

BIG IMAGINATIONS

10 YEAR REPORT

2013 – 2023



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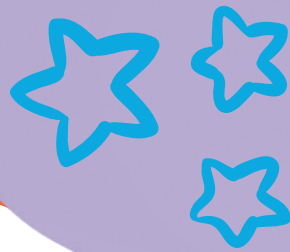


bigimagination.co.uk

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Who We Are



Big Imaginations is a network of 24 arts venues and organisations (from theatres to libraries, rural village halls to green fields, and everywhere in between), dedicated to igniting the imaginations of children aged 0 – 13 years old and their families through the wonder of imaginative, affordable live performances. We are committed to supporting artists and finding experiences that represent all the families we work with.



YEARS OF

**BIG
IMAGINATIONS**



Main aims of the Big Imaginations Network

Audiences

To help as many people as possible, wherever they are, experience and be inspired by great theatre for families.

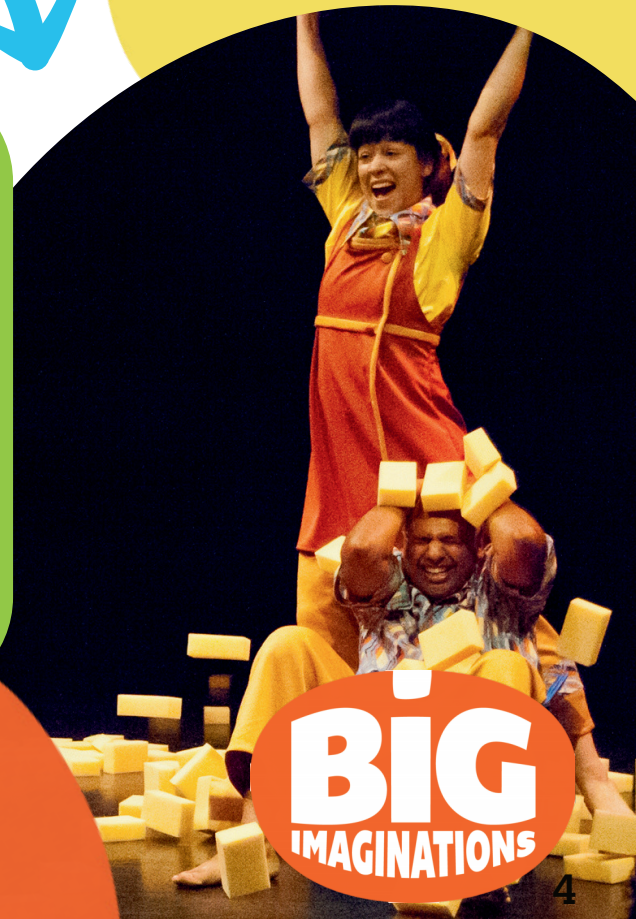
Network

To reach a variety of audiences by creating a network in the North West where brilliant children's shows can come to the region more readily.

Artists

To work with excellent theatre-makers, particularly from the North West, making work of a diverse nature to reflect the communities we live in.

“Working with the Big Imaginations consortium has meant that we have reached more families with our blend of performance and play than ever before. Big Imaginations work is fundamental to the touring infrastructure for children's theatre in the UK.” Liz Clark, Artistic Director, Turned On Its Head



History

Back in 2011 Liz O'Neill, CEO & Artistic Director of Z-arts commissioned some research to find out how many other venues in the region were already programming children's theatre, or who wanted to do more. There were a number of venues who all said the same thing:

“We'd love to be able to bring more great children's theatre to our audiences, but we need support to make it happen”.

When asked if they were interested in forming a network to help realise those dreams, she was inundated! The whole idea of working together was that we could support each other, not only in identifying high quality children's theatre, but also in bringing down the costs of touring for the companies themselves and keeping tickets affordable for families.

We knew that, together, we could create 'mini-tours', reduce costs and pass those savings onto audiences. We secured Arts Council funding in September to create a two-year touring programme across the original 15 venues.

Big Imaginations has been supported by Arts Council England ever since, initially through two consecutive Strategic Touring bids, and then embedded into Z-arts National Portfolio funding.



Members Map

Big Imaginations network is dedicated to bringing brilliant children's theatre to the north of England and beyond...



7
counties

- Greater Manchester
- Cheshire
- Lancashire
- Merseyside
- Cumbria
- South Yorkshire
- West Yorkshire

24
members



What We Have Achieved

60
sub-group
meetings

153,368
audience
members

2147
performances

40
core network meetings

23
pots of
money to
support...

4
festivals

345
different shows
programmed

36
lead artists
through the Artist
Imagination Fund

8
commissioned
productions

Over £746k
invested in theatre for young
audiences in the region

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Commissions

Big Imaginations commissioned 9 performances between 2015 and 2021 before the introduction of the Artist Imagination Fund.



2015



The Adventures of Pom

2016



Sponge

2017



You, me and I

2017



Adrift

2017



Child of The Divide

2019



Stripy Honey
Is Very Yummy

2019



The Stitch Brothers
Patchwork Wonders

2020



Curious Investigators Online

2021



Curious Investigators Live

Artist Imagination Fund

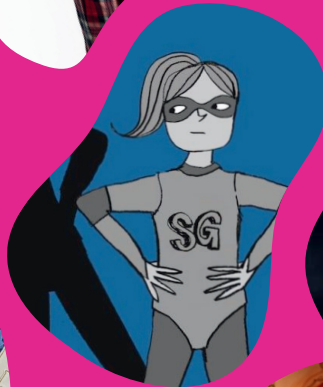
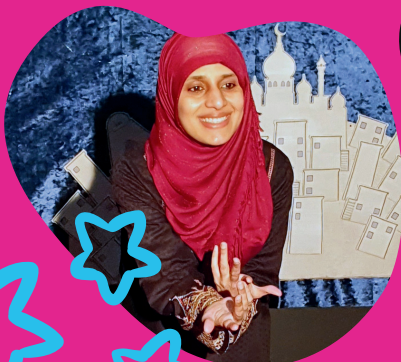
In 2020 we started the Artist Imagination Fund, a fund that is open to all artists and companies developing or creating performance for children and families and based or working in the Big Imaginations member areas.

So far we have allocated 23 pots of money, between £1k and £5k, to support 36 lead artists. Alongside the funding, artists were offered training and development opportunities and support from their host Big Imaginations organisation. Which could include access to space, advice on funding applications and mentoring.



Artist Imagination Fund Artists

2020 - 2024



Big Imaginations Members



“The strength of the network is in the members.

Following an away day 5 years ago we follow the mantra...

“You get out what you put in”



2013 – 2020



2023 - present



2013 – 2016



2013 - present



2013 - present



2018 - present



2018 - present



2013 - present



2013 - 2017



2018- 2023



2013 - present



2018 - present



2013 - 2021



2019 - present



2021 - present



2022 - present



2021 - present



2018 - present



2013 - present



2021 - present



2018 -2023



2013 - present



2017 - present



2014 - present



2013 - present



2023 - present



2013 - 2016



2013 - present



2013 - present




2013 - present

Members for a short time :

Mind The Gap, Brewery Arts Centre, Lawrence Batley Theatre, Burnley Mechanics Theatre

Culture Tameside - Case Study



The most significant impact has to have been gaining the confidence to programme theatre shows. It was like being in a vacuum trying to figure it out alone but since joining the Big Imaginations network it really helped! Especially as it's a network of likeminded people.

The support is invaluable.



Before the network, I was programming in the dark, doing google searches and hoping for the best. I had no idea about quality, no idea about good family theatre and no idea about accessibility or accessible performances.

The BIG network has blown my mind

about non-traditional theatre and what's possible.



It's broken-down barriers for myself and our community, it's been transformative! It's allowed us to take a leap, and get quality shows, without taking a gamble.


I've not got time to watch loads of shows so everyone in the network catching a show here and there means there's chance to see the theatre out there and a lot of people in the network have their fingers on the pulse of what's good and current!






Ben – Culture Tameside



Members Feedback



“I think most importantly it has helped me programme work from backgrounds that represent our participants or artists. We simply wouldn't have been able to bring any of this work without Big Imaginations, it has allowed us to grow our programme of work for families/cyp and keep it affordable.”



“How do you walk into children’s programming, without experience? We drew on the expertise of our network peers. There is a level of quality and trust in work coming from shows recommended by the Big Imaginations network. I’m more embedded with programmers in the north west than I would otherwise have been.”

“Being an organisation picking up from the pandemic with no core funding, we were worried that we wouldn't be able to do work for children and young people. Having Big Imaginations there to support us and to help us find and support / present high-quality work for children and young people has been transformational”

“We’ve programmed international work and work of companies that we never would have been able to book.”

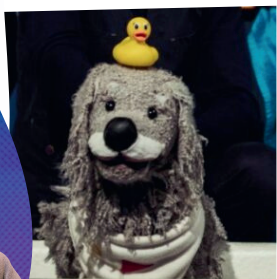
“Without the support, children’s work would have been the first thing to get rid of, yet it’s so important to retain children’s work because where will your next audience come from, if you don’t invest in them?”

“Finding a whole group of like minded individuals who do the same/or similar job to me, all with the same energy and passion for theatre. How lucky are we to have created a network of peers, that we can call on for help, support, advice!”

The Shows



We work with so many amazing artists and theatre companies and have programmed 345 different shows since 2013.



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Our Thanks

Our work has been made possible by our network members, artists, team and volunteers as well as our supporters and funders including...



**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

The Granada
Foundation



**JOHN THAW
FOUNDATION**



In memory of
Matt Evans,
our dear friend
from The Grand
Theatre in
Clitheroe.

