



## **Kids' Own Strategic Plan 2021–23**

## **Background**

Established in 1997, Kids' Own holds an important position within the arts and education sector in Ireland. Kids' Own is driven by a passionate belief in the intrinsic value of the arts in children's lives; as a source of joy, fulfilment and connection. We work to give children greater access to cultural expression and to be actively, creating, enquiring, communicating and making meaning through the arts. Our ethos is rooted in professional arts practice and we produce professionally published outputs (in print and online) that elevate the status of children's voices and artwork and bring these to a wider audience. With a strong social justice agenda, we support children of all backgrounds and abilities to be seen and heard in our society. As a dynamic and creative organisation, Kids' Own is always striving to innovate and explore new ways of working with children and young people.

This strategy sets out our objectives for the next three years to continue advancing our charitable purpose. It reflects our ambition, commitment and determination to enrich children's lives through publishing and the arts.

## **Our Values**

### **Child-centred**

Kids' Own works in defence of children's right to culture. Through the arts, we give children new modes of inquiry and expression. We value children's multiple and shared perspectives (their 100 languages) that lead to strong and proud identities and a sense of belonging and contribution.

### **Integrity**

We deliver our work with an ethos of openness and transparency. We champion the professionalisation of arts practice with children and authentic approaches that are non-directive and non-contrived. We do not compromise on this.

### **Originality**

We value and respect children's authentic voices and experiences. We trust in the collaborative process to let the work unfold without always knowing where it will lead. This is how we elicit truly original and authentic outcomes.

### **Collaborative**

We work collaboratively with children, with their communities and families, with professional artists and other practitioners. Inquiry, listening and process-based approaches are at the heart of these collaborations. We also value collaboration with partner organisations whose expertise increases the impact of our work with children.

### **Actively Inclusive**

We believe in a creative childhood for all children. We have respect for children as experts in their own lives and promote a culture of listening to children within their communities and wider society. We value all children, regardless of background, ability, race, gender, sexuality or religion.

## **KIDS' OWN VISION:**

Our vision is for a society that recognises children as independent writers, thinkers and creators and that truly values the arts in the lives of all children.

## **KIDS' OWN MISSION:**

Our mission is to create opportunities for children to collaborate with artists, and to publish and promote the artwork and insights that emerge from these encounters.

## **Our Purpose: A Model of Social Change**

Kids' Own strives for a society where the intrinsic value of the arts is more widely recognised and where children have credibility as active citizens and equal cultural agents.

What does the child's voice contribute to our literature, the arts and our culture? Our history has taught us the importance of listening to and giving value to the voices of children. Kids' Own strives to challenge the adult dominated view of childhood by giving visibility and representation to children's real thoughts and experiences.

Through rich artistic and collaborative experiences and the publication of children's ideas and experiences, we strive to counter the perception that publishing and arts practice are the reserve of an elite few and we present childhood within an egalitarian context.

Through meaningful arts experiences, we support children's wellbeing, identity and belonging and enrich their capacity for communication, exploration and thinking. Too often children are not given a serious and professional platform for their creative expression. The publication of children's work sends a message about how we value children and their participation in our society. If, as a society, we truly value children's voices and their equal participation, then we need to give them more opportunities and bigger platforms for their voices and artwork to be seen, read, heard and understood.

## **A Review of our Previous Strategic Plan 2017–2020**

A review of our most recent strategy found that Kids' Own has delivered well on its strategic aims over the past four years. In terms of engagement and co-creation, we developed numerous projects, both large-scale and longitudinal within education settings, as well as local and community initiatives with families and target groups. In line with our social inclusion agenda, we engaged with new communities of children through partnerships with Focus Ireland and the Refugee Resettlement Project, and we worked with new groups of children from Traveller communities, and children with disabilities. We also developed new projects that gave a platform to young people, supporting them to have a stronger voice within society on key issues, such as the experiences of new communities, gender equality,

etc. We continued to give visibility to children voices and artwork through the publication of many new collaborative children's titles and also through the development of our archive and targeted initiatives to send our books out more widely to communities through the national network of library services. We maintained a strong commitment to supporting the practice of artists and other professionals working with children and young people, through our management of the Arts in Education Portal and a strong support framework for our long-running *Virtually There* project. We also conducted independent research which brought an evidence base and advocated for the value of long-term arts in education practice in schools. We made strong international connections.

## **The Current Landscape**

Kids' Own operates within a niche area of expertise where the voice of the child is given true representation, and the arts are central in giving expression to the lives and experiences of children. Our unique approach foregrounds the voices of children within our society – not for research- or policy-focused outcomes, but through artistic and experiential processes which are enriching for their own sake. But our work does not happen in isolation and is responsive to the changing environment around us. In today's society we need to support children's meaning-making around personal and social justice themes that impact their well being and life trajectories. We need to recognise that children are at a double disadvantage. They struggle under the pressures and they struggle to be heard. Kids Own is committed to developing arts-based platforms for children and young peoples active inclusion, self-expression, cultural co-creation, and civic empowerment.

Despite enormous challenges posed by major events, such as the Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit, there are green shoots, including strong government-led policies and strategies, as well as grass-roots and independent initiatives, that have strengthened our society's commitment to children and young people. For example, the Arts in Education Charter, a cross-governmental initiative, which was launched in 2013, has facilitated a huge leap forward in the Arts in Education sector, providing a framework and funding streams for long-term nationwide initiatives.

The Arts Council – under new directorship in 2020 – has also set out a strong commitment to children and young people within its ten-year strategy (2016–2025). Objective 8, under its Public Engagement goal, states that the Arts Council will “advocate for the centrality of the arts in formal education at all levels”, “invest in artists, arts organisations and key programmes dedicated to developing high-quality work in arts-in-education and youth arts, and [...] support the provision of excellent arts experiences for young people in the public domain”, “make provision for children and young people a key focus of our relationship with local government”, and “incorporate our commitment to young people into the mainstream of our decision-making”.

Recent Government strategies and legislative changes have an important bearing on our work with children and young people. In 2018, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published the world's first Youth LGBTI Strategy, with associated funding to support strategic

projects. The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 and the Objective Sex Education Bill 2018 (still to be passed) also reflect important steps forward in terms of supporting children and young people to engage in inclusive and empowering narratives within their educational lives. In terms of Early Years, the government's First 5, Early Years Strategy (2019–2028) offers a critical system of integrated, cross-sectoral and high-quality supports and services that will help all babies and young children in Ireland to have positive early experiences. This is complemented by the Aistear Framework which has been an enormously successful curriculum framework for young children, representing a vision for early childhood development that is rooted in play and sensory exploration.

There is growing recognition of the importance of including young people's voices in policy making. Young people have also been involved in leading grass-roots movements themselves and the climate change movement, in particular, is a prime example of the role that young people can have as influencers and activists/ spokespeople for change. This creates opportunities for Kids' Own to give a platform to young people's activism through our unique approach.

## OUR STRATEGIC AIMS FOR 2021–2023

### **Aim 1**

#### **Create opportunities for children and artists to work together**

Increase opportunities for children to develop artwork and writing through meaningful engagement with professional artists, and in community with each other.

##### **Objectives for fulfilling this aim:**

- Provide spaces for quality artistic engagement with children, from birth to eighteen, and their families across a range of contexts and settings nationally, including homes, nurseries, schools and other settings.
- Continue to publish books and other resources by children, for children.
- Promote social inclusion by engaging with children from disadvantaged communities and minority cultures.
- Build on our expertise developed through our previous flagship arts-in-education projects (for example *Virtually There*)
- Continue working in a local, national, shared island and European context.
- Embrace digital and blended approaches to cultural engagement.
- Maintain artistic excellence and integrity in all our work.

##### **To achieve these objectives, we will:**

- Work with artists and strategic partners to create a wide range of collaborative and creative projects for children and young people.
- Forge new strategic partnerships with like-minded and rights-based organisations.
- Develop a studio in our building on Wolfe Tone Street in Sligo Town, for continuous engagement with local children and their families and disseminate the learning nationally.
- Partner with local, national and international festivals and events to reach a wider audience of children.
- Develop collaborative initiatives with European partners.
- Create a new long-term virtual arts-in-education project.
- We will adapt and respond to the increased demand for online engagement through new digital initiatives.

## **AIM 2**

### **Give visibility to children's artwork and writing**

Increase the visibility of children's artwork and writing by publishing (in print and online), exhibition and dissemination.

#### **Objectives for fulfilling this aim:**

- Elevate the public profile of Kids' Own.
- Exhibit children's artwork and writing from our recently developed archive spanning 23 years.
- Disseminate and promote our books more widely.
- Engage with the education sector to integrate the use of our books in the classroom.
- Maintain a strong online presence.
- Document and present our creative process with high-quality visual outputs.

#### **To achieve these objectives, we will:**

- Develop a strong media and publicity plan for our work over the next three years.
- Forge strategic partnerships with libraries, galleries, and the Department of Education and other key stakeholders.
- Celebrate our 25-year anniversary through a touring exhibition and other high-profile activities.
- Enhance and expand our online archive.
- Develop social media campaigns to promote our key activities.
- Increase accessibility to our library of books through digital tools and new technologies.
- We will embed documentation processes in all our projects.

### **Aim 3**

#### **Support professional artists in their practice with children**

Support and develop the practice of artists and other professionals who work with children and young people. Provide a leading model of best practice within the sector.

##### **Objectives for fulfilling this aim:**

- Support the professional practice of artists who are committed to working with children and young people.
- Unpack and promote the fundamental values and approaches that underpin Kids' Own's methodology for engaging with children and young people.
- Contribute to the development of arts-based approaches to education in the education sector
- Nurture existing relationships with Kids' Own Associate Artists.
- Expand our panel of Associate Artists and be actively inclusive in this process.
- Create opportunities to link with European artists and arts organisations.

##### **To achieve these objectives, we will:**

- Develop a training programme that responds to the needs of artists currently working with children and young people.
- Publish and launch our methodology document, and other resources that explore our creative process to support the practice of artists and educators.
- Establish a co-mentoring and skills sharing programme for existing Kids' Own Associate Artists.
- Publish an open call to recruit and train new artists and writers for future projects.
- Attend international events and share learning with international partners.

### **Aim 4**

#### **Advocate for children's equal status as artists and writers**

Champion children's right to actively engage in the arts, and advocate for recognition of the societal value of children's artwork and writing.

##### **Objectives for fulfilling this aim:**

- Raise awareness around the value of collaborative publishing with children.
- Build our profile as a rights-based and socially inclusive organisation.
- Develop independent evidence to support the justification for our work.
- Influence public policy as it relates to children's rights and their role in the arts.

##### **To achieve these objectives, we will:**

- Develop advocacy events, including an international conference on books by children, for children.
- Seek public platforms (e.g. conferences, print media) to champion children's voices.
- Forge strategic research partnerships and embed research more routinely within our projects.

- Build strategic alliances and collaborate with other organisations that champion children’s rights and access to the arts.

## **AIM 5:**

### **Build our capacity**

Translate our ambition into tangible and measurable impacts, by ensuring the necessary resources, processes and structures are in place.

#### **Objectives for fulfilling this aim:**

- Create capacity for the Kids’ Own staff and Artists to deliver on an impactful programme of work.
- Be transparent and accountable in our governance.
- Ensure the financial sustainability of the organisation.
- Represent a model of best practice in all our operations.

#### **To achieve these objectives, we will:**

- Develop an ambitious work plan that can be realistically achieved.
- Nurture job satisfaction through regular staff appraisals, fair compensation and providing training opportunities.
- Be diligent in our adherence to the Governance Code; maintain this as an ongoing action at board level.
- Promote the wellbeing of staff and associate artists, and provide a safe and supportive work environment.
- Explore opportunities to develop a public studio space within our building to develop the capacity for a sustained engagement at the local level.
- Develop a fundraising strategy that will support a mixed-income model.
- Maintain and develop new strategic funding partnerships, including corporate sponsors.

## **How we Measure Success**

In an era where transparency and accountability are of the utmost importance, and scarce resources mean we have to make every action count, it’s important that we monitor and evaluate our successes and failures, and communicate them.

Our workplan includes a set of key performance indicators to measure and monitor our progress against each of the five strategic aims outlined in our Strategic Plan 2021–2023. These indicators will be tracked continuously and our trustees will review our progress quarterly against each of the impact indicators. We provide regular reports to our funders and we are responsive to feedback from all our stakeholders.

To measure the impact of our work, Kids' Own embeds creative evaluation methods within all of our projects, as well as working with strategic partners on larger projects to develop more formal and objective research into the impact of our work.

There is so much to be proud of our achievements to date. With the clear focus and commitment of this strategy, we look forward to leading Kids' Own into the future as we continue to work with and for children.

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AIMS

**AIM 1: Create opportunities for children and artists to work together**

**AIM 2: Give visibility to children's artwork and writing**

**Aim 3: Support professional artists in their practice with children**

**Aim 4: Advocate for children's equal status as artists and writers**

**AIM 5: Build our capacity**

ACTIONS

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