



# 2025-2026 IMPACT REPORT

# FREEDOM

# Festival Arts Trust



# FREEDOM

## Festival Arts Trust

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# ABOUT US

Freedom Festival Arts Trust uses arts, culture and heritage to create unique and extraordinary moments that challenge, inform and change the way people view and experience Freedom across Hull, East Riding and the world, celebrating the city's independent spirit and global connections with free-to-access world class culture and heritage.

We draw inspiration from Hull pioneers such as William Wilberforce, Amy Johnson, Mary Murdoch and the Head Scarf revolutionaries, and use public and civic space as a canvas to activate cultural revolutions. Empowering artists, heritage instigators and communities to create and collaborate, encouraging social unity and sharing the value of joy that comes with freedom.

Our people-powered approach, combined with bold artistic ambition and extensive experience delivering creative interventions, means Freedom Festival is trusted to deliver powerful, transformative experiences in public space - connecting communities, challenging injustice, and leading the way in socially engaged art.

Freedom Festival Arts Trust delivers a year-round programme of arts, culture and heritage whilst delivering one of the UK's most prominent, free to access festivals in public space, Freedom Festival. Throughout all of our work, we strive to ensure we are working as sustainably as possible, through presenting, commissioning and curating new creative interventions.



Pirate Taxi, Pirates of the Carabina  
Photo: Tom Arran

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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I am proud to introduce Freedom Festival Arts Trust's 2025–2026 Impact Report.

In a challenging funding climate, our small but ambitious team has delivered work of extraordinary scale, quality and impact. With just three full-time staff, four part-time staff, an apprentice and a dedicated Board of Trustees, Freedom Festival continues to transform public space through creativity, courage and collaboration. I want to extend my sincere thanks to our staff, volunteers and trustees whose hard work, professionalism and belief make this possible.

I would also like to thank our core funders, Arts Council England, Hull City Council, Wykeland and Esmeé Fairbairn, alongside our project funders, sponsors, media partners and regional collaborators. Your support enables us to keep high-quality cultural experiences accessible and largely free to the people of Hull and the wider region.

The 2025 Festival theme, Reclaiming Space, reflected the power of arts and culture to bring people together. Over 60,000 people joined us during the festival weekend, with thousands more engaging through our year-round programme. At a time when many communities face economic and social pressures, creating joyful, inclusive civic spaces has never been more important.

We remain committed to ensuring that world-class culture is not limited by geography or income. Freedom Festival belongs to the people of Hull, powered by community, driven by creativity and rooted in the belief that shared cultural experiences can unite, challenge and inspire.

Thank you to everyone who continues to make Freedom possible.

***Trish Dalby***  
**Freedom Festival Chair**

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## 1. How big is your organisation?

We are a small organisation made up of 3 full-time, and 4 part-time members of staff. We are also supported by 10 people who sit on our board of trustees.

## 2. How do you get your funding?

We set up as a charitable trust in 2013 and receive core funding support from Arts Council England, Hull City Council, Wykeland and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Outside of that we apply to trusts and foundations for funding, as well as engaging local businesses, organisations and institutions through sponsorship. We also partner with creative organisations internationally to secure funding support for their artists to come to Hull.

## 3. Do you work with local artists?

Yes! We work with many local artists through our talent development programmes, as well as support local organisations by giving them a platform to showcase their work to the public. We are a strong believer in this and will continue to support new and innovative projects from Hull!

## 4. Why have international artists?

We believe that the people of Hull deserve to see the best and there are so many beautiful and powerful pieces of art and creativity from around the world that should come to Hull. Many artists through networks we are a part of, so when we can bring something new and innovative to our streets, we will!



‘+’, Sound de Seca  
Photo: Tom Arran

## 5. Are you part of the council?

We are not part of Hull City Council. We have been an independent charity for 13 years and are kindly supported by Hull City Council through core funding, and East Riding of Yorkshire Council provide project funding for Freedom on Tour. The council play an important part of our programme supporting the delivery of Freedom Festival, and FFAT in return contribute to the delivery of the Cultural Strategy and the City Council Community plan.

## 6. Why do we charge for some tickets?

We are a not-for-profit charity and would love to keep all the shows free of charge, however some shows we ticket to help cover show and venue costs. With all tickets we try to offer a range of affordable pay models or charge the lowest possible amount, with all ticket income funnelled into the programme. 90% of the festival is free to access and all our outdoor programme of events will always be free-to-access.

## 7. What factors affect the size of the festival?

Funding. Since COVID, and now 9 years on from City of Culture, funding and sponsorship has decreased whilst costs of delivery have risen significantly. Over the last 9 years the festival budget has dropped by around 50%. We are working hard to identify new income streams and generate new partnerships, as we know that our audience deserve the best cultural experiences the globe has to offer.

## 8. What's the plan moving forward?

We are looking to build on the foundations created, by developing further our community-based engagement strategy and collaborating with more likeminded organisations on projects which shine a light on freedom and what that means in our society today. We will also continue being a platform for new and emerging talent, and 'the place to be' to see cutting edge and thought-provoking performances. We have some great plans!

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FREEDOM FESTIVAL

Freedom Festival Arts Trust delivered the 18<sup>th</sup> Freedom Festival from 28<sup>th</sup> August – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025, packed with world-class performance, powerful storytelling and unforgettable moments across Hull. The 2025 Freedom Festival curation took on the theme of reclaiming space. Following a range of social and political unrest over the last 12-18 months across the world, we have seen our civic, public spaces and places become antagonistic and precarious. Freedom Festival has a role to play in redefining public space, freeing up space for open conversation, intrigue and most importantly Joy. Throughout the 2025 programme, we reclaimed space through a series of music, dance, performance, film, visual arts and circus interventions that celebrated people, place and the power of community cohesion.

### **Our 2025-2026 highlights included:**

Parade -The Giant Wheel - a collaboration between Autin Dance Theatre, Freedom Festival and the people of Hull. Who create a beautiful and impactful parade from Queen Victoria Square to the Cenotaph. Communities from the across the city from all lived experiences came together to dance, be joyous and have fun in our streets - celebrating our differences and highlighting when we all work together, great things happen!



Parade- The Giant Wheel, Autin Dance Theatre  
Photo: Tom Arran

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FREEDOM FESTIVAL

In collaboration with Living with Water, we presented Sliding Slope by Vloeistof from Netherlands. A work inspired by the North Sea major flood of 1953, performed on a sunken house in the marina! Not only was this a relevant and unique performance, but following the show audience members had the opportunity to chat with the living water team, learning about how Hull has to live with water and take home plants to grow in gardens or local community hubs.

Alongside this we had the opportunity to support 7 local artists from across Hull and East Riding. Giving local talent the centre stage and providing exposure to national and international networks.

The festival was a resounding success, reaching over 60,000 audience members, 250 participants, 148 performances from artists from 9 countries, and over 500 volunteer hours.



Sliding Slope, Vloeistof  
Photo: Tom Arran

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## PARTICIPATION AT FREEDOM FESTIVAL

### Parade - The Giant Wheel, Autin Dance Theatre

Parade - The Giant Wheel is a moving performance inspired by the beauty, power, and impact of people from different walks of life coming together, featuring a 12-foot tall Giant Wheel powered by five street artists and accompanied by music and a large community cast of local groups and individual performers.

It was important to Freedom Festival Arts Trust that the community cast were representative of the city of Hull. We worked closely with local partners Welcome to English, NAPA, HEY Volunteering, and State of the Arts Academy to recruit local people to take part in the show.

**78** Community performers

**18** Workshop hours

**4** Festival shows

*'Thank you for allowing me to be part of it'*

*'It made me feel all jiggly'*

*'How grateful I am for the chance it gave me to participate in bringing joy to myself and others'*



Parade- The Giant Wheel, Autin Dance Theatre  
Photo: Tom Arran



## OUR ACTIVITIES

# PARTICIPATION AT FREEDOM FESTIVAL

Possê is a vibrant outdoor performance that brings people together by blending percussion, dance, theatre and voice. At its heart, the show celebrates community and the idea of reclaiming our streets as places where we can come together, connect and share joyful experiences.

The word Possê itself means community, group, family—and that spirit was at the centre of the project in Hull.

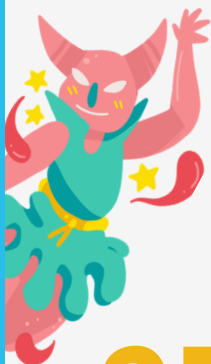
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For this version of the show, the visiting artists worked closely with two local community groups:

- Hull Samba – The performers from Posse led workshops with members of Hull Samba, who joined the show with their own instruments and rhythms.
- Freedom Chorus – The show also featured Freedom Chorus, who became the first choir ever to perform live with Posse.

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FESTIVAL STATS



**148** performances

**40** companies **9** countries  
from

**250** participants  
taking part in **6** participation  
projects



**514** volunteer  
hours



Ghetto Fabulous, Family  
Catwalk Extravaganza  
Photo: Tom Arran



# OUR ACTIVITIES FESTIVAL STATS

**60,000+** Audience

**134,299** Spotify impressions

**400,000** est. impressions via local PR

**811,152** est. impressions via digital billboards

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

**96%** of the audience said the quality of the performance was good or very good

**91%** of the audience strongly agree/agree that Freedom Festival gave them a sense of pride in Hull

**96%** strongly agreed/agreed that it improved public spaces and streets where it took place

The most used 3 words to describe the festival were:

**FAMILY, FRIENDLY AND HAPPY**

*"Uplifted, emotional, joyful, entertained, happy!"*

**Freedom Festival audience member**

*"Quality shows - such pride. Exhilarating, jaw dropping and wow emotions. All day smiles!"*

**Freedom Festival audience member**

*"The jewel in the city's calendar - incredible companies from round the world, free and accessible for all" - Freedom Festival audience member*



Posse, Sound de Seca  
Photo: Tom Arran



## OUR ACTIVITIES

# FREEDOM YEAR ROUND: FREEDOM CITIZENS

We launched our Freedom Citizens programme in 2025: a group of passionate, enthusiastic, curious and committed people from across Hull who will:

- Help shape the future of Freedom Festival Arts Trust
- Share their ideas, experiences and perspectives
- Champion FFAT in their community
- Develop new skills and cultural capacity
- Be part of something exciting, creative and collaborative

Freedom Citizens will join our friendly get-togethers, take part in inspiring learning sessions, and head off on exciting field trips, both close to home and across the country. Creating opportunities for more local people to develop new skills, have new experiences and understand the working systems behind the organisations. Helping to shape and frame what we do in local, national and international context.

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FREEDOM YEAR ROUND: FREEDOM SCHOOLS

FFAT built on our successful school pilot in 2024, taking one of its festival shows into schools. In March we presented *Castaway* by Highly Sprung - an outdoor aerial performance that explores the impact of today's throwaway society on our waterways through a unique gyrosopic flying machine and immersive choreography to three secondary schools: Winifred Holtby, Liberty Academy and Boulevard Academy. The project brought world-class performance directly into school playgrounds, giving hundreds of students the opportunity to experience exceptional art in their own environment.

The 2025 Schools Programme was delivered in partnership with Living With Water, a regional collaboration between Yorkshire Water, Hull City Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, the Environment Agency and the University of Hull. Together, we explored the environmental themes of *CastAway* through workshops in our partner schools, supporting flood resilience, raising awareness of water-related challenges, and promoting sustainable, community-focused solutions across Hull and the East Riding.

**120**

Pupils took part  
in environmental  
workshops

**800**

Audience/school  
members

**4**

Performances

Highly Sprung, *Castaway*  
Photo: Tom Arran



Duo Kaos, Time to Loop  
Photo: Tom Arran



ICHI  
Photo: Tom Arran



Taroo and the Human  
Flag, Company Zid  
Photo: Tom Arran



Cia Nom Provisional,  
Electric Feel  
Photo: Tom Arran

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FREEDOM ON TOUR

Freedom on Tour is a new international touring initiative led by Freedom Festival Arts Trust (FFAT) established to support the presentation of high-quality outdoor arts across public spaces in East Riding, Yorkshire & Lincolnshire. Working as a new consortium our partners include Culture House & North East Lincolnshire Council, ARCADE and The Barn in Tadcaster, Bridlington Council & Goole Junction. In August 2025, Freedom on Tour visited Goole, Cleethorpes, Bridlington Spa, Tadcaster and Hull, and will visit again in 2026. The programme will provide more people with access to world class culture & build skills, capacity & ambition in the region.



Posse, Sound de Seca  
Photo: Tom Arran





Cia Nom Provisional,  
Electric Feel  
Photo: Tom Arran

**97%** Rated Freedom on Tour as good and very good

**33%** of respondents said that the Freedom On Tour event was the only arts and cultural event they had attended this year

**4,500**  
audience members

**40** shows in **5** towns

“Today’s event was brilliant”

“So much positive energy”

“Great use of the space. Amazing to see families and people of all ages with smiles on their faces.”

# OUR ACTIVITIES

## FREEDOM YEAR ROUND: FREEDOM ONLINE

Freedom Festival Arts Trust, Hull Independent Cinema and Unthinkable Film Festival partnered on a new online short film programme in March 2026. The films, podcasts and music explore themes of freedom, justice, joy and climate action, from talks and films to digital interventions.

**FREEDOM**  
Festival Arts Trust

**HULL**  
INDEPENDENT  
CINEMA



Over 800+ unique  
users engaged in  
1,035 sessions of  
Freedom Online.



[www.freedomfestival.online](http://www.freedomfestival.online)

# ACCESS



Taroo and the Human Flag, Company Zid  
Photo: Tom Arran

# 10

BSL interpreted performances

# 7

Audio described performances & exhibitions

## On-site

Access support through partnerships with Nice twice and Gig Buddies

## Online

Audio, easy-read and large print programmes

FFAT is an Unlimited ally: an Unlimited ally is a cultural organisation committed to increase disabled-led art being programmed, produced and commissioned. We are also working towards Attitude is Everything Bronze level live events charter (a framework to support and encourage live event organisations to progress their inclusive practices for diverse and disabled people), which we hope to achieve in 2026.

We work with multiple organisations to ensure on-site and online provisions are made so our shows are easily accessible for all.

# UNLIMITED

# SUSTAINABILITY

As an organisation we strive to be as sustainable as possible, implementing policies and procedures for our staff, volunteers, and suppliers to help us reduce our carbon footprint. Some of the ways in which we do this are:

**Catering:** All caterers onsite used locally sourced produce and provided recyclable containers for all items. Staff catering was vegan and backstage areas were free from single use plastics.

**Marketing:** All brochures and staff passes were made with recyclable materials and were distributed by Hull Delivery Co-op instead of vehicles.

**Audience:** Our audiences were encouraged to bring water bottles to the festival and travel to the festival by public transport, with information on how to get into the city available on our website.

**Festival Themes:** The 2025 Festival included a strong sustainability theme, including:

**Sliding Slope by Vloeistof:** A roof on the water, similar to a sinking ship. On the slippery surface, four people fight for survival. Will they make it? Who will try to find a solution for everyone, who will only want to save his own skin?

**Castaway by Highly Sprung:** A stunning outdoor performance that explores the impact of today's throwaway society on our waterways.

We will continue to produce our festival with sustainability at the core, and currently work in partnership with Without Walls, Northern Festival Network, Urban Sustainable Arts Network (USAN) and Global Streets to share learning, data and best practice and to ensure we are doing everything we can with our artists and audience to reduce our carbon footprint.

Highly Sprung, Castaway  
Photo: Tom Arran



# MEET THE PEOPLE

## BOARD

P Dalby.....	Chair	J Harris.....	Trustee
A Baron-Medlam.....	Trustee	C Harrison.....	Trustee
D Beeton.....	Trustee	T Kagbala.....	Trustee
D Chidera Arikibe.....	Trustee	M Moore.....	Trustee
T Curteis.....	Trustee	R Pritchard.....	Trustee

## TEAM

Phil Hargreaves.....	Festival Director
Lorna Fulton.....	Executive Director
Ian Morley.....	Executive Producer
Katie Atkins.....	Engagement Producer
Kathryn Biggin.....	Business Development Manager
Holly Philo.....	Administration Manager and Digital Comms Coordinator
Dylan McHugh.....	Apprentice



Anchored in Air, Head over Wheels  
Photo: Tom Arran

# FREEDOM Festival Arts Trust

Freedom Festival Arts Trust would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support in 2025.

## CORE FUNDERS



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



## CORPORATE SPONSORS



## TRUSTS, FOUNDATIONS & CREATIVE PARTNERS



## MEDIA PARTNERS



## ADDITIONAL PARTNERS





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



theculturehouse



**ACCESS SUPPORT**



Including access support from:  
Charlotte Anderson, Dave Wycherley, Michael Hurst

**PARTICIPATION PARTNERS**



Hull Freedom Chorus  
Hull Samba  
NAPA VIPS  
State of the Arts  
Welcome to English



Posse, Sound de Seca  
Photo: Tom Arran



**FREEDOM**

Festival Arts Trust

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[www.freedomfestival.co.uk](http://www.freedomfestival.co.uk)



@FreedomFestHull

Freedom Festival Arts Trust is a registered charity (number 1158439)  
with the company number 8530799.

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