

THE THEATRE  
CHIPPING NORTON

# IMPACT REPORT 2025 -26



## Contents

Welcome from our Artistic Director	2
A Little Giant of the Arts	3
A Theatre for Everyone	5
Celebrating Five Years of Community Support	7
Fostering Skills that go Beyond the Stage	9
From Participant to Practitioner	11
Funding Your Theatre	13
Our Supporters	14

# Welcome

from our Artistic Director

This year has marked a step change in the scale and reach of our inhouse theatre productions, and a maturing and consolidation of the social impact of our community programme. We hope you will enjoy finding out more about what we have been up to!

## **Our Mission Statement**

**We are the little giant of the arts – a rural venue and producing theatre with doors open to all.**

**We make and share inspiring performances and transformative creative activities.**

**We act as a driver of social change and community cohesion, and as a source of joy and curiosity for both our local community and national audiences.**

Chipping Norton is a town characterised by extremes. Alongside Cotswold stone buildings and areas of extreme affluence sit hidden but significant pockets of severe disadvantage, underachievement and increasing deprivation. The west end of town ranks within the 10% most deprived nationally.

We are intent on addressing the issues of rural poverty, isolation and poor mental health which impact many young people and families in our local area. This year marked five years since the inception of our new approach to community led engagement - an approach that has seen us recognised as field leaders in rural socially impactful arts activities by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Theatre's Trust.

But don't just take our word for it. Later in the report, you can read, in her own words, the story of one person's relationship with The Theatre, from Mental Health Group participant to becoming a confident team member and arts practitioner.

John Terry, Artistic Director

# “A little giant of the arts”



## The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged

We produced two major in-house shows this year, bringing professional productions to our stage which would not otherwise be viable in a small rural theatre and creating opportunities for professional creatives to work in Chipping Norton.

The Theatre co-produced a major new production, working with The Reduced Shakespeare Company, which has played to over 25,000 in a 26 week national tour, with venues including Bristol Old Vic, York Theatre Royal and the Oxford Playhouse. The tour marks a new milestone in the scale of our in-house production and touring work.

# 27

the number of venues in our biggest national tour to date!

# 25,000

people have seen this production of 'The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged'

105  
LIVE SHOWS

AND

92

PANTO  
PERFORMANCES

We also hosted...

**LIVE THEATRE** - we hosted 64 live theatre performances from the dystopian world of 1984 to family shows including The Cat in the Hat.

**COMEDY** - 22 comedians from pre tour warm up gigs for national names to local legends

**MUSIC** - 19 live music performances on stage.

**SCREENINGS** 42 theatre, opera and ballet performances from houses in the UK and the US.

**FILM** - screenings every week ranging from indie arthouse to Oscar nominees

**DANCE & ART** - our gallery hosted four exhibitions and we began screening art exhibitions from national galleries taking you behind the scenes.



**"One thing you can  
count on here is  
excellence"**

Red Kite Days Review  
Beauty and The Beast  
2025-26

Beauty and the Beast, 2025-26

# A Theatre for Everyone

We make and share inspiring performances and transformative creative activities which are a source of joy and curiosity for both our local community and national audiences.

**35,984**

visitors watched live shows in the theatre this year

**“I was blown away by the performance”**  
audience feedback for 1984

**“We left with an aching jaw from laughing”**  
audience feedback for Mark Watson

**6,700**

children watched beauty and the beast, either with their school or with their family

**“Every aspect of the evening was first class. A wonderful venue, friendly staff and a superb performance by the five musicians”**  
audience feedback for Buddy Holly & The Crickets

## First Experiences of Theatre

We're Going on a Bear Hunt, 2026

**“My grandchildren were enthralled throughout. A real joy to share in their experience of real theatre”**  
audience feedback for Tales from Acorn Wood

**“A wonderful first theatre experience”**  
audience feedback for We're Going on a Bear Hunt

**380**

children took part in our 'Intro to Panto' workshops in primary schools, funded by Cotswold Arts Through Schools



We aim to ensure that our doors are open to all by making theatre more affordable & accessible for everyone.

# £19.60

the average ticket price across every event at The Theatre last year

# £5

Pick A Price and subsidised tickets for under 26s make live theatre and new and emerging talent accessible.

# 502

free community tickets were distributed to local supported families & individuals.

# 845

people attended accessible live shows or screenings including audio described, captioned and relaxed performances.

We also offer free tickets for carers or companions so those with disabilities or additional needs are able to access the theatre without additional cost.

**“It was amazing. I’ve never been to the theatre before and it’s just perfect. I love how personal it felt. The staff were amazing too”**  
audience feedback for relaxed performance



James Rowland, Learning To Fly  
Pick A Price at Chipping Norton Theatre

# Five Years of Social Impact

In 2020, The Theatre launched a new community programme in response to the pandemic, and the dramatic reduction of statutory community services in our region. We set out to bring lasting change and impact to our community.

Prior to 2020, The Theatre's participation programme, Take Part, ran a broad and much-loved range of youth and adult theatre groups. But despite a bursary scheme, what we didn't see in these groups were the members of our rural community who had the greatest needs, and perhaps had the most to benefit from engaging in community and creative activities.

In 2020, in response to calls for help from the food bank we instigated a Free School Holiday Meals programme. Over the years, this went from buttering sandwiches, to weekly shops, to food vouchers and now, five years later, we support 170 children every week of the holidays. As a result, this group are among the most regular users of our building



WISE INVESTMENT

WISE Investment's support for school holiday lunches has been the foundation for our community programme

**“The Theatre is leading the way in socially impactful arts programmes in a rural setting” Theatre's Trust**

We have been recognised by bodies such as Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Theatre's Trust and our own West Oxfordshire District Council for delivering high quality, transformative creative programmes for young people and their families.

“The lunches have made a massive difference over the school holidays & the children have been able to access the theatre to see shows that we wouldn't normally take them to due to cost. It makes such a difference to families on benefits”  
Parent of Family supported by Free School Holiday Meal Programme



Theatre staff distributing arts activities in 2022

But school holiday lunches were just the beginning. Our 'Ladder-of-Engagement' model meets young people in ways that are comfortable, accessible and affordable, before gradually building their confidence and integration into the life and broader programme of The Theatre. This began with easy-to-use art packs, then more creative art packs and in-person workshops, taster theatre workshops and finally to year-round bursaries for our youth theatre.

**17,000**

To date, The Theatre have provided more than 17,000 lunches alongside thousands of arts & theatre activities, opportunities to experience live theatre, and to get on-stage.

Our community scheme now also includes more strands, including theatre-based mental health programmes developed with mental health practitioners to support young people who are struggling in our local secondary schools, a long-term, regular community ticket programme giving families access to the theatre regardless of their finances and specialist SEN and trauma informed youth theatre groups to offer extra support as needed.

"The young people we support are thriving, learning new skills and gaining confidence. Many have joined our Youth Theatre with bursary support, performed on stage and even joined our team!" Clare O'Hara, Project Coordinator



All The Theatre's community programmes are free to the participant; funded by grants and donations.

Participants at a free family arts workshop

- In 2025-26 our community programme has provided**
- 11,050** free school holiday lunches
- 1,066** free school holiday arts activities
- 926** term time theatre sessions funded by bursaries
- 502** Community Tickets
- 52** places in mental health and wellbeing workshops at local schools.
- 42** Free places in Holiday Theatre Workshops.

# Fostering skills that go beyond the stage

## 286

Adults, children and young people 'Take Part' in creative classes at The Theatre every week.

**ADULT DRAMA**

**CHIPPY SINGERS**

**CAN SING CHOIR**

**DANCE 50**

**CREATIVE WRITERS**

**GREAT COMPANY**

## 177

young people have performed on stage in school holiday drama and musical theatre workshops

**LITTLE LIMELIGHTS**

**SATURDAY DRAMA**

**YOUTH THEATRE**

**YOUTH MUSICAL THEATRE**

**YT-SEN**

**We believe that creativity and expression is for everyone.**

Our 'Take Part' programme includes something for everyone with a variety of weekly participatory classes for different groups including babies, toddlers, young people, adults and those with additional needs.

This year we expanded **Little Limelights**, our drama sessions for under 5's, **Great Company**, our theatre company for young adults who are neurodivergent or have a learning disability and **Creative Writers** classes for adults so more people can benefit by getting involved.

**22%** OF YOUTH THEATRE STUDENTS WERE SUPPORTED BY THE JUDITH & TONY YAROW BURSARY PROGRAMME



"I LOVE adult drama. The group is very special with a supportive teacher who encourages us to play and grow. Very welcoming theatre which has given me the creative outlet I was longing for." Adult Drama Group Participant

Adult Drama Participants in rehearsal

"I always feel so at home and inspired when I'm on the stage at The Theatre"  
Bursary Recipient

"That was SO FUN!.." the words of my daughter! Parent of Take Part Participant

"It's fantastic to watch both my kids perform so confidently within such a short time",  
Parent of Holiday Drama Participants

Learning backstage skills at YT Extra!

### Taking part in theatre and drama offers far more than just acting skills.

It develops confidence, collaboration, communication, self-worth and adaptability; vital skills for today and for the future. We aim to provide this opportunity to people of all ages, abilities and all backgrounds in our community.

"My daughter was incredibly nervous when she first arrived ... the theatre were fantastic at building her confidence, encouraging her to be brave and make new friends. She has absolutely loved these sessions! Thank you so much."

Youth Theatre Parent

## YT Extra!

In September 2025 we hosted a day of insider masterclasses, free to our participants, teaching new skills across all areas of theatre including lighting design, make-up, stage combat and theatre skills.



YT Extra was made possible by donations to Anthony Peter's 'Good Morning' fundraising appeal.

# From Participant to Practitioner

In this spotlight, we share the story of a young person, in their own words, who began her journey with us by receiving targeted support from The Theatre, and now, as a young adult, is launched into a confident career as a creative artist and practitioner.



**What began as a small workshop for a shy ten-year-old became a life-changing journey – one that turned a participant into a mentor, a leader and an aspiring practitioner determined to support the next generation in return.**

"I first came to The Theatre for a musical theatre workshop with my older sister. I was 10 at the time and I was not a confident child. Never have been. Whilst I do love being on stage, I could never do it solo, I struggled with it a lot.

In year seven I had some counselling as I wasn't coping very well, but as soon as covid happened, that stopped immediately. I know a lot of people felt just completely and utterly alone throughout that time and a lot of people started struggling with anxiety. When we went back to school all the counsellors had gone; they just didn't have the support that we needed.

I joined The Theatre's first mental health workshops in my school in 2021. It definitely helped me feel like I was less alone a lot of the time. <The Theatre practitioners> were from a place that was very local to us and were friendly and really kind. Knowing that someone cared enough to come from the theatre to school just to try and help us out meant a lot to everyone. The workshops offered a space where we felt we could speak out a lot more.

I've definitely used the toolkit of skills that I learnt through those workshops. I still do a lot of the activities, especially in moments where I am feeling a lot more anxious around exams or other pressures.

At 14, I was offered a place in a holiday workshop at The Theatre and then mum got an email asking me to become an assistant, which I very happily agreed to be. When I started I was not confident, obviously I was nervous, but the practitioner I was assisting welcomed me in straight away.

People come here from different backgrounds, of different need. A lot of people are less confident when they come in and just standing with them, showing them the stage for the first time, watching them grow, especially in their performing abilities and their confidence. Seeing how excited they are when they come off stage, I get a great sense of pride out of it.

I think working at the theatre and coming here, it's impacted me a lot. Learning how to be myself without being apologetic about it. In the theatre you build a community. If you have an idea, you can say it. It might not always be used, but it's always considered.

Even travelling by myself, I wouldn't have been able to do years ago and now I can, because I just feel a lot more secure in myself.



"I've always loved doing the arts so to have the opportunity to do something at the theatre was very cool to me. It was the first time I ever felt that I was truly in charge of something"

This summer I'm participating in a project at The Theatre teaching young people to become assistants and practitioners along with acting and skills workshops. I'm desperate to learn more about how to work with young people within the arts.

**In September, I have a place at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London. I think the only reason I've managed to actually do that is through working here. Being able to be here has just been one of the greatest experiences that I could have ever had".**



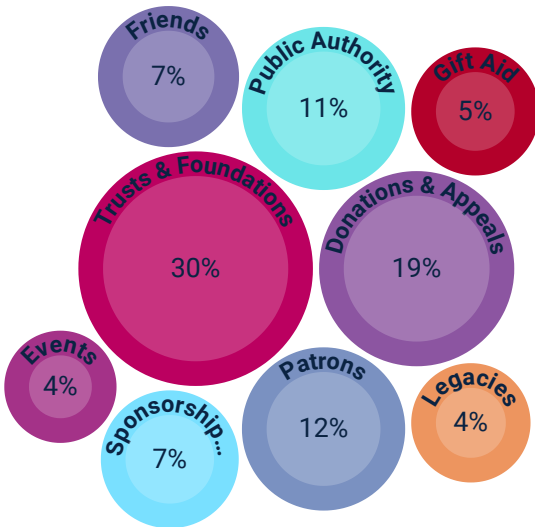
Volunteer Ushers

# Funding your theatre

As a charity, your support ensures The Theatre remains a vibrant, thriving centre for the arts. Everything that happens at The Theatre, from ticketed events to community programmes, is made possible by our members, donors and sponsors. Approximately 25% of The Theatre’s running costs are covered by fundraising and we earn an impressive 75% of our income each year through tickets, sales and Box Office services.

## Fundraising 2025-26

### £345,633



**Thank you!**

- 1985 Donors
- 2685 Prize Draw Tickets
- 157 Sponsored miles run
- 632 Friends
- 63 Patrons

**Over 150 people volunteer each year** from our wonderful team of more than 70 ushers, to our trustees, cake bakers, craft kit packers, volunteers & fundraisers.

to find out more about supporting us call us on 01608 649105 or visit [www.chippingnotontheatre.com/support-us](http://www.chippingnotontheatre.com/support-us)



Ellie in training for the London Marathon, 2025

### Ellie's Marathon effort

Ellie Walker ran her first ever marathon, at London 2025 raising £4,536

## Sponsors & Partners 2025-26

Our enormous thanks to all the businesses and organisations who have supported The Theatre this year.



### WISE INVESTMENT Headline Theatre Partners

- Aldi
- Big Cheeks Wellbeing
- Chipping Norton Business Buzz
- Chequers, Chipping Norton
- Cleenol
- Co-op Community Fund
- Evenlode Investments
- Dragon School
- Hedges Law
- Kingham Hill School
- Noble IT
- Reform IT
- Thunder
- OxLEP
- Windrush Valley School

### WITH THANKS TO THE TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS WHO SUPPORTED THE THEATRE IN 2025-26

The Aird Charitable Trust, The Albion Trust, The Art Society of West Oxon, Big Give, Cash For Kids, Connected Community Fund, Cotswold Arts Through Schools, CHK Foundation, Churchill and Sarsden Parish Council, Doris Field Charitable Trust, Elizabeth Jackson Charitable Trust, Esmée Fairburn Foundation, Enstone Parish Council, Equity Charitable Trust, HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust, Kingham Parish Council, Movement for Good, Oddington Parish Council, The Ormonde Foundation, Oxfordshire County Councillors Priority Fund, The PF Charitable Trust, Singer Foundation, Stella Symonds Charitable Trust, Theatre's Trust, Walter Higgs Charitable Trust, Ward Charitable Trust.

- Our partners include
- Age Concern Chipping Norton
  - Chipping Norton Town Council
  - Chippy Larder
  - Chippy Lido
  - Cotswold Arts Through Schools
  - Oxford Play Partnership
  - Mind
  - The Branch
  - Thrive
  - West Oxfordshire District Council



WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

# WAYS TO SUPPORT THE THEATRE



## SEE A SHOW

Every ticket sold supports performers and artists and The Theatre.

## BECOME A MEMBER

The regular support of Friends and Patrons is vital to The Theatre every year.

## DONATE

Donating helps share creative arts and supports our community programmes.

## FUNDRAISE FOR US

Holding a fundraiser, or taking on a challenge helps more people benefit from the arts

## LEAVE A LEGACY

A gift in your will can help us improve the theatre and deliver a thriving creative programme.

## SPONSOR US

Sponsors share our commitment to sharing the arts with the Chipping Norton community

to find out how scan the QR code above, call us on 01608 649105  
or visit [www.chippingnotontheatre.com/support-us](http://www.chippingnotontheatre.com/support-us)

Registered Charity No. 268154

