

Annual Report 2025-26



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Registered charity 1093556

The UK's only dedicated arts centre
for children and families.

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Welcome



2025-26 was a record year for Z-arts, as we welcomed more people to our events and activities than ever before - 79,194 visitors and over 111,000 interactions.

It was also our 25th Birthday, marked with a free party for local families, a feature in The Independent, and five awards shortlistings. Our Children's Library became truly embedded in our offer, the Facilitate Training programme kept growing, as well as the number of children in our classes. We also welcomed back Z-access Day. Ongoing support from Arts Council England, Manchester City Council and GMCA has let us reach even more families, both here and across the Big Imaginations network. We've also set out our new Strategic Plan for 2026-2031, and we're turning our sights to the building itself and the redevelopment it so urgently needs. I'm genuinely excited for the challenge ahead, and I know the whole team is right behind it.

Liz O'Neill, CEO



A very happy 25th birthday to Z-arts! The celebrations this year have been a reminder to us of the long-lasting impact of all that we do.

Z-arts is vital to children and families in the local community and an important voice in the wider arts and culture sector.

2025/2026 has not been without its challenges and it's amazing to see how the team have navigated this to ensure another year of meeting and exceeding our targets. Beyond the visitor and participation numbers, we want to congratulate all the staff at Z-arts and recognise the amazing work they are doing. We're excited to see the strategic plan for 2026 and beyond come to life and for Z-arts to continue to inspire all.

Lizi Ransome & Nazma Noor, Co-Chairs of the Board



"Everyone in our family loves Z-arts. A welcoming and engaging venue with the loveliest staff. The programming and facilities are excellent."

Audience Feedback

Mission & Values

Z-arts is the UK's only dedicated arts centre for children and families, a centre of excellence for child-centred creative participation, rich and diverse theatre for young audiences and immersive play experiences.

Our Mission:

To inspire and enable generations of young people from Greater Manchester and the North West to use creativity to maximise their potential.

Our Values

Welcoming

Playful

Vibrant

Z-arts Kids Council words

Kind

Friendly

Fun

Curious

Creative

Z-arts is a place to express yourself, to celebrate your imagination, to have fun, be entertained, and dream big!



2025/2026

The year in numbers

In 2025-26 we continued our trend of hitting or exceeding our engagement, visitor and participant targets.

111,672
interactions in total

79,194
visitors to Z-arts

27,822
performance engagements

49,283
participation engagements

2,689
creative & community
engagements



***"WHAT AN INCREDIBLE PLACE, it
feels like 'home'!"***
Audience Feedback

2025/2026

Financial Report

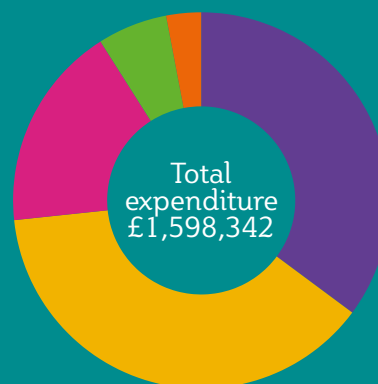
Total Income

Grants & Donations	£683,335	46%
Earned Income	£650,773	44%
Trading Company	£126,988	9%
Bank Interest	£12,443	1%



Total Expenditure

Activity Costs	£562,694	35%
Staff Costs	£611,184	38%
Overheads	£283,019	18%
Trading Costs	£93,787	6%
Direct Costs	£47,658	3%



In Focus:

Facilitate

Facilitate is a year-long training programme for 17-25 year olds. The cohort works alongside our Creative Team to deliver Bright Sparks classes and, at the end of the year, the assistants lead their own creative sessions.

Highlight: Maggie's Story

Maggie joined the Facilitate cohort fresh out of drama school, after a difficult period for her mental health and, as she puts it, unsure about who she was creatively.

"If you'd stuck me in a room and said go on, lead, I would have sprinted out."

Throughout the programme, Maggie learned a lot about herself and, one year on, she was leading her very own drama session with a group of Z-arts children.

"My confidence has gone through the roof!"

When looking back over the course of the Facilitate programme and what it did for her, she says:

"Z-arts was my life jacket."



In Focus:

Our 25th Birthday

2025 marked our 25th birthday, which, along with a free party for all our local children and families, helped boost our profile, including a feature article in *The Independent*.

In November, Z-arts was shortlisted for five awards:

- Best Performance (Christmas Lights), Manchester Culture Awards
- Cultural Welcome, Manchester Culture Awards
- Most loved Community Hub, I Love Manchester Awards
- Most-Loved Family Experience (Adventures in Wonderland), I Love Manchester Awards
- Most-Loved Arts & Cultural Venue, I Love Manchester Awards

Z-arts also presented at three national events in our birthday year:

- Marketing for Family Audiences at Arts Marketing Association Conference in Leeds
- Play and Story Venues at International Hands On Conference in Liverpool
- Retention, Recruitment & Wellbeing in Children's Theatre: Independent Theatre Council, London



"Now we've found you, we are simply hooked!"
Audience Feedback

In Focus:

Artists

Our Artist Development Studio supported 76 individual artists making work for young audiences over 329 days.

Our focus on diverse artists is showing real results, with 53% being Global Majority, 26% identifying as D/deaf or Disabled, 38% LGBTQ+, and 47% neurodivergent.

Highlight: Vital Xposure Artists Lab

Held in partnership with Disabled theatre company Vital Xposure and eight diverse Disabled practitioners, the week aimed to create a toolkit for all artists making work for young audiences, to consider access needs from the very beginning of a creation process.

Supported by a PhD researcher, a research paper has been published, alongside the toolkit.

Highlight: Shows and Touring

Our Artist Development programme continues to have a lasting impact: seven previously supported shows toured across England in the last financial year, reaching a combined audience of 9,607, with two now preparing to tour internationally next year.



Strategic Plan 2026 – 2031

Strategic Ambitions 2026 - 2031

We will be nationally recognised for the quality, imagination and relevance of our creative experiences for children and families.

We will continue to be a welcoming creative home for families and communities, rooted in Hulme and connected across Greater Manchester and the wider region.

We will be a leading centre for developing creative talent in children's arts.

We will remain a financially stable, environmentally responsible and well-governed organisation.

We will be a confident, influential voice for children, families and creativity at a local, regional and national level.

Welcoming. Playful. Vibrant.



"Always a good experience had from the moment we enter the building right up to leaving!"

Audience Feedback

Capital Ambitions

In recent years, the Z-arts building has experienced significant growth in use and this has highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive investment in its repair and redevelopment.

In the last three years...

70,000 → 97,000
interactions

66,000 → 80,000
visitors

Why redevelopment is essential:

- No major capital reinvestment since 1999
- Building continues to rely on infrastructure dating back to 1911
- Victorian heating and plumbing systems
- Accessibility is severely compromised
- Many spaces in need of modernisation and redecoration

Redevelopment is therefore essential not only to address the building's deteriorating condition, but also to create a welcoming, inspiring, accessible and sustainable environment that can support continued audience growth and meet the needs of future generations.



Testimonials

"Z-arts are really inclusive with our ideas. It makes us feel like we really fit in... our ideas want to be heard, and our ideas really matter."

"It's clear so much creative energy has been put into the Adventures in Wonderland experience. The team were so welcoming, and this is a hugely welcomed experience for families. Amazing!"

"I have been twice now and I think the place is simply magical! It's so inclusive and such a lovely, friendly and relaxed space. Now we've found you, we are simply hooked!"

"We love the way children can explore and get busy and absolutely love the library upstairs."

"Amazingly organised, lovely staff, very welcoming inclusive environment. Activities for all budgets. We'll definitely be back. The kids love it, while they learn too!"

"You have a beautiful venue, and I am so grateful for you and that I can introduce my children to theatre."



Our Supporters

We're incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported Z-arts over the years. A huge shoutout to our key funders – your generosity helps us keep creativity, arts, and theatre alive and accessible for all children and families.

Public Funders:

Arts Council England
Manchester City Council
Greater Manchester Combined Authority
The National Lottery Community Fund

Corporate Funders:

Cargill Cares
Torevell & Partners
Greenmount Projects

Trusts & Foundations:

Garfield Weston Foundation
The Clothworkers' Foundation
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
BBC Children in Need



***“We are so lucky to have
this space in Manchester.”***
Audience Feedback

