



Magic Acorns

CIC REPORT 2025/26



WELCOME FROM THE DIRECTORS

Image: Beth Moseley

This year has been one of growth, connection and extravagant ideas.

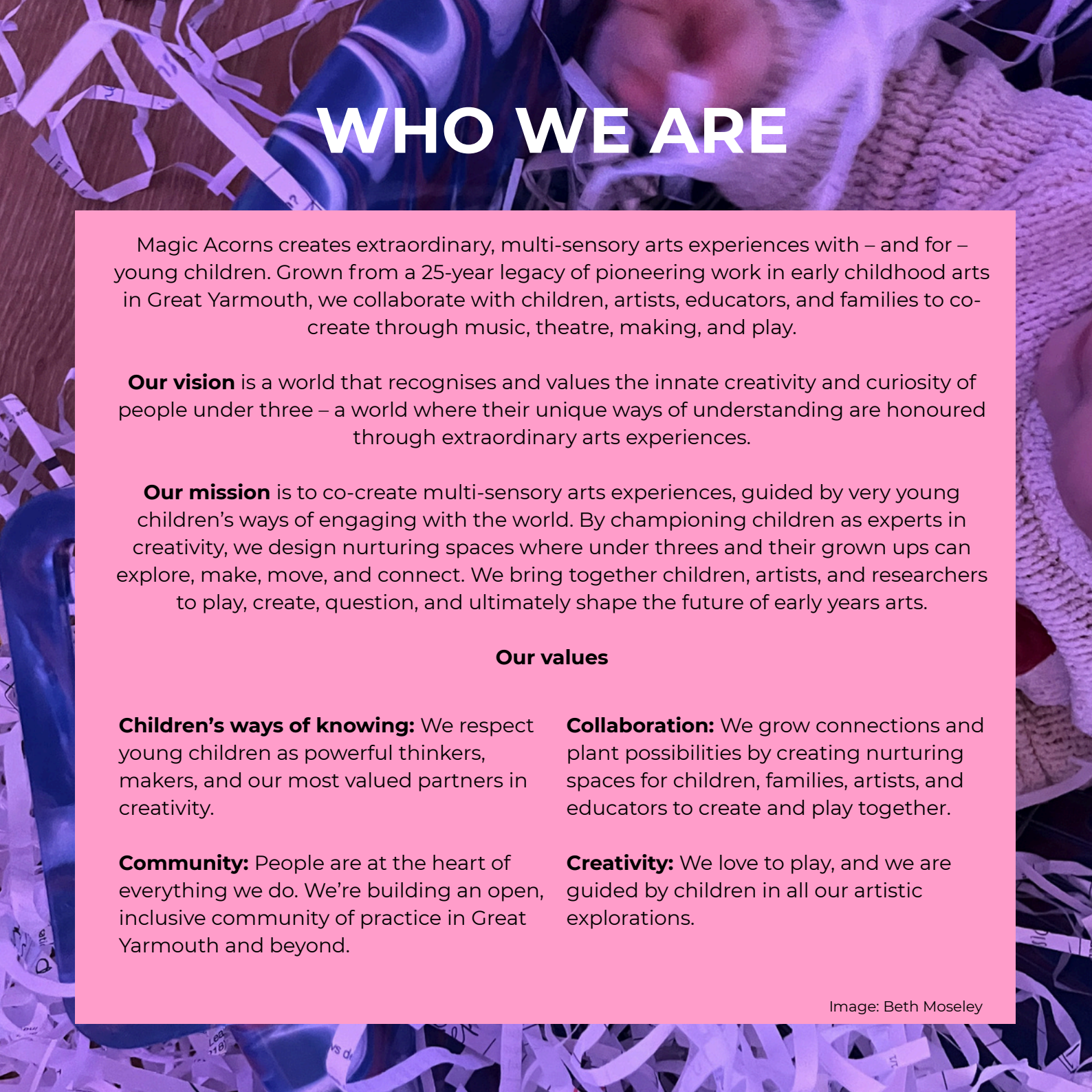
At the heart of this year's work was **Building Our Belonging**. For Magic Acorns, belonging is more than a feeling – it is a dynamic, evolving practice rooted in nurture, care, and spaces where children, families, and artists are valued. Funded by Arts Council England, the project allowed us to establish a sanctuary for early years creativity in Great Yarmouth.

A defining moment came with the launch of **Ripple Early Years Arts Festival** – the East of England's first arts festival dedicated to babies and toddlers. Our **PlayTech** project invited very young children to explore the meeting point of digital and physical play, while **Wavelength** brought families to the North Denes beach to listen, move, and make noise together amongst the dunes. From sand to stage, we witnessed the power of unhurried time and deep play in the unique spaces of Great Yarmouth.

Ripple also brought together local and international artists, researchers, and practitioners at our first **Professional Symposium** – a day of bold thinking about what it means to make art with and for children under three.

We are grateful to everyone who made this year possible.

Dr Charlotte Arculus, Sophie Fox, Joy Haynes, and Dr Jessica Pitt
Directors, Magic Acorns



WHO WE ARE

Magic Acorns creates extraordinary, multi-sensory arts experiences with – and for – young children. Grown from a 25-year legacy of pioneering work in early childhood arts in Great Yarmouth, we collaborate with children, artists, educators, and families to co-create through music, theatre, making, and play.

Our vision is a world that recognises and values the innate creativity and curiosity of people under three – a world where their unique ways of understanding are honoured through extraordinary arts experiences.

Our mission is to co-create multi-sensory arts experiences, guided by very young children's ways of engaging with the world. By championing children as experts in creativity, we design nurturing spaces where under threes and their grown ups can explore, make, move, and connect. We bring together children, artists, and researchers to play, create, question, and ultimately shape the future of early years arts.

Our values

Children's ways of knowing: We respect young children as powerful thinkers, makers, and our most valued partners in creativity.

Community: People are at the heart of everything we do. We're building an open, inclusive community of practice in Great Yarmouth and beyond.

Collaboration: We grow connections and plant possibilities by creating nurturing spaces for children, families, artists, and educators to create and play together.

Creativity: We love to play, and we are guided by children in all our artistic explorations.



**“I haven’t felt so relaxed
with my toddler for ages.
Those moments are rare.”**

Parent participant

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

April 2025
**Creative Research
Centre launches**

May 2025
**Wavelength
Residency**

June 2025
**Magic Beach
launches**

Jan-Mar 2026
**Hertfordshire
Music Service CPD
programme**

April 2025
**PlayTech
Phase 1**

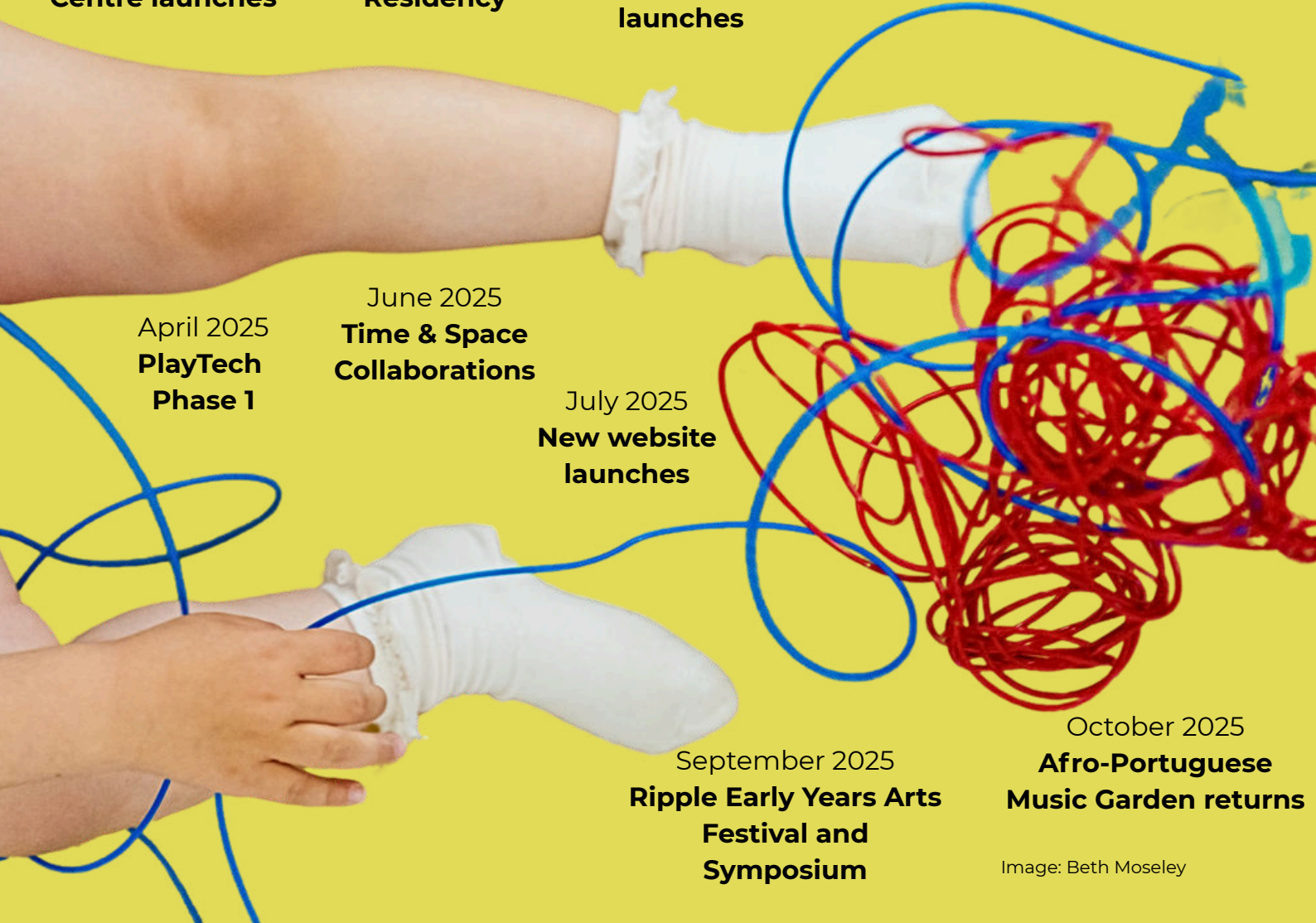
June 2025
**Time & Space
Collaborations**

July 2025
**New website
launches**

September 2025
**Ripple Early Years Arts
Festival and
Symposium**

October 2025
**Afro-Portuguese
Music Garden returns**

Image: Beth Moseley



A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a maroon floral dress, is sitting on a white surface and smiling. To her left, a young girl in a blue floral tank top and pink shorts is standing and looking towards the left. The background is a vibrant, abstract projection of blue, purple, and pink patterns. A large, glowing blue sphere is visible in the upper right, and a green and yellow object is on the right side.

**“Just wanted to say thank you
so much for today, on such a
natural high after getting lost in
some creativity!”**

Parent participant



RIPPLE EARLY YEARS ARTS FESTIVAL

Image: Wild Child for The Herd

Our first ever Ripple Early Years Arts Festival was a joyful, homegrown celebration of children, creativity and community. From 12-21 September 2025, Ripple brought world-class early years arts to Great Yarmouth, including theatre, outdoor performance, interactive exhibitions, sensory play, and professional workshops.

We welcomed 216 babies, toddlers and their grown-ups to nine events in nine different venues across the town, with 82% of events booked at capacity. Seven of the nine events were free to attend, with two ticketed headline shows.

The headline shows were *Great Big Tiny World* by **Oily Cart**, an immersive sensory theatre experience exploring biodiversity and connection, and *Counting Sheep* by **The Herd**, a gentle interactive show for children under three.

As part of Ripple, we also developed 'Time & Space', a project offering two independent theatre companies a package of support including mentoring, rehearsal space, and technical support, culminating in the creation of two new multi-disciplinary performative works for very young children: *When Squishy Goes in the Washing Machine* by **Luminous Tales**, and *After Party* by **Hurly Burly**.

Ripple Festival was supported with public funding from Arts Council England.

A woman with dark hair is holding a baby in a grey baby carrier. The baby is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and white overalls, and has a small pink bow in her hair. They are outdoors at night, with a blurred background of greenery and warm lights. The woman has a surprised or excited expression on her face.

**“Perfectly pitched for our
toddlers and yet so calming
and gentle. The perfect
balance of stimulation and
free expression.”**

Parent participant



RIPPLE EARLY YEARS ARTS SYMPOSIUM

Image: Suzi Corker for Oily Cart

The Ripple Early Years Arts Symposium was a cornerstone of the festival, held at St George's Theatre in Great Yarmouth on Saturday 13 September.

Artists, educators, researchers, policymakers, funders, and arts organisations came together for conversations, practical sessions, and extravagant ideas about creative collaboration with children under three.

We welcomed 83 attendees to this sold-out event, many travelling from across the UK and Europe to be with us. Researcher and educator Hans Van Regenmortel travelled from Belgium to deliver the keynote on 'Young Children, Art and the Continuity of Life'.

We also held two sold-out CPD workshops on Sunday 14 September: 'Playful Bodies: Movement and Materials' with Takeshi Matsumoto, and 'Deep listening – Deep play' with Dr Charlotte Arculus.

"Ripple was more than a festival – it's a statement about the power and potential of the arts in the earliest years of life." - Joy Haynes, Co-Director Magic Acorns

“I felt that I was part of something special, that there was ‘magic’ in the air - and the commitment to making change happen was very strong.”

Symposium participant





Image: Norfolk & Norwich Festival

WEEKLY SESSIONS

Our weekly family sessions offer time for people under four and their caregivers to explore and play with materials, sound and objects in our fabulous multi-sensory space, hosted by our specialist early years artists. The space is carefully set up to invite curiosity and fun - both for the children and the adults that join us.

This year, we ran 133 family sessions with 127 children and 162 parents/carers coming to play. We recorded **a total of 1,154 attendances over the year**, showing strong repeat attendance and ongoing support for our community.

We ran seven different weekly sessions including:

- **Magic Play:** A creative play session for 0-3 year olds
- **Sensory Play:** A play session specifically for children with SEND, neurodivergence, or those who may find regular toddler groups tricky
- **Music Garden:** A musical play session for 0-3 year olds
- **Afro-Portuguese Music Garden:** A musical play session for 0-3s with singing in Portuguese and English
- **Magic Dads:** A play session for dads and male carers with 0-2 year olds
- **Magic Beach:** A summer play series in the dunes on North Beach
- **Magic Families:** A relaxed creative session with activities for grown ups and children

A young child with dark hair, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt with a colorful graphic, is looking up with an expression of wonder. Above them is a large, flowing, yellow fabric structure that resembles a giant, stylized flower or a piece of art. In the background, other people are visible, including a woman with glasses and a child wearing a blue face mask. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor event or exhibition.

**I find this place is really unique,
everytime we come to a session
nothing is the same, it's always
different it's so imaginative.**

Parent participant



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

Image: Beth Moseley

We're passionate about supporting and shaping the early years arts sector by nurturing artists and practitioners at every stage of their journey both locally and nationally.

Over this period we have worked with a diverse range of artists, exploring different art forms, all bringing a variety of experiences and perspectives. We continue to grow our artist community, working directly with 44 artists this year.

Artist development can take many forms. From long-term, slow and sustained support and mentoring through our weekly sessions, special one-off residencies where we invite multi-disciplinary artists who have little no experience of working with very young babies and children, to bursaries and in-kind support to artists and theatre companies developing practice and performances.

This year we have been developing our creative reflective practice using drawing and collaging as tools to think with, and then talking about the learnings from the work with families through the artwork created. By developing this with artists, we are gaining a deeper insight on artistic practices (which are themselves beyond words) with very young children and their families.



**“It was wonderful to find
ourselves in the company of
people who take the work of
making things for and with
babies so seriously.”**

Artist collaborator

A photograph of a young child with blonde hair, wearing a bright pink puffer jacket, standing in tall, dry grass. An adult, wearing a white lab coat and a straw hat with a white band, is leaning over and looking at the grass. The background shows a clear blue sky and more grass. The word "WAVELENGTH" is overlaid in large white letters.

WAVELENGTH

Image: Lewis Wickwar

Held in May 2025 among the sand dunes of North Denes Beach, we held a creative residency bringing together creative practitioners with babies, toddlers, and their caregivers to listen, move, play, and make noise together amongst the elements.

Led by six early years artists, WAVELENGTH celebrated children's innate creativity through movement, sound, and sensory exploration. The artist team brought a rich mix of disciplines – including a spoken word poet, a tattoo artist, and a SEND drama workshop leader. For some, it was their first time working with very young children, offering a valuable opportunity to grow their practice in early years arts. As part of WAVELENGTH, musician and composer Charlotte Jolly created bespoke music for the project, with additional field recordings by Dr Charlotte Arculus.

Residencies are central to our work and focus on shaping what early years arts can be. They are designed to support artists in exploring new ideas, testing emerging techniques, and expanding their practice across artforms. At the same time, they offer meaningful paid opportunities, ongoing mentoring, and a space to grow within a supportive community.

**“Magic Acorns create high quality
and deeply principled work but
still create time, space and care
for everyone involved.”**

Artist participant



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a green rug. She is looking down at a small object in her hands. The room is filled with colorful toys, including a blue basket of colorful balls, a yellow and blue toy, and a cardboard box. The background shows a white door and a white wall.

CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Image: Beth Moseley

Magic Acorns aims to build a community of practice around early years arts by developing cross-sector connectivity, igniting productive partnerships and inspiring new ways of working. Our year-round [creative training programme](#) offers online and offline sessions for artists, early years practitioners, arts sector professionals, and researchers.

This year we held **four online CPD sessions reaching 105 participants** with guest speakers including:

- *More-than-human literacies in early childhood*, **Professor Abi Hackett**
- *Amplifying the languages of children*, **Anna Daly** and **Anne O'Connor**
- *Acorn Network with Suffolk Artlink's Little Beats*, **Kasia Don Daniel**, **Haley Glennie-Smith**, **Bella Askew**, and **Keir Vine**
- *Empowering Spaces*, **Matt Shaw**

We also offer a training consultancy service designed to support artists, musicians, educators, cultural organisations and early years settings who are developing their practice working with under fours. We partnered with a diverse range of organisations to deliver bespoke training commissions, including: **Hertfordshire Music Service**, **Suffolk Artlink**, and **Spring Dance Company**.

**“It was absolutely fantastic,
so inspiring, nourishing and
comforting.”**

CPD participant



Image: Rachel Crome



RESEARCH

Image: Beth Moseley

Academic research, philosophy and thinking-with-children reflects and informs all our artistic work. It goes beyond evaluation or measuring impact – it's a constant, curious enquiry into the nature of creativity, relationships, and the competency of young children. Our approach is pioneering, particularly in the way we place research within practice contexts. We are on the floor, in the moment, and engaged with children and their families.

This year, we continued to strengthen our research programme, with the formalised role of Creative Researcher held by our Co-Director Dr Jess Pitt. We reached out from our hyperlocal, Great Yarmouth research site to share both nationally and internationally what we're learning with our community. We did this through writing, speaking and research collaborations, with continued invitations for commissions on research and evaluation projects in early childhood, education and the arts.

We are imagining and thinking with exciting new concepts such as ToddlerFuturism, coined by our Co-Director Dr Charlotte Arculus in order to foreground young children's ways of knowing as generative, creative and hopeful.



**Our research report,
funded by Arts Council
England, featured voices
of artists specialising in
early years and called for
urgent action to address
policy failure in the sector.**



PLAYTECH

Image: Beth Moseley

PlayTech is a radical three-year research and development project (2025-2027) funded by **Youth Music Energiser Fund** that invites young children aged 2-4 years to co-create experimental, multi-sensory, audio-visual technologies. This unique project builds relationships with families, community partners, digital artists, theatre makers and our team of creative technologists.

We are curious to discover the potential of interactive technology and spaces for children as creative agents navigating the world. Intrigued by the play between analogue and digital worlds, our Great Yarmouth space transformed into a playground of *Blobs* - tactile sculptures suspended from the ceiling that are sensitive to pressure, activating extraordinary sounds and immersive digital imagery when touched or squeezed; *Little Things* - techno carts combining buttons, sliders and touch-sensitive plates to generate audio responses via connectivity.

Our aims for year two involve experimentation with ways of performing and interacting, including 'plug in and play' - taking homegrown prototypes on tour to new spaces. We're also exploring the ethical dimension of high-cost digital tech and knowledge-sharing across the Early Years sector by developing accessibility and open source initiatives. PlayTech's creative technologists are Dr Charlotte Arculus, Natalie Whitney and Emily Godden.

Magic Acorns is part of the **Energiser Learning Community**, a national collaborative network of 12 dynamic organisations amplifying the voices of young children and their communities.

A close-up photograph of a young child with dark skin, wearing a blue floral-patterned tank top. The child is holding a glowing green ball with both hands. The ball is illuminated from within, casting a bright green glow. The background is softly blurred, showing a white wall and a shadow of the child. The overall mood is warm and joyful.

**“PlayTech was so inclusive
for my son with cerebral
palsy. His face was full of
delight the whole time.”**

Parent participant



Images from top L to R: Beth Moseley, Sophie Fox,
Sophie Fox, Sophie Fox, Rachel Crome, Sophie Fox,
Beth Moseley.

THANK YOU TO...

Our artists, collaborators and staff

Abby Page, Anna Daly, Anne O'Connor, Annie Brown, Bella Askew, Beth Moseley, Catherine Carter, Charlie Ditcham, Charly Jolly, Clare Keily, Clare Southern, David Harradine, Dr. Jools Page, Ella Daymond, Emily Godden, Fern Blevins, Gabby De Matteis, Gaelin Little, Genevieve Rudd, Hannah Dilworth, Hans Van Regenmortel, Jasmine Harvey, Jason Parr, Jan Pitman, Josh Hall, Judy Goodman, Julia Devonshire, Kaavous Klayton, Karina Flatt, Kasia Don Daniel, Katie Whiting, Kimberley Moore, Kristy Harris, Lauren Scott, Lewis Wickwar, Liv Corbin-Phillip, Maddie Broad, Mafê Toledo, Matt Shaw, Mendivan, Nat Whitney, Natalie Mason, Natalie Willis, Nataalka Warner, Professor Abi Hackett, Rachel Crome, Rebecca Askew, Rose Feather, Saffron Paffron, Sam Jarrett, Sara Moreira, Sarah Forbes, Sue Parr, Takeshi Matsumoto, Tim Tracey, Zannie Fraser, Zoe Kilb

Funders and partners

Arts Council England, Bakehouse, Catch The Tide, Family Hubs, Geoffrey Watling, Great Yarmouth Library, Hertfordshire Music Service, Hornsea 3 Fund, HurleyBurly, John Grant School, Music 4 All, National Lottery Community Fund, Norfolk Community Foundation, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Museums, North Denes Nursery School, Original Projects, Oily Cart, Out There Arts, Possible Worlds, Postcode Places Lottery, Ranworth Trust, South Quay Gallery, Springs Dance Company, Squirrels Play Forest, St Georges Theatre, Suffolk Artlink, The Herd, and Youth Music

Advisory Board

Jade-Marie Anderson, Rebecca Denniff, Melanie George, Paula Keith, Oscar Lotis, Chrissie Meikle, Nicky Mekheimar, and Mary Stakelum

Non-Executive Directors

Nick O'Connor, Meglena Petkova, and Krista Ribbons

AND a special thanks to all the babies, toddlers and their grown-ups!

BECOME A MAGIC FRIEND

Magic Acorns is an early years arts development Community Interest Company (CIC), which means that we are not for profit, and we rely on grants and donations to deliver our work.

Become a Magic Friend for **£5 a month** and help us to keep growing Magic Acorns all year round. Your regular support helps us to provide free, high-quality creative experiences for babies, toddlers, families, and artists.



Images: Beth Moseley

THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**YOUTH
MUSIC**



RANWORTH TRUST



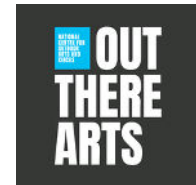
**Hornsea 3
Community Fund**



And our partners:



original
projects



CATCH THE TIDE
GREAT YARMOUTH



THE HERD



HurlyBurly



**little squirrels
play forest**





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