of all the children!"

Proud carer



Images: Leo B Leo R, courtesy Andy Hollingworth

BLACKPOOL GRAND THEATRE

MULTIPLE PROGRAMMES THRIVE

WITH MULTIPLE PARTNERS

The Grand's flagship Story-Led Resilience programme is an award-winning, internationally recognised, social justice project enabling young people to beat the odds, whilst changing the odds: a chance to invest in their own social and cultural capital and artistic excellence.

The programme offers a safe, creative space to tell, make and share stories. In a bid to build resilience, confidence, creative and oracy skills, participants are uniquely inspired to respond to The Grand's diverse programme of on-stage work be that the Royal Shakespeare Company, pantomime, or the international hip-hop festival Sadler's Wells *Breakin' Convention*.

Young people are offered the chance to co-create platforms and amplify their voices. All who take part in the programme's key projects *Tales Retold* (work in schools) and *Illuminate* (work with care experienced children) create work both individually and as a group, while developing a greater understanding of what resilience means to them. Over 90 per cent of the children who take part can talk confidently about resilience

and give examples of what might help and what can undermine personal resilience.

The project's transformational outputs combined with The Grand's robust methodology and evaluation framework are reflected in the work being adopted as a case study example of excellence by the Local Government Association, being selected as keynote presentation at the International Resilience Conference and winning the UK Theatre Award for Excellence in Arts Education Award.

The Grand's work in this area has been supported by a range of partners including the Goldsmiths' Company Charity, Ragdoll Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Blackpool Council. Its success has led to The Grand becoming Education Partner for Children's Theatre Partnership. The Grand is a Royal Shakespeare Company partner theatre and is commissioned by PW Productions for the UK Tour of Bristol Old Vic's *WonderBoy* and the Royal Opera House.



BLACKPOOL GRAND THEATRE

MULTIPLE PROGRAMMES THRIVE

WITH MULTIPLE PARTNERS

"Walls have come down, confidence has grown, behaviour is positive and supportive as opposed to aggressive and disruptive. Illuminate offers a safe space with adults who the children trust, who accept and believe in them. The Theatre is described as a family by them. Blackpool Grand is where they feel a strong sense of belonging."

Lead Social Worker, Blackpool Council Children's Services

"I am always being a little shy, but I am doing my best at everything. I feel more able to speak out loud."

Participant

"The Illuminate Project will inspire the children it works with for decades to come and provide a strong base for self-confidence and support network during hard times."

Children & Young People Now Awards Judging Panel

"We are so proud to work in partnership with Blackpool Grand Theatre. Their expertise in co-designed programming and in evaluation practices ensures the consistent development of work that inspires and makes a tangible difference to the lives of audiences, participants, and peers. Their commitment to social justice is palpable and underpins their practice and ethos."

Jacqui O'Hanlon, Director of Learning and National Partnerships, Royal Shakespeare Company

Images: *Shakespeare Nation*,
courtesy Max Sandiford.

Shakespeare Nation is our community group established in 2019. They have worked with the RSC and appeared on the RSC's main stage in *Henry VI: Rebellion* in 2022. In March, they performed Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in 5 minutes(ish!) on Blackpool Grand Theatre's main stage.



HOUSE OF WINGZ

NON-STOP MOVEMENT

House of Wingz is a movement that celebrates the vibrant and provocative culture of Hip Hop in its many forms. With a now thriving arts centre on the edge of Blackpool town, HOW offers arts, youth and sustainability projects, as well as being home to a wealth of external projects such as wellness, social action, art exhibits and more.

Due to the heritage of dance in Blackpool, there are many dance and theatre schools which function with traditional commercial structures, creating a lack of opportunity for the population of Blackpool who could not afford fees. HOW is a not for profit dance and performing arts organisation which can attract funding to enable free access for all Blackpool's young people to dance classes, podcasting and recording studios, a skate park and more.

The House of Wingz facility is a space where creativity and expression can flow without boundaries. It is home to continual arts development in both youth and adult communities. Beneficiaries use the facility with flexibility and freedom 7 days a week, making space for the creation and development of high-quality local art, for and by local people.

House of Wingz currently employs three local young creatives and works with a further 15 freelance creatives from or living in Blackpool, and supports many emerging artists in several ways including collaborative working and providing space and facilities for the creation of new work. Partnerships with the likes of Sadler's Wells and Emergency Exit Arts create national and international exchanges and showcases.

"It's helped me to find out who I am and what I want to do."

"I come here to be free, I don't think about anything else when I am here, that is why I spend as much time here as possible."

"I always loved dance but I never thought I could make a career out of it but House of Wingz has helped me to make those connections."

"I am feeling so blessed that I have been commission to create work on my own turf."



BLACKPOOL LIBRARIES

BETTER START – THE EARLY YEARS OFFER

Blackpool Library Service with support through Better Start has delivered a fun and accessible programme of events and activities for young families from the Victoria, Claremont, Talbot and Brunswick wards over the past 2 years. From the direct feedback received we know our programme working in familiar spaces (not always a library) and with artists and performers is having a real beneficial impact on our communities and those in their early years.

Example: Our Book Trust Early Years Targeted Offer with our Early Years Engagement team working with 15 nurseries and delivering 600 Pre-School packs. Devonshire Academy received 40 packs and, from these, twelve feedback forms were returned highlighting how much the books had been enjoyed at home with six new library members signed up.

Free special events have brought families and Early Years providers into our Library branches. In the February and October half-term holidays, we welcomed Hawk Dance Theatre and the Knotted Project to perform two shows to Pre-School children in three different Libraries. Both 'Inside the Igloo' and 'The Greatest Robot Ever' included a story which was read aloud and danced followed by a movement workshop. The feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive and it was a great opportunity to showcase our Early Years offer to those new to libraries

The Greatest Robot Ever comments:

"What a great show, children totally absorbed by it."

"My two year old sat right through without a sound."

"Loved every minute – all of us."

"Wasn't sure my child would sit for any length of time but hardly moved!"

For Libraries Week in October, we welcomed Sue Auty and Kathryn Williams to deliver two performances of Flooo0000oot! to our audiences of 0-4 year olds including a group from Butterfly Lodge. This event also attracted new families to Palatine Library and one family commented that it was especially lovely to see a non-verbal show with their non-verbal son.

These performances were followed by one from Rogan Mills at the Layton Lights Switch-on event at Layton Library and built on the Storytelling Festival launch event held at Central Library which included TramShed Theatre. In this way, we have showcased excellent story-telling at our branches and created opportunities to invite families and EY settings to our regular offer.

There is still an on-going need to raise awareness of the Library offer – which encompasses much more than books – and each time families encounter the service through a special event or in a more familiar space, the message that we provide free, high-quality sessions for 0-4 years in a warm, welcoming, sometimes noisy space is key.



Image: Palatine Library

LEFTCOAST

WASH YOUR WORDS (WYW) LIBRARY & LAUNDRY ROOM

LeftCoast has worked with Mereside estate residents on several collaborative arts projects since 2016 and the idea for *Wash Your Words* emerged from conversations about the high cost of electricity to wash and dry clothes. Anecdotally, LeftCoast were told that it was cheaper to 'buy and bin' new (supermarket) school shirts on a weekly basis than launder them at home.

LeftCoast consulted on the estate to test resident appetite for a laundry room. The vision for WYW was to co-design a welcoming, communal space facilitating book-lending, arts activities, community gatherings and clothes washing.

As well as community members doing their washing at WYW, Library membership and footfall has increased and a number of other partners are delivering services from the building including Blackpool Better Start and UR Potential with their baby clothing bank, Mereside and Friends in Action, the Volunteer Centre, and Mereside Primary School's book club. As residents grow in confidence, they have commissioned artists to lead workshops and arranged several Go Sees to other libraries, community gardens and trips to the theatre. They have also launched a People's Pantry at *Wash Your Words*, which offers estate residents a more exchange-based model of food sharing than a traditional foodbank.

"I would be on my own at home, down and depressed if I didn't come to Wash Your Words on a Wednesday."

S, Workshop participant

"I have gained so many skills and got some new work through taking part in this project...also making new friends and meeting new people for me has been a win / win."

D, Volunteer builder

"Joyful design [that] raises expectations of the quality of architecture people should demand of social housing estates, changing the conversation from what people don't have, to what community asset models should look like from a social, economic and environmental perspective."

Judge of the RIBA Journal MacEwen Award, celebrating architecture for the common good, commenting on the Laundry.



THE GRUNDY ART GALLERY

LOCAL REGIONAL & NATIONAL pARTnership WORKING

Bringing together artists with and without a learning disability, the pARTnership is a creative and professional development project delivered by Grundy Art Gallery in partnership with Blackpool Council's The New Langdale – a day service for people with a learning disability, Fylde Coast based artist Tina Dempsey and support from Venture Arts (Manchester), in their role as Critical Friend.

The project takes the form of artist-led weekly workshops focusing on the sharing of skills, ideas and the development of new art works. Alongside this, the group undertake research and development visits to contemporary art exhibitions, organisations and events, and participate in public facing outputs such as taking part in exhibitions, participating in and delivering workshops and participating in art fairs.

To date, artworks produced by pARTnership artists have been exhibited at Grundy Art Gallery and Abingdon Studios in Blackpool, at The Manchester Contemporary Art Fair, and The Horsfall in Manchester at Mura Ma Gallery in Cheshire, and at Sotheby's in London as part of *OUTSIDE IN*'s open exhibition. Artists have received private and commercial commissions; they have been interviewed for BBC Radio Lancashire, and have had their work written about in printed and online press

such as Concrete Magazine. Some of the artists are now represented by *OUTSIDE IN*, a national organisation that provides a platform for artists who face significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance or isolation. More recently work by the artists is being purchased by Private Collectors and in most recent news, work by one of the pARTnership artists has been selected by Curators at Manchester Art Gallery to be acquired into their permanent collection as part of The Manchester Contemporary Art Fund.

The pARTnership is funded by Blackpool Council and Arts Council England where it is the focus of Grundy Art Gallery's uplift in National Portfolio funding for 2023-2026.

The pARTnership has its origins in a Coastal Communities Funded project called Access Fylde Coast that took place between 2018/19 and was led by Disability First. The remit of Access Fylde Coast was to enhance disability access, while boosting tourism and supporting the local economy. One strand of the project saw organisations from across the arts, culture and tourism sectors working together to provide a year-long programme of high-quality activities and events which were disability-led and/or disability focused and which sought to promote and demonstrate inclusive practices.

THE GRUNDY ART GALLERY

LOCAL REGIONAL & NATIONAL pARTnership WORKING

As part of Access Fylde Coast, Grundy Art Gallery delivered a range of activities that brought together high profile and impactful individuals and organisations operating within the disability arts and disability rights movements, locally, regionally and nationally. These 'meeting points' took the form of exhibitions, talks, workshops, and research and development visits. They involved Venture Arts, (Manchester), The Musgrave Kinley (Outsider Art), Collection at The Whitworth (Manchester), Tony Heaton OBE, National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA), SHAPE, (London) and a pilot project with Blackpool Council's , The New Langdale, which sought to provide individuals with bespoke opportunities to develop their own artistic practice.

Legacy from Access Fylde Coast has taken the form of continued active partnerships with all of the organisations and individuals listed above as well as the development of The New Langdale pilot project into the pARTnership which is increasingly being recognised locally, regionally and nationally as a model of good practice.

Image: Abstract Drawing workshop,
The Grundy Art Gallery and Central Library



AUNTY SOCIAL

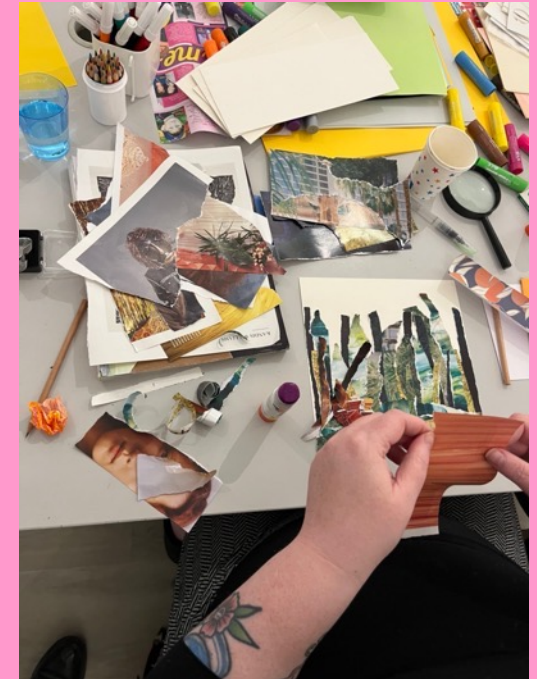
SHOP LOCAL

Aunty Social has operated a town centre retail shop since 2012, regularly stocking products from local artists / makers giving them a visible high street selling space with an affordable rate of commission. We also make our own products and stock merchandise from other not for profit groups. Since moving to Topping Street, we've harnessed the impact of a new town centre venue, working with marketing experts to refresh and update our retail brand identity. We now stock the work of over 45 North West artists and makers at varying stages of their career.

The new venue has also given us the opportunity to invest in a member of shop staff and a new online shop which allows us to represent local makers on a national level. Our retail strategy has allowed staff and volunteers to learn skills such as space planning, range building, trade calendars and develop a critical path process for supplier product launch and replenishment.

We regularly communicate with suppliers on how to best profile their products and maximise sales. Our recent work coordinating Blackpool Creative Market (part of Blackpool Heritage Action Zone) has brought us into contact with even more diverse local makers, who we've hosted at a number of public market events at Blackpool Winter Gardens throughout the year. The markets have

attracted a wider audience of shoppers, many of whom have never previously bought art or handmade goods directly from makers. We also have a close relationship with Blackpool School of Art and host a student takeover twice a year. During this event we hand the retail space over to the students to sell their work to the public. We work with the students to advise on branding, range building, and bring products to market and price pointing. The takeover offers the students the opportunity to experience ways of working post-education outside of traditional employment routes.



AUNTY SOCIAL

SHOP LOCAL

We support the professional development of our makers through one-to-one advice and mentoring as well as social and networking events. We're also planning a programme of tailored business support sessions with Blackpool Council's Business Growth team, and hope to supplement this with specialist skills training on product photography, pricing, marketing, intellectual property and product liability. We also offer advice on environmental sustainability.

Each year we take three Fylde Coast based makers to the nationally renowned Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair (GNCCF) in Manchester. GNCCF hosts over 150 of the UK's leading designer-makers and craft artists selected by an independent panel of craft experts. We work with the artists to develop a range for sale at the fair, support them with driving marketability and help them to gain experience of selling their work in a high-end market environment.



LIGHTPOOL

TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Blackpool Illuminations is the original world leader in creating ambitious light-based art installations. The free promenade display has enthralled the public for over 100 years and presently attracts 3 million visitors from all over the country (mainly from lower socio-economic backgrounds). Over the past 7 years the Illuminations has successfully secured Central Government funding to support transformational change in its business model. This included £2.2m Coastal Communities funding to establish the Lightpool Festival and £4.5m Town Deal investment from 2022-2025 to support creation of new artwork collaborating with freelance design and artists, infrastructure improvement and new state-of-the-art facilities.

In 2023, Blackpool Illuminations with Lightpool became an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation. A key part of the programme includes skills and talent development opportunities for artists and designers wanting to work in the light art sector.

LIGHTLAB is a bespoke talent programme for early to mid-career diverse artists wanting to develop their practice into light-based work, digital, public realm and light festivals. The selected artists undertake research and development with support from a creative producer. The first LightLab was hosted and led by Blackpool for the Light Up the North network in 2016 (ACE funded).

It resulted in an exhibition for the artists at the Grundy and Salford Quays, and artist Chris Paul Daniels' work being purchased for the Grundy Collection. Ten artists from Cheshire East took part in Lumen LightLab in 2020 instigated with Crewe's light festival. LightLab demonstrates clear outcomes for artists who go on to receive paid commissions. We have gone on to deliver a LightLab in 2023 with Durham / Lumiere and Wigan Light Night as partners.

DIGI-LAB builds on our partnership with *Imitating the Dog* (ITD) performing arts company, with an annual digital residency at Lightworks led by established digital artists/companies like ITD and the internal digital mapping expertise within the Illuminations Team. Residencies cover technical and creative knowledge; a group of 10 artists with interest in developing digital are selected through an open selection process with priority being given to artists from the North and with protected characteristics.

Lightpool also delivers artist in residence opportunities for artists to develop their practice towards creating work that could be commissioned by light art festivals. Based

LIGHTPOOL

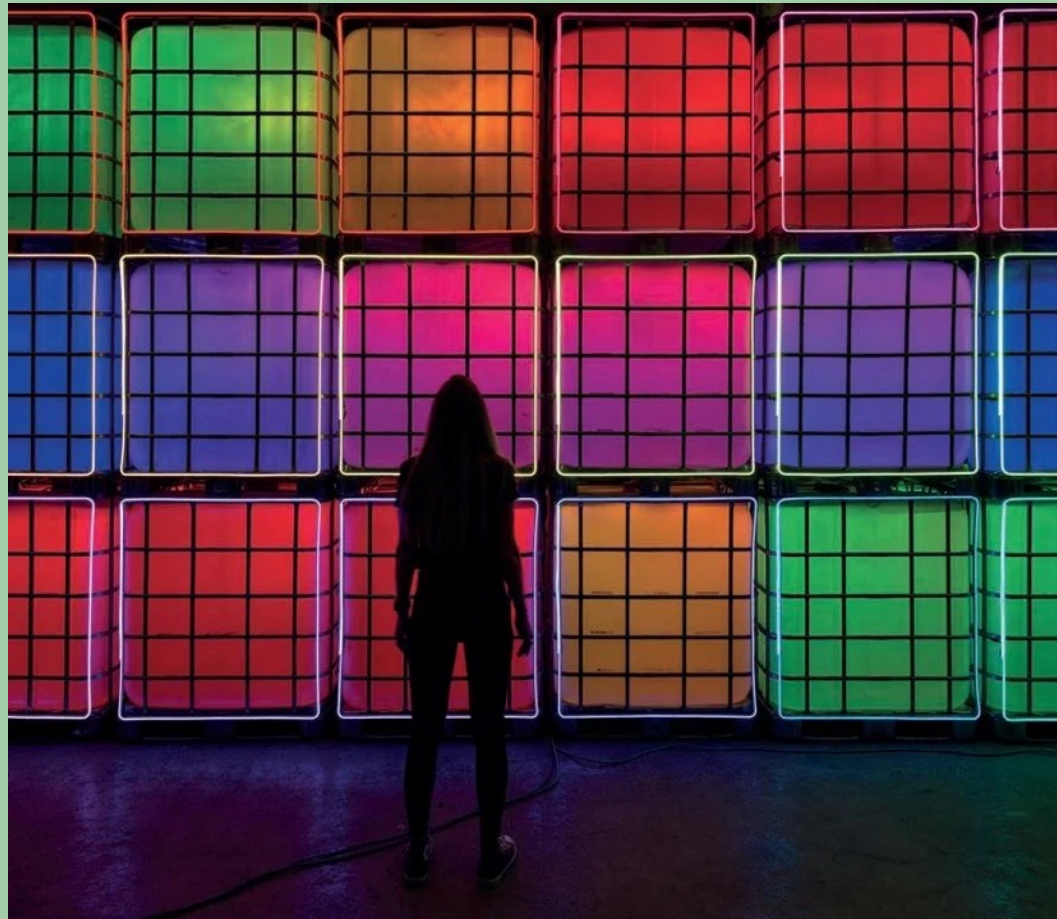
TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

at Lightworks the residency provides access to the Lightworks facilities and the talented in-house team of structural and electrical engineers, artists, animators, designers, and lighting technicians.

It is also a founding member in the Light Up the North Network the UK's leading light festival network and national example of consortium working in place-making.

We are a regular partner in delivering the LUTN SHINE programme which aims to nurture and develop new talent, giving artists the opportunity to exhibit or perform new work at a number of Light Up The North festivals. Artists are selected through an open-call process and will typically be awarded bursaries of up to £10,000 to realise their new artwork. The artwork has to be suitable for outdoor winter light festivals, artistically challenging / interesting and of high-quality, have a strong element of digital/technology within its design, and be resilient to withstand the winter weather at multiple festivals.

As well as financial support, each artist receives training and mentoring from across the LUTN partnership; and they receive development support with guidance in areas such as marketing, finance, production, risk assessments and fundraising.



GRUNDY ART GALLERY

BLACKPOOL'S AMBITION OF SCALE

In September 2022, ARTIST ROOMS, which is a project of National Galleries Scotland and the Tate, reached out to Grundy Art Gallery to see if we would be interested in hosting a newly developed Louise Bourgeois touring exhibition. The opportunity to present one of the most celebrated and influential artists of the 20th Century was swiftly accepted. What resulted from this invitation was an exhibition of scale by a world-class artist that spread out across all of the Grundy's ground floor galleries. Focusing on works made in the last decades of the artist's life, ARTIST ROOMS: Louise Bourgeois, included a number of rarely seen pieces alongside seminal works including one of the artist's trademark large-scale bronze spider sculptures.

As audience data shows, this exhibition was well attended and brought Grundy back to its pre-Covid summer visitor numbers. It was also very well received with feedback such as, 'More of this level of high-quality art in Blackpool please', 'Impactful, interesting, inspiring', 'We are lucky to have seen exhibitions that are equivalent of going to the Tate in London'. These are just a snapshot of the many comments that we received, but these and the wider feedback we collected clearly show an appetite from residents and visitors alike, for exhibitions of scale by artists of international repute to be presented in Blackpool. As well as

providing an inspirational experience on the doorstep, exhibitions such as this can help cultivate civic pride within the town and help to change the negative perceptions often levelled at it from outside. Additionally they increase footfall in the town, and enhance the local economy.

Grundy has a track record of attracting national and international artists and organisations to present their work in Blackpool with some of the recent and future collaborations including Hayward Touring, National Portrait Gallery, V&A, Artangel and Bloomberg New Contemporaries. However, we have plans to do more, and Grundy's ambition to expand the footprint of its building with a new purpose-built extension is just part of this plan. With an additional gallery space and a dedicated learning and engagement room, Grundy will be able to expand and enhance its offer to residents, visitors and potential exhibition partners.

Indeed, the Grundy along with Abingdon Studios Ltd (Blackpool's artist studio group for contemporary visual artists), has the Turner Prize next in its sights. Working together it is our shared ambition to encourage this long-standing and international significant exhibition and contemporary art prize to the town. Watch this space.



Image: Artist Rooms: Louise Bourgeois

THE BRITISH COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE WINTER GARDENS, BLACKPOOL AND FIT THE BILL LIMITED

The British Country Music Festival (TBCMF) is a relatively new, independent festival launched in 2019, supporting contemporary, country and Americana-leaning songwriters primarily from the UK and Ireland with a select number of international artists. The Winter Gardens amazing array of settings from the Empress Ballroom with its gilded, vaulted ceiling to the Horseshoe Pavilion, with its rich history dating back to 1878, provides a stunning indoor venue that attracts a music discovery audience, many of whom are returning each year.

Martin and Marina Blore, whose company Fit the Bill, conceived and created The British Country Music Festival first ran Folk On The Dock Festival in Liverpool for three years. A free festival with twelve stages across the Liverpool waterfront, it attracted 60,000 visitors annually. FTB wanted to create a new, indoor, metropolitan festival. One that champions home-grown artists. That could sit alongside and complement the large, country-based festivals elsewhere rather than replicate what was already happening.

FTB, based on the Fylde Coast, were already familiar with Blackpool's heritage venues and knew the Empress Ballroom, designed initially for acoustic instruments, would be perfect. They approached the Managing Director of the Winter Gardens and

presented the concept of a contemporary country and Americana festival. It was mixed with the unique qualities of the venue and resort. He understood the concept immediately and this resulted in the formation of a development partnership. Early support for the festival also came from Blackpool Business Investment District and a partnership with Blackpool Transport.

During Covid, the partners also received Culture Recovery Support from the Arts Council. The funding was crucial in ensuring the future sustainability of the festival.

The direct economic impact of the three-day festival is just over £500k and it attracts an audience of approximately 4,000 people. It employs 193 people and provides work for 32 freelancers, and 107 performers plus tour managers, agents, sound-engineers, drivers etc. The festival has signed up to PRS Keychange initiative to ensure a 50:50 female to male gender split. This has been achieved every year with a slight bias towards female performers and crew. The festival is attracting a new audience from all four corners of the United Kingdom and is now welcoming visitors from Europe and America with 86.7% of the audience from outside a 2 hour or more drive time so the majority stay in resort. The nature of the event has brought visitors into Blackpool who have never previously been to the resort.



BLACKPOOL LIBRARIES

GET IT LOUD IN LIBRARIES

Since 2020, Blackpool Libraries has been an active member of *Get It Loud in Libraries* (GILIL), a scheme which holds gigs at libraries. Blackpool has hosted the likes of Mush, Bodega, and Brit Award Winning Rising Stars, The Last Dinner Party.

Alongside the hugely successful gigs, the library service has hosted the *Get It Loud Academy*, which gives local teenagers the opportunity to attend workshops with music industry professionals. In 2023, Revoe Library hosted a GILIL Academy in partnership with the Revoe-lution Youth Group. Six young people between the ages of 12 and 15 attended; they took part in photography, beat boxing and rap workshops. All the young people involved successfully completed their Bronze Arts Award, and five subsequently joined the crew at the *Last Dinner Party* gig, where they managed the social media and photography, and helped with tickets and selling merchandise giving them an incredible experience. Working with GILIL helps the library service view itself, and be viewed by others, as venues for cultural activity and makes that vital connection with young people.

"Most tour venues are 14+ and late at night. This is the perfect way to share music with family."

"I had an amazing time, the gig was so intimate and the band were captivating. I'm so happy to have seen them in my hometown."



Image: Bodega at Get It Loud.
Courtesy Blackpool Social Club

LIGHTPOOL & LIGHT UP THE NORTH

A NEW LIGHT

The world-famous Illuminations need little introduction. There are six miles of traditional festoons and tableaux along Blackpool Promenade – commonly known as the greatest free light show on Earth! Lightpool celebrates the Illuminations by bringing contemporary light, projection, performance and fire artists to Blackpool to be inspired by the town's unique relationship with light.

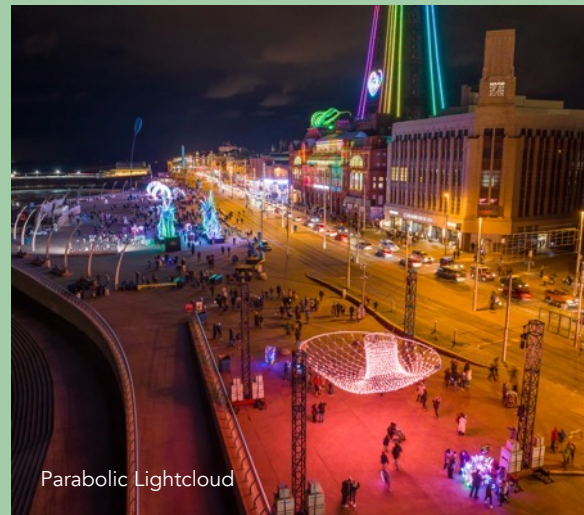
Lightpool is a founding member of the Light Up The North network, where light festivals share their collective expertise to support both the development of the partner festivals and the wider sector. Through regional, national and international networking and collaboration LUTN nurtures artistic ambition through artist and producer development, co-commissioning and joint fundraising. The network is crucial when collaborating on international programming or commissioning new work from UK artists and brings the benefits of joined up thinking. LUTN's Shine programme nurtures and develops new talent, giving artists the opportunity to exhibit or perform new work at a number of Light Up The North festivals.

"The risk is less if you share the cost, and the big international pieces bring credibility."

Phil Holmes, Director of Lightpool



Ride The Light



Parabolic Lightcloud



Seraphic

TRAMSHED THEATRE COMPANY

A PURPOSEFUL PANDEMIC

TramShed is a theatre company offering inclusive performing arts workshops, performances and training opportunities, irrespective of health, social diversity, ethnic background or ability; at TramShed the focus is on ability not disability.

TramShed has many members living with varying additional needs. These include physical disabilities, learning disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, behavioural needs, mental health needs and social / emotional needs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TramShed moved their operations online, reducing isolation within our membership base. At a time when they had to close their doors to the community, the project gave TramShed new skills, new methods of delivery, new inclusive approaches and created a pilot in which research and development for digital inclusive theatre was at the heart.

Members who have struggled to enter a physical performance space through lack of confidence and anxiety previously, truly thrived in the workshops. Members suffering from extreme mental health issues found purpose, focus and direction through the work.

Throughout the project, 119 inclusive performing arts workshops were held online, and TramShed worked with many other organisations, including Chickenshed in London, The Old Electric in Blackpool and Cotton Shed Theatre Company in Rossendale.

"TramShed is an amazing theatre company that has provided a safe space to so many people in such a difficult time."



Images: *Right Where We Are*, live performance; Volunteer and member.

