

Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028



CONTENTS

3	Foreword Naomi Feely, Chairperson
4	Introduction Ciara Gallagher, Managing Director
6	Background
7	Vison and mission
8	Our value
9	Policy context
11	Aim 1
15	Aim 2
19	Aim 3
23	Aim 4
27	Aim 5

FOREWORD

Over almost three decades Kids' Own has created the space and opportunity for children and young people to come together, to collaborate with professional artists and to produce books and other forms of artistic expression for other children and young people. The output of these collaborations has contributed to our broader societal vision that sees children and young people recognised as individual and independent artists in their own right.

The creative work produced by Kids' Own seeks to not only elevate the voices of children and young people in society but to connect with their peers. Our strong track record in engaging with groups of children who may seldom see their life experiences reflected in books, artwork or creative spaces seeks to contribute to a stronger understanding of diversity, equality and social justice.

This new Strategic Plan leverages all that Kids' Own has achieved to date so that in the next five years:

Children and young people remain the central focus of all that we do. We will continue to work in partnership with them and include their voices in all aspects of our work.

The outputs created by children and young people will be published and promoted. We will work to ensure that these are recognised as important and valuable to their wellbeing.

Our engagement with, and support for the artists that we work with will be strengthened by a renewed commitment to represent the diverse communities we work with.

The profile and visibility of Kids' Own and its work will be made visible to all sectors of society and recognised by high-level decision-makers and stakeholders.

Our organisational capacity will be developed and strengthened. We will be responsive and adaptable to new governance and funding responsibilities.

The development and implementation of this new Strategic Plan is a collective effort of: children, young people and their families that take part in Kids' Own work across Ireland; artists who collaborate in diverse ways and spaces with children and young people; funders who support and trust us to deliver high quality projects; partner organisations who recognise the importance of the arts in children's lives, and the board and staff teams who oversee and operationalise all of our activities.

Naomi Feely, Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

The development of this new strategy provided a welcome opportunity for reflection. As we move toward our 30th anniversary, we have reflected on our history and legacy as an organisation, which continues to guide and inspire us, and of which we are very proud. We've taken stock of what we are doing currently – how we are growing, adapting, and developing as an organisation – while also looking forward to our biggest dreams and ambitions for Kids' Own.

Our mission and vision, our values, and our five new strategic aims reflect this process of staying true to our roots while always adapting, responding, and continuing to be excited by our work and future possibilities. Integral parts will remain unchanged: the centrality of children and young people's voices, artistic expression, and lived experiences, to everything that we do; our commitment to giving children and young people's voices and artistic expression a platform through publishing in all forms and much more; and the value we place on our work with professional artists committed to collaborative arts practice with children and young people.

We are also an organisation focused on change and responsiveness. We are committed to listening and responding to children's voices and artistic expression, and to the importance of meaningful engagement with the arts for children and young people, both as intrinsically valuable. We are sure that these processes of engagement with the

arts, and of listening and responding to children and young people as they express themselves through the arts, can create new pathways to changing our society for the better.

So while the core of our work remains unchanged, how we work with children and young people, how we listen, how we respond, will be ever-evolving. The organisation's early foundations were built on the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, in our focus on hearing and listening to the voices of all children, particularly those voices who are seldom heard or 'under-listened' to. In this Strategy, and in our EDI Strategy and Implementation plan, we set out and commit to moving toward equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the organisations, and beyond this toward realising values of justice and belonging through our work too.

Thank you to everyone who helped to shape this strategy in different ways, including our board, staff, youth advisory group and their parents, our panel of Associate Artists, and some of the partner organisations who we have worked with recently.

Ciara Gallagher
CEO and Creative Director.



BACKGROUND

Since 1997, Kids' Own Publishing Partnership has made its mark as an innovative and forward-thinking children and young people's arts organisation and publishing house. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises children's right to "participate fully in cultural and artistic life" (Article 31) and the right to express their right to be listened to and their views to be taken seriously (Article 12). Kids' Own is proud to be an organisation dedicated to realising both of these rights. We aim to ensure that children and young people are not only participants in cultural and artistic life, but recognised as artistic creators in their own right. We also believe that the arts are an important way for children's voices to be heard, listened to, and acted upon more widely in society. We are unique in our focus on creating beautiful, authentic, and high-quality publications by children and young people for children and young people, across a range of

different forms (including but not limited to books and other printed material, digital publications, and other forms of publication through audio and visual means). We also provide a public platform for children's work through exhibition in galleries, libraries, museums, outdoor spaces, and more.

There are two key elements to everything we do. Firstly, children and young people's voices, artistic expression, and lived experiences are central. Secondly, the value of meaningful arts practice, that creates a partnership between children and young people and professional artists, is foundational. By always ensuring we prioritise these core elements of our work, we are committing to elevating children and young people's voices and highlighting careful, considered, and collaborative arts practice as a powerful way to do this.



VISION

Our vision is for a society that knows children and young people are artistic creators worthy of attention, and whose voices and creativity are intrinsically valuable.

MISSION

Our mission is to create projects where children and young people are heard, listened to, and responded to through meaningful arts practice with professional artists, and to amplify children and young people's voices through publishing, broadcasting, and exhibiting their artistic expressions.

OUR VALUES

Led by children and young people (voice)

We are a child and young person-led and centred organisation. Children and young people's experiences, feelings, voices, and artistic expression drive everything that we do. Through meaningful, professional arts practice, we bring new modes of expression and enquiry to children and young people, supporting them to find what they want to say with their voice. We continue to work to find more and new ways of embedding children and young people's voices in our work and organisation.

Real and meaningful partnerships (listening)

Kids' Own is an organisation based on real and meaningful partnerships – we work in partnership with children and young people, with our Associate Artists, and with partner organisations. Those we work in close partnership with bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, without which Kids' Own would not exist and operate as it does. We are a responsive organisation, committed to listening and taking action in response.

Socially engaged (action)

Kids' Own is an arts organisation with a heightened awareness of the different contexts and lived experiences of the children and young people that we work with. We are an organisation focused on change. Through our work we want to change how children and young people are heard and listened to and to be part of demonstrating how essential the arts is in this change.

Authenticity

We strive to bring authenticity and realness to everything we do, and in particular, to our artistic engagement with children and young people. We want to support our artists to bring their authenticity, of self and practice, to their work with children and young people. We want to support children and young people to create artworks that are authentic, that reflect their real and genuine interests, opinions, and voices.

Belonging

As we continually adapt and respond to those we work with in terms of our focus on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, we also want to move beyond some of the constrictions of these terms. We want to continue to actively create an organisation centred on belonging, on listening to and removing barriers across the different elements of the organisation. We want children and young people who are part of our projects, who read our books, participate in our public workshops, or engage with our exhibitions, to feel a sense of belonging. We want our Associate Artists, current and future, to feel that they belong and are listened to; that there is work and opportunities that are meaningful to them. We want our staff to feel a real support and understanding from the organisation that knows they are real people with real lives. Creating a sense of belonging relies on continual change and responsiveness.

POLICY CONTEXT

Kids' Own's work is situated within the context and framework of a number of key national policies, particularly those related to the arts, children, and young people. Our work responds to and aligns with these key policies; our focus on quality, process-based art that respects, listens and responds to children and young people's voices, and holds professional artists and their practice with children as integral, is enabled and brought to life by the shared values, ethos, and direction of these policies.

Key among these national policies are those set out by the Arts Council, including Making Great Art Work – Arts Council Strategy (2016–2025); the Growing with the Arts: Arts Council policy for children and young people's arts and its Implementation Plan (2023–2025). We are also guided by key policies and implementation plans such as the Arts Council's Paying the Artist and the Arts Council's Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy. As we work on a shared island context, we are guided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's new Strategic Plan (2024–2034) Championing the Arts – Investing in the next 10 years. The Creative Ireland Programme 2018 – 2022 and 2023 – 2027 continues to be a key reference point for Kids' Own, in its all-of-government aim to place creativity at the centre of public policy. As a children's arts organisation, we are particularly invested in and attentive to the Creative Youth Plan 2023–2027. As an organisation that works nationally, we acknowledge the importance

of each local authority's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027.

We continue to be guided by documents that strengthen commitment to working with children and young people, including the Arts in Education Charter (2013), a cross governmental initiative, has facilitated a huge leap forward in the Arts in Education sector, providing a framework and funding streams for long-term nationwide initiatives. As current managers of the Arts in Education Portal, Kids' Own is dedicated to working with the Arts in Education Portal Committee to implement and deliver the The Arts in Education Portal Strategy 2023–2027, A Community of Practice.

We also operate in a broader policy context, aligning with policies that take into account different stages and aspects of children's lives. As an arts organisation underpinned by fulfilling children's rights, including their right to culture, right to be heard, and right to participate, we are informed by key documents, including: Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028; First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028; Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024–2028; Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme 2023–2025.

Collaboration with seldom-heard (“under-listened to”) children, young people, and their communities is core to our work.

In particular, over the last 25 years, we have worked closely with Traveller children and young people and their communities. We are committed to continuing this as a central part of our work. The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028, which follows on from the NTRIS (2017-21), will continue to be a key reference point. As we continue to work with Traveller organisations and with Traveller children in education settings, promoting and providing a platform for Traveller children's voices, lives, and experiences through the arts, we are also guided by the new Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030 and Traveller Culture and History in the Curriculum: a Curriculum Audit (NCCA, 2019).

Our work in partnership with organisations who have deep understanding of the different realities children experience and who have expertise in advocating and advancing change is of vital importance. Key among these is the National Traveller Movement's Traveller Youth Participation & Leadership Strategy 2021 – 2025, Supporting & Promoting the Voice of Young Travellers, as well as the respective strategies of Traveller organisations we will work with, and other rights-holder groups. Allowing space for learning from the strategies of organisations we will work with over this strategic period is important in the understanding of the work we do together and in acknowledgement of the learning that takes place through each partnership.



A photograph of two children, a boy and a girl, sitting on a green carpeted floor and painting on a large white sheet of paper. The boy, on the left, is wearing a light blue t-shirt and dark pants, and is using a paintbrush to apply blue paint. The girl, on the right, is wearing a pink and white patterned dress and is also using a paintbrush. They are both focused on their work. The paper is covered with various colors of paint, including blue, green, and yellow. There are also some paintbrushes and a small container of paint visible on the paper. The background is a plain green wall.

STRATEGIC AIM 1

STRATEGIC AIM 1

Work in partnership with children and young people to make exciting, engaging, and authentic artwork and books.

WHY?

To emphasise the importance of equal partnership and depth of artistic process in co-creation between children and young people and professional artists, showing the scope and value of meaningful engagement with the arts for children and young people.

Kids' Own's ethos has always been centred on the intrinsic value of child-led, child-centred arts practice. We will continue to create more and new opportunities for children and young people to be centred in arts processes as collaborators, co-creators and leaders, working alongside professional artists and writers.

When we work with children and young people we want to emphasise: that we are working in partnership with children and young people; the kind of art we want to make together is authentic; artistic process and experience is paramount. We also want to make this process visible through providing a platform for children and young people's artistic voices to be shared after the project has ended.



OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<p>1. Continue to recognise our value as organisation that has been a leader in engaging children in meaningful arts processes with professional artists for almost three decades on the island of Ireland and to amplify and deepen the work that we do, always guarding and developing our process</p>	<p>1. We will have continued to reflect on and develop our partnership with children and young people, and the processes through which we work together. Our reflections and learning will be documented. We will continue to be a leader in the children's art sector in terms of co-creation with children and</p>
<p>2. Create more and new opportunities for children and young people, from birth to eighteen plus, to experience high quality artistic experiences, that enables their many voices to be heard, listened to and responded to.</p>	<p>2. We will have increased the reach of our work to impact more children and young people and in new ways; we will have grown our work with early years children, and with young people up to the age of 18, and in certain instances up to the age of 24.</p>
<p>3. Through this work, we are making space to collaborate/work in partnership with all children, but especially children whose voices are seldom heard.</p>	<p>3. We will have worked with new communities of children. These projects will have been developed through a range of measures including creating new strategic partnerships and researching and implementing new EDI actions/goals.</p>
<p>4. Listen and respond to children and young people's voices in all aspects of our work, including how we develop and facilitate projects</p>	<p>4. We will have responded to and developed new ways to ensure that children and young people's voices are central in how our work involving children and artists is developed and facilitated, including more time pre-project with children and young people to ensure their voices are central to the facilitation of a project.</p>
<p>5. Focus on extending our work in a shared island capacity and building foundations for our work in a wider European context. Ensure that our work takes place across a range of settings and contexts, including community and education settings.</p>	<p>5. We will have developed and extended our work on a shared island basis and will have begun working with new European partners.</p>

STRATEGIC AIM **2**



STRATEGIC AIM 2

Publish, broadcast and exhibit children and young people's artwork and voices

WHY?

To amplify children and young people's artistic voices through providing a platform for their work that recognises and validates their capacity as artists and writers, as part of our wider cultural sphere.

As well as providing a space for children and young people to engage meaningfully with the arts through collaboration with professional artists and writers, Kids' Own also provides a platform for their artwork, words, and voices.

This strategic priority of publishing, broadcasting and exhibiting children and young people's artistic voices is part of what makes Kids' Own unique. We honour and recognise the value of children and young people's art and words through high-quality publication (especially printed books, but also other printed and digital publications, and other forms of publication through audio and visual means). We also provide a public platform for children's work through exhibition in galleries, libraries, museums, outdoor spaces, and more.

We do this so that children, young people, their peers and their communities can see, read, engage with and respond to their artistic voices. By publishing and promoting their artwork and writing, we can encourage new engagement, new opportunities and possibilities for their voices to start conversations, raise awareness, increase empathy and understanding, amongst communities of children and young people.



OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<p>1. Continue to publish books by children and young people for children and young people, that further reflects the diversity of children and young people living on the island of Ireland.</p>	<p>1. We will have published more books by children and young people, that increases the diversity of voices heard through our publications.artists.</p>
<p>2. Create new opportunities for children and young people's artwork and words to be exhibited in galleries, arts centres, and other settings across the island of Ireland.</p>	<p>2. We will continue to build on and tour our archival exhibition TADA!, and have created new opportunities for children and young people's artwork to be displayed.</p>
<p>3. Continue to diversify the ways we publish and broadcast children and young people's artistic voices, including through digital publications, as well as audio and video productions.</p>	<p>3. We will have a range of published outputs, beyond books and publications, that represent children and young people's artistic voices. All our publications (printed or other) will</p>
<p>4. Ensure that our books and publications are available and accessible to children and young people by building on our dissemination plan to ensure the books are in libraries, schools, and community settings across the island of Ireland.</p>	<p>4. We will have built on our dissemination plan, ensuring that a greater number of libraries, schools, and community settings have Kids' Own books.</p>
<p>5. Continue building relationships with schools and teachers through consultation to ensure our books are not only present in classrooms, but that they are recognised as valuable to children and young people's wellbeing, and as useful in extending their learning in connection with the relevant curricula. We want teachers to feel supported and confident in engaging children and young people with our books.</p>	<p>5. We will have developed a pilot engagement programme on using our books in schools, that supports teachers in the use of Kids' Own books in the classroom, and that creates enduring and engaging links with relevant curricula.</p>

STRATEGIC AIM 3



STRATEGIC AIM 3

Urge, encourage, and support artists to be bold, authentic and brave in their collaboration with children.

WHY?

To ensure the artistic quality of our work remains central to everything we do, and that we have a network of professional artists and writers from diverse communities that are committed to working in partnership with children and young people.

Artists are at the heart of Kids' Own; we deeply respect, value, and champion professional arts practice with children. The methodologies and processes which underpin Kids' Own's work have been developed continually and in partnership with our Associate Artists since our establishment. As an arts organisation that centres on co-creation between children, young people, and professional artists, we want to continue to recognise the artistic excellence, energy, and commitment of our Associate Artists that is intertwined with our mission and vision.

Over the period of this strategy, we will develop the ways we support, respond to, and encourage artists, with a particular emphasis on extending the diversity of our Associate Artist panel, and developing a range of supports (as outlined in our EDI policy and action plan). As well as offering supports, we want to ensure that we always provide new sparks of inspiration and exciting opportunities for artists that urge new ways of thinking, collaboration, and listening.



OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
1. Continue to support our Associate Artists and their professional arts practice with children and young people.	1. Kids' Own will have a thriving, committed panel of Associate Artists. We will continue to seek regular conversation and consultation with artists on all elements of how our projects are developed, facilitated and communicated.
2. Continue to model best practice in the arts in education and share our knowledge across the sector, by making visible the process and practice of our work.	2. We will be recognised as a model of best practice across and beyond the arts sector. Our expertise will continue to be made tangible across the arts in education sector through our management of the Arts in Education Portal and the implementation of the Portal's Strategic Plan (2023-2027). Through our management of the Portal, we will continue to bring our support and validation to all artists committed to professional arts practice with children.
3. Develop new and different supports for artists committed to working with children and young people, that recognises that artists are at different stages in their career when it comes to professional arts practice with children and young people.	3. We will have developed of a range of bespoke supports for artists, that are always informed by and with artists, and facilitated through continuous consultation and conversation with artists.promote greater accessibility.
4. Spark new and exciting opportunities for and with artists.	4. Our culture of listening to and collaborating with our Associate Artists will have deepened, as we bring into being opportunities for artists that connect with and extend their practice.
5. Extend the diversity of the artists we work with.	5. The way we recruit, support, and deepen collaborative relationships with new artists from diverse communities will have changed and developed, as we continue to learn and reflect on our work in this area (and in line with our EDI policy).

STRATEGIC AIM 4



STRATEGIC AIM 4

Promote and provoke a serious response to children and young people's artwork/art and voices/artistic voices.

WHY?

To change perceptions about children and young people's art, writing, and artistic voices, and to advocate for the value of the arts as an important way of listening to and responding to children and young people's voices across society.

This strategic priority aims to further our work to promote and provide a platform for children's art and writing. We also want to change perceptions about children and young people's artistic voices in wider society. We aim to promote and provoke a serious response to children's artwork and voices across all sectors of society. We want our work with children and young people to be visible and valued not only with their communities and peers, but to reach, impact, and influence a much wider section of society. This includes but is not limited to: professionals across a range of sectors (teachers and educators, researchers, community workers, social workers, psychologists), as well as policy-makers, those involved in curriculum design, and those with decision-making powers.

This strategic priority also highlights our work with partner organisations and other stakeholders. This aim focuses on the change that we want to see in society and recognises that we can't and don't do this work on our own. Our work with partner organisations and other stakeholders is key: our books and other projects are possible through our work in partnership with a range of organisations, including those focused on advocacy, rights-holder organisations, community organisations, Government Departments and agencies, along with schools, early years settings, other education sector stakeholders. We work in partnership with organisations and agencies who have deep understanding of the different realities children experience and who have expertise in advocating and advancing change.

This strategic priority centres on our advocacy for the importance of children and young people's voices being heard through the arts, and the impact this work can have beyond the arts sector.

We will continue to prioritise research on what we do, why we do it, to document if there are changes and impacts, and to always assess and reflect on what we are doing, and how we can do it better.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<p>1. Develop longer-term partnerships with key organisations and agencies, ensuring our work in collaboration with partner organisations can extend beyond specific projects, to make impact across sectors, and beyond the arts sector.</p>	<p>1. More organisations will see the value in Kids' Own's work beyond the facilitation of a project and publication of a book or other artwork. This longer-term partnership building will ensure our work can be part of a larger movement for change in children and young people's lives, and their wellbeing, and how meaningful engagement with the arts can and should be at the heart of this.</p>
<p>2. Raise the profile of Kids' Own's work and make it more visible to all sectors of society, as well as ensure that our work is known about and considered by high-level stakeholders and decision-makers.</p>	<p>2. We will have attended and presented at relevant conferences and attended and participated in other key national fora, such as the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Summit. We will also aim to develop publications about our work and its importance, therefore developing our profile in key, tangible ways.</p>
<p>3. Continue to develop research on what we do and why we do it; to document if there are changes and impacts and to always assess and reflect on what we are doing, and how we can do it better, ensuring that children's voices are always at the centre of this.</p>	<p>3. We will have developed a further body of research and evaluation about our work in two key areas: the impact of our work on participants and beneficiaries, with a particular emphasis on arts process and experience; the impact of our work, through our publications, on a wider cohort, including children and young people who are readers of the books and who have not been involved in making the books, and adults, such as parents, guardians, teachers, and other professionals who work with children and young people.</p>
<p>4. Invest time and capacity into building strategic relationships with high-level stakeholders to advance key, identified outcomes</p>	<p>4. In recognition of the long-term, embedded nature of the work of building strategic partnerships, we will have developed and begun to implement a stakeholder engagement plan.</p>

STRATEGIC AIM 5



STRATEGIC AIM 5

Address capacity needs to sustain the development of a strong organisation.

WHY?

To ensure our continued growth and development as an organisation matches our capacity



This strategic priority recognises the growth and evolution of Kids' Own over almost three decades, and ensures that we only commit to continued growth and development in line with our capacity. We want to ensure a strong and supported response to our capacity requirements, in recognition of our value and potential as an organisation, and as an organisation that prioritises its people and their wellbeing.

Kids' Own has a strong and dedicated board of directors with a range of expertise and a staff team who are experienced and committed to Kids' Own's work and values.



OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
1. Respond to and resource the organisation's needs in order to evolve and deliver on this strategy	1. Kids' Own will be able to deliver on this ambitious Strategy and will have developed as an organisation in terms of the depth and scope of our work.
2. Recognise and value our staff team, through providing opportunities for continued professional development, and prioritising staff wellbeing through achievable workloads.	2. Our staff will feel valued personally and professionally, and will report good job satisfaction and find workloads manageable.
3. To continue identifying and recruiting expertise for the Board, with a specific focus on diversifying its membership in alignment with our EDI policy.	3. The Board will have successfully expanded its membership by recruiting individuals with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and expertise, in line with the organisation's commitment to its EDI policy. Resulting in a more inclusive and representative Board that reflects a broad range of experiences, cultures and viewpoints, contributing to a more informed decision-making process and a stronger organisational structure.
4. To be responsive and adaptable, while continuing our financial sustainability by ensuring continued good relationships with key funders, and identifying and securing new sources of funding from different types of funders.	4. Our financial security will have continued, with growth in key funders and new types of funding opportunities.
5. Continue to fulfil all of our good governance requirements	5. Kids' Own will be operating as an organisation fully compliant with our statutory obligations and will be working toward key markers of good governance such as Triple Lock status.
6. To prioritise inclusivity, equity, fairness, and sustainability in all our operations (in line with our EDI policy and in the development of our new Climate Action Policy and Action Plan)	6. Key policies and associated action plans, namely our new EDI policy and forthcoming Climate Action Policy and Plan, will mean we have developed in how we operate as a fair and sustainable organisation



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