



20 STORIES HIGH

BUSINESS PLAN 2026/2027



EVERYBODY'S GOT A STORY TO TELL ...
AND THEIR OWN WAY OF TELLING IT ...





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1. ABOUT 20 STORIES HIGH

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We create bold, excellent theatre, music and art experiences with culturally diverse, working-class communities, emerging artists, and world-class professionals.

We tell stories that bring joy, empower, and enable social change.

We inhabit a wide variety of spaces: from theatres, community centres and schools to digital spaces, living rooms and bus-stops.

Our heart is in Liverpool, but our reach is universal.

**WE BELIEVE EVERYBODY'S GOT A STORY TO TELL...
AND THEIR OWN WAY OF TELLING IT...**

Our values: Equity - Wellbeing - Activism - Excellence



2. INTRODUCTION

2026 is a really significant year of celebration and experimentation for us. We hope to collaborate with over **5000+** participants and **18,000+ audiences** as we celebrate our 20th birthday, launch new projects and plan for an exciting future. In a world that can feel really divisive and fraught - **Joy, hope and activism** will be at the heart of all we do.

Our programme will be rooted as ever in creating bold, accessible, excellent art, through exceptional participatory activities *with* and *for* **underrepresented culturally diverse, working-class young people and communities**. Collaborating with young people and communities to develop the stories they want to tell in the artforms they own and want to see.

20 Stories High's work has always been informed by the world around us, and the lived experience of the young people we work with - and this will be true in 2026/27. In response to the continued rise in racism, far right ideologies and hate crime nationally, alongside the impact of global conflicts - we are focusing even more of community connection, celebrating diversity and inclusion.

Leanne Jones, CEO

3. FIVE CORE AREAS OF ACTIVITY 2026/27



KEY PRIORITIES

Key priorities for the year:

1. **Experimentation and creative exploration:** Striving to offer high quality participatory activities and excellent theatre and gigs
2. **Co-creation and young person centred:** programme driven by need, artists, people and communities
3. **Working locally and in areas of need:** Community connection and bridging communities of young people together through art
4. **Inclusive, accessible and relevant:** Continuing to develop our knowledge, practice and reach - with activism at the centre of our practice
5. **Partnerships and collaborations:** collaborating with new partners who share our values, including from outside the arts
6. **Wellbeing:** the wellbeing of all is at the heart of all we do
7. **Sustainability:** Diversifying our income streams and ways of raising funds in order to be as robust and sustainable as possible

During 2026/7 we will focus organisational energy on the following big questions:

- What do young participants, audiences, emerging artists and other organisations need?
- What should 20 Stories High look like, and how should it behave, to meet these needs?



OUR CORE ACTIVITY 2026/27

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i. CREATIVE PROGRAMME

Offer an excellent, relevant and high quality programme: Youth Theatre, Professional Development, 18+ Programme, & development of shows/touring work. Embedding Nu Noize.

ii.. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & ACTIVISM

Continue to ensure our commitments to EDIA are central to our practice, work and approach. Includes continued training, development and growth for our staff, freelancers and Board.

iii. WELLBEING

Continuing to centralise wellbeing in all we do in an authentic, thoughtful way - continuing to priorities time to pause and reflect on our culture and approaches

iv. CULTURAL BRIDGING

Launch of Us, Together project-working in Huyton, Bottle and Kensington with vulnerable young people/communities breaking down divisions and enhancing community cohesion through creativity.

v. NEW CHAPTER

Defining our future. Adjusting to big changes and responding to opportunities. New leadership (Co-CEO/AD & Chair), & fresh partnerships to explore the role of theatre in society for young people.



CREATIVE PROGRAMME: 6 core elements

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All work will be informed by our commitment to wellbeing, equity, diversity, Inclusion and our aim to be an 'activist' organisation.

1
Shows & R&D

2
**Youth
Theatre**

3
**Professional
Development**

4
**Community
Outreach &
Cultural
Bridging**

5
**Music
Projects**

6
**POWER UP!
EDIA
Projects**



CREATIVE PROGRAMME cont.

1. SHOWS

Half Rice, Half Chips

In collaboration with local Musician Paisleigh Bi, we will create a new show exploring cultural heritage, hustle and dreams through an original soundscape bringing together R&B -Traditional Chinese music and Hip Hop.

The show is being created in collaboration with the Pagoda Youth Orchestra and local Chinese, Black and mixed heritage artists and community members.

We aim to create a show that can tour to studio theatres, schools and community spaces for the target audience of 13-30 young people. The show will be accompanied by wraparound activities including workshops, post show Jams, discussions and special music events.

2027 Project: R&D

We will be working with Associate Artists and our community to explore a variety of different story and show ideas. We aim to explore at least three different story ideas through seed commissions - with the plan to develop one idea into our future 2027 show.

We will explore new show ideas through Creative Play days, creative feedback sessions and through R&D days/weeks with youth theatre and other groups.



CREATIVE PROGRAMME cont.

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2. YOUTH THEATRE / ALL YEAR ROUND

Our regular group for 13-18 year olds from Liverpool. In partnership with the Unity, YT makes new work that blends drama, dance, spoken word, music, song, street dance and puppetry.

- **Weekly workshops**
 - Devise & deliver **Summer Show** in July '26
 - **Expanding YT membership** through recruitment and outreach workshops
 - **'Winter sharing'** performance in December 2026
- Outputs:** c35 sessions/2 productions plus pastoral support sessions

3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We will continue to offer professional development opportunity through all of our projects, as well as focused professional development projects working in partnership with Unity theatre, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse and a variety of creative industry professionals. Programme will include some of the following:

- **Actors Training Programme** (10 week course) for a group of 15 local actors
- **Lab course/show** (3 month course)
- **Creative workshops** (open to local 18+)
- **Theatre trips** (open to local 18+)
- **Festival of Opportunity:** Creative Careers festival for young creatives



CREATIVE PROGRAMME cont.

4. COMMUNITY OUTREACH/CULTURAL BRIDGING

Working closely with partners, we will continue to reach out to culturally diverse, working class young people in a community, educational and arts setting in a variety of ways. With the aim of young people and community connecting to our programme long-term, or engaging in activities in their local area in a deeper way. Includes:

- **Ongoing activities in our partner schools and community spaces locally including:** Kings Leadership Academy, St Francis of Assisi Academy, Deaf Active, Unity Youth & Community Centre & Firefit
- **Us, Together - Cultural Bridging project:** working in three key areas Bootle, Kensington and Huyton using creativity to generate connection, hope and joy in a divided communities

5. MUSIC PROJECTS

We have two brand new music projects, supported by new partners Youth Music and Liverpool BID.

- **Nu Noize:** This project will offer three key opportunities for local young people to engage in new music as makers and audiences:
 - 1). Participation projects: creating/performing new music
 - 2). Desk Jams and Mini Gigs: We will curate a series of Jams in our office for audiences in person/online, and take gigs into unexpected spaces (e.g. Prisons)
 - 3). Nu Noize steering group: members will co-create the programme and develop music leadership skills
- **Sound System Festival:** Brand new music festival in the heart of Liverpool to celebrate diversity through music.



CREATIVE PROGRAMME cont.

6 POWER UP! PROGRAMME

EDIA programme of activities, training and sharing of practice including:

- Windsor Primary music video:** Celebrating diversity
- Access Manifesto:** ongoing sharing of the manifesto through development sessions and workshops in person/online
- Anti-racism music event:** Our anti-racism working group are collaborating to plan a special one off gig to celebrating diversity and solidarity.
- Decompressure:** creative spaces for specific communities, welcoming space to celebrate, share wins and decompress.

+ 20TH BIRTHDAY ACTIVITIES

We are 20 this year - and to celebrate this we have some additional events and activities planned to celebrate the past, present and future!

- **Birthday party:** celebrating through special performances and testimonials
- **Birthday films:** celebrating the shows, projects and achievements of the 20SH community
- **Digital relaunch:** new website and branding
- **Creative Fundraising campaign:** with the aim of raising significant funds throughout the year through community activities/events



CREATIVE PROGRAMME: continued

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Other key areas of activity include:

- **Young People's steering group:** inputting into the development of Nu Noize, and the creation of our Artistic Director recruitment and future visioning
- **Digital projects:** Sharing of current films and digital content with schools and groups
- **Trips:** Theatre, arts and social trips for the 20SH community
- **Series of one off workshops:** Skills, development workshops, including two workshops per year with the Sisterhood Network
- **Summer social:** Big community and partners get together with workshops, performances and lots of food
- **The Big Meet Up:** Annual visioning day with Board, Staff and young people

Networks and national activity:

- Youth Theatre Together Network (steering group) and Festivals
- Running a Youth Theatre online sessions for Youth Theatre leaders

For a full breakdown of the programme and intended outputs click [HERE](#).



APPROACH

20 Stories High is in a period of ongoing change. This comes from internal organisational impulses and experiences as a company over 20 years, as well as our external context including the rise of the far right, the impact of the cost of living crisis, Culture Wars, effects of the Pandemic and ongoing Global conflicts.

During 2026/27 we will continue to examine, experiment and refine what it means for us to be a 'theatre company' in the second decade of the 21st century, based around:

- the need to be **safe, dynamic and flexible**
- a commitment to **supporting those who might be hardest hit** for reasons of age, disability and neurodiversity, economic and/or cultural background
- a stronger **connection with our city and our local communities**
- greater attention to **wellbeing** and a commitment to **increasing our impact**.

Externally, we want to explore our role within the arts into the future, how we can shape theatre and contribute to making the arts more accessible, relevant and representative.

EDIA and wellbeing will be central to our thinking and approach.



EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & ACTIVISM

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Equity, Diversity, inclusion and activism will continue to be the cornerstones of 20 Stories High's work in line with our Vision, values and strategic aims, we strive to offer equality of opportunity and actively seek ways to remove barriers to inclusion in all aspects of our practice.

We are seen within the industry as a model of good practice in terms of cultural diversity and engaging working-class audiences, participants and artists - but we know there is always so much more for us to learn, do and share:

- Continue to be ambitious with 'activism' within 20SH and our work; EDIA learning & development for staff, board & young people; strengthen reporting on 'Inclusivity & Relevance'
- PowerUp! external learning session co-facilitated with an EDIA expert, to bring together with the sector together, ongoing anti-racism work
- Expand on existing membership of regional/national sector networks, eg The Culture Network Liverpool City Region participation focus & Youth Theatre Together-to further develop awareness
- Creative and activist responses to the rise of hate crime, community tensions and far-right activism in the Liverpool City Region, for our community, artists and team members when delivering work in areas with challenging contexts



WELLBEING

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Wellbeing will continue to be a central pillar for our organisational culture. It underpins all 20 Stories High does, and we will continue to collaborate with wellbeing experts, researchers and evaluators to evolve our practice and approach in the way we work together and make art.

We will be thoughtful in the way we support teams, young people and communities as we work in focused areas throughout our Us, Together programme -bringing together wellbeing and safeguarding.

Structured activity including:

- Wellbeing offer for team and Board
- Wellbeing offer for all project teams
- Wellbeing explored/evaluated for all projects
- Sectoral sharing, through conferences, events, digital broadcast
- Pilot: arts sector workshops around wellbeing in the workplace delivered



TEAM & BOARD DEVELOPMENT

The effective and efficient operating of our team and Board is critical if 20 Stories High is to be able to deliver its Vision and Mission. 2026/27 is a time of significant change in the team. A number of staffing roles have changed (increasing responsibility and scope), and we will be recruiting a new Artistic Leader and Chair of the Board. Focuses for the year will include:

- Recruitment campaign and appointment of a new Chair or Co-Chairs of the Board
- Recruitment campaign and appointment of a new Artistic Leader
- Training and mentoring for staff in new roles, and for staff members who have new roles within the company
- Associate artists and mentors: during this transitional period, the team and Board will work closely with additional artists, mentors and supporters to ensure the company is grounded and thriving
- Working groups: A series of working groups (made up of Board, Staff and participants - alongside external experts and partners where appropriate) focusing on recruitment or the programme will be essential



4. AUDIENCES & PARTICIPANTS

REACHING & BUILDING AUDIENCES

It is our political, social and artistic ambition to create work that reflects the diversity of contemporary England, and engage with participants, artists and audiences under-represented in arts activities. Our target audiences/participants are culturally diverse, working class, Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent young people aged 13-30. Over the last two years, we have opened up our programme to primary aged children and 30+ too through select projects and events.

Our Priorities 2026/27:

1. Reaching new **culturally diverse, working class young, Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences/participants**;
 - a. Local provision
 - b. **National** participation (development of new work)
 - c. New audiences in **new spaces** (public locations and venues)
 - d. Increasing the **depth and quality** of engagement
2. Continuing to develop our **knowledge and understanding** of our audiences and participants through ethnographic evaluation
3. **Raising the profile of 20SH** locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
4. Developing our **online audiences and engagement**





ENGAGEMENT PLANS 2026/27

- We have an **Audience & Participation Action Plan**, detailing our overall strategies for reaching our target audiences
- For each new project or activity, we will produce **specific and highly tailored audience and participant development plans as part of the Project Initiation Process**, in collaboration with existing audience/community, partners, venues and local agencies to reach specific new or underrepresented/underserved audiences, eg working with Knowsley Council
- We will **improve our knowledge and insight into audience and participant experiences**, going far beyond simple quantitative and qualitative 'poor/satisfactory/good/excellent' data to build a rich picture of the impact of our work on individuals, groups and communities
- We will **develop and trial new models for gathering rich and meaningful personalised data**, applying learning from the ethnographic model of research refined during our State of Mind project, given the name 'Storybuilding'. New methods that we may develop and trial include:
 - Films and vox pops
 - Creative consultation
 - Online surveys or 'digital suggestion box' accessible through our social channels or website
 - In-depth data gathering with regular focus groups and/or '20SH Open Days', based around creative consultation
 - A new reinvigorated Future Collective who can advise us on what young people want and need from arts provision
- We will use this rich data and insight to inform **decision-making** within 20SH, to truly be a 'listening organisation', and to drive Ambition & Quality, Dynamism and Inclusive & Relevance
- We will further develop our **digital audiences** through our online Desk Jams and films



5. HOW WE'LL OPERATE 2026/27



TEAM PROFILE

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We are powered by a small core team and a dedicated group of associates and freelancers that bring specialist skill, energy and ideas to our organisation and our work. Our roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out in job descriptions and person specifications.

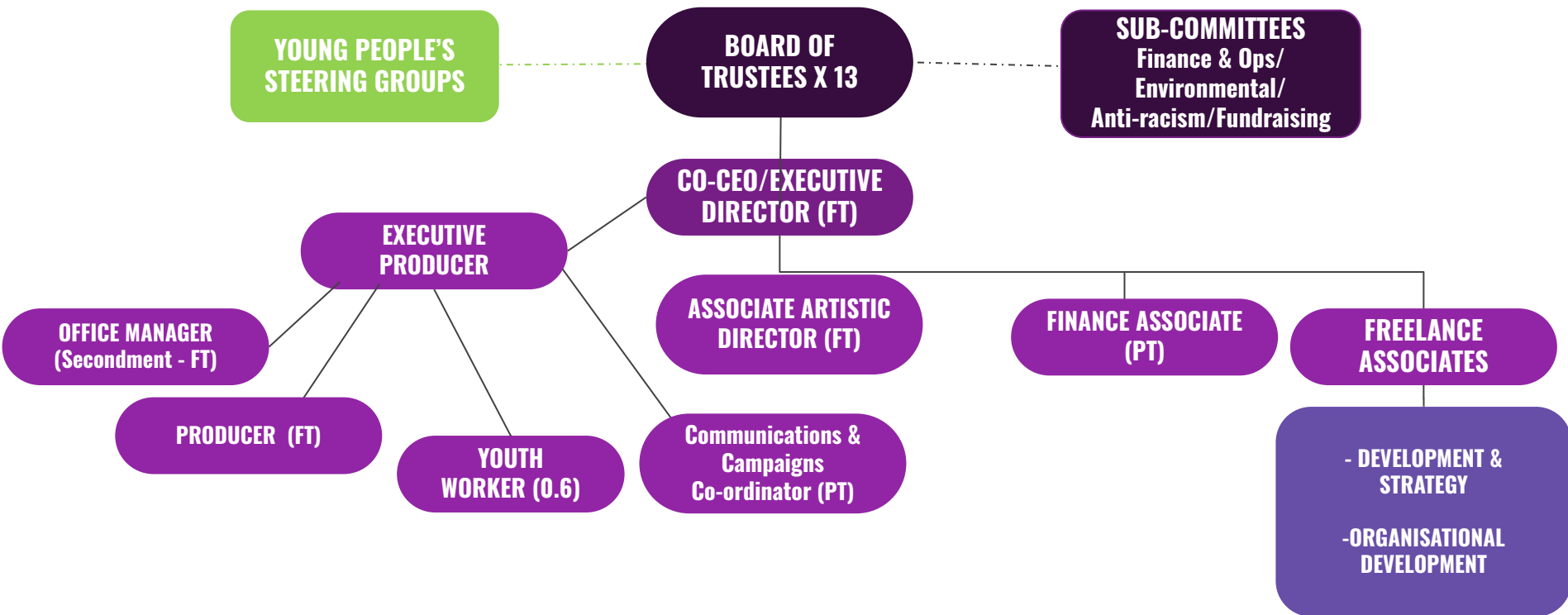
At 20 Stories High everyone - core team, young members & artists - has a seat at the table and all voices are heard and valued equally to achieve high engagement, motivation, creativity and productivity. In 2025/26 our team has changed in order to optimise the opportunities of changing leadership as our Co-Founder Keith Saha and General Manager David Morgan left the organisation.

- Lucy Graham - Executive Producer - is leading operationally
- Amy Thompson (Administrator) - has been seconded to the role of Office Manager
- Leonisha Barley (Assistant Producer) - promoted to Producer
- Leanne Jones (Co-CEO) - has taken on the role of Interim CEO
- Laura Hall (previous Finance Manager) - returned as freelance Finance Associate
- Key Associates: we are working with exciting Associates to lead key areas of the programme including Felix Mufti, Kof Owusu, Faye Donnellan, Paisleigh Bi
- We'll also explore opportunities to develop new roles & create progression routes for young artists/creatives

Full details on our team and board can be found [here](#).



ORGANISATIONAL CHART 2023/24



PARTNERSHIPS

During 2026/27, we will work with a range of partners across the arts/culture, social, health and charitable sectors, and the wider creative industries. Partnerships are essential, and will enhance our dynamism, drive professional and creative development. Partners include:

- **Arts Partners:** Graeae, TATE, LIPA, Unity Theatre, Company Three, Beyond Face, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Open Eye Gallery, FACT, Future Yard, Protect Scouse Dolls, DaDa, Homotopia, Liverpool Sisterhood Network, SHIFT
- **Young People's organisations/education:** Windsor Primary School, Deaf Active, Kings Leadership, St Francis of Assisi, Unity Youth & Community, Firefit, Positive Impact, Catalyst and Liverpool Hip Hop Festival
- **Local Authorities:** Liverpool City Council, Sefton Council, Knowsley Council, Liverpool City Region
- **Funding partners:** Esmee, Granada Foundation, ACE, PHF, Youth Music, Liverpool BID, Studiocare
- **Networks:** Youth Theatre Together, Liverpool Culture Network, Liverpool Arts Safeguarding Charter





6. FINANCES & FUNDRAISING



FINANCES & FUNDRAISING SUMMARY

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Looking forward to 2026/27, 20 Stories High stands to be in a stable financial position, due to careful budgetary management, cost-effective project delivery, our entrepreneurial approach and a highly successful fundraising strategy.

- Total forecast income for 2026/27- £527,725 (inc. £70,000 of designated reserves)
- Total forecast expenditure for 2026/27 - £527, 726.
- Funding is already in place from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Arts Council England NPO 2026/27, Liverpool City Council CAIP, Coutts Charitable Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation's 'New Chapter' grant (ends autumn), Liverpool BID, Youth Music, Garfield Weston and support from Liverpool's Studio Care.
- Grant applicants in progress for key projects: [Backstage Trust](#) (£20K request), [ACE Touring Grant](#) (£30K)
- Other planned fundraising inc.20th Birthday across the year
- We will begin 2026/2027 with general reserves of £100,000, and Designated Reserves of £81,000.

Please click [HERE](#) for up to date management accounts to give a more detailed financial picture.



20
STORIES
HIGH

Love