

ARK T STRATEGY

THEORY OF CHANGE

2026-2027



June 2025
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CEO





CONTEXT / PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ark-T supports children, young people and adults in East Oxford, particularly in Cowley, Temple Cowley and Blackbird Leys. While Oxford is internationally recognised for its wealth and privilege, these neighbourhoods rank among the most disadvantaged in the UK. Here, systemic inequality, intergenerational poverty and social exclusion undermine emotional wellbeing and limit access to education, opportunity and a fulfilling life.

A growing body of evidence – including Ark-T's own evaluation and independent academic research – demonstrates that participation in the arts can significantly improve self-belief, emotional resilience, community connection, and aspirations for the future. These protective factors are strongly linked to improved life outcomes, particularly for those experiencing adversity.

Yet access to the arts is increasingly restricted. Cuts to school arts provision, combined with the rising cost of living, have placed creative experiences out of reach for many – especially those who stand to benefit most. Meanwhile, mental health services remain overstretched and difficult to access, leaving growing numbers without timely or appropriate support.

VISION

A society where everyone, regardless of background or life circumstances, has the self-belief, emotional resilience, and sense of belonging they need to flourish.





MISSION

To build self-belief, resilience and community in East Oxford for those most in need, by improving mental health and wellbeing through inclusive, high-quality creative programmes that are free, consistent, welcoming, and accessible to people of all ages.

APPROACH / VALUES

Inclusive & non-religious

- Ark-T welcomes people of all backgrounds, identities and beliefs.

Community-rooted

- Deeply embedded in East Oxford, we co-create high quality programmes that respond to real local needs with warmth, dignity, authenticity and respect.


Creative & responsive

- We use the arts to foster confidence, resilience and belonging – particularly in communities facing poverty, isolation and disconnection.

Evidence-informed

- Our work is grounded in research, including partnerships with Oxford University and frameworks such as the Wellcome Trust's evidence base for effective mental health interventions.

Collaborative


- We partner with schools, health professionals, researchers, cultural organisations, charities, civic leaders and local artists to create lasting change, amplify our impact, inform policy, and freely share what we learn.
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INPUTS

- Safe, welcoming and inspiring venues, including:
 - The Welcome Space in Templars Square Shopping Centre
 - The Venue on Barns Road
 - The Art Nest at Orchard Meadow Primary School
- Skilled, trauma-informed artists, facilitators, creative practitioners and staff
- Volunteers, peer leaders and community connectors
- Strong partnerships with schools, academics, health professionals, civic leaders, charities, and cultural and community organisations
- Revenue from venue hire
- High-quality resources including art materials, food, digital tools and music equipment
- Funding from charitable trusts, individual philanthropists and supporters

ACTIVITIES - CURRENT PROGRAMMES

- **Art Nest** – A free, creative programme for primary-aged children referred by schools for emotional or behavioural support.
 - **The Art Nest After School Club** – A free after-school version of the Art Nest programme, open to children who have not been referred by a school.
 - **MySpace (Online)** – A free online programme offering creative support to emotionally based school avoiders.
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ACTIVITIES - CURRENT PROGRAMMES

- **HerSpace (Junior & Senior)** – Free creative wellbeing programmes supporting confidence and identity-building for girls (including trans girls) and non-binary young people.
- **The Welcome Space** – A free, inclusive, intergenerational drop-in space open from 10am to 3pm, Monday to Thursday, offering warmth, quiet creativity and connection.
- **Community Lunches** – Free monthly events bringing local residents together for food, conversation and creative workshops.
- **Exhibitions, Festivals & Showcases** – Free public creative events that celebrate local stories and strengthen community visibility.
- **Holiday Activity Camps** – Free, art-based holiday activities for children eligible for free school meals.

ACTIVITIES - PLANNED / EMERGING ACTIVITIES


- Ark-T's planned activities build on our strong foundations to deepen impact, strengthen community voice, and centre dignity, creativity and justice across everything we do.

Programmes for Wellbeing and Inclusion

- **Expand Art Nest** – Continue providing free, creative refuge for primary-aged children referred by schools, with increased capacity, evaluation, and long-term sustainability planning.
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ACTIVITIES - PLANNED / EMERGING ACTIVITIES CONT'

- Grow The Art Nest After School Club – Extend access to children who have not been formally referred, providing safe, creative after-school experiences rooted in emotional wellbeing.
 - Scale MySpace (Online) – Develop our free online creative offer for emotionally based school avoiders, expanding access across Oxford and building stronger digital inclusion.
 - Develop HerSpace (Junior & Senior) – Expand and deepen our free creative wellbeing programmes for girls (including trans girls) and non-binary young people, with new formats, stronger facilitation models, and peer leadership.
 - Launch HisSpace – Develop a new programme for boys and young men, using high-quality arts practice and local community leaders with lived experience to challenge toxic masculinity, build emotional literacy, and nurture positive identity.
 - Launch Reframe – Develop and pilot Reframe, a new non-clinical therapeutic service for 11–25 year olds, created in partnership with other Oxfordshire mental health charities. Ark-T will contribute to this programme by offering young people a safe and supportive space to explore their mental health through the arts, alongside trained facilitators and peers. Designed to meet growing unmet need, Reframe responds to the gap in early and accessible mental health support for young people – particularly those who face long waits or barriers to accessing clinical services.
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ACTIVITIES - PLANNED / EMERGING ACTIVITIES CONT'

Spaces That Centre Dignity and Belonging

- Redesign The Welcome Space – Transform our intergenerational drop-in into a beautiful, high-quality environment that reflects the dignity and creativity of the community it serves – moving beyond donated leftovers to a curated, inspiring public space.
 - Enhance The Welcome Space Offer – Continue offering free access Monday to Thursday, 10am–3pm, with added workshops, expanded creative materials, and a wider welcome to local collaborators.
 - Create a Community Exhibition Space – Designate a permanent area within the Welcome Space to host rotating community exhibitions, showcasing stories, artwork and creative contributions from the community.
 - Introduce an 'Allies Corner' – Establish a dedicated area in the Welcome Space for community members to express solidarity on the issues that matter most to them – such as support for LGBTQIA+ rights, Gaza, anti-racism, and local campaigns – provided they align with Ark-T's core values of inclusivity, dignity and mutual respect.
 - Enhance Community Lunches – Expand our free monthly meals with more nutritious, diverse menus, and develop partnerships with local chefs and community cooks to celebrate shared cultures and culinary traditions.
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ACTIVITIES - PLANNED / EMERGING ACTIVITIES CONT'


Visibility, Voice and Representation

- Increase Exhibitions, Festivals & Showcases – Amplify public-facing creative events that centre local voices, with a particular focus on disabled artists, older artists, and those often underrepresented in mainstream cultural spaces.
- Appoint a Community Curator – Recruit a dedicated part-time curator to co-create exhibitions with the local community, guided by themes and stories the community identifies as important.

Partnerships and Cultural Collaboration


- Build Partnerships with Arts Organisations – Develop creative collaborations with local and national organisations including Dancin' Oxford, the Royal Ballet, Oxford Opera, the Oxford Playhouse, the Ashmolean, the Oxford Philharmonic, Inspire Sounds, local rappers and street artists, and other cultural partners to enrich our programmes, widen access, and increase artistic ambition and exchange.

Advocacy, Co-Creation and Organisational Growth

- Embed Ongoing Community Consultation – Formalise regular feedback loops, creative consultation sessions and co-design processes to ensure programmes remain rooted in lived experience and evolving need.
 - Expand Advocacy Work – Strengthen Ark-T's role in amplifying the voices of marginalised groups through public campaigns, storytelling and creative activism – both locally and beyond.
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ACTIVITIES - PLANNED / EMERGING ACTIVITIES CONT'

- Explore a Full Name Change and Rebrand – Undertake a full organisational name change, rooted in previous consultation and strategic documentation, to ensure Ark-T's name fully reflects our values, purpose and evolving identity.
 - Review and Evolve Impact Measurement – Assess and refine how Ark-T measures impact across all programmes, developing new creative and meaningful approaches to evaluation that are appropriate for our context. This will strengthen our ability to report to funders, demonstrate value for money, and tell the story of our work with integrity and clarity.
 - Develop Ark-T Merchandise – Explore the creation of Ark-T-branded merchandise – such as jewellery, greeting cards, prints and tea towels – featuring artwork from our programmes and community collaborators. Through this initiative we plan to raise funds, celebrate creativity and increase public awareness of Ark-T's mission in a way that is ethical, inclusive and rooted in our values.
 - Prioritise Staff Wellbeing and Fair Pay – Ensure that Ark-T's staff, artists and freelance practitioners are supported through fair, market-rate pay, transparent contracts and a culture of care. As part of this, we plan to review salary benchmarking, invest in professional development and wellbeing, and foster a working environment that reflects the same values of dignity, inclusion and creativity that we promote externally.
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OUTCOMES - SHORT-TERM

- Increased confidence, creative expression and sense of self-worth among participants.
- Reduced anxiety, loneliness and social withdrawal through meaningful engagement and connection.
- Improved engagement with learning, school, and community life.
- Greater sense of belonging and safety in inclusive, welcoming community spaces.
- Increased motivation and aspiration, particularly among children and young people facing barriers to opportunity.

OUTCOMES - MEDIUM-TERM

- Greater emotional resilience and improved emotional literacy.
- Ongoing participation in creative and social activities as part of everyday life.
- Increased ability to self-regulate emotions and proactively seek support.
- Earlier access to support for emerging mental health challenges, reducing the risk of escalation or crisis.

LONG-TERM IMPACT

- A more connected and emotionally resilient East Oxford community.
 - Improved mental health outcomes for underserved and marginalised populations.
 - A recognised model of creative, community-rooted early intervention.
 - Increased recognition of the arts as a vital force for mental health, wellbeing and social transformation across Oxfordshire.
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