

Cotton Shed Trustees Report 2022



Acting Chair of the Charity: Louise Parrish

Treasurer: Brian Miller

Trustees:
Lewis Gallagher
Glyn Ellis
Corey Scott

Summary Report for the period April 2021 - March 2022.

Acting Chair's Introduction

Cotton Shed Theatre Company has completed its 15th year of inclusive theatre workshops/sessions throughout East Lancashire.

The last 12 months have been particularly challenging for Cotton Shed due to the pandemic and departure of long-serving senior staff, prompting the Board to re-assess the fundamental aims of the charity. However, the positive feedback received from members and supporters has reaffirmed the need and enthusiasm for Cotton Shed within the Rossendale community to promote and support inclusivity through performing arts to all generations, without the barrier of high fees associated with commercial theatre organizations. The link between the charity and its founding schools, including an Outstanding educational establishment for pupils with Special Needs, ensures that Cotton Shed is truly focused on providing a service and experience that is relevant and required by its members in the future.

To this end, the Board is determined to ensure that future activities remain consistent to its core purpose. In particular, the ability to deliver stimulating, inspirational and inventive inclusive workshops is central to our new recruitment strategy. Opportunities to develop partnerships with similar charities will continue to be built, with the objective of a recruiting a wider, more flexible artistic team to undertake delivery of both workshop sessions and wider community activities, such as Silver Shed and Sign and Rhyme.

On behalf of the Board, I wish to thank staff, and especially our two Artistic Leaders, that have departed in the last 12 months for all their hard work and dedication in making Cotton Shed the success it has been in recent years. With a refreshed plan and new Artistic Practitioners in place, we are confident that this success can be maintained and the charity can continue to flourish when activities begin again later in 2022.

Workshop Activities

Performance workshops delivered via weekly sessions bring together people from various backgrounds with varying abilities. These sessions seek to breakdown social barriers and give everyone the opportunity to be creative and create outstanding theatre.

Workshop and production activities during the past year were significantly hampered by both continued Covid restrictions and then subsequent departure of our two senior artistic staff.

As interest from the membership for online sessions had waned, it was decided that re-commencing live sessions was priority to enable interaction and minimise any isolation that members may have felt. Consequently, face-to-face workshops began again for Beginners', Children and Company on 12 April 2021 for the six-week period until Whitsun. As these workshops were undertaken during Covid restrictions, extra time was given to staff to prepare the workshop space, supervise entry and departure (including temperature checks), maintain social distancing and sanitise surfaces after use. During this period, members were also engaged via the Cotton Shed Facebook page to encourage attendance at these sessions.

The Company workshops – for those aged 16 and over - were based on reflecting member experiences within improvised short sketches where their disabilities had been misunderstood or they had felt excluded from society. The final goal of this mini-project was to turn these sketches into a short animation film that would make viewers think about the needs of others and promote inclusivity in Rossendale and beyond. This was completed by one of our Artistic staff (and part-time filmmaker) and published on the Cotton Shed Facebook page during the summer.

Unfortunately, the Artistic Leader for Workshops decided to leave in late May to pursue a new outward bounds venture. Consequently, the decision was made to not continue workshops during the summer term due to staff shortages. Due to these on-going staffing issues, together with Trustee changes, it was further decided to not resume workshops until a new board was established and a new staffing team could be formed.

Although the period that workshops could be run during 2021 was very short, those who attended received similar benefits as in the first two years of the National Lottery project. Indeed, after periods of isolation due to Covid, it offered members respite from isolation and enabled them to reform friendships and reinforce their social skills

Productions

Due to the continued disruption of the pandemic plus reorganization of staff resources, no major productions were possible during the year.

Community Activities

- **Silver Shed**

Silver Shed involves interactive theatre performances for people living with dementia, the elderly and their families and carers.

Silver Shed sessions ran successfully from April through to July 2021. Due to on-going Covid precautions, an innovative approach of undertaking performances safely outside was continued, with residents able to view and participate from inside. Twelve sessions were undertaken in total for the following care homes in Rossendale:

- Holme Manner
- Turfcote
- Ashlands
- Highfield Hall
- Lavender Hills

Pictures and feedback were posted on the Cotton Shed Facebook page to retain engagement and promote the Silver Shed project.

As key staff were unavailable in August and September due to personal reasons, it was planned to resume sessions in October. Unfortunately, it became apparent at the same time that the care homes were no longer able to accept visitors who had not been fully vaccinated due to their latest policies. Consequently, the sessions had to be discontinued for the remaining period.

• **Sign and Rhyme**

Sign and Rhyme is a weekly inclusive interactive performance for children aged 0-4 years and their parents/carers.

Sign and Rhyme sessions were reimagined and performed outside at various venues to align with Covid guidelines, regardless of the weather. With each session run by three leaders, approximately fifteen sessions were undertaken between April and July 2001 through a team of five staff before finishing for the summer holidays. Our separate Facebook page for Sign and Rhyme was actively updated during this period to help promote the sessions, co-ordinate dates/times and receive feedback.

Again, due to staff shortages, we were unable to restart these sessions in September 2001.

Feedback during the early part of 2021 indicated the warmth and positivity of our audiences to Sign and Rhyme and how it has helped form bonds between both young children and sets of parents during the pandemic. It also reaffirmed the demand within the community for this activity to return when Cotton Shed is again able to deliver.

• **Summer School**

Although our planned summer school – which extended workshop principles to provide activities for teenagers over the holiday period – was sold out, it had to be cancelled as insufficient staff could be found to safely run the sessions.

Financial Update

A statement of accounts for the year 2021 will be uploaded with this document. Three local schools. Haslingden High School, Tor View Specialist Community and Haslingden Primary School continued to partner with Cotton Shed by providing in-kind support, including office and workshop space, when in-person activities were possible.

Cotton Shed's main source of grant funding during 2021 was the National Lottery Community Fund that began in April 2019, with the third year of its original 3-year period commencing in April 2021. Regular discussions with the National Lottery, including the challenges of staffing caused by the pandemic and departures, has resulted in agreement that underspend can be carried forward to 2022 and 2023 to support the "reboot" of the charity while recruitment and restructuring is undertaken. The board wishes to thank the National Lottery for their continued flexibility and understanding.

Development of Board

In addition to retaining financial sustainability during the last twelve months, the priority was to develop a forward-looking board with diverse, relevant skills and experience in supporting the future direction of the charity. Taking advice from Trustees from other charities and reflecting on previous performance of Cotton Shed Boards, it was decided that a smaller number of pro-active volunteers would lead to more effective and responsive decision-making.

Internal training was undertaken early in 2021 based on the "The Essential Trustee" guide issued by The Charity Commission. This was followed by investing in awareness training by a HR consultant on various contract options when engaging staff and a network session with Trustees of Tram Shed, a similar charity operating in the Blackpool area, to share ideas and gather knowledge on how similar charities are run.

Combining new recruitment and re-affirmed commitment from existing Trustees, the board now consists of five members with a wide demographic spread: two with executive leadership skills within education representing the three founding schools, and three who are recent workshop members having benefited directly from previous Cotton Shed activities. Within this board, we also have representation with lived experience of disability.

With the support of Tram Shed, the board has begun the process of reviewing and improving Cotton Shed's policies, which will indirectly contribute to the learning and development of the Trustees.

Development of Staff

In addition to the core team of Artistic Director and Artistic Leader, four further staff were employed on a freelance basis part-time during early 2021 to help delivery, including two new contributors to Sign and Rhyme. Although their subsequent departures have been challenging, it is positive those who have since left the Charity have been able to grow and pursue new ventures at least partly through the skills and experience developed during their tenure. Our Artistic Leader, for example, has started her own organisation supporting families with outdoor activities. Two of our support staff have secured roles at a theatre within Greater Manchester. The board wishes our ex-colleagues the very best of luck in their new ventures.

Similarly, within the planned new team, one of our newly appointed Artistic Practitioners was previously a long-term workshop volunteer and fund-raiser for Cotton Shed. This is a great example of how Cotton Shed has helped develop our volunteers and introduce them into the arts industry as a profession.

Future Focus

The experiences of the pandemic and staff changes has reiterated the value and importance of Cotton Shed developing connections and partnerships with complementary organisations

Following initial contact during 2020, the relationship between Cotton Shed and Tram Shed has developed further during the last twelve months. This has included a joint Trustee meeting and placing a consulting contract with the Artistic Director of Tram Shed from January 2022 to support recruitment of new staff, improve our social media presence and review and strengthen our formal policies. This has resulted in the appointment of two new freelance Artistic Practitioners at the end of March 2022

We intend to continue this productive and supportive relationship during 2022, with our new staff receiving inclusivity training and initial work experience via Tram Shed. It has also been agreed to seek opportunities to share ideas, resources and freelance staff during the next year.

Starting March 2022, discussions have also begun between Cotton Shed and the Horse and Bamboo performing arts charity in Rossendale on forming a co-operation agreement. With both organisations active in East Lancashire, there is significant potential to pool resources and leverage our respective memberships and profiles within the shared community.

It is envisaged that with these new partnerships and the appointment of two new freelance Artistic Practitioners that Cotton Shed will resume workshops and community activities after the 2022 summer recess.

COTTONSHED ACCOUNTS
01 JANUARY - 31ST DECEMBER 2021

Balance Brought Forward		correct with bank statement 31/12/2020	EXPENDITURE	RECEIPTS
				£
1 Salaries		£	18,251.13	£
2 Accommodation, Travel, Subsistence & trips		£	1,111.95	£
3 Petty Cash		£	-	£
4 Publicity		£	-	£
5 Communication		£	-	£
6 Insurance		£	444.52	£
7 Subscriptions/Membership		£	-	25.20
8 Grants/Donations including Gift Aid & Virgin Money Giving		£	-	2,598.02
9 Summer School		£	-	33,848.78
10 Recruitment		£	107.10	728.26
11 Training		£	372.00	£
12 Production Costs		£	-	£
13 Production Income		£	-	£
14 Resources		£	1,452.23	£
15 Sign and Rhyme		£	340.00	505.92
15a Sign and Rhyme Parties		£	-	£
16 Misc		£	50.00	441.11
17 Friendshed (Active Communities)		£	477.18	£
18 Near Neighbours		£	-	1,725.00
19 Silvershed		£	836.00	£
20 Cottonshed Room Hire		£	728.00	£
21 Shine Alive		£	75.00	£
22 Audit of Accounts		£	20.00	£
23 Lotteries Registration		£	-	£
24 Company Connect		£	-	£
25 COVID-19 Refunds		£	120.00	£
26 Sales		£	43.20	£
27 Songwriting Shed		£	1,010.00	97.25
28 Company Animation Project		£	224.00	£
		£	25,862.31	£
				148,676.24
				123,013.93

correct with bank statement p332

Treasurer:  26/12/22 Date
 Independent Examiner:  3/8/22 Date
 Julie Burton Natalie McMahon



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

COTTONSHED THEATRE COMPANY

On accounts for the year
ended

31/12/2021

Charity no
(if any)

1123037

Set out on pages

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended

Responsibilities and
basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent
examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:

Date:

03/08/22

Name:

NATALIE McMAHON

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

N/A

Address:

14 HARLECH CLOSE, HASLINGDEN, ROSSENDALE BB4 6TL

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.