



# IMPACT REPORT

**The First Two Years**

June 2022 – August 2024

**THE BRIGHT  
FOUNDATION**



## A WORD FROM OUR FOUNDER

It is my firmly held belief that the arts and creativity can shape happier and healthier children and enable young people to reach their full potential. My life's work has been committed to costume design for film, tv and theatre and I have been fortunate to have had some incredible experiences and worked with some inspirational artists. Through The Bright Foundation I want to tackle the barriers that prevent so many of our youth today from experiencing the joy of being creative, offering memorable, and hopefully life changing experiences to them.

I can't believe we are already two years in to this journey. I am delighted to share this summary report celebrating all that has been achieved so far.

**John Bright**, Benefactor and Chair of The Bright Foundation / Founder and Director of Cosprop



## A WORD FROM OUR CEO

This report marks an important milestone in the development of our new arts education charity. It was agreed with the board that we would give ourselves the first two years to play and experiment – to test ways of working; to grow our partnerships and networks; and to understand where we can have the most impact and benefit. We commissioned an Evaluation Consultant, Catherine Orbach, to be a critical friend during this time; establishing a robust evaluation framework and undertaking a situational analysis to understand our local and national context and where we can best contribute. This report summarises an in-depth evaluation of these first two years and will be used to set the long-term goals for the charity.

At a time when funding for the arts is scarce and vulnerable, the scale of John's support and bequest makes The Bright Foundation an important addition to the arts and cultural offer for children and young people in this part of East Sussex, and provides an exemplary model for cultural philanthropy.

**Polly Risbridger**, Chief Executive Officer, The Bright Foundation





## ABOUT THE BRIGHT FOUNDATION

The Bright Foundation is an arts education charity based in Hastings (East Sussex) established in 2018 by **John Bright**, an Academy & BAFTA Award winning costume designer for film, TV and theatre. John is the founder and owner of the world's leading period costume house, **Cosprop**, based in London. His notable credits as a costume designer include *A Room with a View* and *Sense and Sensibility*. John is also an avid collector and has amassed a vast range of antique toys, puppets, model theatre sets, and early cinema equipment.

John brings his creative vision, collections and connections to The Bright Foundation. The foundation aims to use his lifetime's work and collections to inspire a new generation of imaginative children and young people to reach their full potential. John is very aware that Hastings is a town with significant inequalities and is passionate about levelling the playing field, ensuring that children and young people who experience disadvantage of any kind have the same creative opportunities as others.

John funds the core operations of the charity through the profits from Cosprop. He has bequeathed most of his estate to the Foundation, including Cosprop, to support it in perpetuity.

In June 2022 the **Barn Theatre and Museum** opened its doors at Rodgers Farm, just north of Hastings. The renovated farm buildings include a 50 seat children's theatre and a museum showcasing John's collection of antique toys, puppets and model theatre sets. This is all set within 24 acres of beautiful countryside.

In May 2024, the **Benbow Arts Space** opened in central St Leonards-on-Sea. This is a creative learning hub for young people dedicated to the art of filmmaking. It has an early cinema exhibition, an events space, a workshop space, and a film production suite.

The Bright Foundation has a core group of 7 staff working across the two sites; a group of dedicated trustees, freelancers and volunteers; and 32 ambassadors from the world of TV, film and theatre who want to support the foundation in achieving its goals.



INSPIRING  
YOUNG  
MINDS  
THROUGH  
ARTS AND  
CREATIVITY



## THE CONTEXT FOR OUR WORK

John Bright's mission in founding the charity was to focus resource and opportunity on children and young people experiencing disadvantage. Through whatever lens you look, there are large numbers of children and young people facing challenges in their lives in the local area. Additionally, the broader context for the cultural sector remains fragile.

### ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

- ▶ Hastings is the **13th** most deprived local authority in the country\*
- ▶ **23%** of children are living in poverty
- ▶ Average Free School Meals is **36%** compared to **20%** across East Sussex, with some schools in excess of **50%**
- ▶ Hastings has the highest number of children outside of London in temporary accommodation

### EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ **1 in 10** young people in Hastings leave school with no plans for higher education or work – almost twice the English average
- ▶ **All 3** of the local secondary schools require improvement
- ▶ **14%** of the working age population have no qualifications compared to **10%** in the Southeast

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- ▶ **1 in 5** children and young people had a probable mental health issue in 2023

### SOCIAL

- ▶ **Gentrification** of Hastings with a big influx of Londoners resulting in divided communities, rising house prices and stark inequalities

### ARTS AND CREATIVITY

- ▶ UK has one of the lowest levels of government spending on culture among European nations – DCMS funding for cultural organisations has decreased by **18%** since 2010
- ▶ The number of arts teachers in English state funded schools fell by **23%** between 2011 and 2024
- ▶ Since 2010 the share of GCSE entries in arts subjects has declined by **47%**
- ▶ The number of jobs in the Cultural Sector rose by **33%** between 2011 and 2022

\* 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (due to be updated in 2025)



## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Over the first two years a wide range of projects, programmes and activities have been developed and delivered under 4 key strands. Working closely with charities, food banks, community groups and local schools with a high percentage of pupils on free school meals or with special educational needs, the programmes are targeted to engage with a diverse cross-section of the community. Participants have included those excluded from mainstream education, home educated families, looked after children, refugees, neuro-diverse and disabled young people.

### SCHOOLS AND GROUPS

94 school and community groups visited the Barn Theatre and Museum for a one-day creative educational workshop (Experience Day) over the first 2 years. Activities include exploring the museum collection with its antique toys and puppets, puppet making, drama-based costume and character sessions, watching professional theatre shows, learning about the history of toys and making their own, and outdoor learning in the summer. The activities have strong cross-curricular links and are led by highly experienced artist educators.

Time is spent building relationships with groups to ensure visits are tailored to children's needs. The days are offered free of charge, with schools covering transport costs. For some schools, budgets and staffing constraints impact on the possibility of school trips. We have been fortunate to receive a grant from the Spencer Wills Trust to match fund transport costs for schools that face financial barriers in visiting. More in-depth partnerships have been developed with a number of local schools: Torfield School (special educational needs), St Leonard's Academy (secondary), and Westfield School (primary).

Following the launch of the Benbow Arts Space, partnerships are being developed with local colleges, schools and community groups. Visits are being developed in collaboration with teachers and group leaders with options for a day focused on creative career opportunities in film and theatre, or a more creative session exploring the evolution of the moving image in which the students create their own stop frame animations.



*"I've been recommending The Bright Foundation to lots of teacher friends. It's been the best trip in 30 years of teaching"*

Teacher



### PUBLIC EVENTS

From the start, The Bright Foundation has sought out quality children's theatre for holiday and occasional weekend shows, often featuring puppetry linking with the museum collections, or with an environmental theme connecting to the rural location. The Barn Theatre offers a unique, intimate and relaxed space for children to see theatre, often for the first time. A practical craft session inspired by the show is usually offered in the museum space, making a rich and multi-faceted experience and ensuring children have a chance to be creative. Larger scale outdoor events have also been delivered annually, including two family festivals, an Earth Day event, and a series of Summer Open Days with an outdoor story trail. Tickets are very affordable, with a heavily discounted rate for those in receipt of benefits. A network of charity partners has been developed through which we offer free tickets and transport support to attend.

The Benbow Arts Space launched with a week-long Open House - welcoming the local community through the doors to explore the early cinema exhibition, create magic lantern portraits, zoetrope designs, and stop-frame animations. The location in the heart of St Leonards creates much better footfall and exposure for the charity. Going forwards, the space will host public activities and events as part of local festivals including A Town Explores a Book, Hastings Fat Tuesday, and Hastings Storytelling Festival.

*"I enjoyed watching my children feeling brave enough to join in by playing a musical instrument even though they were hesitant at first. The event was very inclusive but without pushing children which helped make them feel comfortable."*

Parent / Audience member for Enchanted Cinema







*"My son typically struggles socially but he has been made to feel so welcome and accepted here, which has been refreshing and so welcomed"*

Parent



## CREATIVE SKILLS AND WELLBEING

5 different week-long projects have taken place over the first 2 years offering children and young people a chance to immerse themselves in a creative experience and work collaboratively towards an outcome, such as an outdoor theatre piece at Barn Theatre and Museum or a film at the Benbow Arts Space. Support through the Holiday Activities and Food programme (funded through East Sussex County Council and Department for Education) is helping these projects grow the number of participants with special educational needs and/or on free school meals - making up 68% of the participants over the 2 summer projects in 2024. The projects are an opportunity to make new friends, work creatively and collaboratively, and in the case of the Barn Theatre and Museum, have access to outdoor space and nature.

The Benbow Arts Space offers a chance to build longer term engagement and support skills development and access to creative career pathways. Two Youth Film Collectives have been established (11-15 years and 16-19 years), meeting weekly and working with a wide range of industry professionals. The Bright Foundation has become a BFI Film Academy hub and is delivering a short course for 16-19 year olds, and offering accreditation through Arts Award.

*"I really loved when we acted with the puppets because we could make endless possibilities. I felt proud as everyone really liked our performance."*

Participant in Puppetry and Performance Creative Intensive



## SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONALS

In order to deliver high quality creative experiences to children and young people, a strong and skilled workforce is needed. A teacher advisory group was formed prior to the launch of the Barn Theatre and Museum to steer the content and structure for the schools offer. Annual focus groups have continued ensuring the activities complement the national curriculum and meet school priorities. Going forwards the plan is to offer professional development and resources to teachers to support them to embed creativity into the curriculum.

Hastings is resident to a large number of artists and creatives and 57 different freelancers have been employed over the first 2 years to deliver the programme, the majority of them local to the area. Mentoring support was offered by the Arts and Education Manager who has over 30 years teaching experience.

A pilot children's theatre commission was tested, with *Look Up Look Out* by Sophie Nuezel. This outdoor immersive dance and aerial production for families was created in Hastings with in-kind producing support and accommodation. The show was premiered in St Helen's Woods, Hastings, and has since gone on to tour to other parts of the country. This investment in new high quality children's work also enabled us to test working off-site in order to reach new audiences.

*'R was fantastically helpful in helping me improve the workshops, particularly in helping me to slow down and allow for opportunities for deeper learning'.*

Guest Creative Artist



**THE FIRST TWO YEARS  
IN NUMBERS**  
JUNE 2022 – AUGUST 2024

**7,047**

PEOPLE ENGAGED  
WITH ITS  
PROGRAMMES

**59%** children  
and young  
people



**176**

DAYS OF  
ACTIVITY

**102** School and  
Group Workshops  
**41** Public Events  
**33** days of Creative Projects



**1,636**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE ATTENDING  
SCHOOL AND  
GROUP VISITS

**43%** in receipt of free  
school meals or with special  
educational needs



**4,781**

PEOPLE ATTENDING  
PUBLIC EVENTS

**10%** in receipt of state  
benefits or through  
charity partners



**135**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING  
PART IN CREATIVE INTENSIVES

**44%** in receipt of free school meals or  
with special educational needs



**3,651**

SOCIAL MEDIA  
FOLLOWERS

**57**

CREATIVE  
FREELANCERS  
EMPLOYED

**7** regular volunteers  
**32** high profile  
Ambassadors



**£1,206,000**

FUND-RAISED INCOME THROUGH  
DONATIONS, SMALL GRANTS AND CHARITY  
AUCTION OF COSTUMES, FILM RELATED  
EXPERIENCES, AND CELEBRITY MEMORABILIA

**£22,900** earned income through box office,  
café sales and space hire



## WHAT MAKES THE BRIGHT FOUNDATION SPECIAL

Feedback from our audiences, participants and visitors highlight the following:



### UNIQUE COLLECTIONS

Both venues feature exhibitions of John Bright's collection which inspires much of the programme activity.

*'The fact that they could touch and engage with so many old and precious toys and objects was wonderful, and certainly added to their levels of engagement and appreciation.'*



### PROFESSIONAL CHILDREN'S THEATRE

The purpose-built children's theatre is of immense value offering a relaxed performance space and quality performances, often a first theatre experience for children.

*'All of the young people were so taken with the theatre performance. It was so special to experience that in such an intimate setting.'*



### DEVELOPING CREATIVITY

The focus on children and young people's own creativity is central to all the work, with practical activities incorporated into almost all activity.

*'The children benefitted from seeing and experiencing the whole process - watching the performance, meeting the puppets and puppeteers, then designing and making their own puppets and learning how to operate and perform with them.'*



### LOCATION LOCATION

Two distinct venues – one set in the beautiful High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and one near the seafront of St Leonard's-on-Sea. Both have professional, high quality spaces and a quirky design.

*'All the surroundings, it's nice and tranquil, everyone is calm, even the fidgety ones. The majority of their time is spent inside a classroom so the space makes a big impact.'*

### THE PEOPLE

The skilled staff team and guest creatives bring a wealth of experience and a child-centred approach.

*'The people there are also what makes it a special place, I heard your staff calling children by their names, checking in on children, encouraging and challenging them.'*



### INCLUSIVE WELCOME

Little touches like headphones for children with sensory needs, family friendly training for staff, and the intimate setting of each site makes people feel safe, included and welcome.

*'It gave the class an experience of the theatre which was manageable to suit their varied needs. A typical theatre would be too overwhelming for them.'*

Special School Teacher



### INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS

The backing of Cosprop opens a door to the creative industries that often feels closed to small community arts organisations. The high profile Ambassadors help raise the profile of the charity and support the fundraising drive. The sale of high-profile film costumes managed to raise over £400,000 in Lights, Camera, Auction.



*"John Bright's contribution to the entertainment industry is unique and legendary. The Bright Foundation will ensure that a whole new generation has the opportunity to explore the "what-ifs" of imagination and the arts. What a legacy, what a gift."*

Hugh Bonneville, Actor and Bright Foundation Ambassador



# IMPACT

The evaluation of the first two years' programme identified three areas of impact on children and young people taking part.

Participants were asked to rate a series of statements relating to these key areas. The figures below show the percentage of people who agreed and strongly agreed with the statements.



1

## CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

Children and young people had positive cultural experiences and developed creative skills



- 99% Enjoyed their visit
- 98% Were absorbed in what they did
- 100% Developed new skills and knowledge
- 83% Felt their minds were opened to new things
- 89% Staff/parents were motivated to support their children's creativity further

2

## WELLBEING

Children and young people and those that support them saw improvements in their wellbeing



- 94% Felt welcomed and safe
- 82% Achieved things they didn't know they were capable of
- 90% Saw their communication skills improve
- 100% Felt more confident
- 82% Made new friends

3

## ENVIRONMENT

Children and young people felt more connected to nature and aware of the environment



- 97% Felt more connected to nature
- 75% Felt more aware of the environment and sustainability

Across every programme people were asked to say how likely they were to recommend The Bright Foundation to a friend or colleague. This is called a **Net Promoter Score**.

The Bright Foundation has a score of 79. Anything over 70 is considered excellent.



# WHAT NEXT?

The establishment of The Bright Foundation is down to the huge generosity of our benefactor, John Bright. But to achieve the full potential of the charity and to respond to the growing needs of our most disadvantaged children and young people, there is a pressing need to raise vital funds to maintain and expand our programmes. We are working to attract new funders, supporters and income streams to create a sustainable funding model, and will soon be launching a Supporters Circle. Here are some of our big ambitions for the future based on the learning we have been on, and the demand and needs we are seeing.

## Supporting young film-makers and their future employability at the Benbow Arts Space

Being located in the centre of town has increased the charity's visibility, and demand for activities at the Benbow Arts Space is growing quickly. We aim to make the space become a home for young aspiring film-makers and creatives – a space where they can influence the programme; use the professional equipment to realise their ideas; and make the connections needed to achieve their aspirations. There is opportunity to expand work-based learning programmes, paid apprenticeships, and build strong industry connections through the BFI Film Academy and Cosprop. To do this we need to improve our post-production facilities and expand the range of technical equipment available for young people to use.

## New spaces at the Barn Theatre and Museum

Having run a wide range of projects at the Barn Theatre and Museum, we need new spaces and facilities to maximise the creative potential of what we can deliver. A planned theatre extension will create a deeper stage and backstage area. In the long-term, we would like to develop a creative education studio and outdoor learning space.

## Making Connections

The opening of the Benbow Arts Space has attracted interest from a significant number of local creatives, many from the film industry. We are keen to harness the power of this community, as well as the Ambassadors, a circle of John Bright's supporters from the film and TV world. At the same time, we will continue to find partners supporting local children, young people and families, who share our passion for arts and creativity.

## Commissions and Residencies

In the long term, we are exploring how we may commission and premiere new children's theatre work that can tour beyond the local region, with offer of creation space and producing advice. We will explore opportunities to work with children and young people from further afield looking at the potential to host residencies.

## JOIN US!

### We'd love you to join us on this journey.

- As audience – come to a show or open event
- If you are a supporter and value what we do, join our Supporters' Circle
- If you're an organisation that finds a synergy with our work, get in touch
- If you are working freelance in the arts, send us your CV
- Apply to become a Volunteer
- Or if you are a teacher or group leader, book an Experience Day



## SUPPORT US!

The Bright Foundation can only continue to inspire young minds through arts and creativity with the support of our generous donors and sponsors. Please consider donating, sponsoring or volunteering:

Visit - [thebrightfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/support-us](https://thebrightfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/support-us)

Or get in touch with the CEO -

[polly.risbridger@thebrightfoundation.org.uk](mailto:polly.risbridger@thebrightfoundation.org.uk)



### **BARN THEATRE AND MUSEUM**

Rodgers Farm  
Stonestile Lane  
Hastings  
East Sussex  
TN35 4PH

### **BENBOW ARTS SPACE**

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