

THE
CIVIC

HYNDBURN ARTS LIMITED

REPORT TO HBC

Gayle Knight



Introduction

The former Oswaldtwistle Town Hall building was refurbished in 2010/11 and reopened as the Civic Arts Centre and Theatre on August 10th, 2010. Initially the downstairs was the Arts Centre and was managed by Hyndburn Arts Trust whilst the theatre was still managed by Hyndburn Leisure. In 2015 the two floors were both brought under the management of Hyndburn Arts Limited.

The initial concept of the Arts Centre was born out of a youth drama group that was active at the time. The group was 50+ strong and had a range of ages. This demonstrated the need for cultural activities for young people. Armed with this information and skills in drama leadership and marketing, I approached the Council and convinced the leadership that it would be a positive development and beneficial, not just to Oswaldtwistle but to the whole of Hyndburn.

Since then the centre has grown from strength to strength and is now a cultural centre for the whole community with over 1,500 attending EACH WEEK to take part, rehearse, perform and watch a diverse range of activities, workshops and shows.

Key achievements to date

- Brought creative employment opportunities to area.
- Over the last three years has been responsible for £1.4million of Arts/Cultural activity in Hyndburn.
- Won 2017 Hyndburn Business Awards tourism award and the overall prize of Business of the Year. In 2018 won Creative Business of the Year.
- Saved Accrington Carnival, Oswaldtwistle Carnival and Warner St events from ending.
- Finalists in National Voluntary Arts Awards.
- Brought in tourists from across the country.
- Added to the local economy (there are no empty shops on the stretch facing the Civic).
- Brought in funding from the Carnegie Trust and Heritage Lottery.
- Made Oswaldtwistle part of a national project via the Carnegie Trust.
- Been instrumental in the reopening of Oswaldtwistle Library for the community.
- Over 1,500 visit the Civic every week.
- Fund raised over £100k for Macmillan Cancer, Anaphylaxis Campaign, The Women's Centre, East Lancs Hospice and worked with other community groups and schools to promote and support their work.
- Run regular creative sessions in 3 schools.
- Run the Arts Award programme allowing young people to get additional qualifications (this has particularly proven useful for Home Educated students).
- Created paid acting roles and part time jobs for young people.
- Work in partnership with local pubs and businesses to help local Police initiatives.
- Defibrillator available.
- Taking theatre shows to other venues –Rhyddings Park, Dog Inn at Belthorn, Haslingden Community Link, Oswaldtwistle Library, Ramsbottom Civic Hall, Whalley Village Hall.
- Deliver Home Ed sessions for people outside main stream education.
- Created a safe environment for events and activities for people with special needs.
- Advised other creative organisations how to develop their business models – i.e. The Bureau, Divas amongst others.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Staff are passionate and dedicated creatives
- We produce in house shows and events at low cost
- Diverse range of activities every evening/week/month
- Diverse range of shows in the theatre
- Young people at the core of what we do
- Multi purpose building/spaces (including the use of Hippings Vale Community Centre.
- Respond quickly with ideas and creativity
- Our advocates are enthusiastic
- Volunteers
- We don't confine ourselves to activities in the building (touring, parks, carnivals)
- Bar sales – a profitable area when taken in isolation – bottles rather than pumps means no wastage

Weaknesses

- The building is a financial drain on our resources
- No reserves
- 1/3 of our annual budget is staff costs
- Short staffed
- If professional tours cancel we lose money twice – firstly on tickets then on bar sales (no show – no bar)
- Hard to replace a cancelled professional event because of the time needed for promotion.

Opportunities

- Keep staff costs low by using volunteers – saving of £5,000 per annum
- Keep staff costs low by not replacing staff member who left – saving of £15,000
- Recoup debts from people who owe us money – ReAct Academy £5,000. If they are unable to pay then evict them and find alternative hirers.
- Concentrate on areas that are profitable
- Outreach work in schools
- Increase hirers at Hippings Vale
- Parties/princesses/in house children's events
- Murder Mysteries and inhouse shows
- Touring theatre shows
- Complete projects to access funding.
- Apply for Arts Council/Lottery Funding for project work
- Increase bar prices

Not take on additional work that is unprofitable – i.e. Carnivals
Book more theatre performances to fill the gaps left in the programme
Ensure that any outdoor events have an indoor contingency plan in place
We are working with energy providers to reduce energy costs

Threats

Imitators – our ideas have been used by other organisations
Financial collapse
Arts Council and external funding is reducing year on year
Hirers going bust owing us money

MOVING FORWARD

Over the past 10 years we have learnt what is successful and what is not. Despite the current recession some areas of our work are profitable when taken in isolation. These are the areas that we need to concentrate on in the near future.

To remain sustainable and a viable business we have to remain innovative in our core areas and continually move and push ourselves forward to new initiatives. We have to invest in our technology and equipment to maintain our professionalism. Where we go others follow.

Touring theatre shows

We now have a strong body of work which we can tour around to other venues. We currently take shows to Haslingden Community Link, Ramsbottom Civic Hall, Whalley Village Hall, The Dog Inn in Belthorn, Oswaldtwistle Library and Rhyddings Park.

We need to move into new areas and develop new audiences. When we develop a new show we produce it in house first. The bulk of the costs are in the first production. After that we can tour it economically to other small venues. At the moment we have no structure in the shows that we take to other venues – i.e. ticket prices vary and we move from one show to the next at different venues. We need to develop tours that we can market as a full package and we need to look at additional venues i.e. Pendle, Blackburn, Burnley and further afield.

Projects

We currently have two heritage projects which will complete later this year. We need to ensure we have replacement projects in place. Applications to funders are a continuous process but recently funders have tightened their belts and it has been disheartening. To continue to move forward we need to push forward and continue to apply for new projects.

We have been awarded some high profile events on Accrington Town Square over the last year – starting with the Christmas Light Switch on. We will apply for further events.

Commissions and Business 2 Business

When the Civic was formed, amongst other things, we were originally intended to be the Arts Development arm for the Council, see enclosed letter from Steve Tanti. We should be involved more in Arts projects and commissions and should be at the forefront of the Council's 'arts' offer. I believe the Council is under using us as a promotional tool for positivity in the borough.

Parties/princesses/in house children's events

We have developed this over the last few years and it is becoming more popular. We need to expand our reach and again move out of our local area. We have helped to create a niche for this type of thing in Hyndburn and others have copied us extensively.

Murder Mysteries and inhouse shows

We have become adept over the last four years at Murder Mystery shows and Children's shows. These are quick and easy for us to prepare.

Technology

We have been developing games and treasure hunts using apps and technology. We need to devise a way to make these income generators.

Outreach work

We currently work with a number of schools on a regular basis delivering anything from one off workshops to full 'play in a week' sessions. From September we will be pushing this out to more schools.

Hippings Vale

Currently Hippings makes a small monthly profit. We will look at increasing hirers and putting in more activities ourselves.

Christmas Panto

When we took over the Christmas period was losing Hyndburn Leisure approximately £30,000 per annum. We have turned that around and it is now a profitable area. However, there is still more to be done to maximise income from Panto and we are drawing in new schools each year.

Financial

For the first 8 years (four operating the downstairs Arts Centre and since 2015 operating the whole building) we have come in exactly on forecast. This has been with some support from Hyndburn Borough Council. But, it should be pointed out that Hyndburn Leisure was losing Hyndburn Borough Council £56k per annum which over the last four years would have been £224k. In the last four years we have had £82.5k in grants from HBC which has saved the Council £141.5k.

That £82.5k has been just over 5% of the income of Hyndburn Arts over the last four years. Hyndburn Arts is not for profit so over £1.4m has been ploughed back into the economy and has provided events and activities for the community AND a tourist destination for visitors to the area.

The main cost area for Hyndburn Arts is staff. We produce a large amount of activity on a minimum staff. Over the last few months we have reduced staff costs by using volunteers on the bar more frequently and by not replacing a staff member who left.

These last few months have been difficult for us financially through no fault of our own. The recession has tightened people's purses slightly and some shows have cancelled their national tours due to low ticket sales. We've also had some shows booked in that have been cancelled due to controversy.

We need to pick ourselves up and look at shows that are booked in and ensure that the programme of professional shows is more robust. Plus looking at cost savings on things like energy.

Repair costs are high and if something goes wrong it is rarely a small job – we've had a flood this year from old pipes that burst, our fire alarm broke and the heating broke last year. It is hard to absorb these costs without reserves.

We are at a crossroads. We can make savings and concentrate on more profitable areas but we also need an injection of cash to clear some debts and move us forward with investment.

Our budget for 2019/20 would show a loss without a cash injection. The budget should not be read as a cash flow as some figures are spread across the year.

SUMMARY

We have proven ourselves to be invaluable to Hyndburn. From reinstating and saving the two Carnivals to bringing tourism into the area to providing a safe and inviting cultural community centre. We are at the heart of the local community and deliver an incredible amount of work for such a small team.

We were responsible for the hugely successful Christmas Light Switch on in Accrington last year and for many of the events on the Town Square this year.

We are important to individuals in the area for our approach to inclusivity whilst creating a highly professional company that tours around the county.

We can build on work that we've done, streamline some unprofitable areas and continue to develop high quality arts for Hyndburn.

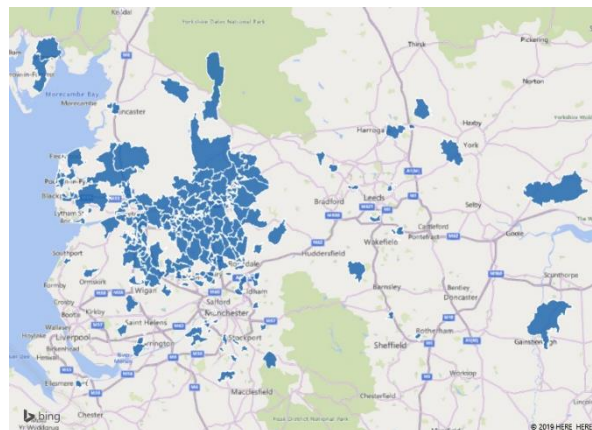
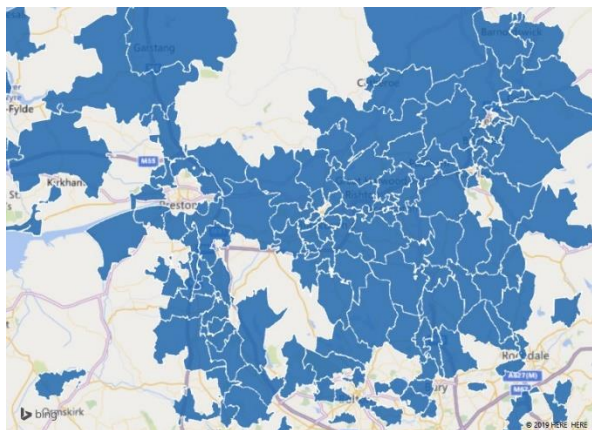
We hope that HBC can see that we are invaluable and they should be investing in us and supporting us over this current difficult period.

Appendix 1

Examples of the Civic's Reach

All events September 2018 to February 2019

Note: data does not totally show 'on the door' sales, nor does it show regular users i.e. coming to clubs and activities. It is a snapshot which shows how far people travel to attend shows at the Civic and the impact we have on local tourism.

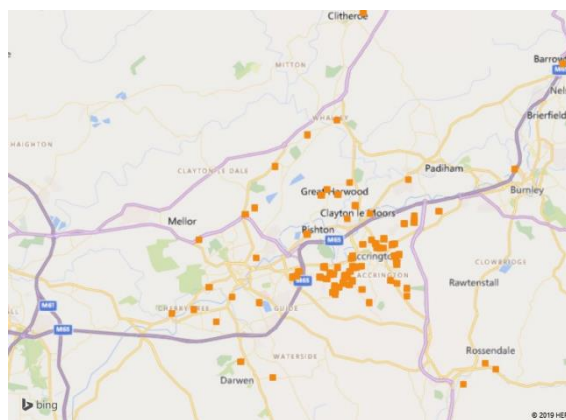
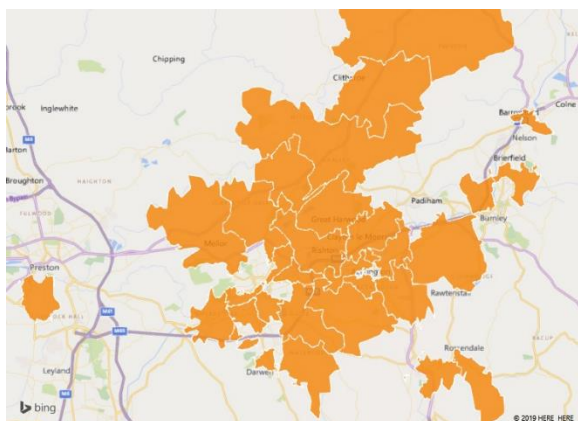


SPECIFIC EVENTS

80's night – Friday 5th October 2018

389 attended via 108 unique bookings

Maps below show postcodes of unique bookings.

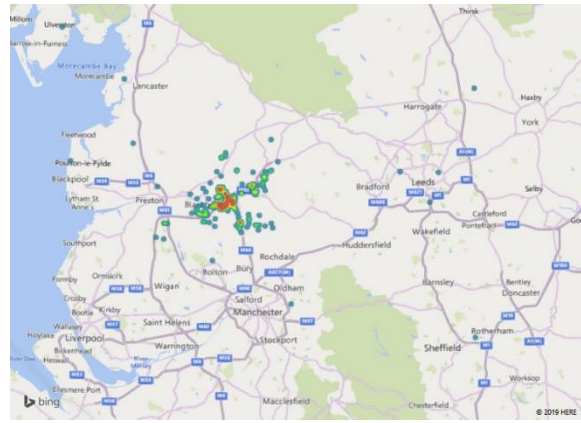
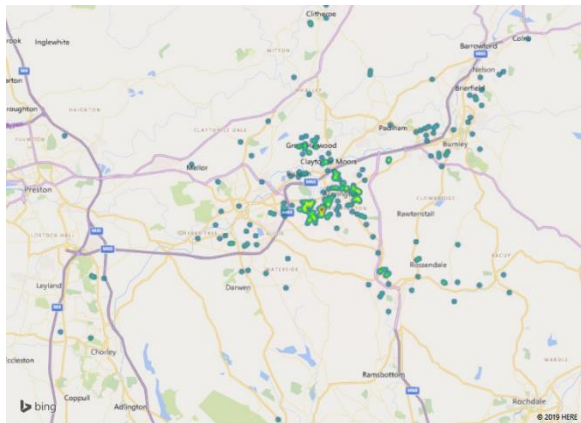
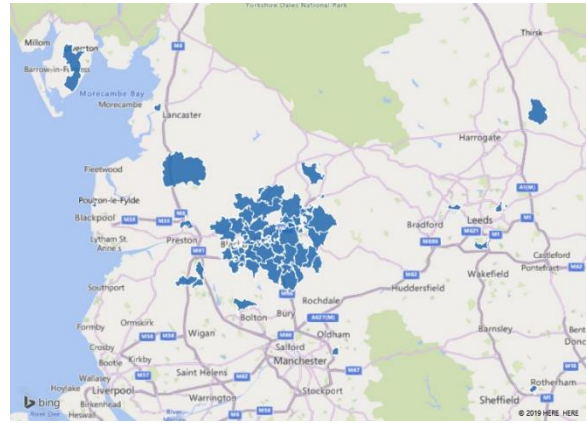
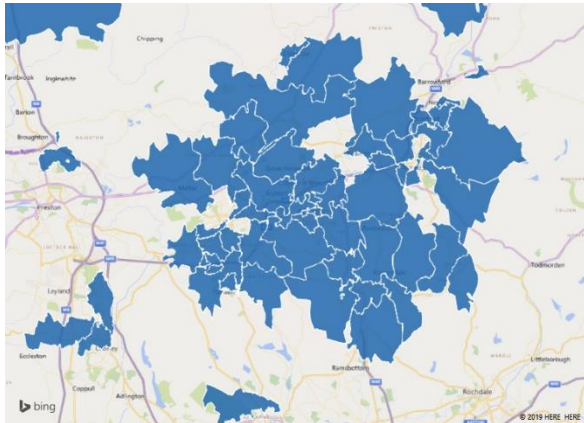


Panto 2018

Number of unique bookings to public performances: 396

Total audience to public performances: 1456

Number of school bookings and school children attending: 28 separate bookings for a total of 3137 children.



Appendix 2

CASE STUDIES/TESTIMONIALS

The following letters of support illustrate the impact that the Civic has on local lives.

Case Study 1 – names are redacted in this testimonial for anonymity.

My name is Sarah Calderbank and I'm 37 years old. I live in Oswaldtwistle with my partner of 15 years, Ryan (39), and my sons Kane (10) and Brandon (7). I'm writing to explain how the Civic Arts Centre has impacted on our family.

We have been involved with the Civic since 2015, when Kane first started attending weekly dance sessions and our involvement has grown from there to the point where the Civic is a regular and valuable part of our life. At the moment, both my sons attend weekly drama sessions at the Civic, as well as holiday drama schools, I volunteer as a Matron when they perform in shows and we regularly attend a wide range of shows, events and activities at the Civic.

The Civic is so much more to us than just a local arts venue, it is a lifeline for our family for many personal reasons. My partner Ryan has had mental health difficulties for over 10 years and was diagnosed with Depressive Psychosis (Schizophrenia) in 2012, when he also suffered with suicidal feelings. I am Ryan's main carer and at that time my children were only 4 and 1 years old and his support needs meant that over the course of several years I became socially isolated and struggled with my own low moods, leading to social anxiety. His ill health still continues to mean that I have little support with caring for our children and that I rarely get to go out without them, other than working while they are at school. The family orientated opportunities offered by the Civic have been a real life line for me personally. Over the years we have had many forms of family and individual therapy but nothing has helped me more with my own recovery than my involvement with the Civic. Through volunteering at the Civic I have a feeling of accomplishment, I have made lots of new friends and have a genuine feeling of being accepted as part of the Civic family. I am never reluctant to go to the Civic, which is a big thing for someone who has suffered from social anxiety.

The Civic is very much a safe place for us all where we are always happy, engaged and supported. This is particularly important for my son Kane, who was diagnosed with ADHD 18 months ago after a 3 year long diagnostic process. Kane has had many difficulties at school over the last 5 years and prior to starting activities at the Civic he had a feeling of not really fitting in and not having anything that he was good at. After joining Dramatic Annie drama sessions his confidence improved rapidly, as did his feeling of being accepted and having genuine friends. None of the difficulties with hyperactivity, lack of concentration, difficulty listening and learning that he experienced at school were an issue at the Civic. He was like a different child and, in fact, found that some elements of his ADHD could actually be used to his advantage. Hyper-focus is a common trait in children with ADHD and this has resulted in Kane having a real talent for learning scripts. Kane is never happier than when he is involved with a production at the Civic, he completely thrives in that environment. He has performed in 5 Dramatic Annie "big shows" alongside his Dramatic Annie friends as well as many Play in a Week productions, carnivals and other opportunities. He was also invited to take part in two of the Civic's in-house Christmas productions, It's a Wonderful Life in 2017 and Alone at Christmas 2018, an adaptation of

Home Alone in which he took the lead role of Kevin. It is impossible for me to put into words what our involvement in that production did for Kane's mental health. At a time when he was struggling with anxiety and seeing a counsellor as a result of Year 6 pressures, he was completely empowered by this role. His confidence was boosted so much, he had a huge feeling of pride and he was thrilled that he made genuine friendships with many of the adult cast members.

As I report myself, Kane has a genuine feeling of being accepted at the Civic, but this is in no small part aided by the inclusive environment created by the Civic. The Civic's approach to creating a safe environment for people with allergies demonstrates their willingness to go the extra mile to create a safe space for people who have different needs, as does the fact that people with learning disabilities are regularly included in mainstream classes and productions - true inclusion as opposed to providing separate activities exclusively for people with disabilities which unfortunately is common place in the arts industry. This highly visible and emphatic approach to inclusion is vital to children like Kane who have learning difficulties; he can always be confident that people at the Civic will create a safe space for him where he won't be judged by his difference.

Nobody is ever excluded from taking part at the Civic for any reason, as my other son Brandon found recently. After taking part in drama shows for 2 years, he suddenly developed stage fright last year. Some drama groups may have felt that this meant that he could no longer take part, but Brandon has been nurtured and enabled to join in any way that is meaningful to him. For the last show he was given the role of "Props Master", which was included in the show programme and he was given an all important badge with his name and role on it. Little things like this make all the difference to children who are feeling challenged and instead of feeling demoralised that he wasn't brave enough to go onstage, he felt incredibly proud of his role and his confidence was boosted, leaving open the option to one day return to a role on stage.

I hope these stories go some way to explaining the significance of the Civic in our lives. To some families an arts centre is just a place where they occasionally go to see a show, but it is so much more to us. It provides regular entertainment, performance opportunities for the boys, learning opportunities through some projects, volunteering opportunities for me, social opportunities for us as a family and as individuals, and so much more. It is a safe space where all four members of our family are happy, confident and comfortable, which might not sound significant in itself, but for the individuals in our family and the challenges we each face, it is immeasurably important. It is a complete lifeline for us and without it I am certain that all four of us would need additional interventions from mental health services.

Case study 2

Sarah Lewis
24 Hargreaves Road
Oswaldtwistle
Accrington
BB5 4RN
24/06/2019

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing this letter in support of the Civic Arts Centre in Oswaldtwistle and what it means to myself and my family.

Where do I start?

Well, we have been accessing the Civic theatre for around 5 years now around a few days a week and it's such a fabulous community hub and space. We have gotten to know all the staff.

My daughter started musical theatre and dance classes 5 years ago and the theatre has grown and continues to grow with us as a family. She has grown in confidence since starting the classes and loves it.

We have also all made really good friends over the years while attending the classes, groups, events, shows.

We watch a variety of different shows including family ones. We have a son with disabilities who manages to

access the shows too thanks to the staff. The staff know Oliver very well now and are always put him at ease

by saying hello and talking to him. They are also always happy to help with whatever his needs are. They also

try and make the Civic accessible for all needs and abilities and make it as Inclusive as possible for everybody.

Questionnaires go out to parents and people to see if there is any way they can improve with events especially for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Without them all we wouldn't be able to access the theatre.

Gayle has helped me raise awareness with a major project I was working on to raise funds to build a park for children with disabilities and has always been happy to help and offer advice. It's all about networking with other people and this is what the Civic is great for. I attended and presented at the Big Positive Meeting which always brings local people and the community together and always has positive outcomes.

It's really good to see links between the Civic and other community spaces, Rhyddings Park for instance. We attend events organised by the Civic at the park which again brings the community together of all ages.

Without the Civic Arts Centre and all the fabulous staff who live and breath it, we wouldn't have anywhere to locally to go to and enjoy things that most take for granted. It's not just a theatre, but a lot amore than that. It brings people of all ages and abilities together though activities, groups, events and theatre.

Regards

Sarah Lewis

Case study 3

Thank you to everyone at The Civic for their continued support. We heard today that Jess had been successful in obtaining her GOLD Arts Award in Photography and as a family we are extremely proud of her.

Jess has been ill for several years and home educated since the age of 14. Initially being too ill to do any academic study but gradually she has learned to do a bit more and take each day one step at a time.

Over the last 12 months Jess has attended the home educated Arts Award sessions. She has been taken there by her sister and both girls have enjoyed their weekly two hour sessions. Jess has grown in confidence and has now achieved 2 bronze, 1 silver and now a Gold award. The opportunity to study in a small group has been ideal for Jess and The Civic have provided support and understanding, helping the group work together but also independently and to achieve both an award and friendship from like minded people.

Thank you from The Robinson family

Case study 4

26 Louie Pollard Crescent
Great Harwood
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB6 7TG

Tel 01254 876345

24 June 2019

To whom it may concern,

I would just like to say how wonderful the Oswaldtwistle Civic Arts Centre and Theatre is. My daughter Emilia, has been attending the Civic for over 7 years and thoroughly enjoys all the classes she has attended. The Civic has not only given her the opportunity to dance, act and sing on stage, but to meet a wide and diverse range of people, build friendships out of her own school groups, believe in herself and build confidence to go and achieve her dreams.

She has recently completed two weeks work experience at the Civic which she gained a great deal from in terms of fulfilment and experience. All the staff were brilliant with her and treated her as one of the team.

I joined the Adult Panto Group two years ago and have enjoyed every minute of the rehearsals and shows. Everyone is welcoming and friendly, there are no prejudices and everyone is treated equally. Like my daughter, I have made new friends and we both refer to the Civic as our 'Civic Family'.

Kind regards

Wendy Geldard

Case Study 5

To whom it may concern,

My daughter started singing in Skoot as a fun thing to do with her friend. It raised her confidence and resulted in her singing solo on stage before the age of ten.

Little did I know that it would also result in me becoming involved there too. I have run Skoot alongside my friend for nearly two years now. It's an amazing thing to watch children grow from those who can barely walk in without their parents to confident young people who sing confidently in front of their peers and an stage.

The Civic Centre is a special part of the community, the more you go the more you find to go to! It's contribution spreads across ages and often brings people together in a range of different ways, a true heart of our community.

Karen Jack

Case study 625th June 2019

Joanne Shepherd
12 Higher Peel St
Oswaldtwistle
Lancashire
BB5 3JJ

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you in order to support the Civic Arts Centre, Oswaldtwistle, for any funding available now or in the future. It is not difficult to comprehend the way in which the Civic has enhanced the local community or the impact it has made over the last 9 years.

One of my earliest memories was that of my daughter being able to hold the Olympic Torch as it made its way through the town, facilitated by the events at the Civic and the honour held by Gayle Knight to be a bearer. So from the start off Oswaldtwistle Civic was put on the map.

I have had a career in the arts and, after a period of calm for a few years it was great that the Civic was born and enabled me to relight my enthusiasm. I was already involved with St Mary's Pantomime group who took up residence at the Civic and made full use of the fantastic facilities. On a personal note, I had wanted to set up a singing group for kids for some time and with the help and assistance of Gayle Knight and staff I formed sKoot (singing kids of Ossy together). We used the Civic rehearsal space and the group was such a success with 35 participants at its height and requests for performances across the borough. Then of course the parents became jealous and once again with assistance from Gayle and her team CAST (Civic Adults Singing Together) was formed. sKoot is still being run from the Civic some 8 years later and CAST ran for 6 years. I was then asked if I would be involved with a new project spearheaded by the Civic 'A Play in a Week'. The success of this enabled us to continue the project and other subsequent plays performed in order to assist with funds for the Civic itself.

My creative juices were flowing thanks to this hive of activity and the community's willingness to participate. I had a couple of charities close to my heart that I wanted to assist in raising funds for. Once again with the full support of the Civic I was able to produce, publicise and perform in a two hander play. Shortly after, following the death of Victoria Wood I was then able to direct and perform in a Victoria Wood revue show, again raising money for charity along with a cast of 15 local people. This was such a success that we were awarded by NODA that same year for the production.

I have been a regular visitor to other productions at the Civic since it opened. So not only have I entertained I have also *been* entertained by this magnificent facility for the last 9 years and continue to do so. The variety of shows, the helpful staff, the amazing resources and facilities have made the Civic Arts Centre a community hub in Oswaldtwistle which our little town would be lost without.

Joanne Shepherd

Case Study 7

My theatre school has been based at The Civic since both opened back in September 2010.

The staff at The Civic are wonderful and always try their best to accommodate our requirements regarding our classes and theatre productions.

The centre has brought a lot to the local community over the years and continues to offer so much to people who without them would not be able to partake in many things which they will most certainly find enriching; educational programmes, theatre groups, sewing groups, reading groups... the list is quite astounding.

Gayle Knight is one of the hardest working people I know. She is constantly coming up with new ideas for themes and activities to offer within the centre and the local community. They never stop.

It's a great place and I have loved being a small part of it over the last decade.

Best wishes,

Cassandra Webster

Appendix 3



HYNDBURN
 The place to be
 an excellent council

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE
 Scaitcliffe House
 Ormerod Street
 ACCRINGTON
 Lancashire
 BB5 0PF

E-Mail: steve.tanti@hyndburnbc.gov.uk

Ms. G. Knight,
 Creative Director,
 Civic Arts Centre,
 Union Road,
 Oswaldtwistle,
 ACCRINGTON.

Your ref:
 Our ref: ST/ED
 Ask for: Mr. Tanti
 Direct Line: 01254 380299
 Date: 14th March 2012

Dear Gayle,

Arts Development

Following your recent discussions both with David Welsby and myself concerning arts development work within Hyndburn, I am writing to you to outline the type of arts related work that we would like you to undertake. I can confirm that we will consult with you on arts related activities that are planned or taking place within Hyndburn.

The Council would like you to undertake the following duties:

- To represent Hyndburn Borough Council in discussions with the Arts Council and Lancashire County Council's Arts Development Team
- To represent Hyndburn Borough Council on the Board of Creativity Works
- To pursue arts related funding in partnership with the Council and to implement and manage resources connected with any successful bids

If you would like any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes for a successful year at the Civic Arts Centre.

Yours sincerely,

S. Tanti,
 Deputy Chief Executive.