

## Armstrong Storytelling Trust Trustees Report: Year Ending May 2024

### Significant Activities & Project Updates

The table is an illustration of the activity undertaken in the period June 2023 to end of May 2024.

| Activities                               | Numbers |
|--|---------|
| Zoom Storytelling Sessions               | 3       |
| Live Storytelling Session in Venues      | 238     |
| Storytelling Events                      | 241     |
| Storytelling Sessions with Liz Weir      | 66      |
| Storytelling Sessions with Guest tellers | 175     |
| Training Courses delivered               | 8       |
| Training Course Attendees                | 114     |
| Yarnspinners Attendance                  | 1061    |
| Total Attendees at AST Events            | 6,594   |

### Activity highlights

Attendees at AST events increased by 16% in 2023-24, with 6,594 attendees vs 5,681 in the previous year.

The number of events delivered increased by 8%, 241 vs 223 in the previous year.

### Rebranding of AST

After board approval in November 2023, work began on rebranding the organisation. This was undertaken with Whitenoise, a design agency based in Belfast. The new branding was launched at a well-attended event held in Belfast Central Library on 18 April 2024. AST Founder, Roger Armstrong, outlined the work of AST and the Chief Executive of Libraries NI, Jim O'Hagan, spoke of the valued partnership between AST and his organisation. An invited audience enjoyed stories and music from the storytellers and musicians linked with AST.

The rebranding has been rolled out across the website and into all marketing materials.

## Armstrong Storytelling Trust Trustees Report: Year Ending May 2024

### Internal projects

- Ethnic Voices

This project, where storyteller Janice Witherspoon is working with a group of Syrian Women, giving them space to share their own stories, is drawing to a close. A total of 10 stories have been recorded and transcribed, with the storyteller currently confirming accuracy and consent with each of the participants. The aim is to have the stories finalised, collated and printed before the end of 2024.

- Young Storytellers

The plan had been to deliver a storytelling session in the QUB Seamus Heaney Centre. However with the building being refurbished in late 2023, reopening in late Spring the decision to hold an event here has been deferred to autumn/ winter 2024.

Despite this, several younger storytellers have been trained within the Bordertalk project and we look forward to providing them with platforms to perform in 2024 – 25.

- Training & Development

We delivered 8 x training sessions for Storytellers, library staff, guides and those in the rural community and voluntary sector.

These included:

- Storytelling workshop for Rural Community Network delivered by Janice Witherspoon on 22 June
- Sensory storytelling workshops x 2 for Library staff with Vicky McFarland on 30 August & 6 September
- Storytelling for children with Daniel Morden on 2 February
- Storytelling with Shonaleigh Cumbers 20 April
- Training in storytelling for staff at Hillsborough Castle delivered by Liz Weir and Eamonn Keenan 22 April
- Storytelling for teachers at Stranmillis College with Liz Weir on 4 May
- Story Snacks, storytelling techniques with Sal Tonge on 11 May

### Yarnspinners

Yarnspinners sessions took place in Tullycarnet, Bangor and Lisburn City libraries. AST also supported Causeway Yarnspinners, in Coleraine Library, during 2023-24. Storytellers from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Wales and England were featured. Attendance grew in 2023-24 with 1,061 attendees vs 895 in 2022-23.

## Armstrong Storytelling Trust Trustees Report: Year Ending May 2024

### Glens Storytelling Festival October 2023

With funding support secured from Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, Causeway Coast & Glens Council, Enkalon Foundation and Glens of Antrim Distillery, AST organised the Glens Storytelling Festival, held from Thursday 19 October to Sunday 22 October. A range of 22 events was offered, the majority in person, with one hybrid story swap, with a total of 606 attendees.

### Four Nations

The Storyteller in Residence continued to represent AST in a series of on-going zoom meetings with representatives of storytelling organisations from England, Scotland and Wales. The focus of the meetings in 2023-24 was the planning of the 2024 FEST conference in Glasgow to take place in June 2024, led by Village Storytelling Centre from Glasgow, which will include input from AST.

### Arts Council of Northern Ireland

AST secured funding for two projects from ACNI during 2023-24.

The **Memories are Made of this Project- Phase 2** was funded with £4,100 under the **Rural Engagement Arts** fund, saw us engage with 7 x rural groups, providing each one with 4 x reminiscence sessions, with local primary school children joining the group for the final session. These sessions were very popular with all those who attended. This project is due to completed by end of August 2024.

Under the **Commissioning Programme**, AST was awarded £13,000 in December 2023. This is for **Reclaim, Reframe, Reflect**. This will see the creation of a quality immersive storytelling piece for live performance across NI. Working with professional storytellers and a musician, a story, music and digital experience will be created, reclaiming the forgotten, side-lined and at times corrupted stories of women and feminine archetypes from our folklore and mythologies. The 3 artists involved from AST are Liz Weir, Anne Harper and Vicky McFarland.

### Belfast Harbour Commissioners

A successful submission was made to Belfast Harbour Commissioners Community Fund for £3,000 to support Belfast Memories Are Made of this. This project allowed us to deliver 2 storytelling session to 4 groups across Belfast, with a finale event held in the Belfast Harbour Commissioners office in late November 2023. The artists involved were Sharon Dickson and Geoff Hatt.

## Armstrong Storytelling Trust Trustees Report: Year Ending May 2024

### BorderTalk project

This project, funded by the International Fund for Ireland and led by Storytellers of Ireland started in September 2023. To date 3 x 5-week NOCN Level 2 storytelling training courses have been successfully delivered by Liz Weir and Stephen O'Hara, with participants drawn from the border counties.

The final course is to start in late August 2024.

A new proposal was submitted to International Fund for Ireland for the continuation of the project, with AST as a project partner. A decision is expected in autumn 2024.

### Income Generation

The following income was generated from funding applications made during the financial year to support the various projects undertaken.

| Funder   | Date       | Award                           | Project                                      |
|--|------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Belfast Harbour Commissioners                          | July 2023  | £3000                           | Belfast Memories Are Made of This            |
| International Fund for Ireland                         | July 2023  | €5000                           | Border Talk project                          |
| Enkalon Foundation                                     | Sept 2023  | £500                            | Glens Storytelling Festival 2023             |
| CCGHT  | Oct 2023   | £3,200                          | Glens Storytelling Festival 2023             |
| Glens of Antrim Distillery                             | Oct 2023   | £300                            | Glens Storytelling Festival 2023             |
| ACNI Rural Engagement Arts Programme                   | Oct 2023   | £4,100                          | Memories Are Made of This-Phase 2            |
| ACNI Commissioning Programme                           | Dec 2023   | £13,000                         | Reclaim, Reframe, Reflect                    |
| Causeway Coast & Glens Council Community Festival Fund | April 2024 | £1500                           | Support for Glens Storytelling Festival 2024 |
| <b>Total</b>   |            | <b>£25,600</b><br><b>€5,000</b> |  |



## **Armstrong Storytelling Trust Trustees Report: Year Ending May 2024**

### **Plans for 2024-25**

The focus will continue to be on the priorities we identified in late 2022, namely the development of younger storytellers, ethnic voices and training and development. There will also be a focus on identifying external funding sources to support core AST costs, as the Heritage Lottery project enters its 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year.

Engaging in events with Arts & Business NI has developed our links with new funders and businesses. As a result, applications will be submitted to Open Reach and DWF, a foundation which awards grants for arts activities.

The Glens Storytelling Festival 2024 will take place from 17- 20 October.

Funding of £1500 has been secured in April 2024 from Causeway Coast and Glens Council Community Festival Fund, an increase on the amount awarded in 2023.

CCGHT have allocated £3,200 to the festival in 2024 with an additional application being made to the Enkalon Foundation as well as an approach to a commercial sponsor, Glens of Antrim Distillery.

In terms of financial administration, plans are in place to move all financial processes to the XERO platform. Assistance for this is being provided by Magic Beans, a Northern Ireland based company approved by XERO. This will start in late August 2024.