

# HOMEMADE CIRCUS

UPSWING

Year 1 Evaluation Report



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# INTRODUCTION

**This report provides an evaluation of the first year of delivery of Upswing's latest project in care homes Homemade Circus. This project was funded by City Bridge Trust and The Rayne Foundation and has delivery spread over two years.**

**The following report provides an overview of the story so far, bringing together some of the team's learning and reflections as well as highlighting some key moments of the project.**

For over 10 years, a strand of Upswing's work has used circus to explore the experience of aging, through projects including *What Happens in the Winter*, *Catch Me* and *Falling/Flying*. Following these projects, Upswing developed an accessible circus practice appropriate for care homes which launched with a 2012 invitation from Magic Me to run an artist residency in a London care home. This work was followed by a similar project in six care homes as part of Hull City of Culture 2017.

Upswing demonstrated that circus in care homes promotes health and well-being through improving physical dexterity, mobility, spatial awareness, balance and teaching new skills whilst providing opportunities for creativity, connection and laughter.

Upswing has refined and developed a way of working with care homes, staff and residents that is unique – keeping the inherent multi-sensory and magical qualities of circus but in a way that is accessible and inclusive to the needs of people living and working in these spaces. Their work has enabled care providers to learn how to improve residents' welfare, happiness and life experiences.

It is important to note that part of the project was designed and successfully fundraised for prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic thanks to the generous funding of the City Bridge Trust. The Rayne Foundation subsequently supported the project by funding delivery to more care homes outside of London (all part of the Excelcare home group provider) with a particular focus on the training of care home staff and digital legacy of the project.

The project was postponed during the pandemic, and subsequently redesigned slightly taking into considering the new context such as time scales and safeguarding of care home residents, staff, and circus workshop facilitators. Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the plight and challenges of the care home community. The growing financial and operational difficulties of these institutions, questions around the quality of life as well as job satisfaction for those working and living in these homes were brought to the forefront of media and public perception. Homemade Circus's aims remain significant, if not more critical today.

Homemade Circus was designed to extend the reach of the previously highly successful circus projects to more older people. As well as providing meaningful and interactive activities with and for care home residents and staff, this project focuses on the legacy of Upswing's practice by concentrating on the training of circus workshop facilitators and the training of care home staff. Additionally, this project aims to develop a Digital Toolkit, contributing to the legacy of Upswing's accumulated knowledge and work over the years.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**In this first year of the project, delivery was focused on:**

- Recruiting and training circus workshop facilitators in working in care homes
- Delivering care home staff training sessions and resident workshops in 4 Anchor care homes in London
- Delivering care home staff training and resident workshops in 2 Excelcare regional care homes
- Delivering 2 training days with Activity Coordinators from Excelcare homes from across Cambridgeshire and Essex
- Developing some online resources for a Digital Toolkit

**In the first year of delivery, 8 new Circus Workshop Facilitators were recruited and trained, over 50 care home staff were trained in using circus equipment and delivering activities and over 130 care home residents were engaged in circus workshops.**

## Anchor Care Homes Delivery

- A total of 14 care home staff training sessions were delivered across 4 London care homes.
- On average 5 staff members attended each training session
- A total of 16 workshops were delivered with care home residents and staff in the 4 London Anchor Care homes
- On average 11 residents participated in each workshop, supported by around 4 members of staff.
- 4 circus parties were held, one in each home, with a total of 67 residents and family members attending.

## Excelcare Homes Delivery

- 2 care home staff training sessions were delivered in 2 Excelcare homes (Sherrell House and Hunters Down) with 3 care home staff participating in each home.
- 2 resident workshops were delivered in these 2 homes with 25 and 22 residents participating.
- A total of 15 activity coordinators from Cambridgeshire and 14 activity coordinators from Essex participated in the day long regional training sessions.

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Upswing staff worked with Marine Begault to design a bespoke evaluation methodology for the project, which was responsive to the project's objectives. Marine had previously been involved in the evaluation of Upswing's work as part of the Artist Residency in Care Homes project with Magic Me in 2012. She has extensive knowledge of working creatively in care homes and is well acquainted with Upswing's practice.

A mixed methodology was used to evaluate the project which included session observations, informal conversations with stakeholders, questionnaires, sessional debrief forms and reflection activities.

**As well as the project objectives, these tools focused on drawing out the following:**

**i. The impact of the practice/ project on wellbeing (of care home staff, residents, and circus workshop facilitators)**

**ii. Changed perceptions (on circus, care homes, older people)**

**iii. What about this practice is particularly suited /not suited to the care home environment?**

**iv. An exploration into quality of life and what constitutes a good life.**

**Evaluation tools\* included:**

**Circus Workshop Facilitators:**

- Baseline Circus Workshop Facilitator questionnaire
- Post Circus Workshop Facilitator training feedback
- Circus Workshop Facilitator zoom debrief sessions
- Circus Workshop Facilitator reflection session

**Anchor Care home Delivery:**

- Baseline care home staff questionnaire
- Sessional Debrief Forms completed by circus workshop facilitators (for the morning care staff training and afternoon resident workshop)
- Circus Parties Feedback Wall
- Care home staff interviews (Care assistants and Chloe Steele Anchor's Wellbeing Coordinator)
- Norton House session observations including a debrief meeting with care home staff

**Excelcare Home Delivery:**

- Sessional Debrief Forms (for the morning care staff training and afternoon resident workshop)
- Reflection session as part of regional training day

\*Samples of these tools are included in the Appendix



# PROJECT OVERVIEW



Upswing has always been interested in exploring new spaces where circus can take place.

Care homes have been part of that exploration since 2012 and Homemade Circus is the latest iteration of this process, bringing together and consolidating what Upswing has learned and developed over the years into learning and development opportunities for circus workshop facilitators and care home staff.

Key to this exploration has been to ask the question around what it is that circus does differently in that space that other creative practices do not do? Also central to this process has been the sharing of knowledge and expertise with artists, care home staff and the world using different formats.

The training and development of circus workshop facilitators has been a significant part of Upswing's work from the beginning; however, this project also focuses on the training of care home staff, ensuring another layer of legacy to the project.

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**Upswing's Homemade Circus is a series of creative, multi-sensory workshops where the circus activities delivered provide a space for participants to play, take risks, discover hidden potential in themselves and each other whilst building trust, confidence, connection, and ability.**

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Through the training of circus workshop facilitators and care home staff, Homemade Circus aims to equip, inspire, and enable others to experience the possibilities and magic that circus can have in care home settings and with older people with any degree of abilities. Project objectives focus on developing the resilience of the different sectors (Arts and Care Homes) that make this kind of work possible.

When designing Homemade Circus, the project hoped to contribute to the five objectives below. This 1st report concerns itself with the first 3 objectives as the last 2 will be better addressed at the end of the project next year.

- 1. The arts and culture sector will be motivated, better resourced, more experienced, and able to engage with care homes at a significant and ongoing level.**
- 2. Care Homes have the resources and experience necessary to engage with high quality arts.**
- 3. Participating care homes see increased value in the arts as a tool for improving their services.**
- 4. Strengthened partnerships between Upswing and care providers creating greater reach.**
- 5. Upswing experiments with and explores different forms of legacy and sharing practice.**

# THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

## i. The Circus Workshop Facilitator Training Week

**The circus workshop facilitators recruited for the project included people with varying degrees of professional experience in the field.** The lead artist on this project, Charlene Low, has extensive experience of working in care home settings and around access specifically. Additionally, a Circus Consultant, Anesta Mathurin, was recruited to support Charlene on the circus side of delivery as Charlene's background is primarily in dance and movement rather than circus specifically. Both Charlene and Anesta were given the opportunity to be part of the creative and planning team and to develop their practice further, Charlene in circus, and Anesta in moving from a performer to a more trainer consultant role.

In the core workshop delivery team, only two circus workshop facilitators had more than 10 years of experience practicing circus and/or facilitation and two had less than 1 year of professional experience. The ages of circus workshop facilitators varied accordingly. Only one circus workshop facilitator had specific experience of working in care homes with people who are living with dementia or limited mobility.

The facilitator training took place over one week (5 days) and focused on building the team, sharing practice, and planning the weekly sessions together. An important part of the week was around learning about the specific context of care homes, in particular people with limited mobility and people who are living with dementia. Zoe Gilmour, a freelance trainer with extensive experience of delivering work in care home settings ran some of these sessions, particularly focusing on building awareness of what to expect and some of the potential challenges of working in care homes.

For example, the context of the care home involves people walking in and out of the space, with residents arriving late or deciding to leave. This can make running a session difficult to navigate. How does a facilitator welcome people who keep arriving and keep the momentum and focus of the session?

But also, considerations around how to create the correct atmosphere.

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**It's important to make the environment right for the session but it is also important to remain aware and sensitive to the fact that you are entering somebody else's environment and home.**

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The lead artist emphasised the need to "finding the right tone" to gently but confidently get the space right (eg. Turn off the tv/radio, create a circle with the lounge chairs.) The lead artist reminded the group that just by wearing brightly coloured or textured clothes facilitators are already bringing in a particular energy and atmosphere.

A session was run by Cathy Baldwin, Dementia Specialist at Anchor on the second day which gave some foundational knowledge around dementia and how it affects people.

# THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

## ii. Delivery in Anchor Care Homes:

The delivery of sessions began in January in four Anchor care homes across London (Silk Court, Norton House, Waterside and Greenhive.)

Each care home staff training and resident workshops included at least 2 circus workshop facilitators with one of them being the same each week. This was done to allow for both continuity (one circus workshop facilitator who gets to know the setting, staff, and residents well and can advise/ adapt sessions accordingly) but also providing the circus workshop facilitators with the opportunity to work and learn from different people throughout the project.

Delivery in each of the care homes followed a similar structure with a morning training session with care staff and Upswing facilitators (approx. 2 hours) and an afternoon workshop with residents and care staff (approx. 1.5 hours).

Four Thematic Sessions were developed and delivered across the 4 homes: "Seaside", "Friendship", "Disco" and "Going to the Circus". Each theme introduced working with different circus equipment (such as juggling balls or ribbons) with some activities, games and playful ideas and prompts on ways to support residents engaging with the props.

Care home staff in the morning sessions were given the opportunity to try all the exercises and games themselves, ask questions and have a go at leading bits of the session before doing it themselves during the afternoon workshops with the residents.

**Interestingly, the time spent together "playing" and "learning" seemed as valuable as the practical techniques around engaging residents with the activities.**

The afternoon sessions invited a selection of residents (usually no more than 12) to participate in a workshop led by the Upswing facilitators and supported by the care home staff. These workshops proved to be hugely popular with the residents and care staff. It also provided the circus workshop facilitators with valuable hands-on experience delivering in care homes and with people with various mobility and cognitive impairments.

4 full days of delivery was planned for each care home (morning training session and afternoon resident workshop). Each care home also hosted a Circus Party as a fifth and final workshop with the residents. This usually took a similar format to a "normal workshop" but included more celebratory moments like dancing and singing. All care homes were encouraged to invite family and friends and some care homes provided food and drink for the occasion.





## THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

### iii. Excelcare home delivery

With the Excelcare homes, the project explored a slightly different delivery model. Excelcare selected one care home from each region (Sherrell House and Hunters Down) to receive a day of delivery (staff training in the morning and resident workshop in the afternoon) followed by a regional training day inviting all activity coordinators from that region to participate in a day long training session.

This year's delivery with Excelcare focused on the Cambridgeshire and Essex Regions.

### The regional training focused on:

- Introducing and using 7 different types of circus equipment
- Which equipment is suitable for which activity and person due to their needs
- How activities can be adapted, adding more complexity for those who want a challenge OR how to make activities inclusive for those with no or low mobility/dexterity
- How to deliver Circus activities in a group environment including the basics of co-leading a group, voice projection, how to engage people during the activity and how to manage and adapt activities to meet the needs of individuals in the group.

# THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

## i. Norton house observations (case study home)

The section below gives a flavour of what might happen during one of these care home delivery days.

### The Morning Care Staff training Session:

It is the first day in Norton House (two weeks postponed due to a COVID-19 outbreak). Charlene's introduction to the project immediately sets the tone as she highlights and celebrates the care home staff: "the staff are the beating heart of the home."

The session kicks off with passing a beach ball and saying the name of the person you are passing it to. The key is to make eye contact before throwing the ball. Already, there is lots of laughter as people drop the balls or forget names. Eye contact and saying people's names is key - particularly in a care home setting where people living with dementia need this kind of recognition. More beach balls are added making the game more exciting. Failure is celebrated.

Next, "Passing the Bunting" is introduced; a signature Upswing activity that is used to open all their sessions in care homes. A large string of bunting is passed around the room to each individual, often in silence with gentle music playing in the background. This moment can take time depending on the number of residents (and their willingness to let the bunting run through their fingers to the next person).

The Upswing facilitators explain to the staff that this is an important moment at the beginning of a workshop to connect all residents together. It is a gentle start after the sometimes hectic arrival of bringing different residents from different floors into the space.





## THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

### i. Norton House observations cont.

The theme for the session is introduced  
– Friendship Day

*“we’ll be looking at team work today.”*

A conversation around perceptions of circus ensues.

*“Circus is hard!”, “Plenty of tricks”, “Fire eating!!”*

*“Based on what you did, it shows me that it connects people.”*

Next, Ribbons are introduced. The Upswing facilitators lead by showing what can be done using this piece of equipment.

*“Pick someone and make a connection, with eye contact or with your ribbon.”*

With all the activities and equipment introduced, the facilitators always demonstrate the ways in which it can be made more challenging or made more accessible.

*“Limited mobility residents – you can lead the ribbon but let them track it with their eyes, or you can dance around them with the ribbon.”*

Immediately staff understand the potential of such activities.

*“this is wonderful, they are going to love this”*

And indeed, there is something about circus and the feeling of freedom that it provides “to run away with the circus.” There is playfulness in the exploration– you try, you fail, you try again.

There seemed to be a little bit of a misunderstanding that ideally the staff who attended the morning training would be the staff supporting the resident workshops in the afternoon. This seemed to be quickly resolved.

*“it feels energising. It feels free.”*

# THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

## i. Norton House observations cont.

### Afternoon Resident Workshop:

One resident, Maria, arrives a little earlier than everyone and is very pleased to have all the attention. She immediately gets into character by wearing one of the circus hats and comments on people's appearances "very handsome!"

The facilitators are throwing beach balls at each other and the residents, and doing tricks as people arrive.

It is a slow start as staff bring residents down from different floors... some residents do seem to lose a bit of interest but mostly still happy to be there.

There are some powerful moments of 1-2-1 connection through the passing of the bunting. Some of the residents struggle to hold onto the string but still enjoy feeling the tension of the string passing through their hands.

Flower sticks are introduced with the facilitators holding the residents' hands and letting the object roll down their arms into the arms of the resident. "It feels funny!" The sensory aspects of this object and the pleasure it creates is clearly visible. There are lots of giggles and sighs of pleasure.

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There is something special about circus objects. They are bright, multi-sensory, familiar, and yet unfamiliar, they often have good weight and density to them which again adds another sensory dimension.

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There is a lovely moment with one of the facilitators and one of the residents who only has the use of one hand – there's a bit of a trial-and-error process to try and make the flower stick roll down but they make it work. Both look very pleased.

The use of flower sticks as dusters lead to some cheeky behaviours and lots of laughter.

Each resident receives a circus hat. Tipping the hat across the circle is working well as there is clearly greater spatial awareness of the room and the residents across the circle. Residents are making eye contact with each other and smiling as they tip their hats to each other.





## THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT'S HAPPENED?

### i. Norton House observations cont.

The Upswing facilitator initiates a group tipping of the hat (altogether: 1, 2, 3, hat tip) which feels quite magical as it manages to centre all the attention and bring the group together.

We spend quite a bit of time throwing juggling balls into the hats which feels right as there is clearly some enjoyment from the repetition of the activity. One staff member calls out into the circle

*“Sidney says he’s really happy and really likes it”*

The cool down feels lovely and appropriate and involves a self-massage of hands and arms and legs. One facilitator, after checking for consent, gently massages a resident who does not have the use of their hands.

*Iris, who initially did not seem very keen to be there and did not want to engage with the facilitators at the beginning is participating in all the activities. She’s trying it all out and going beyond copying and into the exploration phase.*

They are clearly loving it and pointing to specific parts of their hands for him to massage.

The final activity brings out the parachute. This signifies the end of the session and another moment when everyone one is brought back together. People make faces under the parachute as it flies up. It’s another joyful moment and the element of surprise is key in this. The excitement and surprise of seeing everyone making faces under the parachute is enjoyable at any age.

One of the staff members who is clearly loving this activity is dancing/making poses under the parachute. The staff member and one of the Upswing facilitators go into the middle and create a series of poses together.

The beach balls are thrown into the parachute and the group need to work as a team to get the balls onto a particular colour of the parachute. Residents enjoy the tension and challenge of this activity.

There is a clear shift in atmosphere from the beginning and the end of the session. Residents seem more present, aware of each other and the space. They are calm.

As Maria, one of the residents leaves she says:

*“I was feeling lonely before but now I’m feeling a million-dollar happy.”*

# IMPACT

This next section will assess the project against the first three objectives for this year, set out at the beginning of the project.

**Objective 1: The arts and culture sector will be motivated, better resourced, more experienced, and able to engage with care homes at a significant and ongoing level.**

ACTIVITY	DIFFERENCE/OUTCOMES	EVALUATION TOOLS
Circus Workshop Facilitator Training Week	Circus workshop facilitators gain new skills and knowledge, have increased confidence in working in the care sector and have changed perceptions of care homes, ageing and dementia.	Baseline surveys, end of training feedback
Care Home Delivery (Anchor and Excelcare)	Circus workshop facilitators report increased knowledge and experience of working in care settings collaboratively with staff, they report personal practice and confidence is positively impacted by this work, circus workshop facilitators express desire to continue to work in the care sector	Sessional debrief forms, zoom debrief sessions, creative evaluation session



# IMPACT

## ii. Care home delivery

The Sessional Debrief forms were a valuable tool to track the project and its impacts but also to encourage reflection and learning from the circus workshop facilitators.

As the sessions went on, their reflections and observations from the sessions became more perceptive and insightful, noticing the little changes in a person's body language or questioning aspects of their own delivery. They demonstrated the ways in which artists grew and continuously adapted their practice as the project progressed.

The Zoom debriefs were also key in the circus workshop facilitators being able to share their questions and challenges with each other.

These are a series of questions and observations that arose from these reflection moments between the facilitators. These questions demonstrate the depth of reflection and learning taking place. Having a space for these to be expressed led to interesting conversations and suggestions:

- How to bring back people into the group – knowing the timing about how long to let things go on for and when the room needs to be brought back?
- How to build the confidence in care home staff to talk to a whole group of people. Instinctively carers go to each individual to give instructions rather than address to the whole group.
- How to transition from one prop to another, or pair work back into group work?
- How to manage anxiety of individuals around something new happening.
- Interesting to consider what does participation look like to different individuals?
- How can we connect the work more to individuals?
- Do you sometimes feel like the pattern is fractured when you're leading?





# IMPACT

## ii. Care home delivery

Through their delivery of training sessions and resident workshops, the workshop facilitators developed new skills and understandings around working with care homes and people who are living with dementia. The workshop facilitators reported having increased confidence in working in this setting but also generally in themselves and their practice. New skills included:

- Accessing a new environment, people with dementia and feeling less intimidated by dementia. It gave me more confidence in my practice. I learned new circus facilitations / skills. (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)
- Teaching people how to teach – it was really great to get the opportunity to do this. (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)
- Changed my attitude to myself and my ability to deliver/train people – I have more confidence, less imposter syndrome. (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)
- I have new narratives for introduction of tasks – a new way to engage a range of people. More adaptations of activities for accessibility. (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)
- Having a tool (Circus) to bring back a person's personality momentarily (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)
- Lots of impromptu singing and dancing at Waterside. I learned to leave time for spontaneous fun and not to be too fixed in the session plan. (Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

As well as developing these practical skills and knowledges, they reported on the joy this work brought to them both in terms of feeling part of a team but also in being able to reach and connect with the staff and residents. All the facilitators recruited have said they would like to continue this work next year. One facilitator has asked for support to organise this kind of work in her region where she lives, and another facilitator has enrolled in a LEVEL 2 Dementia care course.

### Highlights of the project included:

*'Working with others. Learning with and from them. I am usually 'the expert' / trainer so it was really nice to be amongst like-minded people and get some input.'*

(Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

*'The joy of helping people achieve small but important goals.'*

(Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

*'Sharing joy, reaching into another world, opening up residents and reaching them.'*

(Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

*'The proclamations of joy!'*

(Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

*'Seeing people having a good time doing things they thought were impossible.'*

(Facilitator Creative Reflection Session)

In the creative evaluation session, the facilitators reported having changed perceptions because of the project. These included changed perceptions around themselves (who they are as a performer/facilitator), capacity (who is capable of what), what older people enjoy, care home environments, dementia, and the daily lives of care home residents.

# IMPACT

## Objective 2: Care Homes have the resources and experience necessary to engage with high quality arts.

ACTIVITY	DIFFERENCE/OUTCOMES	EVALUATION TOOLS
Staff training	Increased confidence and skills among staff to try new creative approaches using skills acquired during the programme, changed perceptions on risk and circus	Registers, baseline surveys, informal conversations, Circus workshop facilitator sessional debrief forms
Sesident workshops	Increased confidence and skills among staff to try new creative approaches using skills acquired during the training, Care Home residents have the opportunity to enjoy and participate in activities that are often mistakenly perceived as 'high risk'	Registers, informal conversations, Circus workshop facilitator sessional debrief forms
Parties/ final celebrations	Staff feel confident to host and participate in the parties, the Circus workshop facilitator leave the care home and day care centre with a legacy from the project (legacy handbook, box of materials)	Informal conversations and observations, feedback wall
Excelcare Regional Days	The regional days are co-delivered between Circus Champions and Upswing team. The events are collaborative and demonstrate the possibilities and potential of circus in care homes. Attendees enjoy themselves and feel inspired to try some games or activities in their homes	Registers, reflection activity, session observations

# IMPACT

## I. Anchor delivery: Care staff training, resident workshops, and circus parties

Care home staff changed their perceptions on circus and learned new skills around facilitation and creatively engaging with their residents. Having the circus equipment as a way into these creative explorations was key as the facilitation does not only rely on them but they can rely on the object and what it can do as a guide. Key to their experience was the realisation that being challenged is central to the experience and enjoyment of it.

*The first session was just magical. It just really stuck in my head. It is not about the session itself...I never thought that I could do so many things with a ball or a hat or a simple scarf. It's like now when we get bored, you just take anything and you can just dance around, make some fun things with it. I never thought I could just create something out of nothing.*

(Circus party conversation with care staff)

*I used to think the circus was a clown with a big red nose, but it's not that. it's fun, it's exercise, it's music, it's singing together, it's bonding together. It's like holding hands and forming a group dance. It's bringing all the people together and that's good for their wellbeing...*

(Circus party conversation with care staff)

*It has added to the skills about how I should present activities to the residents. I achieved a new skill. My head would not have gone to circus before.*

(Care staff debrief session)

*I loved the Juggling ! – because it was challenging. The throwing of the balls and remembering the pattern. Coordination. You have to be focused. It was challenging but fun.*

(Care staff debrief session)

*Sometimes you don't think you can do something until you try. I was really struggling with the scarves but then I did it. I was so happy about it... I felt I had achieved something. It's motivation.*

(Care staff debrief session)





# IMPACT

## I. Anchor delivery: Care staff training, resident workshops, and circus parties

Circus workshop facilitators quickly realised that care home staff had preconceptions as to which residents would benefit from attending the workshops. For example, it was only due to a staff shortage issue that the facilitators were able to engage with a visually impaired woman by going to her on her floor. She clearly benefited hugely from this interaction however she had not originally been selected to take part in the workshops.

The facilitators continuously emphasised that the selection of residents should not be based on ability however it became clear that certain presumptions around access remained.

By the end of the delivery, it seems like most staff did shift their understanding of who could access the workshops. This challenge is addressed in the recommendations section of the report.

***This is for everybody really. Even if you can't see very well. Or you can't walk or you can't stand or have reduced mobility, you still can do it seated...It's so different. Feels very organic.***  
**(Care home staff conversation)**

By the second week of training, care home staff were already willing and excited to lead aspects of the resident workshops.

***Care home staff taking those first steps by coming up with lovely new ideas using the equipment that are personal to the residents.***  
**(Facilitator Sessional Debrief Form)**

***Staff are really keen to learn skills, for themselves as well as for the residents. Staff are really keen to get involved and willing to lead. We were able to practice this a bit today.***  
**(Facilitator Sessional Debrief Form)**

Having a regular facilitator in each care home was very beneficial to building that rapport with the staff and residents. Particularly around building this sense of “team” with the staff there. This relationship would have benefited further from having a dedicated person leading on this in each care home (like a Circus Champion). This is discussed further in the recommendations part of this report.

# IMPACT

## I. Regional training days:

The regional training days involved a different delivery model to the Anchor care homes. Excelcare's overall operation includes 32 homes in four regions and presented an opportunity to explore how to disseminate circus practice across a larger organisation. There are different practices across the care industry - Excelcare have designated activity coordinators whilst at Anchor the care staff have a remit to introduce enrichment activities. This project was an opportunity to explore and test both models.

The focus with the Excelcare partners was around training their activity coordinators. One care home in each region received some additional training as well as a workshop with their residents. The activity coordinator in this home became the "circus champion" for the region, thus able to advocate for the ways in which the sessions work in practice. Whilst the circus champions in both homes were very enthusiastic about the work and what they experienced with their residents, not enough time was spent with these individuals and within these homes for these staff members to really "champion" the work across their regions.

Further sessions are being scheduled in these homes in year 2 to trial the Digital Toolkit with the care home team.

*The activity coordinators reflected on how important it was to get together in this way and share their experiences and challenges together. Most of them had never met before and enjoyed being able to support each other and give ideas with specific scenarios.*

The regional training days were hugely successful with very high attendance (15 and 14 activity coordinators from each region.) Enthusiasm for the circus equipment and potential this provided was high. Activity coordinators have already communicated this to their Manager, Andrew Seal, Head of Lifestyle & Hospitality, and he intends to order the circus equipment introduced in the training session for each home.

An interesting conversation did occur around different ways to manage care staff disrupting the activities and sessions. Some activity coordinators spoke about being disrupted by tea trolleys being pushed around the space, or tea being offered during a physical activity session. They suggested that this kind of training would be beneficial to all staff (not just activity coordinators) so that they could understand and experience the potential of such activities first hand.



# IMPACT

## Objective 3: Participating care homes see increased value in the arts as a tool for improving their services.

Activity	Difference/Outcomes	Tools
Care staff training	Staff enjoy the training sessions, learn new skills, and understand how these skills could be applied in their sessions and/or everyday care of their residents	Sessional debrief forms, informal observations and conversations, interview with Anchor Wellbeing coordinator
Resident workshops	Staff report there is more physical activity, greater risk-taking and new circus/physical skills learned in a safe and controlled environment. Staff and residents enjoy the sessions. There is increased confidence and skills among staff and family to try new creative approaches using skills acquired during the programme	Quotes from staff during sessions (recorded in the sessional debrief forms), debrief conversations with staff, interview with Anchor Wellbeing coordinator
Circus parties	A shared, joyful experience is created for residents, staff, and family in the care setting. Increased collaboration in the care setting encouraging staff, residents, and family to come together and engage in a creative process.	Informal conversations and observations, feedback wall

# IMPACT

**The care staff found the training inspiring and spoke about the ways in which certain equipment or exercises would be useful with specific residents or in specific situations. A lot of them reflected on the ways in which some of these group activities would in fact be very useful in some of their 1-2-1 sessions as these tend to be more challenging.**

We had a longer conversation in the regional training day around the challenges of agency staff brought in to do 1-2-1s. Activity coordinators spoke of agency staff being on their phones the entire day, “just sitting, sometimes sleeping” and not engaging with the resident. They believed that a lot of the circus equipment and activities brought by Upswing would work brilliantly in this kind of setting.

It may be interesting to explore whether the resources created (such as the Digital Toolkit) could be used to train or induct some of these agency staff and support them in their roles with residents.

***This is such a great activity for the 1-2-1 in their rooms. We really struggle to know what to do with them so this would be something different.***  
(Regional training day)

***I can really see this being beneficial with end of life***  
(Regional training day)

***It's something simple. Any of us can do this with a resident as a way to connect with them.***  
(Anchor Care staff training)

The care home staff and facilitators observed the ways in which the activities were beneficial for the physical as well as mental wellbeing of the residents. The nature of these sessions involves bringing people from different floors together, whilst they live together they rarely get the chance to be in the same space. The facilitators and care home staff observed how some of them began to bond and get to know each other. They also observed the ways in which the mobility of participants visibly improved during sessions.

***Iris doesn't usually participate or move much and look at her now***  
(Chloe, Anchor Wellbeing Coordinator)

***Staff were taken aback and saying "look! Look at Debbie moving her legs."***  
(Sessional Debrief form)

***Since the first session the accuracy and agility when using beach balls has dramatically improved, they have learned how to adapt - i.e., squeeze rather than catch. They have been practicing with the staff and with balloons.***  
(Sessional Debrief form)

***She had said that she hasn't really got any friends here, so we used the beach ball game to introduce her to new people and she really enjoyed interacting especially with Margrett and Peter. As the session progressed, she was able to physically unfold quite a bit with her head up which was lovely to see but she did get tired and fold back in towards the end.***  
(Sessional Debrief form)

***This is so good for keeping the brain active***  
(Regional training day Activities Coordinator)

# IMPACT

It became apparent that the training sessions and workshops were valuable to the care home staff not just in terms of skill development but to spend time together, laughing and being physically active together, all of which contributed positively to their physical and emotional wellbeing.

*The bonds, the connection that it created*

(Circus party conversation with staff)

*It's just so much fun. I always say to people - I can do a 12-hour shift on that day because it just takes me somewhere else...It gives you that excitement, you have so much extra oxygen. You just feel so good that you can cope working later because you just feel that excitement in you. So, so much creativity.*

(Circus party conversation with staff)

*We are so busy; we don't really have the opportunity to sit and have a discussion. We don't have time to get together.*

(Project debrief conversation with care staff)

*We are laughing with them together, so of course our wellbeing is impacted! And also, our exercise - we don't have time to do exercise, so we do it here. (laughs)*

(Circus party conversation with staff)

*Sarah said: "It's been really fun because you can bring your own personality and creative imagination to it."*

(Circus workshop facilitator sessional debrief Form)

*Alice said: "I have been practising juggling with tangerines at home!"*

(Circus workshop facilitator sessional debrief form)

*It has helped my health. It will also help the customers' health. Some of the customers they need a bit more activity...I can sometimes be a little lazy (especially after work). I have a gym card, but I never go. It has helped my motivation.*

(Debrief conversation with care staff)

*Sometimes you come to work, and you feel a bit down and low. But all these activities and the engagement, suddenly it boosts you. And you forget. The contact we have, the bonding, the connection. It does impact on our wellbeing. It boosts the moods. The laughter, the talking, the jokes.*

(Debrief conversation with care staff)







## IMPACT

The circus parties were a wonderful way to end the delivery in each home. Some family members did attend although this is something that could be encouraged and explored a little bit further. The timing may be of issue here (daytime, during the week) as many of the family members may be at work. Nonetheless, the parties were festive and a joyful experience for all. At the end of the circus party, facilitators and care staff asked residents to feedback on how they feel.

**Below is a sample of those comments:**

*"I enjoyed it, makes a change from the boredom of life..."*

*"It was nice to be with other residents. Some I knew – some I just see every now and then."*

*"I feel homely."*

*"I feel it made me help to do some exercise with fun and music. Big smile on my face. Awoken."*

*"I liked how everyone was in it together. I liked doing the activities with other people I've seen around before. We were all doing the same thing together as if we'd been doing it forever."*

*It was difficult for the facilitators to say goodbye, but they reminded residents that they had left a box of circus equipment in each home*

*"Alive! Makes me want to sing!"*

*"It takes me away to a dreamworld."*

*"It feels good to have something brought to us. I've been coming every time and they should have it more often."*

*"I feel happy having exercised and moved my body."*

# CHALLENGES

- **COVID-19:**

As expected, there were a few COVID-19 outbreaks in the care homes which created some logistical challenges around rescheduling workshop facilitators and visits. Additionally, there were some COVID-19 cases within the Upswing team which again resulted in re-scheduling. All of these were well managed with the workshop facilitators and care homes taking the necessary steps to ensure the safety of all.

- **Communication with care homes:**

There were some logistical challenges around communication with the care homes. Upswing benefited from a direct link with the Anchor Care homes via the Wellbeing Coordinator, whose role includes overseeing activities across the London care homes. She was instrumental in getting all the care home managers and staff on board the project as the training of staff does require significant amount of scheduling and forward planning. She regularly attended sessions and her feedback and support during the project was invaluable. After this initial introduction however, the team would have benefited from a more direct link with each of the care homes; either through the care home manager or through a dedicated member of staff or “Circus Champion” as a way to more regularly check in regarding some of the logistics in the day-to day running of the project. There were issues around miscommunication about COVID-19 outbreaks, start times of sessions, role of staff in attending the training and then supporting the afternoon sessions.

- **Not enough equipment:**

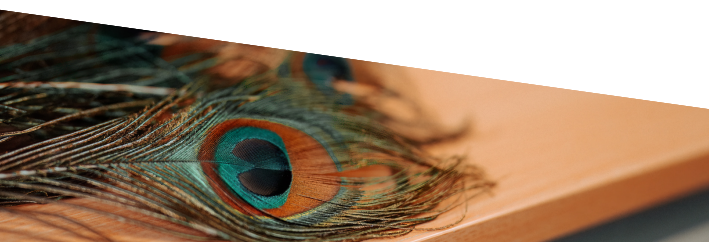
The budget for the project had been written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and involved having one bag of circus equipment touring the different care homes. As this was no longer possible for hygiene reasons, the budget was reassigned to provide for a bag of circus equipment per care home. Each home received around 12 sets of each equipment however, the nature of some of the sessions meant that more than 12 residents and or care staff attended. Whilst the sharing of equipment is inherent to any session, the facilitators felt that it was sometimes difficult to manage.

- **Staff engagement and inconsistency of attendance:**

The workshop facilitators did find that certain care home staff were harder to engage into the project. One facilitator spoke about a member of staff attending the training session but sitting in the back of the room on their phone the whole time unwilling to do any of the activities. Whilst this only happened once it is important to consider the ways in which the project is being communicated to staff, which relates to the previous challenge around communication with care homes. Having a dedicated person in each home motivating the staff, reminding them of the project and why it is taking place is key. The facilitators also spoke about the benefits of having the same staff attend each week as they could see a real improvement and shift in their approach as the project developed. Having new members of staff attending the training of afternoon sessions was perceived as an extra challenge for them to navigate.

- **Keeping energy in the afternoon sessions:**

The afternoon sessions took place after the residents' lunch which proved problematic for some. Care home staff reported finding it challenging to motivate some residents who felt sleepy. The facilitators also reported finding it sometimes challenging keeping the energy going in those afternoon sessions. It may be interesting to discuss a more bespoke schedule with each home that takes this into consideration.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

- **A circus champion in each home**

A Circus Champion in each home would facilitate staff buy-in and logistics. A designated member of staff in each home can advocate for the project regularly and support the logistics such as reminding staff about the sessions and supporting the workshop facilitators in understanding some of the specifics of each home (residents, daily schedule, family engagement etc.) Time is always a challenge for care staff so it is key that there is manager buy-in as they would need to allocate some time for this member of staff to “champion” the project each week. Upswing could discuss with each care home manager how to make this role attractive with some perks.

- **Earlier scheduling for workshop facilitators**

The workshop facilitators suggested that communicating the schedule of delivery earlier on in the year would be helpful as many (whilst extremely enthusiastic and passionate about the project) struggled to make their diaries align. Upswing has agreed with them that the second stage of delivery will take place during January- April and that they will be booked in well in advance.

- **A tour day prior to the sessions starting**

The facilitators suggested scheduling in a “tour day” on the first visit to a new home to get a sense of the layout of the home, meet the staff / Circus Champion and meet the residents. They felt it was important to “show” what the practice is capable of (in terms of different levels of access, multi-sensory and joy) so this could include some performative elements in lounges or 1-2-1 sessions with bedbound residents. Engaging with the home more “informally” in this way would ensure that the staff have a better understanding of what the project is about and who the sessions are for as they felt a number of residents were missed out because of their preconceptions around access and circus.

The workshop facilitators suggested that this tour day could also include a tour of facilities as some of them struggled to get access to a kettle and somewhere to leave their belongings.

- **More appropriate baseline evaluation for Care Home staff**

The care staff baseline evaluation survey took a long time to complete in the first session. A discussion-based activity seems more suitable for this group as many have English as a second language and lacked confidence in writing and/or expressing themselves through writing.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

- **More workshop facilitator training around dementia and 1-2-1 delivery**

The facilitators demonstrated a strong interest in learning more about dementia and the benefits of sensory activities. They are keen to learn more and are not afraid of sitting and “receiving” more information on the science behind these topics.

More training on 1-2-1 delivery is also something they are keen to develop and explore and a skill they believed could also benefit the care staff training too.

**Is there scope to support the facilitators beyond the project? What happens to the network of partnerships and relationships built between Upswing and these care homes?**

- **More bespoke delivery for each home**

It was suggested that tailoring the music more to the individual tastes of residents at each home was a very positive action in the sessions. Perhaps the Circus Champion could do this as part of their role, or it could be discussed with residents on tour day so that facilitators can arrive with a bespoke play list.

A more bespoke timetable for each home as well would ensure that sessions don't clash with staff member's breaks or post-lunch sleepiness. Again, this is something the Circus Champion could look after/discuss with the facilitators in the tour day.

- **Considering how the project is ended:**

An important consideration to think about ahead of next year's delivery is the way in which the project will come to an end. The legacy involves the launch of the Digital Toolkit, as well as opportunities to share the project and learning throughout the wider care and circus communities through conferences and meetings.

# CONCLUSION

**The first year of delivery of Homemade Circus has been hugely successful.**

The 8 circus workshop facilitators that were recruited and trained as part of the project have been inspired and equipped to deliver care home staff training sessions as well as workshops with people living in care homes. All of them wish to continue working on this project next year.

The care home staff that were trained have learned about different creative approaches to run engaging, accessible, and physical activities using a variety of circus equipment. Importantly, the wellbeing of all (workshop facilitators, care home staff and people living in care homes) has been positively impacted by the project.

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**Through their years of experience of working in care homes, Upswing has perfected a circus practice that brings joy, connection, physical and emotional wellbeing to all of those that participate.**

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# APPENDIX

## Homemade Circus Baseline Artist Questionnaire

This baseline survey will help us to gain a fuller understanding of you and your experiences as an artist prior to the project beginning.

Part of this project aims to support participating artists to acquire effective new skills and techniques for engaging care home communities in creating high quality artistic experiences. This survey is part of us being able to assess this objective and your journey.

Thank you for your time!

\* Indicates required question

Email \*

Cannot pre-fill email

What is your name? \*

Your answer

What is your age range? \*

- 0-19
- 20-34
- 35-49
- 50-64
- 65-74
- 75+
- Prefer not to say

What do you consider your Gender Identity? \*

- Female (including trans women)
- Male (including trans men)
- Non-Binary (e.g. androgynous)
- Prefer not to say

Is your Gender Identity different to the sex you were assigned at birth? \*

- Yes my gender identity is different
- No my gender identity hasn't changed
- Prefer not to say

What do you consider your Sexual Orientation? \*

- Gay Man
- Gay Woman / Lesbian
- Bi-Sexual
- Heterosexual/ straight
- Queer
- Prefer not to say
- Other:

What do you consider your Disability status? \*

- Deaf or Disabled
- Not Deaf or Disabled
- Prefer not to say

Do you identify as Neurodiverse? \*

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What is your Nationality? \*

- EU Citizen
- British Citizen
- Non-EU Citizen

What do you consider your Ethnicity? \*

Choose

Socio-Economic Background: Thinking back to when you were aged about 14, which best describes the sort of work the main/highest income earner in your household did in their main job? (Please note this question is optional - leave blank if you would prefer not to answer)

- Modern Professional Occupations: E.g. Teacher/lecturer, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, welfare officer, actor, artist, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer
- Clerical and Intermediate Occupations: E.g. secretary, personal assistant, clerical worker, office clerk, call centre agent, nursing auxiliary, nursery nurse
- Senior Managers and Administrators: Usually responsible for planning, organising and co-ordinating work for finance such as finance manager, chief executive etc
- Technical and Craft Occupations: E.g. motor mechanic, fitter, inspector, plumber, printer, tool maker, electrician, gardener, train driver
- Semi-Routine Manual and Service Occupations: E.g. postal worker, machine operative, security guard, canteen, farm worker, catering assistant, receptionist, sales assistant
- Routine Manual and Service Occupations: E.g. HGV driver, van driver, cleaner, porter, packer, sewing machinist, messenger, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff
- Middle or Junior Managers: E.g. office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager, politician
- Traditional Professional Occupations: E.g. solicitor, accountant, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer
- Short Term Unemployed: Claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for a year or less
- Long Term Unemployed: Claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year
- Retired
- Not applicable
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

How many years have you professionally been working in the circus/performance industry? \*

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- more than 5 years
- more than 10 years

What attracted you to the Homemade Circus project? \*

Your answer

What areas of your professional practice would you like to develop through this project? \*

Your answer

How would you rate your understanding and/or experience in working with care homes? \*

1 2 3 4 5  
None      A lot

How would you rate your understanding and/or experience in working with people who are living with dementia? \*

1 2 3 4 5  
None      A lot

How would you rate your understanding and/or experience in working with older people? \*

1 2 3 4 5  
None      A lot

How would you rate your understanding and/or experience in working with people with limited mobility? \*

1 2 3 4 5  
None      A lot

Please add details of these experiences below \*

Your answer

What first three words come into your head when you think about "ageing"? \*

Your answer

What first three words come into your head when you think about "ageing"? \*

Your answer

What first three words come into your head when you think about "care homes"? \*

Your answer

What first three words come into your head when you think about "dementia"? \*

Your answer

A lot of this project is around positively impacting the "quality of life" of people living in residential care homes. What does a **Good Life** look like for you? In your opinion what is essential to a good quality of life? \*

Your answer

Get link

Page 1 of 1

# APPENDIX

## Artist Training Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in this week's training. We'd really appreciate a couple minutes of your time to get some feedback on it.

Email \*

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

What was the highlight of the training week? Why? \*

Long answer text

Please tell us about one new skill or new knowledge you have gained as a result of this training? \*

Long answer text

Put yourself back into the first day of training. How much more confident do you feel now about starting this project in care homes? \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What areas do you think you may need more support with? \*

Long answer text

Is there anything that surprised you about this week? (Something you learned about yourself or the care sector?) \*

Long answer text

Any fears, hopes or questions you would like to share? \*

Long answer text

# APPENDIX

## HMC Sessional Review Form MORNING SESSION

Home Made Circus Sessional Review form is a form you need to complete together after each session you deliver.

This form reviews the session you delivered **with care staff in the morning**. It's important for us to understand what is **working, challenging** and **meaningful** in these moments you spend with the care home staff.

Email \*

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

Your names: \*

Short answer text

Date and Name of Care Home \*

Short answer text

Session number, theme and activities held \*

Long answer text

Number of Care Staff and Artists \*

Short answer text

Significant events / Magic moments / Connections made between staff and or activities \*

Long answer text

Quotes from staff \*

Long answer text

Any issues to be followed up, queried or solved? Any particular challenges? \*

Long answer text

Any improvements or ideas for next **staff training** session \*

Long answer text

## HMC Sessional Review Form AFTERNOON SESSION

Home Made Circus Sessional Review form is a form you need to complete together after each session you deliver.

The questions below refer to the afternoon workshop you delivered with the staff and residents. We are interested in finding out about what is working, the challenges and the impact this work is having on you, the staff and the residents.

Email \*

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

Your names: \*

Short answer text

Date and Name of Care Home \*

Short answer text

Session number, theme and activities held \*

Long answer text

Number of participants \*

Short answer text

Number of Staff and Artists \*

Short answer text

Significant events / Magic moments / Connections made between staff, residents and activities \*

Long answer text

Comments and observations on any mobility or coordination issues or improvement about the group or individual \*

Long answer text

Quotes from participants or staff \*

Long answer text

Any issues to be followed up, queried or solved? \*

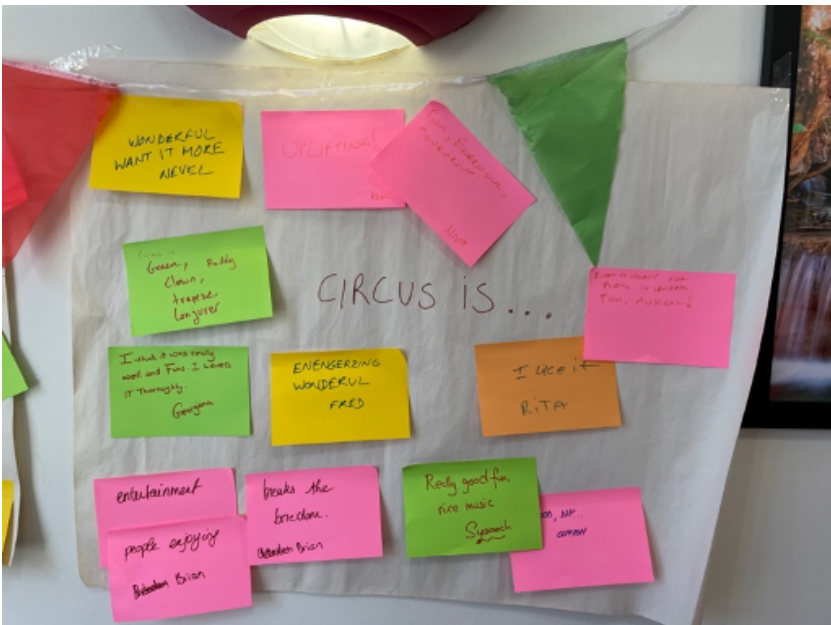
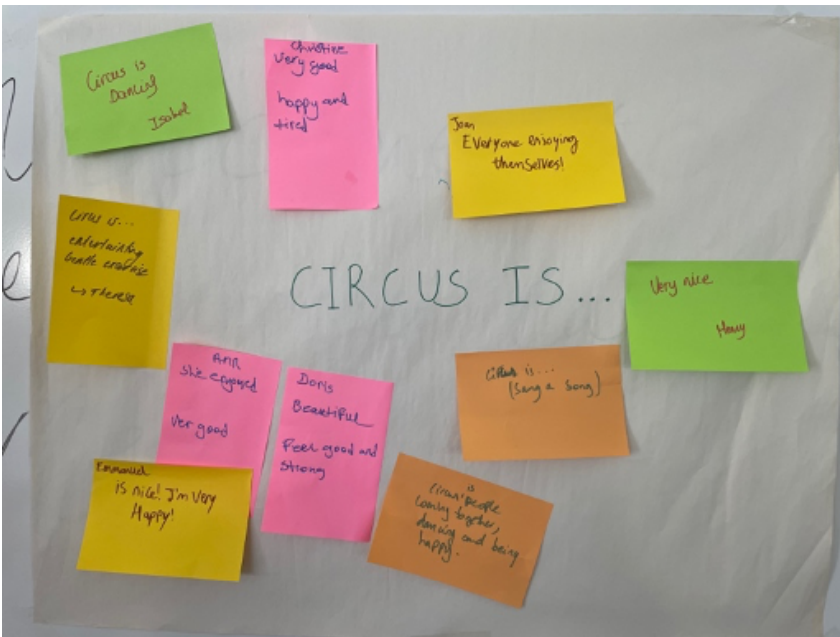
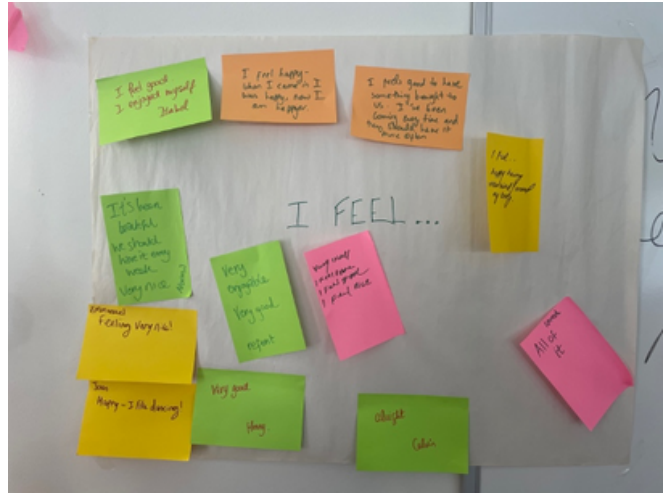
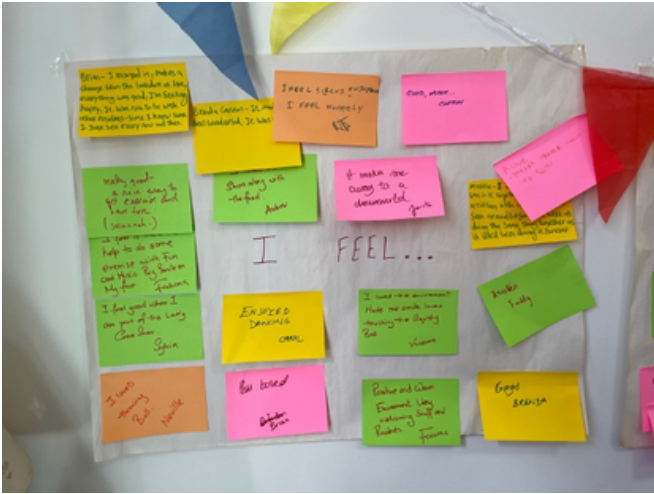
Long answer text

Any improvements or ideas for next session \*

Long answer text



# APPENDIX



# APPENDIX

engaging  
Clowns animal food smells  
fun balls juggling fear  
instruments excitement laughter  
trapeze educational animals freedom  
fulfilling discipline children tent  
costumes confidence building greatest show man challenging  
popcorn fire Dumbo  
connected terrifying Danger emotional  
getting out of your comfort zone

accessible to all  
entertainment  
useful  
Clowns  
informative  
exploration  
colourful  
scary  
laughter  
fun  
Big Top  
elephants  
lion tamer  
refreshing  
tight rope  
laughter  
trapeze  
inclusive  
unicycle  
show horses  
Big Top  
entertaining  
interactive  
family fun