



# Activity & Impact Report 2022

# Introduction



2022 was an incredible, challenging, productive and exciting year for The Flying Seagull Project.

We initiated new projects in both the UK as well as internationally, delivering a full National programme alongside our International Activity for the first time on this scale.

We have also been able to buy and improve our fleet of vehicles, notably with the new Wonder Wagon mobile showstage to add to our Showmobile and our wonderful festival stages.

2022 has also been a year of rigorous internal updates to ensure our day to day operations, policies, practices, governance and care packages are up to date, supportive and fit for purpose. We have had a Board refresh, increased our team, enhanced our Wellbeing provision and have delivered a full, energetic, colourful year reaching the highest number of children yet.

# International Projects

## Playtime Poland

### 202 Sessions delivered reaching 2261 children

After months of planning, we decided that supporting young people evacuated to large orphanages and institutions in Poland was the most responsive and effective way we can support children affected by the war in Ukraine.

Since the invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, more than 2,000 children living in orphanages have been evacuated to Poland. These children are now living in old institutions that the Polish government has been trying to replace with a modern foster care system over the last two decades.

They've had to endure war and emergency evacuation without family support. They now face an uncertain future, living in large institutions where they might struggle to find the encouragement and opportunities for individual expression that every child needs.

So, from October until Christmas, we had two teams of clowns, musicians and play specialists sharing laughter and happiness with these Ukrainian orphans who've been evacuated to Poland.

We saw timid and stressed children develop confidence, make friends and smile again after going through terrible experiences.



**“It was amazing to see the teenagers getting involved, I have never seen them having so much fun together. When you started the sessions the teenagers were very dubious and towards the end of it they had big fun and could not wait for the second session. On the second day, when I could not be there, I was surprised to see that they joined the session of their own accord. Usually they are very shy, but they obviously felt safe and comfortable enough to join in.” - caretaker Stara Kiszewa**

# International Projects

## Miles of Smiles

### 94 Sessions delivered reaching 2612 children

This is our annual tour of Europe. The format allows us to respond to “hotspots” where children are in acute need of emergency play relief, and develop relationships with new and existing partner organisations. 2022 has been the first year we've been able to run a Miles of Smiles tour since the start of the pandemic.

To make up for lost time and share light and laughter with as many children as possible, this year's tour visited five countries and featured Seagulls from our branches in the UK, Norway, the Netherlands and Greece.



With your support, our team shared shows, play sessions and games with children in refugee camps, asylum centres and care homes. We also worked with children from Roma communities, and put on sessions with disability support groups across Greece, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Belgium.

In Bulgaria we worked with children in residential care homes, mainly neurodiverse residents aged from 7 years. In Greece, we were mainly in camps and In Germany and Belgium we were in care homes and refugee camps.

**“Thank you so much for the wonderful workshop and show. I would like to express how impressed we were by how quickly you established rapport with the children. We were very impressed to see that they remained engaged and excited over the whole hour, which is something we don't see often. Even the teenagers that are 'too cool for school' couldn't hide their laughter.”**

**'Never in my life have I laughed so much, I laughed the full 45 minutes of show long, I am sore in my cheeks!'**

**Anonymous Teenager**

# International Projects

## Bulgaria Laughathon

### 36 Sessions delivered reaching 772 children

There are more than 22,500 child refugees stranded in Greece, Cyprus and the Balkans. These children and young people have endured dangerous and often traumatising journeys, after fleeing violence and persecution in countries including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan.

On arrival in Europe they face hostility and brutality, and often spend years of their childhoods in squalid and dangerous refugee camps. And childhood doesn't wait. Their need for healthy and happy activities and a sense of normality cannot be put on hold just because it's easier to pretend that this "problem" is far away and nothing to do with us.

But we're determined to keep offering support to children and young people as they seek safety in Europe: the more we're told that we should be divided and fearful of each other, the more determined we are to be united. This support is never more urgently needed than during the winter months, when conditions in refugee camps in Greece and the Balkans become unimaginably harsh.



So, throughout the winter our teams were bringing circus, songs, play and friendship to young people in refugee camps in Bulgaria, who are being forced to grow up in conditions that no child should experience. And as well as our work in refugee camps on this project, we were also sharing play and laughter sessions with groups of children from Romany communities and with organisations supporting young people and adults with disabilities.

**We had two wonderful visits from the Flying Seagulls' artists. Their program was very rich and different on both visits. The artists were extremely sensitive to the peculiarities of each child, it was obvious that they had a lot of experience in their interaction with different groups. Even the children, who find it difficult to show their emotions, had fun sincerely and were very happy.**

# International Projects

## Lebanon & Jordan

### 91 Sessions delivered reaching 8165 children

Since our last project in Lebanon in 2019, the country has been on the brink of economic and political crisis. Services supporting young people have been under huge strain, and child refugees from Syria remain in a precarious position.

Many of these children have now spent years growing up in refugee camps, where they face serious problems including child labour and exploitation. They remain unable to return home and live in a permanent state of impermanence. Syrian refugees in Jordan face similar problems.



As well as dealing with the vast number of Syrian refugees, both Jordan and especially Lebanon are struggling with their own economic and social situation.

In March, we launched our first project in Lebanon since the pandemic and our first ever project in Jordan.

Over 10 weeks, we delivered 91 shows and play sessions, working with schools, refugee camps and disability support groups. Thanks to your support, we brought laughter and happiness to 8,165 children who have endured real hardships over the last few years.

# National Projects

## Emergency Laughter Relief

### 117 Sessions delivered reaching 2311 children

Throughout the year, our Emergency Laughter Relief projects share play and laughter sessions with children who've sought refuge in the UK. Although these children have reached a country of safety, the process of resettlement is long and difficult. It means that children, who've already experienced major upheaval and often severe trauma, are spending upwards of 18 months in temporary accommodation centres.

The reality of living in temporary accommodation centres, such as hotels, is widely misrepresented in the media. These are isolating and empty places, with very little provision for education and children's activities. These young people badly need stability, but are instead faced with the possibility of further relocation and upheaval harming their prospects of taking part in education, making friends and integrating with their peers.



The result is that the formative years of thousands of vulnerable children are being shaped by boredom and feelings of hopelessness and neglect. This is not only an immediate crisis for their mental health and wellbeing, but can cause lasting harm into adulthood.

In response, we're determined to make sure these children have a regular routine of rehabilitative childhood activities. We know that structured play and games can create a safe and happy place to recover a sense of normality and start rebuilding a childhood that's been taken away by violence and displacement.

**One hotel we work in is full of young boisterous energetic boys who often fight and get very angry very quickly. Our Seagull crew took juggling scarves, which went very well. Those who usually struggle and initiate conflict had a lovely time showing the team how they dance with the scarves. They taught the crew how to dance in their traditional Afghan style of dance, so they could share their culture with the team.**

# National Projects

## Laugh n Play Holiday Tours

### 205 Sessions delivered reaching 5437 children

The cost of living crisis is blighting the childhoods of young people across the country. As well as obvious injustices like children going to bed cold or hungry, we're seeing young people's access to recreation, play, new experiences and social activities getting eroded as families struggle to make ends meet.

The result is huge and rapidly growing inequality in childhood opportunities. This is not only deeply unfair. It also does real harm to the physical and mental wellbeing of the children affected.



Our Laugh 'n' Play projects address this crisis through delivering a regular programme of shows and play sessions across the UK during school holidays when the need is greatest. We have two to three teams travelling the country during school holidays to reach as many children as possible in urban and remote areas.

We delivered shows and sessions with food support organisations, community centres, hotels and community groups providing temporary accommodation for refugees, and refuges for women fleeing domestic abuse.

**“Activities like the one you came in to deliver during the Easter holidays are SO important, and not only help with the healing of broken hearts but help increase self-worth and wellbeing in children staying with us. It helps children to create new, happy memories away from the trauma they have experienced and helps them to look forward to a life filled with more joyous activities like this one – we are so grateful of your support.”**

# National Projects

## Skills Share Circus Club Regular Sessions

### 31 Sessions delivered reaching 232 children

Our regular Seasons and our Skills Share Circus Club programme run throughout the year, delivering regular, long-term sessions and workshops tailored to groups of young people with specific needs. We run these regular sessions in weekly blocks, with identified activities developing over the course of the programme.

So far, our teams have worked with a pupil referral unit supporting children who are outside mainstream education, a charity supporting young people with disabilities, a group supporting autistic young people and their families, unaccompanied minors going through the process of resettlement, and children in Clacton and Jaywick facing high levels of exclusion, isolation and deprivation.



Through sharing regular, structured play sessions and workshops over a longer period of time, we've seen improved mental health, confidence and participation among the children and young people we've worked with.

This is why our regular Seagull Sessions aim to strengthen children's confidence and their mental and physical health by sharing professional-quality skills and activities workshops in partnership with local organisations over a longer period, to build skills, confidence, peer relations where a longer interaction is beneficial.

**It's been exceptionally beneficial for those who are more withdrawn and less likely to work together (comfort zone is usually to work on their own and less likely to use body kinesthetics) so this has been an excellent experience to draw them out and to give them confidence. Plate spinning. Slack line. Juggling etc have all helped to draw them out of themselves. And also they come up with their own, new games to do with each other, improving skills and peer relations.**



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