

IMPACT REPORT 2025/26



THE HERD

MAKING SPACE FOR CHILDHOOD





This impact report spans January 2025 - March 2026

We delivered **192 live hours** of creative play and shows **in our home of Hull** in this time.

We delivered **988 live hours** of creative play and shows **around the rest of the UK.**

WHAT WE DO

Rooted in Hull, and acclaimed nationally, we collaborate with young children to dream up shows, installations and local programmes of play that spark joy, celebrate child creativity and nurture family connection. We run regular creative play sessions in family hubs, community centres and schools. We tour shows to our local libraries and the UK's leading theatres. We build play installations in disused shops and world famous arts venues.

We believe in the radical power of the arts to help children thrive, families connect and communities flourish. We think that 21st century life leaves little space for childhood, and puts pressure on family connection, so we create stories and spaces dedicated to children and their adults. Our work has creative play at its heart because we know from child psychologists that play is the way that children develop their brains, bodies and social skills. We work in communities where the pressures of poverty have a particularly negative impact on childhood.

Led by theatre makers Ruby Thompson and Sam Caseley, we're a herd of artists, makers and play workers, with a shared dedication to the genius of young children.



SHOWS



INSTALLATION



PLAYWORK



OUR VALUES

PLAY

We play alongside children to create ideas for all our work, play with artists to realise these ideas, and then unlock opportunities for our audiences to play.

FAMILY

We create mutually beneficial experiences for the whole family, as enjoyable for adults as children. We understand families come in all shapes and sizes, and use the word to describe a child and their responsible grown up/s.

JOY

We exist to celebrate, interrogate and nurture the joy of childhood. We create exceptional moments for our audience that sit outside of the everyday.

RELEVANCE

We ensure our work is relevant, exciting and truthful to children by collaborating with them in all stages of the making. Our shows and experiences resonate with children living through the 2020s.

EQUITY

We work hard to remove the barriers children and families have to accessing arts experiences, with a particular focus on barriers facing working class people and Disabled people.



50
ARTISTS

40,974
AUDIENCE MEMBERS

1,180
LIVE HOURS

53
PERFORMANCES

4,519
PARTICIPANTS

1,010
EVENTS*

2
AWARDS

2025/26 IN NUMBERS

*this covers our creative play sessions, installations and workshops



REPLAY

A LIMITLESS RECYCLED PLAYGROUND



**“It was probably the best fun I’ve ever had in my life. Definitely.
More playgrounds should be made from recycling”**

Child Feedback, REPLAY

REPLAY 2025/6

Part installation, part adventure playground, REPLAY is a space built entirely out of waste materials repurposed for fun. The space features a design to ignite imaginations, a score composed from recycled sounds and a crowd-sourced play generator.

Children and their grown-ups are invited to play side-by-side in this space full of things you can move, change, combine, wear and reimagine. In REPLAY's self-led experience, you can build your own worlds, invent your own games, and be inspired by others.

REPLAY was commissioned by Southbank Centre as part of Planet Summer 2023. It is a co-production by Southbank Centre and The Herd Theatre. 2025 saw it's return to the Southbank Centre, a run which was then **extended twice due to popular demand**.

REPLAY was programmed as part of Bradford City of Culture 2025. It ran for 8 weeks at Damart Mill in Bingley.

In total REPLAY was open for 44 weeks over 2025.

38,108 total participants



“Now in its third year at Southbank Centre, I feel like REPLAY is reaching Cadbury Creme Egg status in how hotly anticipated it now is each season... If you’re a [London] parent and you’ve never heard of it, you’re basically the equivalent of a teacher who hasn’t heard of the “six seven” trend, and I’m not sure I believe you”

‘Dad’s in London’ Blog





38,108 total participants

30,912 London participants

714 live hours in London

7,196 Bradford participants

171 live hours in Bradford



TURNING JUNK TO JOY AT A RECYCLED PLAYGROUND

CBS 19

6:50

73°

LOCAL NEWS: ANS TIE GREEN RIBBONS AROUND TREES TO HONOR FLOOD VICTIMS FROM CAMP MYSTIC



CBS News did a feature on REPLAY which was broadcast to 15 million viewers in America.

AWARD WINNERS

At the **Hull City Council Team Awards 2025**, Whale Song our 2024 picture book and drama programme delivered in collaboration with the Hull Schools Library Service was **Highly Commended for its work providing children with a space to explore bereavement.**

Our 2024/25 local touring strategy for Counting Sheeps won the **Audience Impact and Innovation Award** at the Fantastic For Families Awards 2025

“This is a groundbreaking, hyper-local model for early years theatre, built on deep community consultation and co-creation with over 50 families. By touring regularly to 18 venues in areas with little early-years arts provision, and shaping the show around the real needs and experiences of babies and carers, it delivered exceptional local impact and made high-quality theatre part of everyday family life.”

Maya Cross Odemudia, Manchester Family Arts Network Ambassador



PLAY HERD

WEEKLY CREATIVE PLAY SESSIONS WITH ARTISTS



PLAY HERD

With support from Youth Music we are currently on a three year journey investigating how we build playful relationships between artists, young children and their families. This work is deepening our understanding of co-creation, of 'listening' to children in 100 different ways and how to be creatively child-led and role model this to parents and carers. Each week we have a 'play box' of open ended resources and instruments that we play with together.

PLAY HERD has run weekly at The Octagon Family Hub, on Thornton Estate since February 2025, and at Fenchurch Family Hub, on Beverley Road, since September 2025.

PLAY HERD is delivered by The Herd artistic team, and freelance artists of different artistic practices. At Play Herd we see toddlers grow their imaginations through playful improvisation with crayons and cardboard, understand their bodies through dancing alongside dancers and find their voices through song.

71 sessions delivered

84 hours

173 participants





“It is the highlight of our day”

Parent feedback on PLAY HERD



ARTIST TRAINING

We want to develop a pool of passionate freelance artists who specialise in early years co-creation in the Hull region. This would serve our projects, and the wider Hull artistic ecology, whilst also serving our youngest citizens.

Our first training day in collaboration with academics from The University of Hull, took place in November 2025. We paid for **15 freelance artists, 4 Herd staff and 2 Child Development academics** to come together for a day of PLAY HERD training. The training took place in the inspiring setting of The University Hull's Botanical Gardens. We welcomed in a local nursery group to come and play in the trees, to put our theory into practise.

“I got some real creative flow being with a load of people who are passionate, open fun and intrigued. I felt like I finally found my herd.”

Freelance Artist feedback

DEVELOPING EARLY YEARS ARTISTS IN HULL Case study



Hull based Ceramic Artist Zivarna Murphy on collaborating with PLAY HERD - “Co-facilitating the Play Herd sessions with **The Herd** has allowed me to **understand truly what it is to play**, be led and guided by mini-makers in non-verbal play where I have been able to tune in to what they're doing and follow their lead.

This has translated into my own practice where I can allow myself to let go with the freedom to follow the materials I work with.

Working with The Herd on the Play Herd sessions has led on to further opportunities for me as an artist as I now facilitate Early Bods sessions at Humber Street Gallery in Hull which is based on the clay play sessions with The Herd. I have adapted many of the skills and lessons learned through Play Herd to be able to facilitate these sessions on my own with 0-5 year olds.

Play Herd has given me the confidence and skill set to flourish in working with early years children.”



Our weekly programme takes place in the 8% most deprived postcodes nationally (English indices of deprivation 2025). Deprivation specially affecting 0-15yrs shows we're working in the 9% (BABY HERD Gipsyville), 2% (PLAY HERD Fenchurch), 4% (PLAY HERD The Octagon), most deprived postcodes nationally.



“I feel very grateful for these sessions. Mahira has learned how to socialise here”

Parent feedback on PLAY HERD

“ONLY TIME THEY PLAY TOGETHER” PLAY HERD CASE STUDY

In September 2025 a 2-year old child attended her first PLAY HERD session with her mum. The child seemed to thoroughly enjoy herself but did not spend any time playing with her mum. During the singing, the child would sometimes join in, especially with dancing, but mainly stayed away.

The following week the child came back, with both her mum and dad. Mum commented on how much fun she had had last week. Her dad seemed very eager to get involved and they had lots of nice moments of play together. When it was time to sing at the end, the child encouraged her dad to sit in the circle with her and then asked her mum to come too. When people were dancing, dad was joining in and the child encouraged her mum to stand up and dance too, which she did.

The child and her Mum now come every week. The family seem to know the structure of the session and are willing to engage with every aspect of it. Mum plays with her a lot throughout the sessions but the child still likes to play with the facilitators too.

In January 2026, Mum started to bring the child's older brother to the group, who also seems to get a lot from the session and engaged with all aspects of it. The 4 year old brother has Autism, and Mum commented how they struggle to play together at home, but play together throughout the session

Mum has told us that the siblings love coming to the sessions each week. She has also told us that they sing the songs from Play Herd at home. Whilst they still struggle to play together at home sometimes, they all play together with such joy at PLAY HERD.



BABY HERD

BABY HERD came from PLAY HERD and a desire to meet families at the beginning of children's creative lives. We started sessions at Gipsyville Library in the Hessle Road area of Hull, in November 2025.

The sessions are delivered by performing artists - musicians, dancers and actors. Each week we choose 1 or 2 simple materials to explore, fabrics, textures, paper or cardboard, foil, water, shapes and foam. These open ended-resources have endless possibilities.

The facilitators don't plan ahead of a session - we have a basic structure, an initial improvised spark from the artists, and then we see how the babies and adults respond in order to know where to go and what to do in a session. BABY HERD is possible with support from Arts Council England's Project Grants.

“The only group which we go to which I think is actually for the babies...the only group I have been to where I have seen the facilitators interacting with the babies”

Parent feedback on the BABY HERD





COUNTING SHEEPS

A sleepy sleepy show for 0-3yrs

**“The best thing I have done on maternity leave,
would 100% recommend.”**

Audience Feedback, Counting Sheeps



COUNTING SHEEPS

A show for 0-3yrs and their (very tired) grown ups. Two sheep on a journey through the joys and frustrations of bedtime. A touching, musical adventure filled with sensory play.

We performed for two weeks at The Polka Theatre in Wimbledon, London. One of the leading venues in the country dedicated to presenting work for children. The show was fully sold out a week before the run started.

We then toured nationally to 10 venues including Sheffield Theatres, Stephen Joseph Theatre and Half Moon Theatre.

1,976 audience members

53 performances

74% capacity across the run

SOLD OUT at Polka and Half Moon



“The actors were great at feeding off of individual children’s needs and interaction.”

Audience Feedback, Counting Sheep





“I watched the story of my life in 30-40 mins but would watch it over & over again.”

Audience Feedback, Counting Sheeps



“I didn’t know what to expect but this was just pure magic... So simple, yet so effective. The actors managed to maintain the babies attention (not an easy feat) without over stimulating them.

It was relatable and just all round feel good, with great interactive moments. I normally feel a bit self conscious as my toddler loves to be involved and was on the stage 90% of the time, but I was reassured that it was ok and he was allowed to move around and enjoy the show in his own way.

What a wonderful first introduction to theatre.”

**Audience Feedback, Counting Sheeps at
Polka Theatre**



“It’s beautifully crafted, sensory-led performance was matched by an impressive co-production process and a truly innovative hyper-local audience development strategy, so successful that 40% of families returned to see the show again. It met every part of our award criteria with clarity, creativity and care.”

Fantastic for Families Award judges, Audience Impact and Innovation AWARD WINNER Fantastic For Families Awards 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

We continued our commitment to using waste and recycled materials across all our projects. Children need to explore and touch the world to understand it so we make work where that can happen. As such our work is material heavy. We work hard on sourcing responsibly.

This year we worked with local ReFactory, MyGroup on ONE DAY PLAY - They reupholstered all our foam letters with waste car leather. This has made the equipment robust without costing the earth.

For REPLAY we partnered with Sail and Prop Up to source recycled materials from the theatre, TV and Film industry, and are supported by British fashion brand POETRY who donated props and fabrics from ex-display items in their London stores.

You can find our [Environmental Working Principles here](#)

100% materials waste or reclaimed for REPLAY

95% materials waste or reclaimed for PLAY HERD

80% materials waste or reclaimed in Counting Sheeps

100% materials waste or reclaimed in One Day Play set updates



ONE DAY PLAY





ONE DAY PLAY

Our fourth year of delivering One Day Play, a unique experience for KS2 Primary Classes supported by [Hull and East Yorkshire Children's Univeristy](#), funded by [Hull City Arts](#) and [I Am Fund](#).

802 Children across 16 schools in Hull, came to a professional theatre space at the University of Hull, Wilberforce College, Ferens Art Gallery and Hull Truck Theatre and wrote, staged, designed and rehearsed their own original play.

One Day Play platforms children's imaginations and opens up the theatre making process at a formative age. The children got a hands on experience of performing, lighting, design, directing and stage management, culminating in a performance to their invited parents and carers.

802 children participated

25 primary classes in Hull

210 parents/ carers watched final performances



“Today I was happy because I did sound designer and I might do that when I'm older”

Child Participant Feedback, One Day Play

ONE DAY PLAY

As well as opening up careers for children, each year student volunteers from Wyke and Wilberforce Colleges in Hull, join One Day Play to get work experience as theatre facilitators. Supporting each for 6 hours of delivery, they become 'Assistant Facilitators' for the day.

“I felt fully supported the entire time. Thank you for making it so inclusive and fun. It will help with my future and my course”

Student Volunteer, One Day Play

25 Student volunteers from A-Level Drama Courses

150 Hours of delivery

7 Professional Theatre Makers facilitating





“Being in a professional space created a sense of excitement and importance for the pupils. For some pupils, especially those who may not normally have access to such venues, it was an inspiring and memorable opportunity.”

Teacher Feedback, One Day Play



“I would like to applaud the amazing work you do with very young children. It’s brilliant to see how you truly connect with and amaze babies, young children and their families”

Early Years Practitioner, Hull

SUMMER OF PLAY



SUMMER OF PLAY

Essential Playworks and Pop Up Play both returned this year for our SUMMER OF PLAY.

Pop Up Play turns waste into open ended objects for play. Pop Up Play visited 5 parks in Hull throughout the summer, spent a week delivering 6 days of play in different locations across Barrow-in-Furness for “Barrowfull Playcations” and spent weekend at Scunthorpe 20-21 Visual Arts Centre.

Essential Playworks is part game, part show, part infrastructure project which took over the streets in Rotherham as part of the Children’s Capital of Culture Celebrations, Scunthorpe at 20-21 Visual Arts Centre, and did 14 shows across the week of the Big Malarkey Festival in Hull for schools and families.



730 audience members at Essential Playworks
3,526 Pop-Up Play Participants



“Simply put, The Herd make the world a more beautiful place”

Audience Feedback, Summer of Play



SCRIBBLE

OUR CITY PARADE



As part of Hull City Council's Our City Parade 2026, delivered by Back to Ours, we were commissioned for 'SCRIBBLE', a section of the parade celebrating the creativity of Hull's youngest citizens

We scribbled with paint and paint pens, with 2-4yrs in our weekly creative play session PLAY HERD on giant bits of fabric. Then we took some of their scribbles and made them into giant 3D sculptures. These were attached to prams in the parade, and some hand held ones were interacted with by the babies and young children walking in the parade.

We made the original artworks on fabric into costumes, a banner and to dress our heritage silver cross pram. This pram led our parade, pushed by dancer Charlotte Hanson. The pram was a nod to the families of Hessle Road who would take part in Fish Dock Pram Races in the 1920s and 30s.

CREDITS

CORE TEAM - EMMA BRIGHT, SAM CASELEY, HANNAH EVERARD, RUBY THOMPSON

ARTISTS AND COLLABORATORS - ASSOCIATE ARTISTS RUTA IRBITE, FINLAY MCGUIGAN, LUA BAIRSTOW, YSABELLE WOMBWELL, PARKEY ABEYRATNE **ONE DAY PLAY** RUTA IRBITE, JACK CHAMBERLAIN, JESS MORLEY, ANDY STAFFORD BAKER, ELLEN BRAMMAR **COUNTING SHEEPS** EMMA BRIGHT, SOPHIE CLAY, PARKEY ABEYRATNE, FINLAY MCGUIGAN, STASHA DUKIC, YSABELLE WOMBWELL, NATALIE YOUNG, LIZ DEES, IAN MITCHEL **PLAY & BABY HERD** JESS MORLEY, SOPHIE THOMPSON, XOLANI CRABTREE, RUTA IRBITE, ZIVARNA MURPHY, LAUREN SAUNDERS, ED GRIMOLDBY, EMMA WASLIN, FRANCES TITHER, YSABELLE WOMBWELL, HOLLIE GIBBS, LOTTIE HANSON, TAMAR DRAPER **SUMMER OF PLAY** SARAH PENNEY, ADAM BASSETT, ANDY ROSS, MARC GRAHAM, SOPHIE THOMPSON, DANNIELLE HARRIS, JESS MORLEY **REPLAY** RUTA IRBITE, LUKE JAMES, LAURA BOUGHEN, CIARA LITTLER, RACHEL ANDERSON, ZAHNA SCOTT, ELIZA COLLIN, MARK LABAN, MEGAN CASELEY, EVIE HAVERSON, CHANELLE WINDASS, LIZ DEES, SASKIA GUINNESS, PIRAN CASELEY, JOSH LINDON, MAISIE JACKAMAN, RUTH HARDIE, COLLEEN MARTIN, LARA TYSSELING, TONY BIRCH, DAVE MORTLOCK, PAM CRAWFORD, DAISY ALLEN, AMY BAIRSTOW, JOSH CARTMELL, SOPHIE LAYCOCK, KATE ROTHERY, EMILY BOYFIELD **SCRIBBLE** LOUIS DALTON, RACHEL ANDERSON, LOTTIE HANSON,

BOARD OF TRUSTEES - NAQIYA EBRAHIM, ANN-MARIE MERRICK, ANDREW SHIMMIN, JAMIE JACKSON, HELEN SAVAGE, KATHERINE IGOE-EWER, LOUISE HOLMES

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PARTNERS AND FUNDERS IN 2025/26



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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



POETRY
SOUTHBANK CENTRE

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Energiser Fund



SAIL

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UNIVERSITY
of **HULL**



BRADFORD 2025
UK City of Culture



HULL AND EAST YORKSHIRE
children's
UNIVERSITY



Wyke
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FERENS
ART GALLERY



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@theherduk
www.theherdtheatre.co.uk