



ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



MAGIC ME WHO WE ARE

Magic Me brings generations together. Through our vibrant programme of arts activities, children, younger and older people meet to create and exchange experiences. They develop individual skills and confidence, build community connection and cohesion, combatting isolation and loneliness.

Working in partnership with our local communities across Tower Hamlets, we have pioneered intergenerational arts for more than 35 years. Growing from this expertise we also run sensory, creative activities in care homes in London and Essex.

We are proud of our growing community of younger and older people, who are building meaningful creative connections across different ages, faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

OUR VISION:

a world without ageism, where everyone can enjoy their unique creativity and full potential.

OUR MISSION:

to inspire change, for individuals, communities and systems, through extraordinary art, sparking magic between generations.



Message from our Chair and Director

WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

This year, since last summer's racist rioting, our work has felt even more urgent and necessary. Sometimes hope feels in short supply. Hate and violent misinformation are deliberately seeking to divide our communities, which are already struggling with ongoing financial pressures.

We are different people. We come here together to mix and make belonging.

Older adult

example in Bethnal Green, the percentage of younger and older members of our Creative Mix group reporting 'I feel optimistic for the future' grew from 25% to 83% over 7 months.

Magic Me activities grow from ideas generated by younger and older people or are sparked by issues identified by partner organisations.

Through 2025 we have also been excited to partner Wellcome Collection, a leading museum and library exploring health and human experience, to create an artwork challenging ageism for an upcoming exhibition. (See 'Looking to the Future')

People tell us how much they value the opportunities and hosted spaces that Magic Me offers: places to meet, to make and to imagine new possibilities.

In our experience, the majority of people want to contribute and build community. This Report is full of positive stories of our participants across Tower Hamlets and Essex, their many achievements and the impact of Magic Me programmes. For

This project is like a plant that starts small and gets big.

Younger person

We are grateful to our many funders and supporters, who have partnered with us this year and made all this work possible. You are a key part of our Magic Me community and we look forward to our continued work together. Thank you.

David Russell
Chair of Trustees

Susan Langford MBE
Founder/Director

This Autumn, as we publish our Annual Report, Susan will be saying goodbye to Magic Me, after 36 years as our Founder and Director. She says:

What a joy it has been! Whether filling the Hackney streets with carnival, showcasing artworks on the 205 bus for London 2012, or supporting 70+ year olds to pass their GCSE Citizenship, I have been privileged to work with amazing, funny, thoughtful and caring people of all ages and backgrounds. I am thrilled to have had such an exciting and varied working life.

See 'Succession' to meet our new Joint CEOs

Message from Susan

Projects in Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets is our home, and we are proud of the relationships we've built with our neighbours over the decades we've worked here. Our project partners and co-creators come from the care, education, health, housing and arts sectors. We're in constant dialogue about our borough's changing needs so we can build projects together which serve the interests and issues of our developing population. To co-create Roots & Routes (over the page) we held initial conversations with 45 potential partners to find the 6 we're currently working with, all the while learning more about where intergenerational relationships are already strong and where Magic Me might work with local people to foster them further.

Though we're next to the City and Canary Wharf, Tower Hamlets is an under-resourced borough: half of children live in poverty here, and 40% of pensioners claim pension credit, making it hard for people to participate fully in social, cultural and educational life. Our projects in 2024/5 aimed to break down those barriers to participation.



'Her Story, Our Inspiration'

'It's important to look to the past, present and future' says one of the stars of our film *Her Story, Our Inspiration*. Made over a summer of artist-facilitated workshops and discussion, the film features students from Mulberry School for Girls and Connaught School for Girls and older women from Tower Hamlets, all sharing stories, insights and reflections of the challenges women face – and overcome – across generations.

Inspiration came from both social and personal histories. The film shows how figures from Mary Wollstonecraft to Noor Inayat Khan, Greta Thunberg to the Grunwick Strikers (plus a good spread of mothers and grandmothers) help participants find the determination required to keep advocating for women's rights across all ages.

PARTNERSHIPS:

Mulberry School for Girls, Connaught School for Girls, Global Girl Leading

ARTISTS: Chuck Blue Lowry, Laila Sumpton, Sue Mayo, Charlene Low

FREELANCE SPECIALISTS: Charlie Davey, music

FUNDERS: Mulberry Schools Trust





Her Story, Our Inspiration won Best Intergenerational Project with Under 20s at the national Age Friendly Awards 2025, presented by InCommon and Clarion Futures.

We premiered the film at the international Global Girl Leading conference in October 2024 for a live and online audience of nearly 1,000 people, and it formed the focus of Magic Me's celebration of International Women's Day in March 2025.



Scan the code to watch the film or find it online at www.magicme.co.uk/project/her-story-our-inspiration/

I have become more confident in front of large audiences and made some new friends. Younger participant



I live in a block of flats with over 30 other people that don't really intermix and I feel glad to have the bounce to come here and keep lively. Older participant

Creative Mix

'Belonging' was the theme our returning Creative Mix group explored this year. Health & Social Care sixth form students from Mulberry UTC and older Tower Hamlets residents met regularly for creative workshops, experimenting with poetry, printmaking and movement. Drawing portraits with long sticks, imagining a personal island, and discussing memories and stories around food uncovered the shared interests of older and younger group members. This collaborative, communicative exchange felt particularly vital this year as Tower Hamlets took stock after the far-right riots of Summer 2024.

Participants worked towards a shared feast and a local exhibition of their work. A quote from a poem they wrote together sums up the group: 'This place is for those people who need a hug on winter days'.

PARTNERSHIPS: Gateway Housing Association and Mulberry UTC

ARTISTS: Arji Manelpillai, Charlene Low, Ruan Murphy

FUNDERS: London Borough of Tower Hamlets, The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington



Roots & Routes

Where are your roots? What are your routes in and out of your community? Roots & Routes is the very beginning of a new project, which comes under the umbrella of LAB. LAB will be the home for a programme of new projects which we build in response to local community conversation. Following a creative discussion with members of the community, participants made a map with artists Shabnam and Skye. It highlights the important features of our borough: its diversity and creativity, and those features will inform the project as it develops. Stay in touch to watch Roots & Routes and other LAB projects unfurl over the next few years.



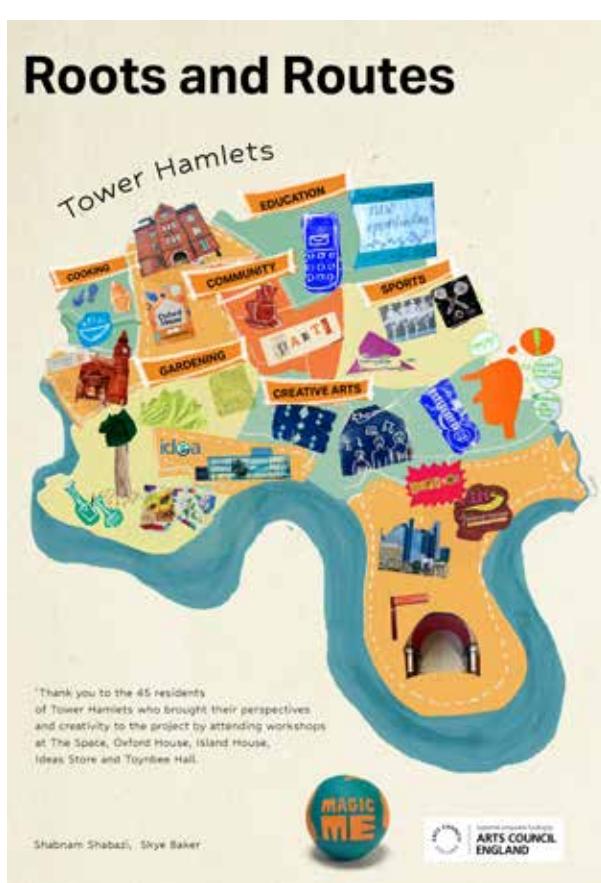
Artworks

Our four-year Community Arts Trainee programme drew to a close this year, with our final pair of Trainees bringing the total of talented young locals we've worked with during the programme to ten. People from Black, Asian, working class or other minoritised backgrounds often face higher barriers to getting started with careers in community arts: our programme of training, mentoring and development focussed on bringing down those barriers, meaning that there are now more Tower Hamlets and Hackney residents equipped with the skills and experience to go out into their local communities and produce creative projects with confidence. Two of our trainees have subsequently worked for Magic Me as Project Co-ordinators.

I knew I would be working with different generations and my local community but I did not expect to learn as much as I did.

Artworks Trainee

I am definitely more confident and career driven than I was at the beginning of the traineeship. Artworks Trainee



PARTNERSHIPS: The Space Theatre, Canal Club Community Centre, Oxford House, Island House Community Centre, Watney Market Idea Store, Toynbee Hall

ARTISTS: Shabnam Shabazi and Skye Baker

ARTWORKS TRAINEES: Kimberly Johnson, Rhovie Isiko

TRAINER: Lewis Greener

FUNDERS: London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Westfield East Bank Creative Futures Fund, supported by Westfield Stratford City and Foundation for Future London

Work in Care Homes



Creativity in care homes has been at the centre of Magic Me's work since our very earliest days. Our current programme, Spark, combines all that we have learnt from our previous projects including Artists' Residencies in Care Homes, with research partners Anglia Ruskin University. Their report, *Dare to Imagine*, focuses on how arts and care home staff can best work together to embed creativity into care homes, and informs the way we develop all our care home projects.

70% of care home residents live with a dementia, 40% with depression. Many are lonely. Care home staff face many practical and financial pressures when looking after their residents. Spark – with its emphasis on training and flexible arts activities for the non-expert – offers joy, excitement, fresh ideas, and new ways for everyone to connect and communicate. Everyday life is enriched, and relationships between staff, residents and their friends and family are strengthened.

Spark

Established in 2021, Spark is now our flagship care home programme: a combination of staff training and artist visits to care homes to embed high quality creative activities into everyday home life. Activities focus on the sensory – light, colour, texture – suiting residents who communicate non-verbally. All the ideas, which include paper marbling, light and shadow play, cyanotypes, poetry and weaving, use inexpensive, easily available materials and equipment.

Activities can be adapted for 1-2-1 or group work, and can take place in various locations including bedrooms, communal spaces and outdoors. This year, we partnered again with Essex County Council Quality and Innovation Team and worked directly in care homes in Basildon, Brentwood, Canvey Island, Harlow and Rochford.

Remember Bob, who you did the light activity with? He now joins us on outings which he never did before you came. Care home staff



ARTISTS: Georgia Akbar, Lily Ash Sakula

PARTNERSHIPS: Essex County Council Quality and Innovation Team

FREELANCE: Sally Knocker, Dementia Specialist and Trainer

FUNDERS: Essex County Council, The Rayne Foundation

I really enjoyed it. Come back!

Care home resident

We also offered an additional day of training to another 70 care home staff throughout Essex. A big thank you to volunteers from the Bank of England who came to the Magic Me office to help us box up the selection of art materials and resources we provide for trainees and care homes.

Spark Book of Ideas

As Spark's impact spreads, more arts and care professionals tell us they want to learn about Spark techniques and how to employ them in their own settings. We published *Spark Book of Ideas* to reach a wide readership with a gentle introduction to the Spark programme. Written by Lily and Georgia and designed by DesignPrintBind, the 52 page, full colour guide runs through some easy, low cost activities which are adaptable for all levels of ability.

Spark was shortlisted for the Best Co-Production in the 2025 Dementia Care Awards



If you'd like a free downloadable copy of the book, scan here or find it online at www.magicme.co.uk/connection-and-creativity-in-care-homes-we-launch-a-new-spark-book/



Leadership & Activism

Strong principles underpin Magic Me's work. Our organisational values of Collaboration, Creativity, Thoughtfulness and Inclusivity inform our projects out in the community and in care homes, as well as our behind-the-scenes work in the office. Activities are planned so the intergenerational experience is designed, not accidental, so younger and older people are equally valued in cross-age partnerships. Our care home work is designed to be flexibly age appropriate, in the moment and reciprocal. We foster a climate conscious, pro-wellbeing culture in the office, the community, the care home and beyond.

Interest in intergenerational work is increasing. Magic Me was a pioneer in this area, and our goal is to remain a leader within the field into the future. We work constantly to refine what it's possible to achieve in intergenerational arts with trained and expert artists, committed partners and participants and a staff dedicated to inventing fresh approaches to emerging situations and dynamics. We share our expertise widely, and continue to demonstrate its full potential.

Associate Artists

Our amazing Associate Artists co-design and facilitate our projects, and are the face of Magic Me for our many participants. As we're an intergenerational organisation, it's only right that we have intergenerational artists: some of our cohort are in their 70s, some in their 20s and lots are in between. They all bring expertise in their artforms, ranging across puppetry, writing, theatre, visual arts, filmmaking, dance and combined media, and in working with diverse community groups. We're grateful for their lively ideas and commitment to the Magic Me approach.



As an artist working often on my own, I have benefitted incredibly from the days about safeguarding or matters like racism ... [training] has really helped me in my own practice. Magic Me Associate Artist

Artists & Practice

Artists & Practice is our programme of quarterly Learning and Development days for our Associate Artists to share creative skills and experience. This year, as well as learning practical art-form skills such as puppetry and model making skills, our Artists were supported to share and develop expertise in Magic Me's anti-racist, anti-ageist, pro-safeguarding practice.

Thank you for providing these L&D days. They are a privilege to be a part of. Magic Me has such respect for their artists and invests time and resources that help increase self-confidence and contribute to a sense of community with the artists themselves. The L&D days reflect this respect and seems such a unique programme within the field of arts participation. And no small thing, offering a fee to attend these sessions is also a sign of respect for the artists' time and contributes to a sense of being valued. Thank you!

Magic Me Associate Artist



ASSOCIATE ARTISTS: Amanda

Mascarenhas, Amy Leung, Arji Manuelpillai, Carolene Yawa Ada, Charlene Low, Chuck Blue Lowry, Georgia Akbar, Laila Sumpton, Liane Harris, Lily Ash Sakula, Polly Beestone, Ruan Murphy, Shabnam Shabazi, Skye Baker, Sue Mayo

FUNDERS: Arts Council England



Sharing the Learning

As our society continues to age and change, Magic Me remains pioneering – inventing fresh approaches to emerging situations and dynamics. With interest in intergenerational work increasing, we remain a leader in the sector, and are glad to share our expertise with others. This year, we contributed to British Future's report *Creating Connections: the role of the arts in bridging divides and bringing communities together*, we presented at a Meet-Up for Mercers' Company grantees, and we engaged guests at a Rayne Foundation event with treat-sized, colourful, light-filled Spark activities.

In May 2024, our Director Susan and Project Manager Audrey enjoyed a visit to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party, and in October we attended a reception at the Houses of Parliament to honour the Global Girl Leading project.

The year in numbers

18
organisational
partners

6
local
authorities

15
artists

2
trainees

1,388
live and online
audience
members

4
volunteers

4,764
online
community

116
care home
staff

500+
care home
residents

234
participants

13
teachers &
community
organisers

Our Impact

Who does our charity help?

Magic Me supports the younger and older people of Tower Hamlets through our community programmes, and also the residents and staff of care homes where Spark and other projects take place. Tower Hamlets is an under-resourced borough. We know that poverty and low income are barriers to taking part in the arts, so all our activities are free to participants.



Creative Mix participant feedback from 24/25

Impact for older and younger people at the end of the project

92% reported improved connections from taking part in the project

87% reported it helped them feel part of the community

94% reported feeling motivated to do more creative things in the future

The problems we solve

We all believe in making art just for the love of it: our Associate Artists all have their own projects outside of Magic Me, and many of our office staff create art, music, poetry and dance in their spare time. But we also know that making art together brings additional social impact. We work with funders and partners who want to improve individuals' wellbeing, their employment potential and confidence. Our projects build community cohesion and boost pride in the places where people live. Growing evidence suggests that participation in community arts can improve mental health and mitigate the diseases of isolation – so we're also exploring what our work does in the field of creative health.

The change we make

We create the space where people make positive change happen. Our community arts projects encourage the interactions that build understanding and empathy. They:

- increase participants' confidence and sense of wellbeing
- challenge negative perceptions of ageing and misconceptions about their partner age group
- combat loneliness and build community cohesion both across generations and within age cohorts
- use artistic creation to encourage relationship building and a positive focus beyond the self
- encourage intergenerational participant groups to face the common task of creating work for audiences
- foster participants' development of new methods of communication to face that task together
- bring joy



Our projects in care homes build

- better communication between staff, residents, friends and families
- new, lasting friendships between residents
- new approaches to providing more personalised care
- tangible improvements in residents' moods and wellbeing
- increased social engagement
- improved physical dexterity
- staff confidence to devise and deliver creative activities long-term

Spark findings from 24/25

	Agree	Strongly Agree
Staff experienced an increase in meaningful connections between residents and staff.	16%	84%
Staff gained new ideas, activities and ways of bringing more creativity into care homes.	-	100%
Staff built their confidence in being creative with residents.	34%	66%

Staff also reported –

Residents experienced an increased sense of connection with staff, other residents or their home	65%	35%
Residents felt their individual needs, interests and strengths were recognised and valued.	50%	50%



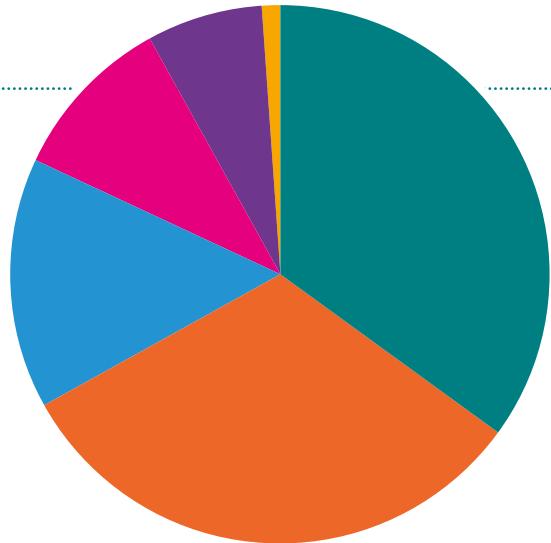
Our Finances

This summary is taken from Magic Me's full, independently examined accounts. If you would like a copy, please visit www.magicme.co.uk or contact Magic Me on info@magicme.co.uk or 020 3222 6064.

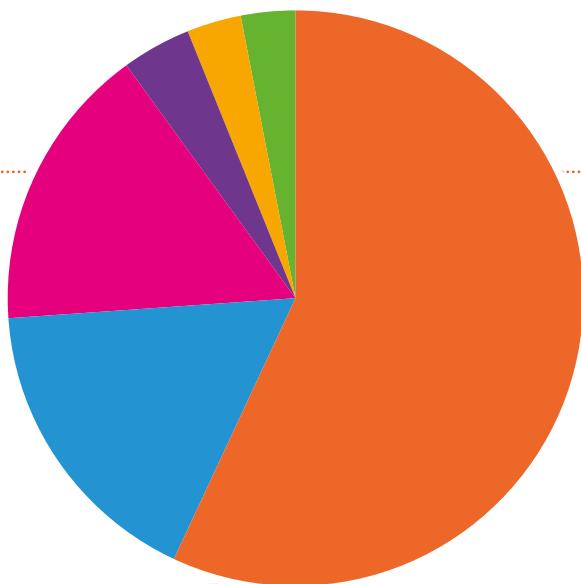
Income during the year 2024/25 was £445,797. As you can see from the pie charts, the majority of our expenditure of £428,921 is on people – the staff and freelance artists who make our programmes possible.

Income 2024/25

- Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisation 35%
- Trusts & Foundations 32%
- Local Authorities 15%
- Livery Companies 10%
- Individual donations 7%
- Other 1%



Expenditure 2024/25



- Staff costs 57%
- Artists fees, materials & project costs 17%
- Fundraising 16%
- Administrative expenses 4%
- Rent, office and communications 3%
- Governance including accountancy 3%



Thank you



Thank you to the many trusts, foundations and funders whose support enabled our work this year.

Grants & donations in 2024/25



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And

French Huguenot Church of London

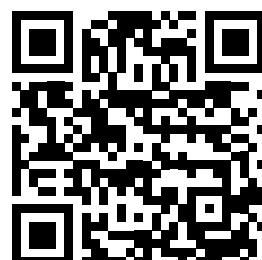
Charitable Trust

Mulberry School for Girls

Thank you to our individual donors and Big Give supporters

A huge thank you to all those individuals who support us with one off and regular donations throughout the year – both those friends we know and those who prefer to remain anonymous. You also helped make this year's Big Give Christmas Campaign a huge success. Our pledgers and champion funder The Childhood Trust joined forces with individual donors to raise a whopping £35,722. Thank you to all of you: that's a lot of people whose lives you've improved through creativity this year.

**Scan below to add your support or visit
at <https://magicme.raisely.com/>**



Thank you for in-kind support

34SP for website hosting

A&O Shearman, for printing our resource books and Annual Reports

The People Who Made it Happen

Associate Artists

Amanda Mascarenhas
Amy Leung
Arji Manuelpillai
Carolene Yawa Ada
Charlene Low
Chuck Blue Lowry
Georgia Akbar
Laila Sumpton
Liane Harris
Lily Ash Sakula
Polly Beestone
Shabnam Shabazi
Ruan Murphy
Skye Baker
Sue Mayo

Trustees during 2024/25

Alicia Tan
David Russell, Chair
Dominique Moore
Emily Andrews
Hugh Blacklock, Treasurer
Imogen Davies
Jimena Meza Mitcher
Louisa Joseph
Miriam King
Rebecca Goh
Thomas Nowacki
Yaa Adansi-Pipim

Trustees who stood down during the year

Harriet Cheng

Thank you to

Our good neighbours: Praxis, and our landlords at Bethnal Green Meeting House, Pott Street
D.R. ink
The Bank of England
Creative Mix Volunteers Chinny Yeung and Gianni Luca Pisano

Photo credits

Creative Mix: Mark Wilkinson
It's on the Cards: Hayley Madden, Kyle Madden
All other photos: Magic Me staff and Associate Artists

Former staff during 2024/25

Chloe Latchford, Project Coordinator

Freelancer staff

Emma Mulligan, Accounts

Trainees during 2024/25

Kimberly Johnson
Rhovie Isiko



WE
REMEMBER ...

Alma Ramnauth
Vi Davis

... Magic Me participants who have sadly passed away over the last year.

Looking to the Future



We're setting out for 2026 with a spring in our step, with exciting plans to continue exploring the intergenerational, anti-ageing and creative health possibilities in Tower Hamlets, East London and Essex. The year begins with a number of projects which are already underway –

It's on the Cards: we're in the first stages of an intergenerational project with a Brick Lane primary school and older Tower Hamlets residents in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust. Discussion and creation sessions will culminate in an artwork to be exhibited at the Wellcome Collection in central London in 2026.



Her Voice Matters: we return to our partnership with Mulberry Schools Trust to create another women's filmmaking project. A brand new cohort of older and younger participants will delve into the local archives to research some of our home-grown heroines and see where the journey takes them.

Creative Mix: our sessions will continue at Pott Street. If you see us out and about in Tower Hamlets with our 'tea trolley' of arts activities, come and say hello – we'll be busy encouraging new participants from local sheltered housing complexes to come and join the group.

Spark: we're back in a new group of six care homes in West Essex, training care home staff in the creative and sensory techniques which inspire residents to improve connection and communication. We're also piloting additional schemes to involve residents' friends and family in activities.

LAB: there are more community based consultation projects to come, including a collaboration between primary schools and a community centre in the Isle of Dogs, plus a ground-breaking LGBTQ+ intergenerational project.

Scan to sign up to our newsletter or online at <https://magicme.co.uk/newsletter-sign-up/>, or follow us on social media and you'll be the first to know about all our forthcoming plans. If you work for a cultural, care or health organisations and you'd like to talk to us about a partner project, drop us a line at info@magicme.co.uk





Succession

After 36 years leading Magic Me, our Founder Susan Langford steps down as Director in October 2025.

Susan's pioneering work with cohorts of staff and artists over the years has reached thousands of participants, from primary school pupils to centenarians. Lives have been changed, relationships deepened and communities brought together through creative arts projects developed under her leadership. As the many benefits of intergenerational practice have been increasingly recognised, Magic Me's expertise has been sought after. Over the years Susan has shared our approach with colleagues and communities across the UK and in Korea, Brazil, Ireland, Poland and Spain.

Our Chair of Trustees, David Russell, says

'On behalf of the current and past Trustees of Magic Me, I'd like to say a huge thank you to Susan for her imaginative leadership and tireless stewardship of the organisation over the last three and a half decades. Political, financial and public health contexts have changed hugely over the years, but through it all, her unwavering belief in the creative imaginations of people of all ages and abilities has enabled an astonishing body of work to flourish. She leaves Magic Me in a robust condition, ready to take on a new generation of challenges and opportunities.'

Susan is passing the Magic Me baton to two new Joint CEOs: Kate Hodson, former Programme Director and Ben Butcher, former Head of Operations. They bring much experience and expertise from both within and outside Magic Me, and were appointed after a robust restructuring and recruitment process.

Susan's impact on Magic Me and its beneficiaries has been astonishing: we all salute her vocation and her dedication.





At this table

*Life begins to take shape at this table.
Dominoes, cards, slamming chips at this table.
Opening our laptops, discussing bills at this table
We eat, we drink, we make new friends at this table.
Laughter and happiness fill the room round this table.
We argue, we rage, we throw things at each other
But at the end of the day, it's love around this table.
It's a place to discuss and connect and smile together.
A place to feel safe, to make lasting peace for the future.
We reminisce of our parents, our old friends at this table.
We follow the journey, we share the tastes and music
our oldest memories, stories moving through generations.
On this table, we consider performing, sharing ourselves
We smile and laugh and talk about our future, our potential.
We gather we eat and we pray, our laughter will always stay
Because this table is for all of us, it's a boat to bring us together.
And listen now, at this table a silent story awaits to be told.*

This poem and artwork were made by the participants
of Creative Mix



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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UK Government

Thank you to A&O Shearman for printing this report.

26 Pott Street, London E2 0EF

Tel: 020 3222 6064

info@magicme.co.uk

www.magicme.co.uk

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