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Scotland's Year of Stories 2022

Partner organisation case studies

YEAR OF
STORIES
— 2022 —

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Introduction

Delivered as a partnership between VisitScotland and Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS), with support from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Scottish Government, the Community Stories Programme supported 180 organisations and community groups to celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories 2022.

This document provides a range of case studies from partner organisations involved in the year.

It accompanies the evaluation report for the programme: Scotland's Year of Stories 2022: Telling the Story of the Community Stories Programme.

Contents

Chamber Music Scotland	4
Historic Environment Scotland	9
Publishing Scotland	11
Scottish Library & Information Council	14
Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland	16

Case Study 1: Chamber Music Scotland

Themed Years present a range of opportunities, and a number of organisations used Scotland's Year of Stories to develop new events.

We spoke to Paul Tracey, Chief Executive of Chamber Music Scotland, and composer Gareth Williams, to find out about **Songs from the Last Page** – a song-writing and live performance project they delivered as part of Scotland's Year of Stories.

Supported by EventScotland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the project celebrated storytelling and storytellers through song.

Why did your organisation decide to get involved with Year of Stories and have you been involved with Themed Years previously?

Gareth: Year of Stories was a nice call. It was very open and accessible, you could be quite bespoke and tailored. With the timing of the Themed Year there was a serendipity. I had an idea bubbling away and this opportunity came along, coupled with the fact I could approach Chamber Music Scotland. It was the right idea at the right time.

When the open call was announced, we had this idea sitting on the table. There was some material there to trial, but Year of Stories provided an opportunity to develop this collection of songs and present them. With most things you would have a period where you would write all of the work, but this was a moveable process right through the year, with new songs emerging throughout, so that was really interesting. It was constantly moving and growing.

Paul: From Chamber Music Scotland's perspective, Gareth approached us, and it was an opportunity to work with him in a longer project and it was a lovely idea that resonated. From a strategic perspective there was funding attached to it which meant we could build capacity, and I could see how it could kind of stretch who we reach as an organisation and how we work with partners. That was really interesting.

How do you feel your organization has contributed to the collaborative element of the themed year, and what benefits have you seen in return?

Gareth: We have found new partners and new sectors. We were developing literary chamber pop music and we took that to literary festivals, and through that we were making new connections. We have done new festivals. For me it was my first time in Skye, and Leith and places like that. These were new for me as an artist, and that was helped by the funding and the partnership.

The library tour was new, and that was a dream that was stitched into this. This was a genre of music intended to be performed at book festivals and libraries. We collaborated with artists, so I think that's a few connections.

Paul: For us as an organisation this movement into Chamber Pop was really great, and that's something about doing this project is that these things can give you a vehicle to explore something. Most of our music is instrumental so how do you connect it in with Stories? But it aligned with our exploration of where chamber music can go, and Gareth provided an opportunity to explore that and that was an opportunity to reach a different audience, and different partners, like book festivals. And there were also collaborations with partners new to us, for example SEALL and Skye book festivals were new for us, and Findhorn Bay Arts - with them we were connecting into their festivals that were funded through Year of Stories. So collaborations with those funded through the Themed Year were good. Recently we have been touring and we have been able to build on those connections, like our ensemble will go to Findhorn later in the year. We can see evidence that these partnerships are extending.

I would also say by exploring the languages (Scots and Gaelic) it gave us a good opportunity to make connections.

Gareth: The other one is the collaboration with writers – both living and dead. There was a collaborative approach to accessing that literature. I was able to have nice encouraging conversations with writers like James Robinson. They gave their support and intrigue and allowed me to create new songs. I was very grateful to EventScotland for their help at initial stages. They were able to explain the fund, very helpful and encouraging in terms of project management, and they came to the shows and were present which counts for an awful lot. I would say I always felt they were really invested and supportive of the project. The feeling was they liked it and wanted it to do well. There were also other opportunities like the Scottish Parliament. They were keen to give platforms for this, it felt additional to just funding it.

Paul: They seemed supportive, invested and interested in Gareth's project. They have a loud voice, so that platform really helps. The other partnership is the one between Chamber Music Scotland and Gareth. Because the project was over a long period it enabled us to develop a relationship with Gareth as an artist, and when you do it it's unlikely that the relationship just drops and falls away. The fact it happened over almost a full year enabled us to stop and take stock and problem solve. There were issues with so many partners and such fresh material. That was really new and I wish it was possible to incorporate that in to more work. We were also trying to find our way in post-COVID audiences. It wasn't the easiest time to go out with a new audience, and we found out a lot about that audience so there was a lot of taking stock.

How did the Year of Stories align with your creative practice and in what ways did the themes inform the development of your work?

Gareth: I felt quite strongly aligned with the Themed Year. It wasn't just a bit of flag waving. I felt invested and part of a programme of other materials. That's down to the communication about what the Themed Year is about. Storytelling is a rich part of our lives, and culturally significant and that is a good premise. The idea was a good one. It can be hard to make the theme fit, but this was the right opportunity to do that.

Paul: I think sometimes with something like this the temptation can be to find something that fits the money, but this wasn't like this. This was a concept that Gareth had that aligned so well, so it felt meaningful, rather than trying to create a project that fits. So in terms of our creative output it was really nice and made sense. At the beginning it was hard to market the event. We knew what it was but it took a while to crack how to get the public to understand it. Working across art forms you can either bring people together or fall between gaps, so it was about finding the place for it. For us, there was also a question when Gareth first approached Chamber Music Scotland. It was a really positive thing, but we had to question whether we were the right organisation because some would say it isn't chamber music – but it allowed us to do something we were looking to do and enabled us to stretch in a supported way. There was something exciting, and the Themed Year was a vehicle to explore it. It wouldn't have happened without the Themed Year. Maybe it could have been a small scale project, but we couldn't have done it to this scale.

What impact has the Year of Stories generated?

Gareth: The audiences showed curiosity, they couldn't quite imagine what it was going to be like. There was a feeling that we were able to share the books that were sung at the door, and part of it was about encouraging them to read those books too.

For me as an artist I have received funding from Creative Scotland to record an album and present a residency at the Fringe for a week. It's not over yet. The narrative of impact is still going. That is all off the back of the Themed Year.

Paul: At an organisational level, I would say in terms of reach it has helped us a lot with different audiences. I don't think any of this was really our typical chamber music audience so that was interesting for us, it helps us with awareness as well, and we were able to get additional press coverage as well. We could also use that income to leverage other funding, from organisations and individual donors. They saw this project and thought they really wanted to invest in it. So that was an impact. We could increase digital content so the project helped us to keep up that. And also the legacy thing that Gareth is talking about there - although it's to a lower level of involvement, there is still involvement. We are supporting Gareth's recording and performing, and we have talked about the potential to take this outside of Scotland too.

Gareth: We went into the year not knowing what was going to happen, and what audience would do, but coming to an end of the process when we were evaluating and thinking about the legacies the project feels really successful. One big thing that kept coming through was that audiences were going for known things and safe bets. We had a crisis in terms of cost of living at the same time, so people were going for things they knew, and this was about saying "this is a cool thing, come and see what it's like". I think generally we did well with audience but there was always that question about audience patterns. As the year went on that conversation dissipated.

The journey started in Paisley with a masked performance. The audience were separate and masked and attendance was low. We were still firmly in COVID era. And then over the year there was a bit more green life on the branch. Audience attitudes started to relax. People were becoming more comfortable at events. When we finished with Music in the Green event in Glasgow that was

very busy. It was more of a chatty, singalong concert, so we had come back to concert etiquette. People were happy to sit together. The habits were changing, but it was a slow thaw.

We also reached a wide range of geographies. There was such a wide spread, like Ness, Skye, Aberdeenshire, library tours and quite targeted areas that EventScotland was keen for us to hit. There was a range of venues and therefore a range of communities. I was really happy about that. It was the best way to do it. If you are talking about people and place, you have to go and see them.

From our evaluation, we also know that 94% of the audience reported that they were more aware of the wealth and diversity of stories in Scotland, and 84% reported that they were more likely to visit the places connected with the stories.

Paul: Another impact also relates to the Gaelic and Scots. Going into this project, I wouldn't have thought it would explore this, but it really did. It helped us with our explorations. There was a definite strong people and place and language theme, and that has been really valuable. It was not what we were targeting but was an offspring.

Could you tell us about any longer term impacts you think may result from the Year of Stories?

Gareth: Looking beyond the album, we want to see if we can see if we can take Scottish stories to other places, and use this approach in other places we go. So there is something in there to be explored. There is also ongoing potential there with partners and funders. A few relationships that we would like to deepen, like libraries as performance spaces.

Personally, I started this project seeing myself as a composer, and I left it thinking of myself as a singer and songwriter. This project has changed how I identify as an artist, and the way I'm teaching my students at the University of Edinburgh. It has changed the way I am working on operas and music theatre – that has changed as a result of the approach we took.

Paul: Gareth has such a strong reputation as a composer and there was a slight developmental thing with being more of a leading performer, and I saw that in the way you talked about it. There's something valuable in that Gareth is established but maybe that brought different people in to our audiences because Gareth is known for other things like musicals and operas.

Gareth: The fact that the project lasted a year meant there was a chance to change how I did things, and grow in confidence. It became much more a conversational event and I was more at ease. But maybe it will be remembered as the one after COVID. In lockdown I was playing piano at home and wondering if I would ever play for people again, and there was something about deciding to perform again. The Year of Stories was the vehicle for that. The timing was a way to move forward.

Paul: I can see how we could work with Gareth again in a similar scale project, like working with actors in a narrative format and seeing how that works. There are definite legacies but there is also that connection with an artist to be built on.

Gareth: For the Themed Year as a whole, I had a strong awareness of what was being delivered and what was going on. You would see the logo everywhere, so there was awareness. Timing wise I think it was a great opportunity for people to have support, funding for festivals, tours and so on, because they were desperate for it after COVID. So across the sector it felt it was making an impact on organisations, and through the different strands. There were a lot of projects going on. Visibility was very high.

It's hard to think Year of Stories in isolation. The Themed Years are becoming very important for artists. They really chalk up cultural value. We start to depend on them. I remember Coasts and Waters, and I was involved in Homecoming, and we are curious about seeing the next theme. It is part of the fabric of making work for artists. I know less about how it sits in the public consciousness, but for artists it's as important as the Proms in London. It allows so many artists to reach audiences.

Would you be interested in taking part in future Themed Years, and would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Paul: Only a fool would say no if the theme is a good fit. There is never a point in trying to push a square peg in a round hole. I would relish the idea of doing it again, but we have to wait and see what the theme is and if there is something that fits. I might be inclined to have slightly less partners, we had so many across Scotland.

Gareth: I only have good things to say about it. There are always things to learn as well. You want to allow others opportunities if you come back and do it you can take that learning from the first experience forward. And it will be interesting to see what the next theme is. So yes, the short answer is yes.

Case Study 2: Historic Environment Scotland

Themed Years present a range of opportunities, and a number of organisations used Scotland's Year of Stories to create opportunities to boost their activities.

We spoke to Gillian Macdonald, Head of Sales & Marketing at Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to find out more about HES's involvement with the Year of Stories.

Why did your organisation decide to get involved with Year of Stories and have you been involved with Themed Years previously?

We run the largest operator of heritage visitor attractions in Scotland. We operate sites like Edinburgh Castle and Stirling Castle, sites right across the country from the Borders to sites on Orkney and Shetland. So, our involvement with the Themed Year was to try and put on activity that brings visitors to our sites, whether it's actually activity taking place at our sites or whether it's digital content that reflects the theme of the year.

We have been involved in previous Themed Years and we often use the theme across the organisation. The objectives of the Themed Years are primarily around stimulating tourism in the events industry - we take a broader look at it in our organisation and try and see where we can integrate the theme in some of the other things that we do and then bring all that activity together. For example, we might deliver a research project that is related to the Themed Year.

Did you commission any new work or artists as part of the activity that was delivered?

Yes. We produced a storytelling competition with young people. As part of the competition, we invited young people to visit our sites and come up with a fictional story based on it. This was delivered in partnership with the Scottish Book Trust and the Scottish Storytelling Forum.

One of the other elements of the program was an exhibition that we ran called *Unforgettable*. It was an exhibition featuring untold stories of 12 people from Scotland's history. They were people that you might not have heard of who were not famous but had left their mark on Scotland in some way.

How do you feel your organization has contributed to the collaborative element of the Themed Year, and what benefits have you seen in return?

As part of every Themed Year we work in partnership with different organisations, depending on the nature of it. This year was a good example of that with the storytelling competition. For us it's a really positive thing. The Themed Year gives us an opportunity to partner and collaborate with other people, which is a key element of what we try and do as an organisation anyway. It also lets

us think about how we can promote or tell stories, or how we can raise the profile of sites in a slightly different way.

What other benefits do you think Themed Years offer partner organisations like your own?

I think it benefits smaller organisations that don't necessarily have budgets to explore collaborative opportunities. And that approach of working together brings more bang for your buck. The sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts. The Themed Year gives a platform for partnership.

What impact has the Year of Stories generated?

We measured social engagement with the content we produced related to the Themed Year, including content generated from the storytelling competition and press coverage, and we have seen a benefit from that. We have also seen a benefit related to Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Previously you could talk about it, and no one really knew what you were talking about, but talking about the storytelling part of our heritage and people helps to make it more real. I think the Year of Stories has given a more accessible platform to talk about ICH.

What other new partnerships did you develop as part of the Year of Stories? Were these new partnerships?

The storytelling competition was one example. One of the other projects was an exhibition. As part of the Coasts and Waters Themed Year, we had worked with some documentary filmmakers to produce a documentary about a community living in Torness and a traveller community there. We took some of the photography that was taken as part of that project and created an exhibition which featured in North Berwick and during the *Fringe By the Sea* event. So that was quite interesting and brought the two Themed Years together.

One of the big benefits of the Themed Year in general is that it brings industry together and it gives a bit of inspiration to say "here's something we could use to create new activity and new events around". So, rather than everybody just working in their silos and on their own, it brings people together.

Would you be interested in taking part in future Themed Years, and would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Yes, we'll continue to be part of them. We find that some themes are easier to apply than others, and Year of Stories was particularly good, but we can usually find something to do to support the theme.

We are quite a big organisation, but even if you are a smaller organisation involvement in the Themed Year can help enhance what you do. You can be part of the promotional programme, which can help you to reach audiences that you might not reach through your own channels, and you might have an opportunity to create partnerships that become something bigger and long term. So, I think the Themed Year is good for all sorts of organisations, assuming that they feel that the theme resonates with their organisation and activity.

Case Study 3: Publishing Scotland

Themed Years present a range of opportunities, and a number of organisations used Scotland's Year of Stories to deliver new work.

We spoke to Vikki Reilly, Business Development Manager at Publishing Scotland, to find out more about their involvement with the Year of Stories.

Why did your organisation decide to get involved with Year of Stories and have you been involved with Themed Years previously?

Publishing Scotland is the trading networking body for the publishing sector in Scotland. We usually do something to help promote or align with the Themed Year, and the Year of Stories was a great platform to promote our member publishers and their work and let people know about the sector, because it was about storytelling. So, we got involved with the Year of Stories in a much bigger way than we have with previous Themed Years.

Usually we promote relevant materials through the Books from Scotland website. But this year we did a much bigger programme of events, with promotion and marketing around it. This had three main strands:

1. We engaged with book festivals to identify opportunities to programme events at the festivals with our member publishers. We pitched events around the five themes from the Year of Stories.
2. We delivered events exploring how the publishing industry works, this included pairing together authors and their editors. The events explored not just books, but the working relationship between the author and their editor. We also did an event around the *Lyrical Fiction Prize* at **Borders Book Festival**.
3. We also promoted Scottish storytellers. This built on the usual Books from Scotland website, with a section of our website dedicated to the Year of Stories, which featured author interviews and book recommendations around the five themes.

Did you commission any new work or artists as part of your activity?

In addition to the activity above, we commissioned Hannah Lavery, the Edinburgh Makar, to write a poem celebrating Scotland's Year of Stories. This featured in our Spring/Summer catalogue.

How do you feel your organization has contributed to the collaborative element of the Themed Year, and what benefits have you seen in return?

We collaborated with everyone – with festivals, bookshops, publishers. That was the name of the game. For example, Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust put on a strand of events in partnership with Scottish Storytelling Centre, and for that I put together reading lists for each of the themes for their events, and they were all from our publishers as well. We collaborate a lot as an

organisation anyway, but everything we did the Themed Year was geared around collaboration. When we went to the book fairs we would take the catalogue with us and brand our stall with the Year of Stories logo so people would talk to us about it. We did an event with the Edinburgh International Book Festival, and we ran a fellowship where we invited people to find out more about Scotland's publishing. Pretty much everything we delivered was a collaboration.

This is the first year that we were really connected with VisitScotland in a much bigger way, and that was nice. We would tell them what we were doing so they could promote it, and it was nice to be so involved. I think the collaborative approach was great for VisitScotland to see just how much can be done and how vibrant the publishing scene is. It's easy to pay attention to the big names in Scottish books, so it was good to show that there is a rich scene underneath the big star names.

What other benefits do you think Themed Years offer partner organisations like your own?

I think it is great. It's really sensible for all these official channels to know what everyone else is doing. It's also a great opportunity for Scottish Government to see the breadth of the culture industry. We really punch above our weight in terms of what we can do with little resources.

How did the Year of Stories align with your creative practice and in what ways did the themes inform the development of your work?

We don't normally work as closely with the festivals. We wouldn't usually pitch events to book festivals, so that was a new thing for us to do. The special section of the website was just for the Themed Year. We usually do catalogues, so that wasn't new, but working with the festivals directly was new, as was getting together the online content – and to do it on the Books from Scotland website and the Publishing Scotland website that was something new.

What impact has the Year of Stories generated?

I must admit this last year was a difficult year – it's a shame it was the Themed Year because it was still a post-COVID recovery year, so the book festivals didn't have as high numbers as they usually do, so audience figures weren't as great as they could have been. All the organisations were pleased to be involved, and the publishers were pleased with the work we did. But for the general public the impact was probably less, due to it being a COVID recovery year and due to the cost of living crisis. We're already seeing with some of the book festivals this year that the audience numbers have been brilliant. 2022 feels like a bit of a blip, rather than the way of things to come, but those circumstances could not have been changed.

I'm hoping book festivals will now be more aware of our member publishers and so will be more likely to promote them. And I hope we will keep the relationship with VisitScotland to get the stories out and to help them show the diversity of what Scotland has to offer.

Would you be interested in taking part in future Themed Years, and would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Absolutely! The regular update meetings brought an awareness of organisations – including some I had never heard of – and it was great to have that opportunity to become aware of everything that was going on. It creates a cohesive offer.

Case Study 4: Scottish Library & Information Council

Themed Years present a range of opportunities, and a number of organisations used Scotland's Year of Stories to create opportunities to boost their activities.

We spoke to Marion Kunderan from the Scottish Library & Information Council to find out more about their involvement with the Year of Stories.

Why did your organisation decide to get involved with Year of Stories and have you been involved with Themed Years previously?

I sit on the Working Group for the Themed Year, and our CEO sits on the Steering Group. As part of this I provide feedback on the activities libraries have been delivering, and provide a flow of information between the VisitScotland team and libraries. I also shared funding opportunities with libraries and information on how they could promote their activities. Our role is more of a connecting and information role.

How do you feel your organization has contributed to the collaborative element of the Themed Year, and what benefits have you seen in return?

We have basecamp groups set up for different themes, for example we have a Reader Development Group, and an Adult Library Services Group. So, we made use of these groups to share opportunities, and for this Themed Year it was a pretty easy sell. The Year of Stories was a gift for libraries, because it shone a light on what they already do, and allowed them to showcase the activities they do – not just in terms of sharing stories – but also in terms of collecting them. We made sure they knew all about the funding opportunities and connected them up with other partners within the group. I know that a lot worked with the Scottish Book Trust, as part of the Year of Stories, but many of those partnerships already existed.

What other benefits do you think Themed Years offer partner organisations like your own?

The chance to sit and be part of a positive Working Group, with regular meetings, was a really positive experience. It gives you the chance to raise your profile with those other partner organisations and to show the opportunities that are there and the kind of work that you do. And although some of those partnerships were already established, there were some new partners in the Working Group who maybe didn't know a lot about what libraries have to offer and I'm hopeful that it created new connections and opportunities. This is something we will follow up on as part of our overall strategy. I think it's been a great opportunity for us.

What impact has the Year of Stories generated?

I think it was perfect timing for libraries because they had come out of very difficult time post-pandemic. It gave them an opportunity to reconnect and it allowed them to collect stories. I know that one of the services used funding from the Community Stories Programme to work with their community in collecting COVID stories.

It reconnected the libraries with their communities. Nearly every service ran at least one or two events. All of the themes really resonated with libraries and New Stories provided opportunities. For example, there were poetry workshops that looked at connecting with refugee communities. There were lots of activities and that gave libraries something positive to do after a difficult time. It was a really positive thing for libraries to reconnect with the users, and to promote Scottish storytellers and Scottish writers and books. And obviously the Themed Year was covering the whole of Scotland, so it really was a gift. There has always been interest in previous Themed Years, but the Year of Stories really resonated with libraries.

There were also poetry workshops and writing groups that sprung up through the Year of Stories, and I imagine they will continue on beyond the life of the Themed Year.

Would you be interested in taking part in future themed years, and would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Absolutely. It helps the services, and it also provides them with opportunities to respond to the Public Library Improvement Fund. Sometimes services struggle to come up with new innovative ideas every year, but the Themed Year can give them something they can build on and link into, and that gives them a focus for planning for the year.

Case Study 5: Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland

Themed Years present a range of opportunities, and a number of organisations used Scotland's Year of Stories to support partnership working.

We spoke to Steering Group Member Donald Smith, Chief Executive of Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland (TRACS) and Director of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, to find out more about their involvement with the Year of Stories.

Why did your organisation decide to get involved with Year of Stories and have you been involved with Themed Years previously?

TRACS has a strong focus on storytelling, and one of our major annual projects is the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, which falls in October of each year so the Year of Stories had a strong alignment with our activity. I was also involved with the Steering Group for the Themed Year.

We did not apply for any specific funding as part of the Year of Stories, but instead saw it as an opportunity to broker partnerships to widen the impact of the year. However, we have organised major events as part of previous Themed Years. I felt the Year of Stories had such a wide potential and wanted to give priority to new projects coming through. The collaborative potential is one of the central benefits of the Themed Year.

Did you align any of the activities you delivered through the Storytelling Festival to the Year of Stories themes?

Yes, we took all of the themes, and invited proposals and commissions based on these themes within our own events, as part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival.

Did you commission any new work or artists as part of the activity that was delivered?

We did. We commissioned about 20 performances and projects. These involved a total of around 70 creatives.

How do you feel your organisation has contributed to the collaborative element of the Themed Year, and what benefits have you seen in return?

The Associate Director of the Festival took a very active role in the industry group, delivering presentations and reaching out to organisations. As the Storytelling Festival Director, I did a lot of press and media work to support the Themed Year. This had a knock-on benefit when it came to promoting our own festival later in the year, as we were able to build on some of the momentum from the Year of Stories.

We also played a key role as an enabling partner for two of the major events. This included **Figures of Speech** – an event related to literary storytelling, and the **Map of Stories** project. This was an astonishingly ambitious project which presented storytelling traditions and the contemporary situation across parts of Scotland. This had a much larger investment from Creative Scotland and we used our grassroots knowledge and networking and the platform of the Storytelling Festival to enable that to happen and it's been a big success. We also buddied up with quite a number of the community projects. That varied from quite minor things, like being able to put people in touch with good people who could help them, to offering some of them platforms. For example, there was the Deaf Blind Society project, there was the School of Scottish Studies Archives project, and there was a community film from a multiple deprivation estate in West Dunbartonshire. We gave a showcase to numerous other projects, some of which hadn't necessarily been funded by Scotland's Year of Stories but saw the opportunity to participate. As an example, the Northern Lighthouse Board did this fantastic project about the lives of the lighthouse keepers and their families all of whom were now becoming a bit of history because of automation. This captured some of those memories and experiences with a film, a presentation and a discussion.

That partnership working brought diverse content to our festivals, and it brought diverse participation which helped us to delivered against our equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. It has also seeded new work for the future. So for example, we had a special kind of cost of living response called Stone Soup Collective. These were community events, combining stories, music and food. We did about 20 of these, some very successful and some not, and we did one at the Storytelling Centre, but the rest were scattered in different communities. One of those was specifically related to a refugee project, and that paved the way for a much bigger collaborative project that's going forward in the coming year.

What other benefits do you think Themed Years offer partner organizations like your own?

The Themed Year displays what Scottish Government calls the "Team Scotland" approach. You have all the key bodies and agencies, including people that are representing public sector industry networks and private sector industry networks around the same table and the approach is to ask what they can do to contribute to the Themed Year. That produces some very, very interesting and sometimes unpredictable outcomes. For example, in the Year of Stories, people begun to get a handle on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). That is something that TRACS have been grounded in from our inception. The definitions come from UNESCO frameworks that are international but the term is a bit of a jargon, and through the Steering Group I just saw the whole thing heat up and begin to come to the bubble. And so you saw things emerging where there was a strong kind of strategic collaboration or understanding about ICH and how it has this ginormous potential for Scotland. It has ginormous potential for our organisations, it has ginormous potential for local communities, so it's very interesting that the Community Stories Programme asked projects to think about how they were contributing to this ongoing celebration and promotion of those things that they felt within their communities were of significant ongoing importance, because that's the thing about ICH. It's not decided by UNESCO, it's a response to what people think is vital and important in their own areas and communities and networks. I felt that was a huge benefit.

What impact has the Year of Stories generated?

There have been ongoing partnerships and further partnerships that have been developed because of the Year of Stories. That includes some funding opportunities that have emerged that we have been able to take advantage of and that have affirmed the role of storytellers. Through the Year we have seen storytellers enhanced, and further opportunities for employment, and I don't see that petering out. The Year of Stories had boosted the profile of storytelling as a kind of art form in its own right.

I think there are ongoing benefits to collaboration with other partners, and specifically around strategic policy advancement around ICH.

Would you be interested in taking part in future Themed Years, and would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Absolutely. Obviously we have to make a judgment each time according to the theme, thinking about how we would come at it and encourage our networks to get involved.

We would definitely encourage other organisations to engage with the Themed Year. We get involved on a regular basis with small organisations, as well as some big ones, and I think one of the biggest successes of 2022 was saying they could be part of this Year of Stories. It's good for them, it's a development opportunity.

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