



ANNUAL REPORT



2025/26

2025/26 AT A GLANCE



178 participants

479 audience members

5,170 hours of intergenerational contact

167 newly trained care home staff

15 partner organisations in Tower Hamlets

350+ hours of artist learning & development

681 professional peers reached

94% of people who participated made new connections

1 giant intergenerationally operated papier-mâché FishBirdHorse puppet!

Welcome to our Annual Report 2025/26

This has been a year of great change for Magic Me. We said farewell and thank you to our Founder Director Susan Langford as she retired, and we transitioned to a new joint leadership model. Co-creation and collaboration have always guided the development of our programme: now Ben and Kate bring those values to their co-direction of the organisation too.

93% of participants reported that our projects help them to feel part of a community – a statistic we're very proud of as, nationally, increasingly divisive politics threaten to separate us; and, locally, Tower Hamlets remains the borough with the highest population turnover rate in the country with residents reporting to be lonelier than London and UK averages. Improving our reporting processes throughout the year helped us highlight our charity's impact. The expanded stats and deeper stories you'll read in this report prove the benefits we brought to participants this year and beyond.

Our projects demonstrated the power of intergenerational collaboration to illuminate big topics: we tackled everyday ageism with ***It's on the Cards***, and explored women's equality in our ***Voices Across Time*** film première. Loneliness continues to be a challenge for older and younger people. Our pioneering approach brought the generations together to build community, proving creativity can be a powerful tool for social advocacy and age-positive representation.

I don't have any family so coming here to meet people and get involved has been great. We are all one.

Older Creative Mix participant



I learnt how to become more confident and how to gain more social skills. I learnt how to become closer to people...

Younger Voices Across Time participant

We're grateful to Arts Council England for NPO funding. Our third year as a National Portfolio Organisation with ACE support means that we have been able to train and develop our pool of Associate Artists to the point where they are recognised by other organisations for the excellence of their community arts practice. We continue to advocate for more investment in professional artists and intergenerational facilitation skills.

Locally and nationally, we've been sharing our learning and our belief in intergenerational connection through a **Leadership & Activism** programme of conference and webinar presentations.

Thank you to all our partners, funders and supporters who have collaborated with us this year to make all this work possible. As we head towards our 40th birthday (make a note for 2029), we look forward to continuing to work with you for years to come.

David Russell Chair of Trustees

Ben Butcher Joint CEO and Executive Director

Kate Hodson Joint CEO and Creative Director



IT'S ON THE CARDS - working with museums

Teenagers are stropky, 40 year olds are over the hill and 80 year olds like nothing more than a pastel picture of a bunch of flowers. So high street birthday cards would have us believe.

Pupils from a Brick Lane primary school and older Tower Hamlets neighbours contemplated a pile of these cards – and despaired at the ageist humour on display. So with the help of our artists Sue and Skye, they set up an imaginary design studio to make new cards that celebrated the milestones of ageing.

This project was an invited collaboration from The Wellcome Collection, the central London museum that explores the past, present and future of health. Our participants' processes and card designs became a key display in the museum's *The Coming of Age* exhibition, which will attract 100,000s of visitors between March and November 2026.

PARTNERSHIPS: The Wellcome Trust, Christchurch Primary School

ARTISTS: Skye Baker, Sue Mayo

FUNDER: The Wellcome Trust

It's on the Cards is a great example of the social value generated through strategic collaborations. If you would like an intergenerational partner for your project, get in touch!



VOICES ACROSS TIME - we made a film

Working with our artists Chuck, Laila and Amanda, students from Mulberry School for Girls and Connaught School for Girls explored the histories of local East End heroines together with their older women neighbours in Tower Hamlets to make a mini-documentary.

Voices Across Time uses oral history and digital storytelling techniques to bridge the gap between generations, allowing younger and older women to amplify voices that often go unheard.

The film shows an exchange of talismanic items from dresses and teddies to prayer-books and tasbehs to begin the intergenerational conversation; followed by studies of inspiring local heroines including Annie Besant, Josie Woods and Louisa Martindale.

Participants were red-carpet ready for film screenings at the international Global Girl Leading conference in Westminster, and at Poplar Union for International Women's Day.



A fantastic project for young people to get involved with – taking risks to develop them in many different ways. (Teacher)

IMPACT

This project finished during the far right marches. Magic Me projects encourage community connection during tumultuous times.

Scan to watch
Voices Across Time



Link to
website **here**

PARTNERSHIPS: Mulberry Schools Trust, Global Girl Leading

ARTISTS: Amanda Mascarenhas, Chuck Blue Lowry, Laila Sumpton

FUNDER: Mulberry Schools Trust



CREATIVE MIX - intergenerational get-togethers in Tower Hamlets

Creative Mix participants created a giant dancing papier-mâché FishBirdHorse puppet this year. The puppet can't be operated by one person alone – it needs both young people and older people to bring it to life.

The young and older people who came together for Creative Mix are Health & Social Care students from Mulberry UTC and residents from local Tower Hamlets sheltered housing complexes. They met regularly to build relationships, experiment with new artistic skills and share their stories.

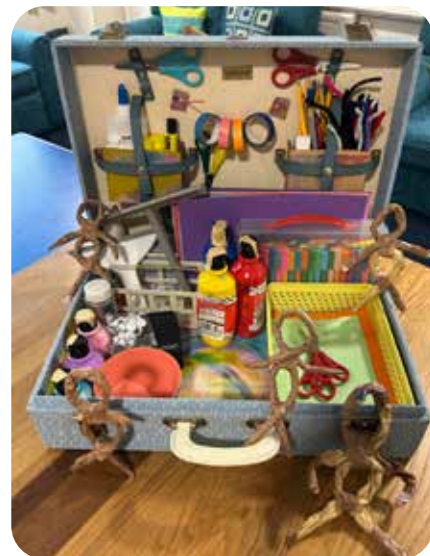
Drawing on the skills of our Associate Artists, participants decided for themselves what issues they wanted to explore, and how. Dance and puppets one term, poetry and printmaking another. A 'Belonging' theme saw participants exploring stories and experiences of food, culminating in a joyful public exhibition at St Margaret's Chapel in Bethnal Green.

We are different people, we come here together to mix and make belonging. (Older participant)

IMPACT

Creative Mix completes its third year, confirming the value in longer term projects. We provide the space to nurture consistent relationships then measure steady growth in engagement.

THE PICNIC HAMPER PROJECT - working in sheltered housing



'Do You Know You Have A Neighbour Who...?' said the posters we made to display in Gawthorne Court, a sheltered housing complex in Bow. Our Associate Artist Polly went door-to-door with a picnic hamper kitted out with art materials, and a menu of easy, chatty arts activities to prompt community conversation between residents. Our resulting poster exhibition shared the results with residents and visitors alike.

While the people who took part in the Picnic Hamper activities had a great time, participant numbers were lower than we'd hoped. We learned it takes intensive one-to-one relationship-building to create a community: something that we'll bear in mind for future sheltered housing projects.

IMPACT

As the ages of residents who live in sheltered housing schemes decrease, the range of generations found in the building increase. That gives us opportunities to create new projects that help build connections and meet the desire for community.

PARTNERSHIP: Mulberry UTC

ARTISTS: Arji Manuelpillai, Carolene Yawa Ada, Charlene Low, Ruan Murphy

FUNDER: London Borough of Tower Hamlets

PARTNERSHIP: Clarion Housing

ARTISTS: Polly Beestone, Sue Mayo

FUNDER: Clarion Futures

Case Study



INTERGENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING - as it happens

We asked one of the older participants on the *Voices Across Time* project how she felt about her time as a filmmaker. She said 'It's been wonderful, I haven't stopped talking about it since the project finished. Lovely to be with people the same age. Amazing seeing how young people are today – how confident the girls were – it made me feel really happy. There are not a lot of opportunities for intergenerational things, that was one of the main reasons I joined – we need more, otherwise it's an 'us' and 'them' thing and we don't understand each other.'

Case Study



'Everyone helps each other out'

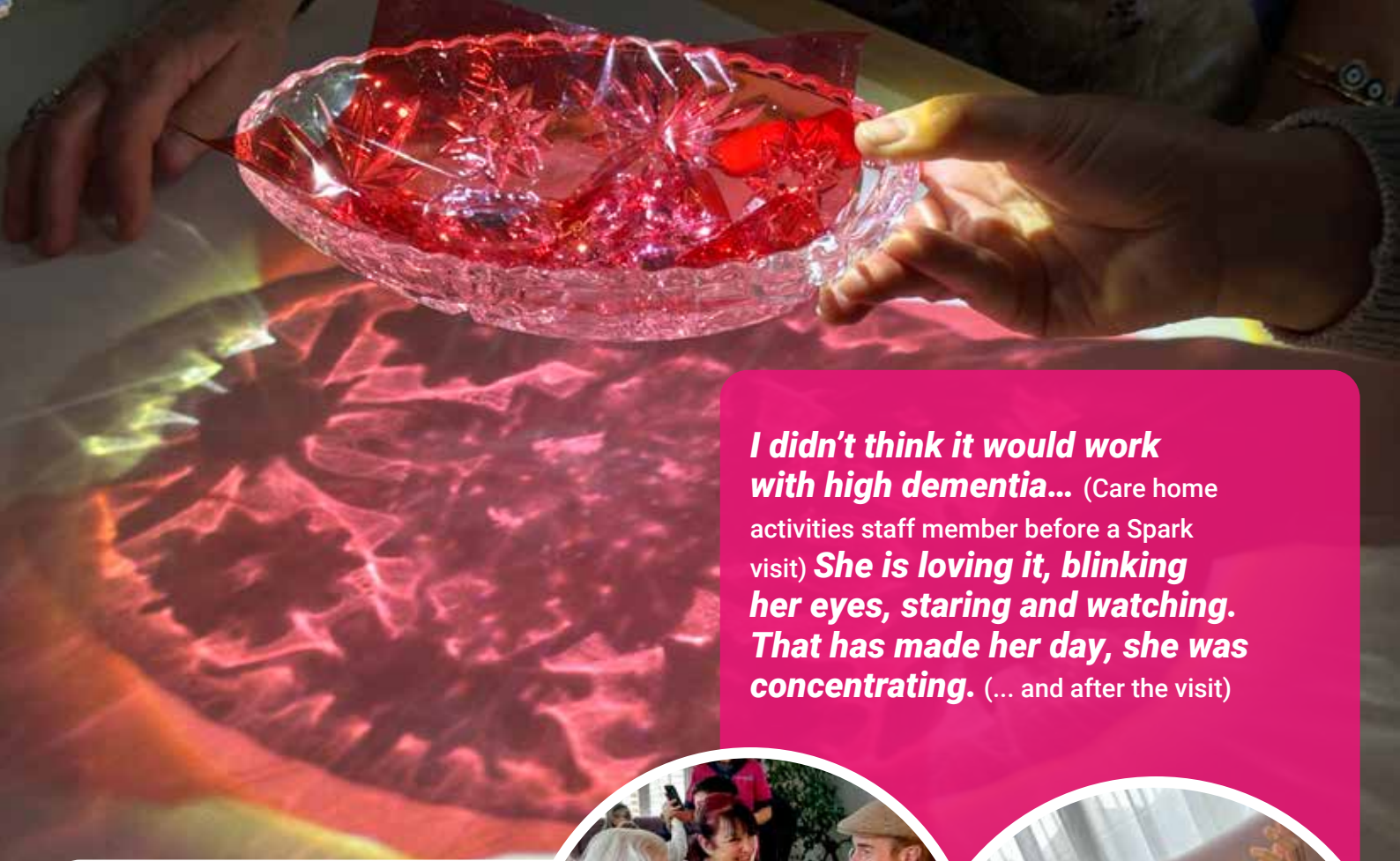
Taomi Simms is one of Magic Me's valued volunteers. What did she enjoy about her time with Creative Mix, we asked. 'The patience in the room' she said 'There's no rush rush rush. Both age groups speak their minds, and everyone helps each other out. And for the time I'm in the room, I'm off my phone!' This is Taomi's first volunteering role. Would she recommend it to others, we asked. '100% without a shadow of a doubt!' she said 'It's a very grounding experience – completely wholesome – and you feel the love in the room!'

Case Study



'We were just getting along as people'

One of the younger participants told us about her experience as a member of Creative Mix. 'It was nice because I've done some volunteering with elderly people but it was very different. When I done it with them it was us doing things for them and we were helping them set up ... we hosted a tea party for them once. It was interesting then because they were telling us stories about their lives but this was very different, there was less life stories and we were just getting along as people which was nice.'

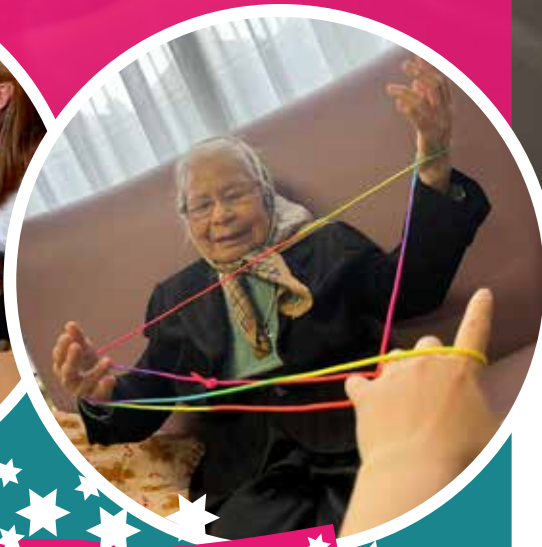


I didn't think it would work with high dementia... (Care home activities staff member before a Spark visit) **She is loving it, blinking her eyes, staring and watching. That has made her day, she was concentrating.** (... and after the visit)

SPARK - **creativity in** **care homes**

Spark has been our flagship care home project for five years: it's 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.

Spark can improve wellbeing for people of all abilities, including care home residents who are living with a dementia – our work in this space is award-winning.



AWARD WINNER!

Spark is the Winner of the Creative Arts & Culture in Dementia Award 2026 presented by the UK Dementia Awards.

PARTNERSHIPS: Essex County Council, Excelcare

ARTISTS: Billy Ash Sakula, Georgia Akbar

FREELANCE SPECIALIST: Sally Knocker

FUNDERS: Essex County Council, Excelcare, The Rayne Foundation, The W G Edwards Charitable Foundation, Fowler Smith & Jones Trust

SPARK DANCE - adding movement to our work in care homes

Spark evolves. Artists, staff, funders and care experts bring their research ideas to the project, and we develop new ways of communicating creatively with care home residents. This year, some 'Test & Learn' funding helped us pilot a new dance activity for Spark participants. Our movement specialist Charlene co-choreographed movements using music, colourful scarves and stretchy resistance bands to support residents to stay active, flexible and balanced.



SCAN



Scan to download a copy of *The Spark Book of Ideas* – full of techniques to try out with your own groups.

Link to website [here](#)



PARTNERSHIPS: Westport Care Home, Silk Court Care Home

ARTISTS: Billy Ash Sakula, Charlene Law, Georgia Akbar

FUNDER: London Sport

LAB - we consult the community



Think of LAB like an umbrella which sits over a number of Magic Me's community projects. A LAB project begins when a group takes part in a creative activity facilitated by one of our Associate Artists. Important issues arise, conversation and connection happens, and a creative plan emerges.

This year, we worked on a short project on the Isle of Dogs, and ran pilot sessions to explore the possibilities of a new year-long intergenerational LGBTQ+ project in Tower Hamlets. Stay in touch for updates!

It would be great to get an idea of what it was like for the older queer people, like a lineage or heritage. When straight people do genealogy it doesn't interest me as much, a lot of us are disconnected from family.

(Pilot project participant)

SCAN



SUPPORT LAB LGBTQ+

To build on discoveries from our pilot sessions, we're planning a year long intergenerational project for the LGBTQ+ communities of Tower Hamlets. Our fundraising target is £48,000 – could you help us get there?

Link to website [here](#)



PARTNERSHIPS: Micro Rainbow, Project Indigo, ELOP

ARTISTS: Billy Ash Sakula, Ruan Murphy, Skye Baker

FUNDER: Arts Council England



LEADERSHIP & ACTIVISM - creative health and beyond

For nearly 40 years Magic Me has pioneered intergenerational arts in the UK, and we want to share the successes we have in building community, combatting isolation and improving wellbeing. Meeting our peers, publishing our evaluations and advocating for our artists enables us to show our work in action.

Where we connect

Connecting with our intergenerational arts and creative health peers via conferences, webinars and networks brings fresh ideas and potential partnerships. Staff presented at Arts Council England's 'Creative Ageing Peer Learning Programme' and 'Creative Care: Engaging Older

People Living in Care in Meaningful Creative Opportunities' events, joined London Action on Creative Health, took part in Creative Health Summer Schools on everything from fundraising to evaluation, attended the Bristol Arts & Dementia conference, and the Flourishing Lives Intergenerational Forum. We are also taking an active role in Tower Hamlets' Creative Health Steering group – helping our borough to develop a Creative Health strategy in partnership with other local arts and cultural organisations.



Sharing the Thinking

Via a newly refurbished website (www.magicme.co.uk) and a more strategic approach to LinkedIn, we've been sharing ideas about intergenerational practice and creative ageing with an audience of peers and funders. This year's thinkpieces included an article about achieving pension age, a deep dive into the principles behind intergenerational work, and an exploration of the impact of the arts on care home residents.



What our artists say

Magic Me is one of the few arts organisations I know who involves artists in the development of their practice. Thank you for setting an example to other organisations in how you work and your consistency of ethos and ethics.

They are the highlight of my freelance calendar and are so enriching, nourishing and inspiring for my practice!

The days have been inspiring and have built a real community of artists during a time when you really have to fight to keep on doing this work.

Community Arts – showing the way

We are very proud of the programme of professional development we offer for our Associate Artists. We have poets, printmakers, filmmakers and more in our cohort of expert community practitioners and facilitators. They come together regularly to share artistic skills and reflect on their practice. This year's topics included a refresher on Magic Me's principles, a primer on working with sheltered housing schemes, a training session on anti racism and conflict resolution with Tas Emiabata, and a discussion about LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Connection with Dr Richard Vytiniorgu and the Include Age Research Project. It costs £2,093 to fully train an artist in our anti-ageist, anti-racist, intergenerational approaches – could you support our training programme?

IMPACT



Who we help

Our key beneficiaries are the younger (7-25) and older (55+) residents of Tower Hamlets who may benefit from free supported creative activity. Though it's rich in diversity and history, Tower Hamlets is an under-resourced borough – 1 in 2 younger people live in poverty here, and 1 in 3 older people. Poverty makes it hard to participate in cultural and civic life, leading to isolation and loneliness. Our free-to-join projects – including free refreshments and supported travel – lower those barriers, bringing people together to help build stronger and more supportive communities.

We also work in care homes in East London and Essex, bringing activities to residents who may not have easy access to creative and sensory activities. Care home staff receive training too, so they can embed creativity into the home on a long term basis.

wellbeing

social cohesion

bringing joy

creative health

confidence

challenging ageism

building community

FEEDBACK FROM 2025/26

As part of the evaluation process for our projects and programmes, we use Arts Council England's 'Impact and Insight' framework. This framework lets arts organisations – whatever their size, location or speciality – use the same evaluation questions so we can all compare our work. This is what participants in Magic Me's 2025/26 programme told us – the percentages are the number of people agreeing with the statement.

94%

'It gave me the opportunity to meet new people.'

91%

'It helped me gain new insight or knowledge.'

96%

'It made me feel more confident about doing new things.'

98%

'I feel more motivated to do more creative things in the future.'

96%

'It opened my mind to new possibilities.'

93%

'It helped me feel part of the community.'

81%

'I did something I didn't know I was capable of.'

90%

'It helped me to develop stronger relationships.'

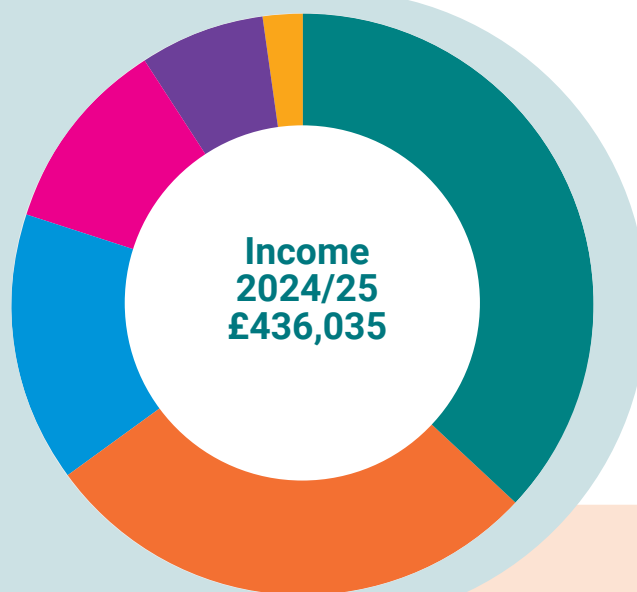


OUR FINANCES

This summary is taken from Magic Me's full, independently examined accounts. If you are reading this online, the full accounts follow, but print readers who would like a copy can visit www.magicme.co.uk or contact Magic Me on info@magicme.co.uk or 020 3222 6064.

Income during the year 2025/6 was £436,035. As you can see from the pie charts, the majority of our expenditure of £432,240 was on people – the staff and freelance artists who make our impact possible.

- Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisation 37%
- Trusts & Foundations 28%
- Local Authorities 15%
- Livery Companies 11%
- Individual donations 7%
- Other 2%



Expenditure
2024/25
£432,240

- Staff costs 53%
- Artists fees, materials & project costs 18%
- Fundraising, including fundraising staff 18%
- Administrative expenses 4%
- Rent, office and communications 4%
- Governance including accountancy 3%



THANK YOU

Thank you to the many trusts, foundations and funders whose support helped us bring our project participants together this year.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



And

**French Huguenot Church of London
Charitable Trust**

Mulberry School Trust

The W G Edwards Charitable Foundation

FUNDERS AND DONORS!

SCAN

Scan to discover how you can both support our participants and deliver your philanthropic priorities.

Link to website [here](#)



Thank you to our individual donors and Big Give supporters

A sincere 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 2025's Big Give Christmas Campaign a huge success. Our pledgers and champion funder The Childhood Trust came together with individual donors to raise an amazing £27,424. Thank you to all of you: that's a lot of people whose lives you've improved through creativity this year.

Thank you for in-kind support

34SP for website hosting

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

Fatto a Mano for providing pizza for our Creative Mix celebrations

Munch Munch for catering all our other events

Rayne Foundation for providing space for our staff and trustee away day

THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT HAPPEN

Associate Artists

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

Current Staff – Summer 2026

Amin Ali Project Coordinator
Audrey Aidoo-Davies Project Manager
Ben Butcher Executive Director, Co-CEO
Julia Bird Fundraising & Development Manager
Kate Hodson Creative Director, Co-CEO
Priyanka Chauhan Project Manager

Former staff during 2025/26

Natalie Golding Development Coordinator
Kimberly Johnson Project Coordinator
Susan Langford MBE Founder Director

Freelancer staff

Emma Mulligan Accounts

Trustees during 2025/26

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

Trustees who stood down during the year

Yaa Adansi-Pipim

Thank you to

Our good neighbours: Praxis, and our landlords
at Bethnal Green Meeting House, Pott Street
All Things Equal
D.R. ink
The Bank of England
Volunteers – **Chinny Yeung** and **Gianluca Pisano**

Photo credits

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

NEXT YEAR

We're on our way to 2027 with a number of established and innovative projects which will continue exploring the social and health benefits the arts can bring to people in Tower Hamlets, east London and Essex. Look out for -

Creative Mix: our sessions at Pott Street will continue, but this time we'll be focussing on partnerships between older people and primary school pupils.

Spark: more Spark training and activity in care homes, with additional plans to involve residents' friends and family in activities.

The Art of Conversation: In collaboration with local law firm A&O Shearman and an East End primary school, we are designing a series of conversation prompt cards to encourage creative intergenerational connections.

Gateway Housing 100: Gateway Housing have commissioned us to celebrate their 100th anniversary. Our project will use photography, drawing, collage and creative writing to explore Gateway archive material and residents' stories.



We are also raising the funds to support -

LAB LGBTQ+: based on the consultations we've had with our community in 2025/26, we want to bring together older and younger members of the LGBTQ+ community for a banner-making project.

Birthday Celebrations: as part of our plans for our 40th birthday in 2029 we are planning a project to archive our catalogue of artworks and organisational history while bringing together participants from our past and present to celebrate our extraordinary legacy.

NEWSLETTER!

Scan to sign up to our newsletter – a monthly round up of reports and plans.

SCAN



Link to website [here](#)



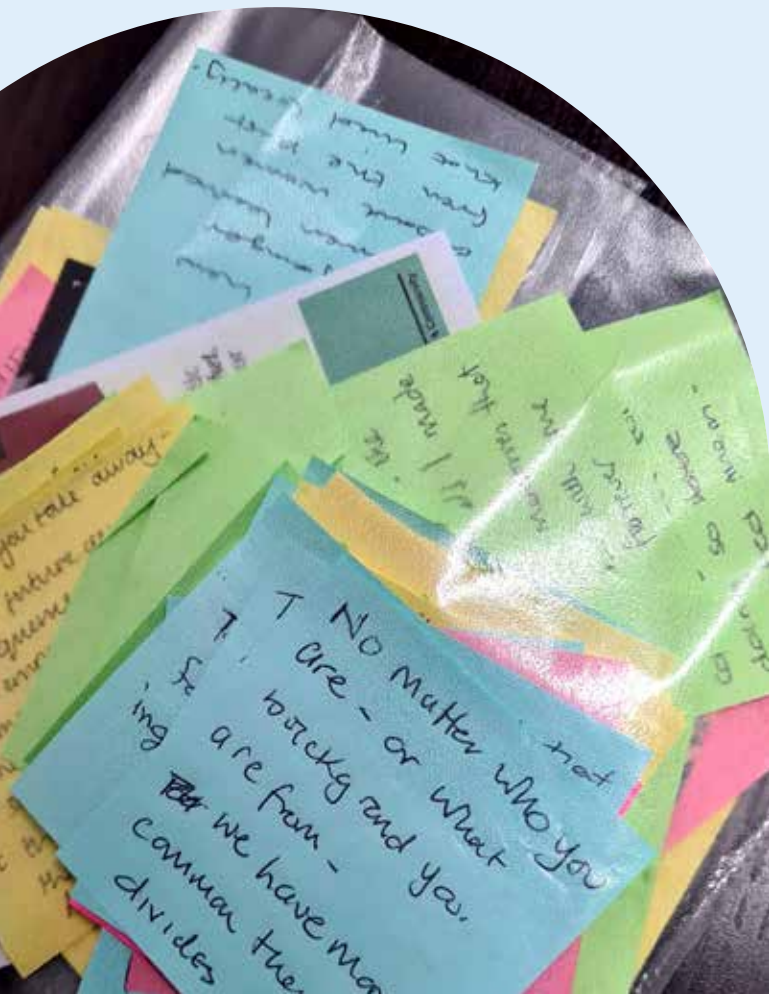
A NEW STRATEGY

One plan comes to an end, and another begins

The programmes and projects we delivered in 2025/26 were part of a three year organisational strategy which refocused Magic Me after Covid, deepened our relationships within our Tower Hamlets home borough and extended our work in care homes in London and Essex.

Following successful delivery of that strategy and with a new leadership team in place, it's time for a new plan. At the time of writing (September 26) we are putting the finishing touches to the new strategy to take our charity and its beneficiaries from 2027 to 2032.

Again, co-creation and collaboration form the framework for this process. We have spoken to over 60 members of our community ranging from participants to partners, peers to funders, think tanks to artists. Everything they have told us and asked us, we are refining and combining into objectives for this next strategy.



We're asking questions

How do we build more relationships and develop ways of reaching a wider audience including potential participants and the public?

How do we tell our story and encourage people to think about us?

What might it look like to create London's first Intergenerational Borough in Tower Hamlets?

How do we best use resources to occupy a leadership role across the sectors we serve?

Can we celebrate our 40th birthday with an archive project?

Can we build on the great work done highlighting ageism and the power of intergenerational connection through It's on the Cards by developing a regular public programme of work?

In answering these questions and clarifying our plans for the next five years, we will above all honour what our community has asked for: joyful connection, innovative practice, and meaningful creative experiences.

Stay in touch to see how our new strategy develops – you can sign up for our newsletter, follow our social channels or visit our website. We are always keen to explore new partnership possibilities, and we'd love to hear from you.

MAGIC ME TIMELINE 2025/26

April

- Our film *Her Story, Our Inspiration* wins Best Intergenerational Project with Under 20s at the Age Friendly Awards

May

- We begin the workshops and sessions with Mulberry School Trust which eventually become our *Voices Across Time* film

June

- A Creative Mix exhibition opens at St Margaret's House
- *It's on the Cards* starts coming to life at Christ Church Primary School

July

- Our first time in a professional film studio, creating sections of *Voices Across Time*



August

- Thanks to The Tudor Trust funding, Magic Me staff take a shared week of additional leave, to recharge ready for the Autumn and beyond

September

- Staff harvest the bumper crop of tomatoes we grew in our yard
- Our partnership with Excelcare begins, sending artists into care homes for Spark sessions
- *Voices Across Time* is screened at the international Global Girl Leading conference

October

- Ben Butcher and Kate Hodson take up their new Co-CEO roles
- Amin Ali, a new Project Coordinator, joins the team



November

- Susan Langford, our Founder and first Director, retires - we wish her farewell with a party!
- Associate Artists take their Picnic Hamper of paper and paint to sheltered housing homes to encourage residents to make art together

December

- Generous donors help us to our biggest ever Big Give Christmas Challenge fundraising total
- Volunteers from the Bank of England come to the office to pack boxes of Spark materials
- The papier-mâché FishBirdHorse puppet made by Creative Mix participants makes its debut

January

- Staff and Trustees gather for an Away Day to start planning our new five year strategy
- We run a number of pilot printmaking workshops with East London LGBTQ+ groups to prepare for a new project

February

- Launch of our new website - now all our projects and plans are just a click away
- Our Artists' Learning & Development day focuses on working with sheltered housing schemes

March

- *The Coming of Age* exhibition opens at The Wellcome Collection in central London, featuring our project *It's on the Cards*
- The co-creation process for our 2027/32 strategy begins

WHO WE ARE



Magic Me is the UK's leading intergenerational arts charity.

We bring the 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, and combat isolation and loneliness.

Working in partnership with our local communities across Tower Hamlets, we have pioneered intergenerational arts for more than 35 years and invested more than £7m in the borough. 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.



Find us on

 [magicmearts](#)

 [magic-me](#)

 [@MagicMeArts](#)



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ENGLAND**



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