



Japanese Arts in the Community

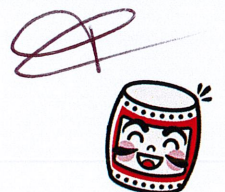
The Obon on the Foyle Festival Group

Report of the Trustees For the year ended 31 March 2024

Trustees Yoriko Marshall
 Cara McLoughlin
 Colleen O'Neill
 Shay Clyde
 Gerry Delaney

Charity Number NIC103135

Registered Office The Playtrail
 15 Racecourse Road
 Derry
 BT48 7RE



The Obon on the Foyle Festival Group

Report of the Trustees For the year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees present their report and financial statement for the year ended 31 March 2024

Principal Activity

The principal activity of the company in the year under review is the advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation, the promotion of racial harmony, equality and diversity. Provide opportunities for the Japanese community living in the North West and surrounding areas to make their customs and tradition part of the local cultural calendar. Address the barriers existing in N Ireland in particular in relation to music and festival by creating a new shared space where both traditions can feel safe and included.

Trustees

The trustees serving during the year were as follows:

Yoriko Marshall
Cara McLoughlin
Colleen O'Neill
Shay Clyde
Gerry Delaney

About the Obon on the Foyle Festival Group

Foyle Obon is a pioneering Japanese arts organisation leading the way in the development and delivery of Japanese arts in Northern Ireland. We focus on local and international partnership building, commissioning, education projects, supporting emerging and established artists and building community and intercultural understanding. We deliver a year-round outreach programme and flagship Foyle Obon Japanese festival. We are passionate about our work and community and are core deliverers of this work in N Ireland.

Our Vision

Using Japanese arts & festival to create & share joy, build community, and celebrate hope in a diverse, inclusive, and peaceful Northern Ireland.

Our Purpose

We empower and support our community of Japanese facilitators, artists, and practitioners of Japanese art forms through innovative artistic programmes, professional development and capacity building.



Our Values

Integrity: The ethical framework of our organisation. We are committed to following defined principles of ethical, honest, and trustworthy leadership. We treat everyone with respect and kindness.

Empowerment: The work of our organisation. We are committed to empowering our artists, audiences, and volunteers by developing artistry, confidence and skills. We support people to own their voices and take their place in the world.

Inclusion: The community building role of our organisation. We are committed to bringing our diverse and far-reaching community together through our Japanese arts and festival programme. We hold space for kind and brave community connections. **OF/BY/FOR/ALL.**

Wholeheartedness: The spirit of our organisation. We are committed to supporting creativity, inspiration, and connection through our arts. We are passionate about cultivating courage and compassion in the spirit of joy and festival. We seek to actively create happiness and celebrate life.



2023 – 2024: Key Projects and Activities

Introduction:

2023 – 2024 was another successful for the Obon on the Foyle Festival Group. Our outreach programme of community workshops continues to focus on using taiko for mental and physical wellbeing. We are delighted with our project with Ulster University which has resulted in a ground-breaking piece of research on the use of taiko as a tool to improve health and wellbeing.

Recognising the therapeutic benefits of the arts is an exciting new phase of development within our work. It formalises relationships that we have built over many years and aims to 'engage all actors who can help and support a healthy local population'. It brings community and voluntary organisations together, sharing skills and expertise as part of an inclusive mental health service as 'true partners.' It is a recognition of the value of the arts and music for a happy, healthy life'.

Our work with carers is solidifying these results. We play an important role in the cultural calendar of the local area with our Festival, our Christmas concert and our appearance at the inaugural One World Concert. We continue to be recognised as an important organisation in the international taiko world, illustrated by our work with Shogo Yoshii and the ongoing exciting collaboration with Kodo.

Key notable activities of the Obon on the Foyle Festival Group in 2023 -2024 include:

Projects:

Taikolove for Carers

This 18-month project, funded by the Department of Health Carers Fund, is delivering 10x 6week courses in Taiko drumming to people with caring responsibilities, in an effort to improve their mental health and wellbeing and to encourage them to take some time for themselves.

The project began in September 2023 and will run to March 2025. We are currently running two classes a week, on a Wednesday and Thursday morning, at the Light Space in Pennyburn. The feedback to date has been overwhelmingly positive with participants expressing their newfound love of taiko and the camaraderie that exists in the groups. We had the idea to provide a small lunch after the workshop so people could come together and chat, this has been a really important part of the experience and has allowed the participants to share stories, to bond and the relax.

Participants will be invited to perform at our Festival in May, but no pressure!

Sunflower Taiko – Drumming for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

We completed our 18-month project with Ulster University to conduct research on the mental health and wellbeing benefits of taiko drumming. A core group of 15 participants committed to three ten weeks blocks of taiko drumming and a performance or volunteering opportunity at our Obon festival. The project began in September 2022 and progressed very well with some members performing at our Christmas concerts in 2022 and 2023 as well as at our Obon Festival concert in May 2023. The research report was collated by Dr Grainne Mc Anee with



editorial input from Sinead Reddin and was launched on March 26th, 2024, in St Columb's Park House. The project is funded by the Department of Health Mental Health Fund.

Irodori Taiko for LGBTQ+ Teens and allies

We are now in the final year of this 3-year project funded by BBC Children in Need. Irodori taiko offers a safe and inclusive space for building confidence, exploring identity, and learning to use your voice – as well as learning to play and perform taiko!

Our group of young LGBTQ+ players and their allies/siblings have been continuing to learn taiko and have performed at our Obon Festivals and Christmas concerts. This year they have once again had the opportunity to go to Tullarvan Mill for a 3-day residential which was really successful and enjoyable.

Going forwards, we are meeting with BBC CIN to explore further development of this project for 25-27.

Foyle Obon Festival Concert 2023

On the evening of May 20th, 2023, we held a Foyle Obon Festival Concert in the amphitheatre of the Playtrail. We had intended to stage our full festival but owing to funding constraints we were only able to stage the taiko and bon odori concert.

We were delighted to welcome Shogo Yoshii to the stage to take part in the performance of Junko's song, which was a wonderful celebration of Junko's contribution to taiko.

Shogo and Fiona also performed together, in a fantastic display of the power of taiko.

Ibuki Taiko, Irodori Taiko and our community taiko teams also performed in the night. Hannari dance led the audience in Bon Odori and staged some beautiful traditional dance pieces of their own. Despite the terrible weather, this was a very successful evening, with high quality taiko and great community atmosphere. The festival concert was funded by DCSDC Community Festivals Fund.

Shogo Yoshii at Foyle Obon Concert 2023

We have been working with Shogo Yoshii since 2019 when he was commissioned to write a taiko piece for performance at Foyle Obon 2020. Sadly, the Covid19 pandemic meant that the festival was cancelled. Shogo continued working on the piece and Ibuki taiko members had been learning this intricate and complex work since 2020. The piece was without a name, and we were honoured to have it named by Junko Okura, one of our longest standing taiko players. She named it 'Inochi Kagayake, warera ga matsuri' but after her sad death from cancer we have been calling it 'Junko's Song'.

We were delighted to welcome Shogo to Derry in May 2023 to take part in final workshops of the piece and to perform as part of the festival concert. This was an amazing performance, and we were delighted to be able to show our audience such a talented player.

One World Festival 2023

The first DCSDC One World Festival was held on September 23rd in the Guildhall. We successfully tendered to perform as part of event and were scheduled as part of the programme in the Guildhall Great Hall. This was a great opportunity for our community taiko groups – Himawari and Irodori – to perform in a public space. They rehearsed hard and were great on the day. Our performance team, Ibuki Taiko, also performed. As part of the festival programme, we also displayed two large lanterns decorated with lantern panel dedications in the Harbour Museum.



Christmas Community Concert 2023

On the afternoon of December 10th, 2023, we held our second Christmas Community Concert at Lisneal College. Funded by the PHA/Clear Project, this was once again an opportunity for the entire Foyle Obon Family of participants, Japanese families, performers, Volunteers, and staff to come together socially to reconnect, perform, dance, sing and have craic!

We had 40 drummers, as well as 125 friends and family members. There was taiko and Bon Odori, talent spots, a quiz and lots of Japanese (and more local) food. This was a wonderful opportunity for our community taiko players to perform for their families and friends and to feel part of the wider Obon family.

Crossing Oceans – Kodo and Foyle Obon collaboration project

The "Crossing Oceans: A Journey through Taiko Drumming and Matsuri Traditions" - Kodo & Foyle Obon Collaboration was an innovative community initiative that sought to unite diverse cultures through the universal language of taiko drumming and festival.

In August 2023, Foyle Obon Directors, Katsu and Fiona Umetsu, travelled to Sado Island in Japan for the Earth Celebration festival, funded by the Daiwa Foundation. Their visit included masterclass workshops with Kodo, meeting with festival production staff gaining insights into festival logistics and planning. Fiona and three members of the Ibuki Taiko team took a private Odaiko masterclass with Tomohiro Mitome.

In November 2023, Kodo members then conducted an online course for our local taiko teams. These early morning Saturday workshops were completely new and extremely significant. Our members were able to directly learn from Kodo masters, increase their knowledge about taiko fundamentals and learn a Kodo One Earth Music composition.

Additionally, Yuichiro Funabashi and Taro Nishita visited Derry in February 2024 to lead workshops, strengthening our cross-cultural collaboration. This visit resulted in the invitation to members of our performance group, Ibuki Taiko, to come to Sado island in August 2024 and perform as one of only three groups chosen as part of the Earth Celebration fringe festival.

Taiko development

As part of our ACNI Project Lottery funding for 23-24, we run a year-round programme dedicated to the development of taiko artists. This initiative offers workshops, training, and performance opportunities, nurtures local talent and expands the reach of taiko drumming in the community. While it is important to provide performance opportunities for our community participants, we are also committed to supporting the development and inspiring the creativity of our local experienced musicians. Over the past year, our artists have worked on developing new pieces and have had workshops with Shogo Yoshii and Kodo.

Intern/Taiko trainee

In late 2022, Foyle Obon welcomed Forton Umetsu to the team as our Intern and trainee taiko teacher. Funded through the Keadue fund (CFNI) Forton has continued to develop their skills and role throughout 23/24. They have worked closely with Fiona on the Carers Project, assisting with all Carers workshops and helping participants with taiko practice. They have set up a system to measure attendance at all events and keep track of evaluations.

They were instrumental in managing Christmas concert and the Obon Festival Concert in May 23, as well playing taiko at the concert! They are a huge asset to our tiny team, and we are delighted to see them grow and become more confident in their abilities.



Funding review:

During 2023 – 2024 we successfully secured funding from the following bodies.

Arts Council of Northern Ireland Project Lottery
Arts Council of Northern Ireland Rural Engagement Programme
Department of Health Carers Fund
BBC Children in Need
Daiwa Foundation
GB Sasakawa Foundation
Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland
Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Festivals Fund
CFNI Keadue Fund
PHA Making Life Better Short-Term Fund
The Honourable the Irish Society

We would like to thank all our funders for supporting us during this past year. We will continue to focus on maintaining relationships with existing funders and diversifying the sources of income.

Financial review

As of 31st March 2024, due to successful funding applications the group was in a good financial position with restricted funds in place in the sum of £52449 towards ongoing festival and programming costs, and ongoing further funding applications prepared, submitted, or pending towards 2024/25. The group has no overdraft facility and no outstanding liabilities.

Structure, Governance and Management

During the period, the Obon on the Foyle Festival Group has ensured stability in structure, governance, and management. Board meetings have been regular and consistent.

Thanks and summary

Thank you to our committee members for their hard work and efforts throughout the year and everything they do to help the core team make our events a success. Thank you to everyone who has taken part in events and workshops and/or been audience members throughout the year. We are proud that our Obon family remains connected and together. Finally, thank you to our funders who have continued to be supportive over the past year.

Yoriko Marshall

23/4/24

Yoriko Marshall, Chairperson

Date



