

the Albany



Impact Report 2025

Welcome

We're delighted to introduce ourselves as the new Co-CEOs of the Albany, taking over from Gavin Barlow and Shenay Gaul, who both stepped down this year, after making a profound impact on the Albany and the local area in their two decades of leadership. Neither of us are strangers to the building, with Vicki stepping up from her role as Creative Director, and Mimi returning following a stint as Administrative Producer during the Mayor's London Borough of Culture 2022.

As we look ahead, the Albany is entering an ambitious new phase. Our new Creative Strategy places democratic, community-led approaches at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that art and creativity are central to how we connect with our communities. Alongside this, we are strengthening partnerships with cultural, civic and community organisations to amplify our impact locally, across London, and nationally. This report highlights examples of that work, from the launch of our new Community Council — a group of critical friends who will help shape the future of our artistic programming — to our ongoing support for local artists through space, funding, advice, and guidance, enabling them to create, share, and experiment with new work.



Top image: Mimi Findlay, Vicki Amedume and Michelle Matherson (image by Elena Ledgister)
Cover image: Well Done Mummy Penguin (image by Robert Day)

This report is also packed with statistics and stories demonstrating the impact arts and culture have had on the health, creativity and social lives of people in Deptford, Lewisham, London and beyond. We're proud of everything our team has achieved this year and look forward to taking the Albany forward into an exciting new chapter.

Vicki Dela Amedume MBE
Creative Director and Co-CEO
Mimi Findlay
Executive Director and Co-CEO

2025 has been a year of transition and opportunity. Saying farewell to CEO Gavin Barlow enabled us to reflect on the Albany's achievements over the past 20 years, through its rich and vibrant history. You'll find some highlights of that journey on page 5, a reminder of the deep roots we share with our community.

But this year hasn't just been about looking back, it's been about embracing change. We were thrilled to welcome Mimi Findlay and Vicki Amedume as Joint Chief Executives, a partnership that brings fresh vision, energy, and a shared commitment to creativity, collaboration, and inclusion. Together, they are helping us reimagine what a cultural landmark in Deptford can be.

Looking ahead, we will be progressing planning for our project to deliver much-needed upgrades to our building, to better serve the artists who create here and the audiences who bring it to life. And, as always, we'll do this the Albany way - by listening. Our local communities will have a real voice in shaping how their arts centre looks, feels, and functions.

With your continued support, we're ready to build a future that honours our heritage while embracing the possibilities ahead. Here's to the next chapter of the Albany story - one we'll write together.

Michelle Matherson
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Our year at a glance



Awarded – London Youth Quality Mark - **Bronze**. In recognition of the quality of our youth programme.

Shortlisted – Arts Council Digital Culture Network Award. Recognising our digital innovation in engaging audiences.

Shortlisted – Charity Awards 2025 Celebrating excellence in the Charity Sector.

Nominated – Attitude is Everything Award. For Innovation in Creative Access.

Vision statement

The Albany is the engine room for people to reach their creative potential, tell their stories and define their own culture. Together we will inspire new possibilities for positive change.

Values

Open and welcoming

We foster an inclusive space, both physically and culturally, where anyone can feel welcome and heard.

A home for ideas, creativity and action

Everyone has the potential to be creative. We believe that creativity can make real change for individuals and on urgent issues around social justice and the climate crisis.

A connector of people

We put our communities at the heart of any process. We share our knowledge to shape change and create something better for everyone.

Responsive and flexible

We're co-operative, willing to listen and adjust our approach according to the task in hand. We love seeing amorphous ideas become reality.

Committed to representing the extraordinary creativity and diversity of Deptford and Lewisham

We're deeply rooted in Lewisham and South East London. We advocate for its residents, representing the diversity of our borough and the voices of Black and Global Majority people.

Adventurous and ambitious

We believe that a sense of adventure is essential to achieving our vision. While we are rigorous in our approach and celebrate our successes we're not afraid to try something new.

Our heritage

1894

The Deptford Fund is established by a group of local women to improve the lives of people living in the area.

1899

The Albany Institute, named after its new royal patron the Duchess of Albany, opens on Creek Road. The new building acts as everything from a nursery, to a classroom for boot mending and domestic science classes, and a social space for young women who work in the slaughterhouses.

1972

Theatre company The Combination move from Brighton to take over the building, which now becomes an arts venue known as the Albany Empire.

1977

Dire Straits make their debut at the Albany Empire, a moment commemorated in 2009 by the installation of a PRS plaque on the site of the old building. Music legends including Squeeze and Elvis Costello have also performed at the venue.

1978

The Albany Empire is destroyed by fire, in a suspected arson attack by the National Front in retaliation of Rock Against Racism gigs held in the venue.

2025 and beyond...

Co-CEOs Mimi Findlay and Vicki Dela Amedume take over leadership of the organisation, with plans underway to transform the Albany to ensure its survival for years to come.

2012

The Albany take over the management of Deptford Lounge, a purpose-built library and community hub over the road on Giffin Square.

2022

The Albany is appointed as lead delivery partner for We Are Lewisham, London Borough of Culture 2022, a programme of over 600 events attracting 400,000 audience members throughout the year.

2000

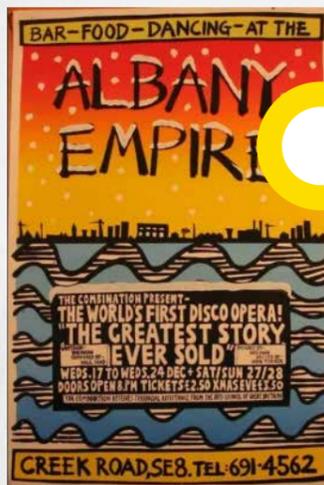
The Albany is saved from closure by a partnership with the National Theatre 'Art of Regeneration' which brings in £3m worth of investment to rejuvenate the building. In 2003, Gavin Barlow takes over as CEO and goes on to lead the organisation for the next 20 years.

1980s

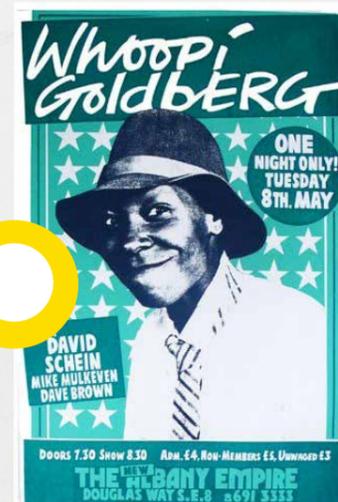
The Albany becomes a launchpad for rising stars, with Lenny Henry, Whoopi Goldberg, Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer all performing here at early stages in their careers.

1982

Diana, Princess of Wales, officially opens the new building, in its current location on Douglas Way. A purpose-built multi arts venue, the designs originally included plans for a ceramics studio, photography dark room and soft play space for children.



London Borough of Culture 2022



On our stages

Our creative programme is led by, and made for, our local communities. We are proud to present a high-quality on-your-doorstep cultural offer where Deptford residents can watch their favourite comedians; discover the next big musical talent; introduce their children or grandchildren to their first theatre experience; or even get creative themselves.

Our Creative Strategy aims to put local people at the heart of our decision making. We appointed our inaugural Community Council this year: eight critical friends who are helping to shape the future of our programme and activities. So far, members have influenced our family offers, how we work with schools, and what happens in our garden.

Our Pizza and Pitches project continues to invite local people to bring their own ideas to the table and pitch to receive funding to make them a reality. This programme enables us to bring audiences into our decision-making process, discover new talent, and uncover truly inspiring stories.

This year, we grew our music strand, continuing to programme long-standing collaborators such as Charles Hayward, whilst incubating new ideas like BPM, a showcase of emerging electronic music producers led by our Associate Artist kWaKe BaSs. From drop-in Jazz Saturdays in our cafe, to full-building takeovers like Creekside Festival, we are platforming the exciting and eclectic range of music being made in South East London.

We've also reaffirmed our commitment to queer programming, forging new connections with local LGBTQ+ organisations the Triangle Centre and Tiara Nights; supporting LDN Queer Mart and Arty Farty Market to profile queer artists and makers; and providing free space to queer-led companies such as Breach Theatre.

Charles Hayward (image by Suzi Corker)

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Creekside Festival *September 2024*

Produced in partnership with local radio station AAJA Music, this full-building, day-to-night takeover attracted 1,000 visitors.

After the Act *October 2024*

Presented by Breach Theatre, this musical theatre piece about the legacy of Section 28 previewed at the Albany before heading off on a UK tour.

Love Music, Hate Racism *February 2025*

Headlined by Dave Okumu, with a line-up of special guests, this special concert was the first in a national tour of gigs planned in opposition to the rise of the far right.

Deptford Literature Festival *March 2025*

We were proud to partner with residents Spread the Word for another year of their festival, which included a launch party celebrating Lewisham Lyricists.

393 performances

11 commissions

27,980 audience

43% of audiences from Lewisham

97% of audiences rated their experience good or very good

96% of audiences agreed or strongly agreed that the Albany is a welcoming place for the whole community



Award:
Attitude is Everything

Nominated for innovation in Creative Access

*Deptford Literature Fest
(Image by Kashif Haque)*



Engaging the youngest theatre goers



Boxville (image by Paul Blakemore)



Soft or Spiky (image by Steve Gregson)

The Albany is such an incredible venue. The size makes it so much less daunting for children than a big theatre.

Audience member

We cultivate a love of the arts from childhood, inviting our youngest arts attenders into the building with regular events for local families.

Our annual Christmas production, this year produced by Can't Sit Still theatre in a co-commission with ARC Stockton, was a particular highlight, drawing in rave reviews from audiences and critics alike. We also unveiled a new Wild Play area in our garden, thanks to funding from the Bupa Foundation, and have been running outdoor early years sessions encouraging messy play and interaction with nature.

70 performances
6,584 audience
72 schools and nurseries engaged

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Boxville *November 2024*

A hands on, cardboard adventure featuring paper dragons and corrugated crabs.

Well Done, Mummy Penguin *December 2024*

This year's festive show, an adaptation of Chris Haughton's beloved picture book, received a four-star review in the Guardian.

Soft or Spiky? *February 2025*

We continued our programming for babies and toddlers with this interactive show from Polka Theatre and Half Moon.

Froglife workshops *various dates*

We continued to encourage little ones to get outdoors in our free garden workshops run by our partners Froglife.



- The Guardian for *Well Done Mummy Penguin*



This commission has been a total game changer for us
Cat Boot, Artistic Director, Can't Sit Still



Deptford Lounge: Managing a Community Hub

The Albany manages Deptford Lounge, an award-winning, purpose-built library, event and meeting space, on behalf of Lewisham Council.

In the summer, we bring the community together for events on the square and in winter we are a warm space, welcoming people in for a hot drink and a comfortable space to read, chat or study. All year round, we hire out our spaces to local community groups for events, meetings, clubs and sports.

This year we've focused on supporting artists – from establishing our sell out scratch night which encourages writers, directors and performers to come together to share new work, to continuing to run our monthly writers' group, Just Write It! We also formed a new relationship with LDN Queer Mart, hosting two fantastic full-building takeovers in June and December.

- 514** events
- 81** artists exhibited
- 25,081** audience
- 4,789** people attended Vietnamese Mid-Autumn Festival
- 4,500** people attended LDN Queer Mart events

[Deptford Scratch] really helped me realise that there is immense talent and brilliant writing available on a local level.

Audience member

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Deptford Scratch *July and January*

Our new scratch night aims to platform up-and-coming new writers and connect them with performers and directors. After two sell out events this year, it has become a staple of the Deptford Lounge calendar as well as expanding into Greenwich Theatre.

LDN Queer Mart *June and December*

A showcase of 100+ up-and-coming queer artists and small businesses, from illustrators to ceramicists and jewellery makers.

Vietnamese Festivals *September and February*

We continued to host Vietnamese Family Partnership for two incredible full-building takeovers to celebrate Mid-Autumn and Lunar New Year.

Exhibitions *year round*

This year's exhibitions ranged from a display of work created by participants on our free cyanotype course celebrating 'Spring Snapshots of Deptford' to a reflection on LGBTQ+ History Month and a festive takeover inspired by the Albany's Christmas show, *Well Done, Mummy Penguin*.



CASE STUDY

A Creative Community in South East London

Ella is a writer and performer who runs *Just Write It!*

I've been running a monthly writers' group called Just Write It in the workshop space at Deptford Lounge. It's been going really well and is really well attended. There are always new people who come every month. It's really nice, because writing is such a solitary activity. It's nice to get

together, be in a space with other people doing that.

Being involved with the Albany and Deptford Lounge has given me a space to meet other likeminded writers, and because of that I've expanded my creative network. I'm based in South East as well, so

it's really nice to engage with people in my local area. So it's made a difference in terms of meeting people, meeting other creatives in the local area, having a space to write, and just feeling a stronger sense of community with other creatives, for sure.

A cultural connector

In 2022, following our success as Lead Delivery Partner for the Mayor's London Borough of Culture, we were appointed as Lewisham's Anchor Cultural organisation for the borough. Our role as anchor is to act as a hub for artists and cultural organisations in Lewisham, providing support and amplifying the incredible creativity and talent developing on our doorstep every day.

We are home to more than 20 brilliant creative and community organisations, nine of whom are Arts Council NPOs, and we're incredibly proud of the work we do to support emerging artists and creatives across the borough, from Deptford to Downham.

Our Associate Artists and Artist of Change programme embeds artists in the local community and provides them with free space, funding and support. Our Creative Communities Membership offers affordable work, rehearsal and movement space, as well as free fundraising advice and support, and the opportunity to build networks with other creatives across the borough.

This year, thanks to funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, we invested in our workspace and facilities for artists. This included improving our coworking hub; introducing a new fixed desk offer; building a new recording studio; and creating a much-requested rehearsal space complete with sprung floor.

Top image: Garden at the Albany
Right: Albany coworking space
(images by Elena Ledgister)



PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Associate Artists

We welcomed six new Associate Artists this year, each focused on a different area of our work, from music to family programming.

Fundraising support

Part of our anchor role is to share our expertise, demystify the funding process, and facilitate connections between fundraisers in the borough. This year we gave away 66 hours of free support.

Creative Cuppa

We launched our new networking event, which invites creatives into our cafe to meet our programming team, connect with each other, and share their ideas.

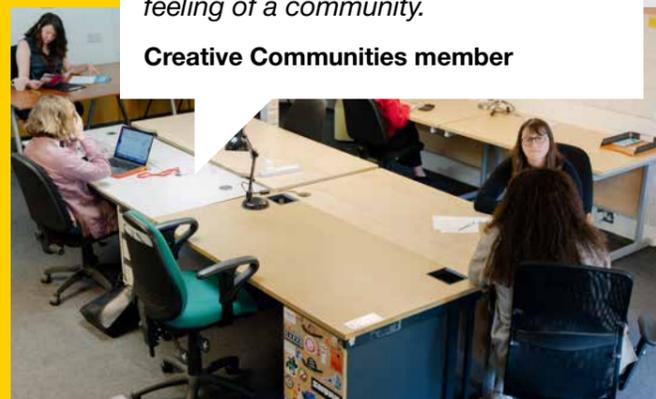
Creative Communities Membership

This year, our members claimed 314 hours of subsidised meeting and movement space; and booked 292 desks in our newly refurbished coworking space.

616 hours of free advice and support offered to artists
150 community and creative organisations supported
56 community led co-productions
435 artists employed
132 new Creative Communities members
24 residents

As a freelancer, I love having the sense of a base I can return to, a feeling of a community.

Creative Communities member



CASE STUDY

It's all about the process

Charles Hayward is a long-time collaborator of the Albany

My connection with the Albany stretches back to 1976 when it was still in the old building on Creek Road. I remember first experiencing it as a wonderfully mixed space, where anything could happen.

I really appreciate the Albany's community-led approach. Working here has allowed me to explore various musical

forms, from African and Mediterranean to Chinese, without feeling the need to compromise or dilute the authenticity of those traditions. The collaboration has always been genuine, never forced.

The Albany is more than just a venue or a community centre to me; it's been

a place where I have continually learned and grown through decades of connection, shared experiences, and collaboration. It's a space where creativity isn't rushed but allowed to evolve, where the process is just as important as the end result.

Supporting youth wellbeing

Our youth programme focuses on using creativity as a tool to support young people with their mental health and wellbeing. Young people told us that they needed a safe and welcoming place to go outside of home or school, and so we created Come As You Are, a weekly youth takeover for 12-25 year olds. Every Tuesday, our building is taken over with the vibrant energy of our young members, playing games, enjoying free food, and taking part in creative activities ranging from music to dance to creative writing. Trained mentors are on hand to lend an ear and provide a safe space for young people to thrive.

Our youth music project, REZON8, offers 14-25 year olds a safe environment to talk about and explore their mental health, share their experiences, and express how they've navigated those challenges through the powerful medium of music. We are grateful to the Baring Foundation and Elizabeth Legacy Fund for their support of this important project

In the summer, four young performers from REZON8 had the opportunity to perform at Glastonbury, along with four sound engineers from our youth technical training course who were offered work at the festival.

I just feel like I can call this place my second home.

CAYA member

Worked with **1,645** young people

76% were Black and Global Majority
50% were resident in social housing
93% reported increased skills, social connection and confidence

350 young creatives supported to develop their own work

1,098 hours of paid work

8 young people went to Glastonbury



Award:
London Youth Quality Mark – Bronze.
In recognition of the quality of our youth programme

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Creative Coding Collective 16-25 year olds

We held an advanced coding course this year, which included mentoring from industry professionals, building pathways into the tech and digital sector.

Love2Dance 8-18 year olds

We celebrated ten years of street dance classes in Lewisham, with a special showcase event marking the end of this impactful project.

Technical Training Course 16-25 year olds

Alongside partners including Southbank Centre and Lewisham Music, we offered free training in lighting, sound design and stage management, which led to four sound engineers gaining paid work at Glastonbury Festival.

Holiday clubs 5-12 year olds

Our holiday arts and gardening clubs provide healthy food and creative activities. We have now formed a partnership with local theatre company Montage Theatre Arts to run drama classes during the school holidays.

Albany Young Company 12-24 year olds

We partnered with resident company SOUNDS LIKE CHAOS to run a weekly youth drama company, led by two alumni of the group. They performed their show, *Hold On to Letting Go*, in November.



CASE STUDY Escapism

Hayden attends REZON8

Coming to the Albany, it's given me a sense of freedom from my stammer. Because for some reason when I record or when I'm performing live, I don't stammer.

I've been coming here for one to two years. Before joining, I was recording at home. I was stacking up shoeboxes for a mic stand, and I would put the microphone on top of

that and record. When I came to REZON8 at the Albany, I recorded in an actual studio for once. I saw how the quality was different. And with the software as well, they've taught me a lot and encouraged me to learn more out of it.

Just being here makes you feel a certain way. There's a lot of mentorship and the people are very kind.

And the kids here that also make music, they inspire you too. That's basically all I do now is make songs and listen to music. That's basically what I do. Once I come here, I know nobody's going to judge me. No one's going to look at me any type of way. There ain't no like bad vibes ever here.



Inspiring creativity at any age

Meet Me Tea Dance (image by Roswitha Chesher)

Meet Me is our award-winning programme for over 65s, delivered in partnership with Entelechy Arts. Each week, older members of our community take part in creative sessions, from choir and printmaking to dance and storytelling.

It's a vital space for connection, creativity and wellbeing, and this year we have enjoyed coming together for celebrations including a Summer and Winter Party and 21st Century Tea Dance. We also got out and about, with the choir performing at the Old Vic's 12 Choirs of Christmas; and hosting a craft stall at Telegraph Hill market.

- 65** regular members
- 48** new members referred
- 40** artists worked with
- 33** volunteers

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Meet Me... on the Dancefloor

Funded by Sport England, these sessions aimed to challenge perceptions of the kind of exercise older people want to do, and celebrated members' love of music and rhythm.

Meet Me... on the Phone

As well as our in-person club, we also run creative sessions over the phone, for members who are less able to get out and about. Recent sessions have covered poetry, music, watercolour painting and creative conversations led by local museums and galleries.

21st Century Tea Dance

Led by Entelechy Arts, this year's tea dance included an immersive installation exploring our oceans and the impact of climate change, all made out of recycled materials.



CASE STUDY

I just do things my own way

Astrid is a Meet Me member

I started coming to Meet Me... just over a year ago. Now, once a week at least I've got somewhere to go.

It's helped me with not being so lonely, being out of the house and I like the activities. I'm doing knitting and crochet, although I don't know how to read patterns! I just do things my own way. People help each other here.

Since coming here I've had a go at weaving and things I've not done before. I don't think I'm being creative, I think I'm useless at it! But this is a place where you can do it anyway, it doesn't matter. But quite a few others, I look around and see quite

a few are very, very good. I'm inspired by the people here.

I stopped drinking two years ago so now instead of drinking I'm knitting or crocheting. I know it seems like an old lady thing, but it helps me get rid of the bad habits I really should stop at my age. Now I've stopped biting my nails as well and I want to stop smoking. I say to myself "I'm going to knit this line first and then knit another one before I have a cigarette". I picked knitting back up when I came here, I hadn't done it for about 40 to 50 years before that.

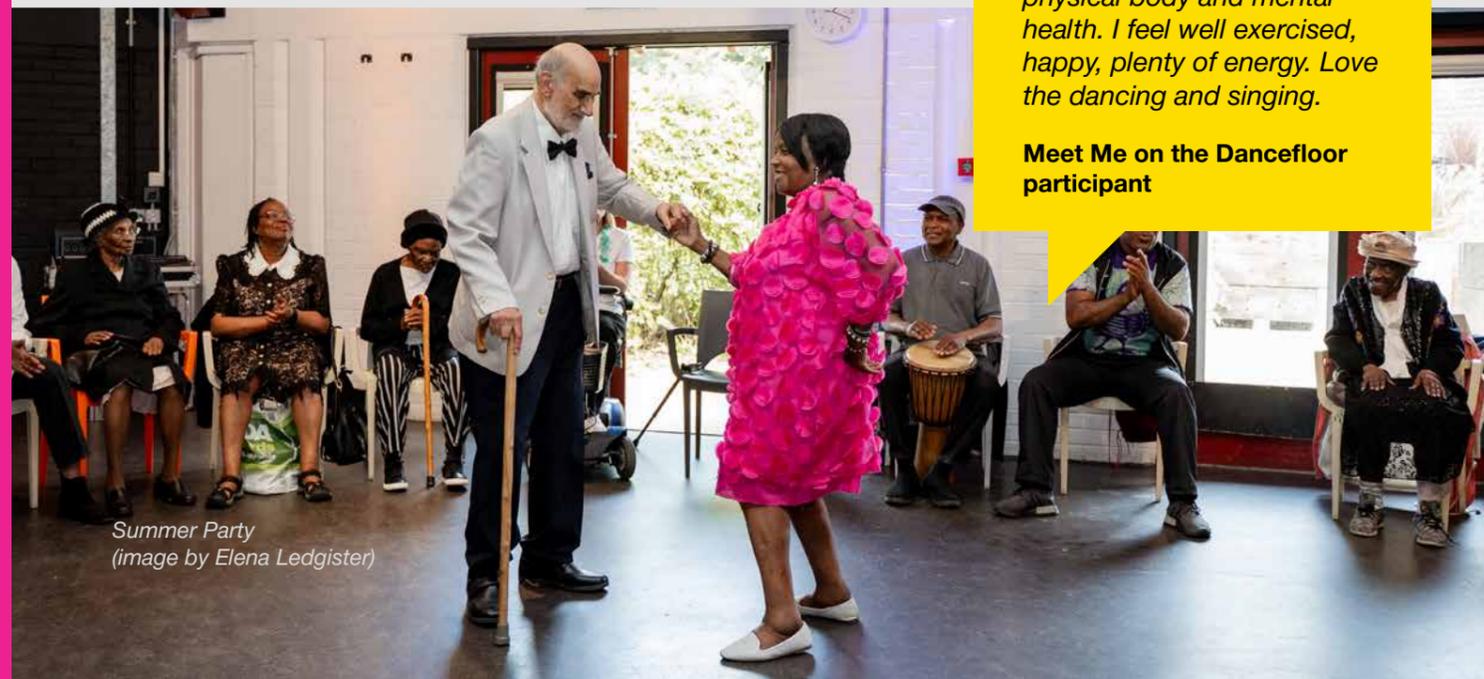
Along with the bad habits I used to have a lot of

anxiety as well. I'd be feeling quite anxious before I went to the shops to buy my paper and cigarettes and I don't get that anymore. And I'm out more, travelling on the bus, doing things. One lady here likes walking and she got me walking to New Cross on the way home! She lives in New Cross as well and she got me walking all the way there, which is good exercise.

Meet Me... is a chance for me to get out of the house and it's something that I look forward to every week. Now I've got an aim and ambition in the later stages of life.

It had a big impact on my physical body and mental health. I feel well exercised, happy, plenty of energy. Love the dancing and singing.

Meet Me on the Dancefloor participant

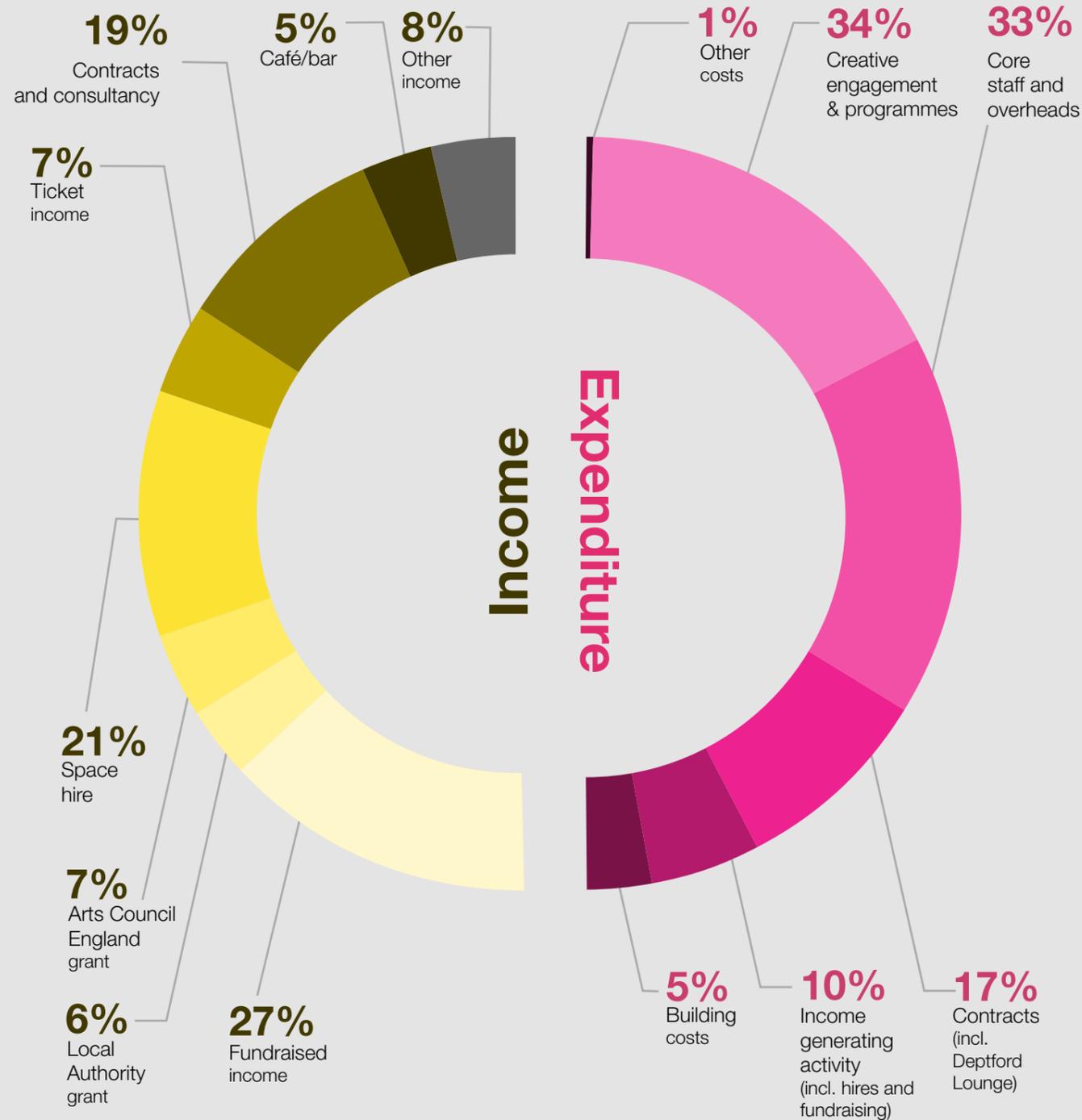


Summer Party (image by Elena Ledgister)

Finances

Total incoming resources this year were £2,456,074, an increase of 13% on the previous year, earned income rose by 15% to £1,495,994 making up 60% of total incoming resources.

Total Resources expended were £2,849,484, a 7% increase on 2023/24, this was due to spending of held Restricted funds across the year and the impact of external factors on the Albany such as high energy prices (particularly challenging with an ageing building), the hike in Employer National Insurance Contributions, and a challenging funding environment.



Fundraised income from Trusts, Statutory and individuals was 40% of our overall income. Each year we fundraise almost one million pounds just to keep our community programmes running. For over 20 years we have been working with people locally who need us most, delivering award-winning community collaboration and ground-breaking artist development.

But the cost of running our vital community hub is rising, and with the funding landscape changing, particularly for arts and culture, we need the help of our community now more than ever. This year we launched two schemes: “My Albany”, where individuals can support us from just £5 per month, and Albany Anchors, a higher level giving scheme to get closer to the action from £1,000 per year. We look forward to growing these schemes and deepening our connections with our supporters over the next financial year.

Thank you!

We are grateful to our funders who enabled us to support our community, young people and artists this year:

Arts Council England
BBC Children in Need & National Lottery Community Fund #iwill Fund
BSW Heating Ltd
Bupa Foundation
Charcoalblue
City Bridge Trust
The Elizabeth Legacy Fund
Jack Petchey Foundation
Lewisham Local (Warm Welcomes Fund)
London Borough of Lewisham

London Youth
Maudsley Charity
Mayor of London (Propel Fund)
The Merchant Taylor's Foundation
Monday Charitable Trust
Mulalley
National Lottery Community Fund
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Sport England
UK Government (Shared Prosperity Fund)
United Living

And those who wish to remain anonymous.

Residents:

Apples & Snakes
Day 600 Ltd
Entelechy Arts
Fun Palaces
Heart & Soul
Independent Theatre Council
Kali Theatre Company
Lewisham Education Arts Network (LEAN)
Poetry Translation Centre
Recruit a Chef
Refugee Council Lewisham
Robert Ferreira (counsellor)

SOUNDS LIKE CHAOS
South London Arts Therapy
Spare Tyre Theatre Company
Spread the Word
Street Traders Lewisham
Studio Raw
Three Boroughs
Lewisham Family Self-Help Association
New Earth Theatre Company (until 16 July 2024)
Together UK
Healthwatch Lewisham

Thanks to all the staff, volunteers, artists and freelancers who have contributed to our creative community this year.