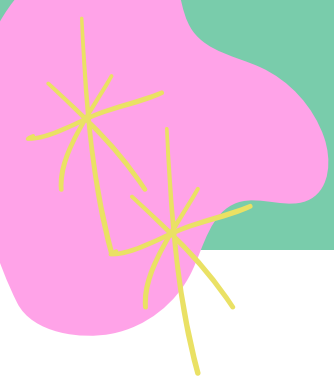




THE VILLAGE STORYTELLING CENTRE

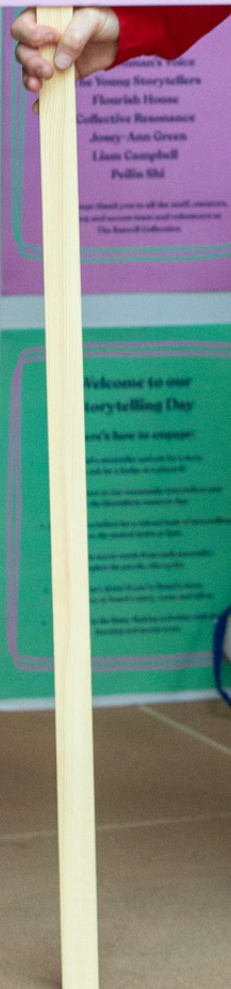
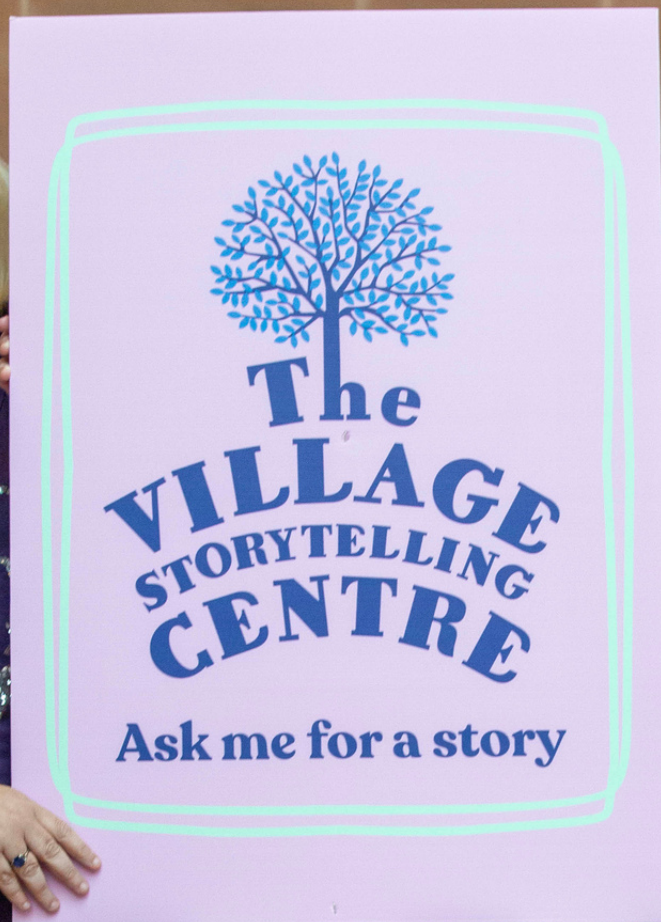
Creating Storytelling Communities,
Growing a Glasgow Scene

DR STEPHE HARROP
2025



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1.1 INTRODUCTION

This report explores the work of the Village Storytelling Centre to nurture a creative ecosystem, rooted in contemporary storytelling, for, among, and with Glasgow's people and communities. It documents how the interplay of the Village Storytelling Centre's different activities, including storytelling in early years and education contexts; creative community groups; collaborative projects; artform development initiatives and commissions; and professional training programmes all combine to generate a diverse, accessible, and energised storytelling scene.

Glasgow is full of folk who can tell a good tale, but storytelling as a contemporary artform has, until recently, had limited impact within the city, and Glasgow's diverse voices have been underrepresented among the UK's storytelling professionals. This report documents the aspiration of the Village Storytelling Centre to encourage the growth of a cultural landscape in which participation in storytelling is available to all of Glasgow's people and communities, in contexts ranging from taster workshops and local events to professional training and potential career-development.

This study is rooted in the experiences and reflections of key stakeholders, including regular participants in the Village Storytelling Centre's youth and adult groups; new and emerging storytellers who've benefitted from its mentoring and training processes; as well as the organisation's core storytelling practitioners.

It identifies how interactions between the Village Storytelling Centre's activities, from grassroots storytelling communities, to emerging cohorts of new storytellers, and growing networks of established storytelling professionals, are empowering the creation of new platforms and events across a range of neighbourhood and city-wide locations, enhancing the cultural vitality of these areas, and positively shaping the emergence of a contemporary storytelling ecosystem with a distinctively Glasgow style and spirit.

1.2 ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This research applies the dialogical methodology developed by Stephe Harrop for the book *Contemporary Storytelling Performance* (2023: 19), an approach based on the work of pioneering sociologist Arthur W. Frank. Over a period of two years (2024-25), Stephe observed the work of the Village Storytelling Centre's practitioners, periodically inviting them to take part in reflective conversations about their activities. She also interviewed a sample group of participants in the Village's community groups, as well as current and recent members of its Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme.

The content of these conversations was unique to each individual, but their structuring questions were inspired by the 'storytelling methodology' developed by Anne Pirie and Liz Firth for *Arts at the Old Fire Station* (2024: 6).¹ This appropriately story-centred approach foregrounds the narration of participants' individual experiences, expressed 'in their own voice and words' (6). It allows for the gathering of 'rich qualitative data' (7), while holding space for the articulation of 'unexpected, emergent, personalised, or complex' feelings and understandings (7).

Recordings of these conversations were then transcribed into a series of 'stories'. These stories appear throughout this report, offering first-hand reflections on the range of creative activities and cultural networks facilitated by the Village Storytelling Centre, and the way that these can offer individuals and groups pathways to active participation, and self-recognition as part of an emerging, city-wide community of storytellers.

This work additionally forms the basis for a visual mapping (2.1) of the interconnected range of activities undertaken by the Village Storytelling Centre, which highlights the many flows of participation, interaction, cooperation, and creative synthesis which contribute to the emergence of a Glasgow-centred community of storytellers. In this report, the visual map and participants' stories combine to offer an integrated, multi-vocal account of how the Village Storytelling Centre works to create access not only to, but between community and education contexts; collaborative projects; artist development schemes; and performance platforms. It tracks how this approach empowers a

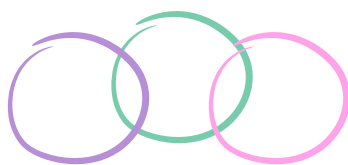
diverse array of participants and practitioners to identify themselves as storytellers within a growing Glasgow scene.

In these stories, participants and practitioners frequently refer to the Village Storytelling Centre simply as 'the Village', a piece of informal naming which reflects both their familiarity with the organisation, and their sense of belonging to a known community of peers, neighbours, collaborators, and friends. To avoid repetition, there are times when this report follows the same convention. There are also moments when the Village's professional practitioners, past and present, are namechecked - often simply by their first names. These include Trinidad Cabezón Droguett (who leads Story Cafes and adult community groups); Shona Cowie (currently an Associate Artist of the Village); Daiva Ivanauskaitė-Brown (international performer and community storyteller with adult groups); Stephanie Morris (formerly a facilitator, and recently commissioned to develop a performance for the Village); Lababa Naqvi (facilitator and Associate Artist); Dan Serridge (the Village's Artform Development Lead); and Colin White (the Village's Community Stories Lead).

In analysing the multiple threads of the Village Storytelling Centre's activities, and their impacts, this report draws on the language of cultural vitality. This is defined by the Centre for Cultural Value and The Audience Agency as the 'creation, dissemination, validation and support of arts and culture as part of everyday cultural life', in ways which 'collectively shape the identity and wellbeing of communities' (2025). This concept resonates strongly with Creative Scotland's ambition to ensure that people from all parts of society can 'access, participate in and value a range of artistic and creative activities' (2025: 4) in ways which provide 'meaning, inspiration and collective experience', simultaneously 'benefiting health and wellbeing' and 'defining and enhancing communities' (2025: 2).² It is applied in this report to help identify the multiple dimensions of the Village Storytelling Centre's activities, and to articulate the variety of ways in which participation in storytelling, and a sense of belonging to a community of storytellers, impacts the cultural lives of people and communities in Glasgow. The language of cultural vitality also helps to conceptualise the Glasgow's emerging storytelling scene as an ecosystem in which multiple individuals and groups interact and co-create to produce a range of cultural outcomes within a shared environment.

2.1 MAPPING A GROWING GLASGOW STORYTELLING SCENE





3.1 CREATING STORYTELLING COMMUNITIES

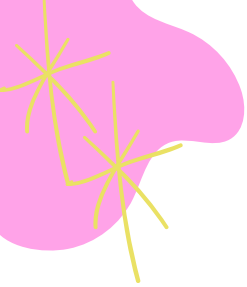
A key characteristic of the Village Storytelling Centre is its distinctive ability to combine city-wide, national, and international impacts with rootedness in a specific locality. Based since 2000 in the neighbourhood of Pollok in South Glasgow, the Village Storytelling Centre serves as a known and trusted hub for cultural and social activities, offering a friendly, creative space for community building, confidence raising, skills development, and artistic self-expression.

The wide-ranging, inclusive provision available at the Village's homebase helps to enhance wellbeing and a sense of belonging for local people at every life stage. Through engagement with its regular community programmes, performances, and events, a diverse range of individuals and families have the opportunity to explore story-led creative and social activities, which in turn can open up further pathways to participation in a city-wide storytelling scene.

3.2 CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Practitioners from the Village Storytelling Centre frequently work in partnership with Glasgow's schools and colleges, and in early years settings, bringing creative workshops, projects, and performance opportunities to children and young people across the city. The Village's own regular Early Years provision also includes Imagine Lab, a sensory storytelling session for children under 5 and their adults, and Connecting Stories, a space for parents and carers to nurture their connection with new babies and to build supportive peer networks. Its Story Club (for children aged 4-8) makes space for children to come together, participating in playful storytelling and art activities to build confidence, friendships, and positive wellbeing. For older children (8-12), weekly Story Makers sessions aim to instil confidence through creative arts and stories, empowering each individual to find their own unique voice. Young Storytellers (12+) is a youth-led storytelling project that uses storytelling and related arts to explore themes of relevance to its participants, as well as generating original works to be shared at local celebrations, and city events and festivals.





● ● ● Andrew's Story ● ● ●

I was a teacher. I saw a post – the day it was actually closing – for the Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme. And I thought, “I’m gonna put in for that”. So I just applied for it. And I got it. Which was really excellent.

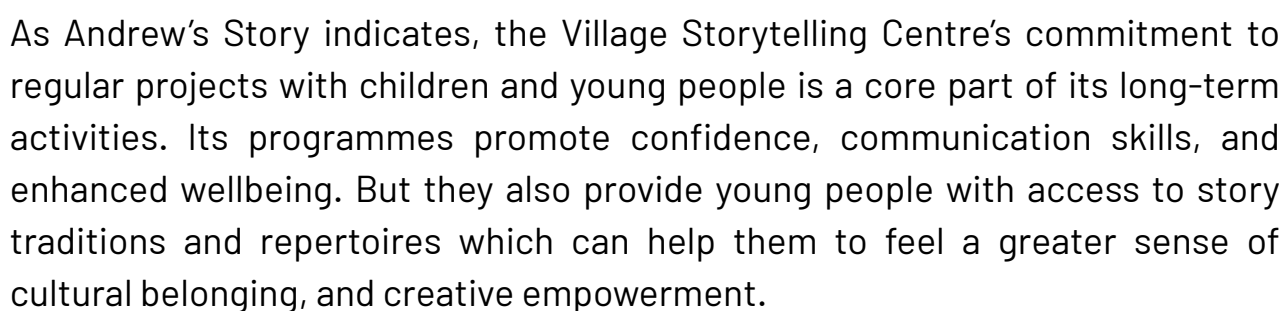
Because you’re involved with the Village, you meet other storytellers from all across the UK, sometimes from across the world. So it’s been really good for building confidence, and making connections. And getting an opportunity to use storytelling in your day-to-day work, in your career. It led to freelance work, then it led to a permanent position with Village Storytelling Centre. I’m now Storyteller for Children and Young People.

I’m interested in traditional Scottish stories; stories from the Highlands and islands; stories from the Gaelic tradition. And also the tradition of the Travelling People. So that’s my area of focus. This summer, at the sessions I’ve been doing with the kids at Story Makers and Story Club, all the stories have been Duncan Williamson stories³. ‘Cos the kids don’t always get a chance to hear about Duncan and his stories. I’ve taken three stories: one about the broonies; one about selkies; and one about fairies. Then Linda Williamson⁴ came to the Village to tell the kids some stories about Duncan and their life.

I’m trying to give the kids a sense of the tradition that’s there; to give kids in Glasgow access to stories. For example, yesterday I was telling a story about the broonie on Cara, one of the islands. Last weekend I’d been up to Argyll, so I got pictures of the island, and you could see the house the broonie’s meant to stay. So I’ve been telling the kids these stories, and showing them these things. Giving them the opportunity, I suppose, to keep those stories and traditions going in the city.

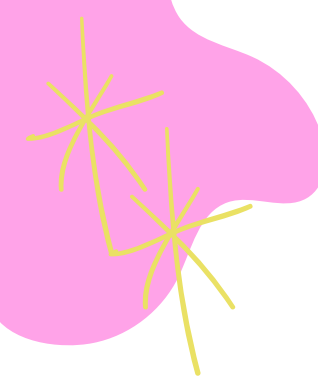
Glasgow’s a good city for storytelling; you’ve got loads of characters; loads of comedy. But I don’t know how much traditional storytelling there is, outside things like the Village. So to get that stuff out there, that’s important. Keeping the traditions, keeping the culture alive. That’s the thing that motivates me.

The Village is an inclusive place. It’s actually interested in people. There’s a genuine interest. It’s not condescending. It’s giving people from all different backgrounds a platform. And that’s an important thing. It ties in with Glasgow’s ethos, I think.



Evie's Story describes how this feels from the point of view of a young participant, reflecting on the range of positive outcomes her involvement with the Village, from her early years to her teens, has led to.





● ● ● Evie's Story ● ● ●

I've really been involved with the Village all my life. When I was a little baby, my Mum brought me along. Through primary school, then up to high school now, I've done most of the projects.

A really big highlight for me was performing at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, at the Village Storytelling Festival. I performed once, just after lockdown, doing a piece called Paper Rainbows, which was really special 'cos it was my first big performance. And my second performance, Break A Leg, was a piece that me and the other Young Storytellers created. It was really nice, 'cos it was something we had formed from just a thought, to a performance.

It's really helped me with my confidence. I've always been a nervous person, and coming to the Village has helped me perform with confidence. 'Cos at our group, on a Monday, we've got performers; we've got directors. And I'm really proud to say that I'm a confident performer now. I'll take on a challenge, and I'll try my best with anything I get given. I'm really proud that the Village has helped me do that.

I've made so many friends. Some of the friendships I've made at the Village I think I'll carry on with, for years and years. I think that's a really special thing.

It's so important that there is a next generation of storytellers. Stories are so important, 'cos they get passed on through generations. I think it's really good and special that stories are getting passed on to me, and I'm getting the skills to pass them on. So it's not a dying thing. It's really connecting, and community-based. Yeah.



As Evie's Story shows, the Village Storytelling Centre's projects strengthen youthful participants' sense of their own place within traditions of storytelling in Scotland, learning about and retelling tales passed on from previous generations. But they are also supported to recognise their own creative agency, developing story-centred performances and projects which speak directly to their own contemporary contexts. Of the two Village Storytelling Festival performances Evie describes, Paper Rainbows (2022) explored friendship, connection, and the transformative power of seeing things through different eyes, while Break a Leg (2024) focused on neurodiversity and identity (based on a graphic novel previously created by the Village's Young Storytellers with illustrator Jillian Mendoza). Both projects were devised and performed by the Young Storytellers themselves, with mentoring and direction from Colin White, the Village Storytelling Centre practitioner who leads the programme. These creative projects not only showcase participants' communication skills, teamwork, and self-confidence, but also their growing capacity to share ideas about the world, and cultivate a sense of social connection, through story.

Both Evie's Story and Andrew's Story reveal how sustained interactions between children and young people and professional storytelling practitioners can facilitate the growth of shared projects, rooted in creative encounters between traditional story cultures and contemporary lives. These experiences allow young people to recognise their own place within a network of participants in storytelling which stretches from their own peer group, to well-known local professionals, to international tradition-bearers like Linda Williamson. Creating performances for Glasgow events, including the Village Storytelling Festival, also supports the Village's Young Storytellers to recognise their own cultural activities as part of a city-wide network of diverse storytelling voices: a creative community within which their insights, perspectives, and innovations are valued and celebrated.

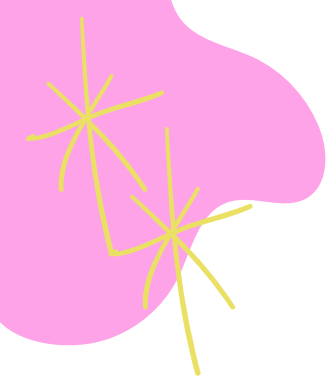
3.3 ADULT COMMUNITIES

The Village Storytelling Centre also offers a core schedule of activities for adults resident in local communities, with the aim of improving participants' wellbeing, enhancing their sense of community, and building friendship networks through shared creative explorations. Long-running groups include Pollok Voices, which offers a laid-back, social experience of crafting stories and performance to people living in the Greater Pollok area; This Woman's Voice, which provides women in the Pollokshaws area with a space for creative expression through storytelling and art; and Voices of Peace, a weekly workshop for Glasgow's women refugees, asylum seekers, members of diaspora communities, and New Scots, where participants are supported to share stories of their heritage, life-journeys, and hopes for positive futures.

For these groups, the Village Storytelling Centre's homebase, in a residential area of Pollok, represents a space of welcome, enjoyment, and supportive exchange. Different groups evolve their own weekly rituals of greeting; arranging the room to their liking; making hot drinks; sharing snacks and chat, helping participants to feel a sense of ownership in relation to the space, as well as the social and artistic practices they develop there. Regular session facilitators, drawn from the Village's team of professional practitioners, become known and trusted as friends, with their own diverse backgrounds and languages – the current team includes practitioners of Chilean and Lithuanian heritage; as well as representatives of Scotland's different linguistic communities – adding to the sense of inclusive, convivial welcome.

Initial access to these groups often comes through community referral, meaning that participants with no prior knowledge of storytelling are able to explore it as a new experience. However, as Helen's Story shows, participants are quickly able to develop new skills in devising and performing stories, enhancing self-confidence, while simultaneously building friendships and social support systems which increase their sense of belonging, and wellbeing.





Helen's Story

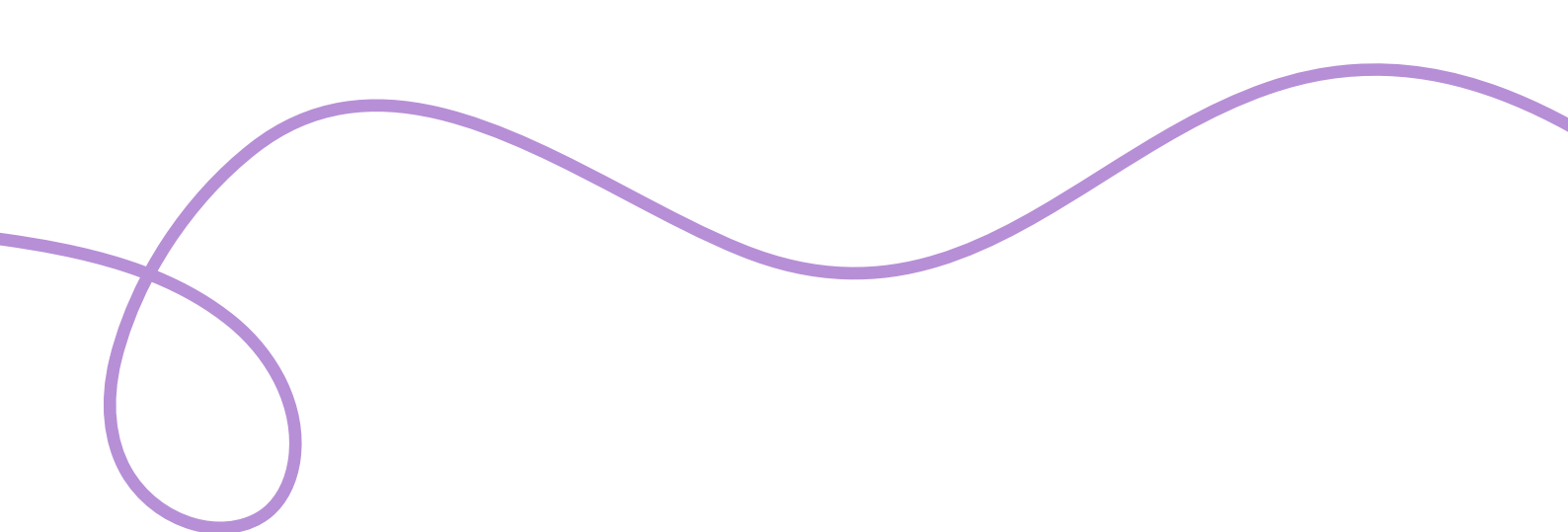


I was first involved just as the pandemic came in. Martin from my housing association telephoned me and said, "Would you like a telephone call from the Village?" So that's how I got into contact. I was talking to Steph; she was phoning me every week. And then when restrictions were ended, I was invited along to the group – Pollok Voices. So that's where I've been ever since, for five years.

It's good making up the stories, and then performing them. We've done a few festivals, in front of different people. We did a performance about Queen Victoria's visit at Crookston Castle, at an open day, getting the people to join in. At Christmas we done a performance at a community dinner. Part of it was based on my wee mouse story: me as a mouse went up the Christmas tree and watched all the lights. So that's been good. That's really engaged my brain. Quite exciting. Quite nerve-wracking. But once you get started you enjoy it.

We done another performance for the environmental programme, up at The Pollok Centre. Before the pandemic I had actually taken a nervous breakdown. So the pandemic made me feel quite isolated, at times. I've got a park across the road. And I used to look out and say, "I wish I could go out there." So when the Covid restrictions ended, I was able to go out walking in the park. It's really helped: listening to the birds; listening to the river flowing by. It felt safe. A safe place. So that was my wee story that I performed, about that time.

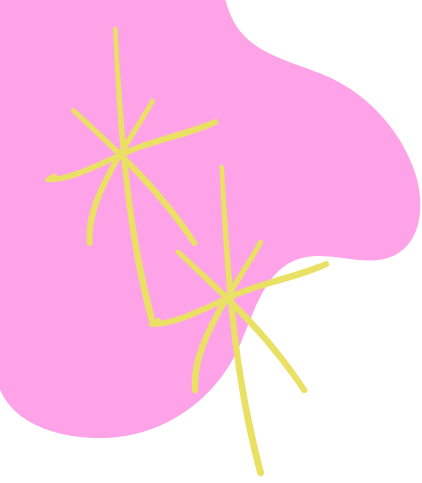
I would never in my whole life have thought I would be doing performing, like that. But there you are. I started coming, and my confidence has grown. Daiva and Trinidad have been great. Bringing you out. Giving you encouragement. And the group, the girls – I've really made good friendships there. We've always just got on, and cared for one another. It's been a nurturing group, I would say. I'm on my own, so coming out here has kept me going.



Helen's Story reveals the rich interplay between place, community, and storytelling creativity which is central to the Village Storytelling Centre's work. Participants are supported not only to create sociable peer networks within their weekly sessions, but also to pursue projects in collaboration with local organisations, and to make performances for neighbourhood events and venues. In this way, the growing competence in storytelling fostered by the Village's activities provides participants with a gateway to become involved in other (environmental; heritage) groups and networks, as well as the experience of becoming visible, vocal community representatives through public performance. As Helen's Story shows, such experiences can significantly enhance people's sense of involvement, safety, agency, and belonging in their local neighbourhoods, as well as enriching the cultural vitality of their Glasgow communities.

The way that storytelling activities can enhance personal communications skills and confidence, while promoting a vital sense of social validation through the shared experience of community performance, is also strongly present in Fathima's Story, where she reflects on three years of involvement in the Village Storytelling Centre's Voices of Peace group.





● ● ● Fathima's Story ● ● ●

It has been over three years since I joined the storytelling group. I first heard about it through my friend Lababa. She told me about this group and I am so grateful she did.

From the very beginning I felt happy, relaxed, and – most importantly – at home. The time I took for myself helped me realise something powerful: that I could freely speak my ideas, share my thoughts, and also learn from the stories of others. I truly enjoy my time here.

Before this I had never spoken publicly about my story. Storytelling gave me my first ever opportunity to do this. I still remember the first ever time I spoke. It was at Pollok Community Centre. I was extremely excited and happy. Not just me but my whole family and friends were proud of me.

The Village Storytelling Centre has given us something special. Space to express our feelings, and share our experiences. No-one interferes. No-one judges. We are free to speak about everything and anything. And that freedom, that space, means so much.



Here too, the significant value that participants find in the Village's supportive, low-stakes, creative spaces is clear. As Fathima's Story shows, working with and through stories allows participants to process complex lived experience, while also enhancing their language and communication skills, among safe and friendly peer networks. But this provision of a safe space for self- and group-directed storytelling explorations is complemented by the additional opportunity for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to share stories on the community's public platforms. In this way, the Village Storytelling Centre's commitment to providing local performance opportunities, in collaboration with neighbouring organisations and venues, not only enhances cultural vitality, but also progressively empowers participants to occupy a public place in their family and community networks, as respected storytellers with important tales to tell.

In addition to their activities in Pollok, the Village Storytelling Centre's practitioners also devise and deliver peripatetic Story Cafes, which offer groups and organisations across Glasgow a bespoke, sociable experience of story-led creativity in their own spaces. However, as Karen's Story shows, these one-off encounters can prove an important gateway to more sustained engagements with storytelling.



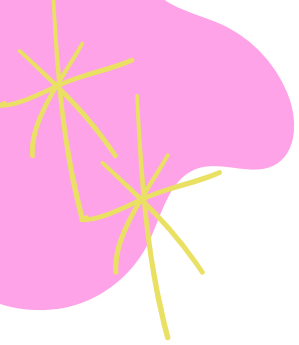
I am a member of Glasgow Disability Alliance. It is an organisation that is led by disabled people, for disabled people. And they have different taster courses. And after you've been to a taster course it's up to you if you want to follow on and continue. I went along to a Story Cafe. Trinidad was the storyteller that day. She said it was in Pollok. I stay in Cardonald. And then I just came along. And that's how I became a participant in the storytelling.

I was born with cerebral palsy. And cerebral palsy has left me with a voice that doesn't quite convey my intelligence. And I've always got to come back to people, and say "I am intelligent". Your voice doesn't match up to what you are. So for many, many years that has been the bane of my life.

But here, for one of the projects we actually had to perform a story. So the fact that I sat there, and I performed my own story is something I wouldn't have done. The storytelling has gave me the confidence to do that. They've gave me the confidence be that person that I am all the time. I'm now 60. So it's taken me a long time, to be that person.

We performed in St James Church, and then we performed at the Village Storytelling Centre. My stories are about family, and past times. Even from just describing the building, or describing the setting, it takes people back. It's a connection, 'cos we're all together, in that one story. If you're telling a story, and you can describe it well, you can make that setting come alive. Then the people who know it can visualise it from memory, and the young ones who're listening to it for the first time can visualise it in their own way. It's history coming alive, to them.

I've always been able to write my feelings. But being here with the other girls, it's nice, as well. 'Cos we're all different. But we've none of us been put in a corner. We've each got a place to shine.



Karen's Story clearly articulates the way that Village Storytelling Centre's community participants, often accessing and experiencing storytelling for the first time through a Story Cafe, can discover in this practice a valued tool for self-expression, and cultivating social connection. For Karen, sharing her treasured family stories offers a route to overcoming ableist stigma, while using her newfound storytelling voice to build community and intergenerational solidarity through her oral performance of Glasgow memories.

The distinctive blend of sociable dynamics, creative skills-building, and story-sharing on neighbourhood platforms which characterises the Village's community-based programmes creates impacts which include improved personal confidence and wellbeing for individuals; the cultivation of nurturing friendship groups; and the opportunity for participants to become a visible – and vocal – presence in their local communities. This work results not only in happier, healthier, and more confident individuals, but also in the emergence of a grassroots community of storytellers: people who share an enjoyment of creative expression through stories, and are developing the skills to raise their diverse voices on public platforms throughout Pollok, and the city of Glasgow.

At the opening of the Village Storytelling Festival in 2024, this community of storytellers shared their work alongside national and international storytelling artists at an opening event held at the Glasgow School of Art. Their video and visual artworks covered the School's walls, while a witty and warm live storytelling performance drew wisdom for today from lived Glaswegian history. The festival concluded with the now-traditional celebratory day of community-led activities and performances (including offerings from Pollok Voices and Young Storytellers) at St James' Church, in Pollok. In this way, the Village Storytelling Centre's work supports its community participants to engage in creating accessible, inclusive cultural events and performances at a neighbourhood level, while simultaneously developing pathways for individuals and groups to gain experience of performing on public platforms as part of Glasgow's growing storytelling scene.





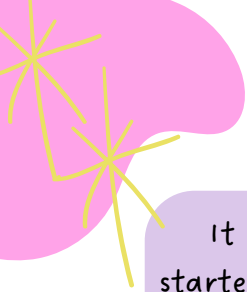
4.1 DEVELOPING GLASGOW'S STORYTELLERS

In addition to nurturing self-confident, outspoken communities of storytellers at grassroots levels, the Village Storytelling Centre is also committed to the development of a storytelling performance culture in Scotland's most culturally diverse city. Unlike Edinburgh, Glasgow has not been a key location for twentieth- and twenty-first-century reimaginings of traditional oral storytelling. Despite the existence of the Better Crack (or Craic) Club, a venerable storytelling club which gathers in the city's West End, until recent years storytelling as an artform has had limited impact within the city. The working-class, urban, and New Scots voices which distinguish contemporary Glasgow have similarly been underrepresented among recent generations of storytelling professionals.

The Village therefore aspires to identify, support, and provide platforms for a range of new storytellers, through collaborations, commissions, and the development of its Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme. This work aims both at empowering artists in neighbouring fields to discover their storytelling potential, and helping emerging artists to recognise storytelling as a viable route for their talents and aspirations. As a result, the Village Storytelling Centre is already beginning to produce 'graduate' artists and practitioners with the professional skills to work productively in a range of creative contexts, and with the cultural self-confidence to actualise their own vision of a contemporary Glasgow storytelling scene.

4.2 NEW STORYTELLERS

One route towards the creation of a diverse Glasgow storytelling ecosystem is the development of collaborative relationships with artists in related fields, whose practice has the potential to overlap, entangle, or combine productively with story. Lababa's Story shows how such an encounter with contemporary storytelling allowed a community artist in one field (visual art) to radically refocus her working life, and her sense of creative identity and potential.



● ● ● Lababa's Story ● ● ●

It was absolutely a coincidence. And I really am so glad that happened. I'd just started volunteering at Amina - The Muslim Women's Resource Centre, as a community artist. It was just for a couple of weeks. Someone said: "Would you like to attend a session that's going on? It's about storytelling." I thought: "That sounds interesting. OK, I'll go." Shona was delivering the session, and she asked us to draw something. So I drew, and she was like: "How were you able to do that?" And I said: "I am an artist." She said: "Would you like to work for us?" And I thought: "Wow - why not?" So that's how I ended up working with the Village Storytelling Centre.

I have been involved in Voices of Peace, with Daiva. We have some very loyal participants. Voices of Peace is all about bringing their stories together, and creating something beautiful out of it. We have created this beautiful bond with each other. That has been going on for a couple of years now.

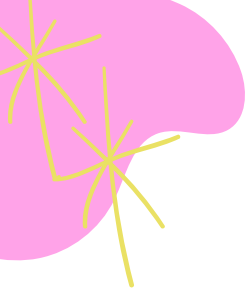
Recently I did a collaboration between the Village Storytelling Centre and Hemat Gryffe.⁵ It was with a group of women who have experienced domestic abuse. And it was such a successful project. We met for seven weeks, sharing stories in Urdu and English, and we created a very beautiful patchwork. It was five feet by five feet. It conveyed their resilience, their strength, and their hope for a brighter tomorrow.

For me, storytelling is like healing. In my country, almost every woman is a storyteller. But I never knew storytelling was a thing, in Glasgow, until I came here. Storytelling is an important tool in bringing cultures together; bringing the community together. You help people tell their stories. You give this platform to people, where they feel that they are being heard. And they realise that there are so many people out there who are maybe facing the same challenges, who have the same issues. So we are not alone.

Storytelling has given me a voice. And has improved my self-confidence, as well. I feel now I have this platform where I can tell my story to people. I feel heard. I don't feel lonely. Sometimes I used to feel a little shy. But if you are a storyteller you just have to say goodbye to your shyness. And I am so glad that I am able to do that. I feel that it brings the world together, because when you're telling a story from another part of the world, it's like you're bringing that place here, to Glasgow. So it's connection; connecting people.

I am so grateful for the Village Storytelling Centre for giving me these lovely years, and these opportunities to work with them. It has transformed my life. Plus, you earn money, doing something you love - which is the best thing! I am really hoping I can flourish more in the future with storytelling.





Lababa's Story shows how the Village Storytelling Centre's proactive approach to identifying and developing potential collaborations can empower a range of arts practitioners to discover their own, distinctive storytelling practices, acting as a gateway to career development. Lababa's current work with the Village includes enriching the work of long-term community groups (Voices of Peace), as well as establishing and delivering bespoke projects in partnership with third-sector organisations (like Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid), making story-led creativity accessible and engaging for a wider range of participants. Her capacity to work in Urdu as well as English crucially enhances the tapestry of languages through which storytelling can be experienced both in Glasgow, and Scotland. Her own storytelling identity and practice has also flourished during this period, during which she has performed at locations including Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts, the Burrell Collection, and at an annual guest-hosting of Edinburgh's Guid Crack storytelling club (facilitated by the Village's Dan Serridge, Trinidad Cabezon Droguett, and Andrew Wilson).⁶ She has also embarked on a storytelling apprenticeship with Scottish Storytelling Forum (SSF), in partnership with TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland) and based at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, working to build a repertoire of tales which blends narratives from her Pakistani heritage with traditional Scots folklore. From an initial, serendipitous encounter with the Village Storytelling Centre, through a process of co-operation, mentorship, and skills-building, an artist in one field has been empowered to identify herself as a storyteller, adding a new, resonant, and necessary voice to Glasgow's storytelling scene.

The Village Storytelling Centre also aims to engage with potential new storytellers through its regular artist commissions. In recent years, these commissions have provided opportunities for Glasgow-based artists with an interest in storytelling to work with Village's practitioners to develop a performance for the biennial Village Storytelling Festival. The terms of these commissions identify storytelling as the predominant focus of the work to be created, but they also articulate an open, curious approach to projects which might challenge or broaden traditional expectations of storytelling forms.

For example, theatre-maker Raymond Wilson's *I Hope Your Flowers Bloom* (Village Storytelling Festival 2022) was a contemporary meditation on masculinity and urban ecology, which went on to be featured in the Made In Scotland Showcase (2023). While *Smoke and Sickle* by Emery Hunter and Bobby Bradley (Village Storytelling Festival 2024; featured at the Scottish International Storytelling Festival 2024 and – retitled *Dregs* – at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2025) delivered a powerful reimagining of traditional selkie tales, navigating deftly between BSL, Visual Vernacular, and English, just as its protagonists slip between worlds.

This inclusive approach to identifying practitioners whose work has affinities with oral storytelling, and who might be supported to discover their own storytelling voice and practice, plays a key role in the Village Storytelling Centre's aspiration to cultivate a vibrant, self-confident storytelling scene in contemporary Glasgow. Their commissioning process seeks to engage with artists who might benefit from focused support from established practitioners, while bringing their own unique perspectives and energies to the creative challenge of reimagining storytelling performance for contemporary Glasgow audiences.

4.3 EMERGING VOICES IN STORYTELLING

Such externally collaborative approaches are complemented and extended by the Village Storytelling Centre's in-house Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme. This scheme offers aspiring storytelling practitioners the opportunity to undertake a three-month, paid placement with Village Storytelling Centre, receiving structured support from core team members with specialist skills in both applied and performance storytelling. Emerging Voices in Storytelling participants have the chance to make an active contribution to the delivery of community projects, while developing their own performance work for platforms including the regular Sangs An' Clatter event, a mixed-bill of stories and music presented at venues across the city, and as part of the Village Storytelling Festival.

This programme is designed to be appealing and accessible to people with an existing interest in story and/or performance, but not necessarily familiar with contemporary storytelling. Liam's Story, for instance, recounts how he was signposted to the programme through his youth theatre. It reveals how the Village Storytelling Centre's embeddedness in the cultural life of the city, and commitment to providing rich, hands-on training experiences, is increasingly allowing creatively curious young people with no prior access to the field to envisage themselves as part of a vibrant, self-confident and distinctively Glasgow storytelling ecosystem.



I've been part of a youth theatre company called Toonspeak for the past eight years. And someone from that company reached out to me and said the Village Storytelling Centre has got this opportunity to bring on emerging storytellers for a paid placement. And as soon as I saw it, I thought this was a great opportunity to really dive into storytelling.

When I started, I didn't know anything about storytelling. I thought it was purely just reading a book to kids. But learning with Dan, and everyone else at the Village, it's been an unreal experience. I've done a lot of theatre in my life. And I write poetry, and stuff. But storytelling just gets that connection from the performer to the audience in a way that nothing else can.

Through my whole life, everyone always said to me that I need to smooth out my voice. Because it's so Glaswegian that it's not good for acting. Then when I started storytelling, they were like: "No, no, no - let's hear the Glasgow twang!" And it's just nice to actually be myself, without having to hide behind a mask. It's helped me a lot, as well. Allowing people to see me for who I really am. It's made me a lot more chatty, and approachable, knowing that I can talk about anything. And the people will enjoy it. 'Cos that's all that storytelling is. You being you, and telling a story.

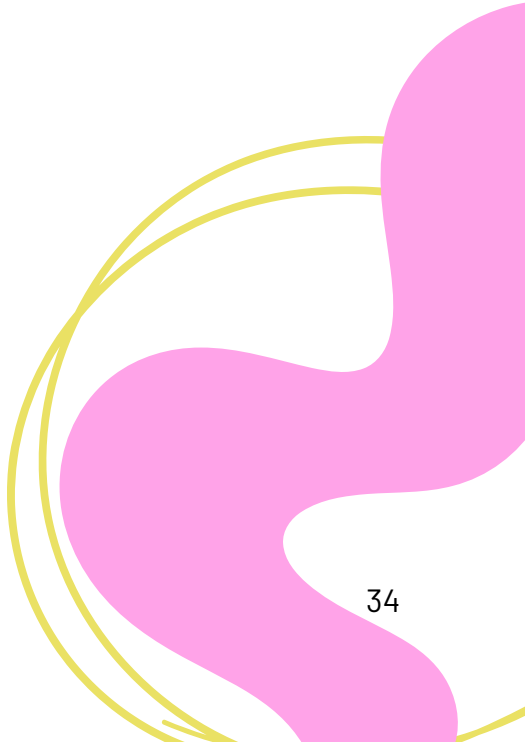
We've recently finished the training, but I've been working with the Village here and there, and they've got a few projects coming up that they want me involved in. So it's gonna surpass the programme, and hopefully it's gonna turn into a career.

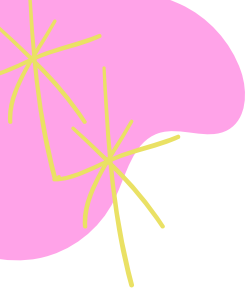
I also facilitate drama groups across Glasgow, and it'll be a great way to get more people to know what storytelling is. Because it's so unheard of. I'd never even heard of it, before doing it. And I think we need to share that with the younger generation. 'Cos they'll love it, as well.

It's exciting. Me and a few other people at the Village Storytelling Centre have been talking about creating a youth network, to connect younger people within Glasgow. Honestly, it's fantastic to be a part of it. And I want to stick in this area of storytelling. It's a thrill to be part of something that's just growing.



Liam's Story offers a clear picture of how Emerging Voices in Storytelling provides a well-supported, highly-networked encounter with a contemporary artform which many young people may not have experienced, but which offers engaging, creative routes to improved skills and self-esteem; the acquisition of professional skills in applied arts and performance-making; and increased awareness of the ways that storytelling can contribute to the establishment of rewarding career pathways. It also indicates the importance of the Village's commitment to empowering storytellers to speak in their own voices, curating programmes and performances where Glasgow Scots is actively celebrated as a richly expressive medium for telling stories. This account further highlights the self-sustaining quality of such initiatives, with this highly energised, youthful practitioner now determined to share his positive experience with younger cohorts of Glasgow's future storytellers and story audiences.





5.1 GROWING A STORYTELLING SCENE

The ability of the Village Storytelling Centre's Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme to empower its participants with sense of their own cultural agency in relation to Glasgow's growing storytelling scene is also strongly evident in Frankie's Story. This tells how an artist who came to the organisation entirely new to oral storytelling has been able to establish a thriving creative practice, fuelled by a love of stories and a richly intercultural sensibility, within the contemporary city. It also shows how the creation of cohorts of skilled, self-confident story practitioners is contributing to the changing face of Glasgow's growing storytelling ecosystem.



I first got involved because I saw their call out for Emerging Voices in Storytelling. And I was really intrigued by it because it was about oral storytelling, which was something I'd never gotten into before. As somebody who is a theatre-maker and a writer, it seemed like the best of both worlds. So I went for an interview at the Village. And they offered me a spot. And that's how I started with them.

I'm grateful all the time for my experience with the Village. Now that I've done this programme, I have a much better idea of the place that storytelling sits within the wider cultural and artistic landscape. I know how to interact with the industry, the community of storytelling. And also, I know so much more about how storytelling can interact with an audience.

I have taken that, and just run with it. The programme finished in July. In August, I decided to put together an application to Creative Scotland. And I was very, very lucky, and they said: "Yes, here you go!" Our first show was in November.

The aim of Wildcard Stories is to introduce audiences to contemporary storytelling. We get quite a lot of people who've never been to a storytelling show before. Which is really exciting. And then people who come back for the next gig, which is amazing. Also to introduce practitioners to the art of storytelling: in every show we have at least one person who's never done storytelling before, and we bring them in. And alongside that, once a month I'm running the Glasgow Storytellers Group, which is a really nice, casual group setting for people who are interested in using storytelling in their creative practice.

I've become a lot more engaged with my community. Last year I was offered a gig working with Govanhill International Festival, right here in my neighbourhood in Glasgow. And they brought me into the archives, I got to learn loads about the local neighbourhood. All of our stories; our histories; and this community, which has been an immigrant community for so long. And then I got to tell those stories back to the people of my community. So from a job that I got through the Village, I'm now really connected with my local community. As somebody who's also an immigrant myself, I really cherish that. Our final Wildcard Stories is going to be part of the Govanhill International Festival, and we're going to be telling stories about the local area.

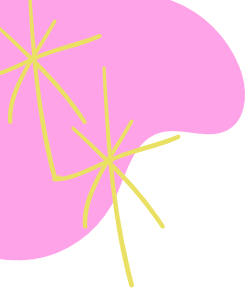
The Glasgow voice is just a little bit different. Our identity includes so many things. Coming first from the Highlands and Islands to Glasgow, to the Southside. Then the Irish, the Jewish community, the Italians, the Pakistani community, the Roma community. And now, we're welcoming in refugees from around the world. And storytelling has allowed me to be a part of that, in a way that I didn't expect when I moved to Glasgow. Finding a place within that tapestry, through storytelling, has been absolutely incredible.



Frankie's tale evidences how focused training and support from the Village Storytelling Centre allowed her to substantially refocus her career, applying her existing skills in writing, performing, and event producing to the creation of a new storytelling night, which quickly began to attract sold-out audiences at its popular Southside venue. Following the proactive precedent set by the Village's cross-disciplinary commissions, her work has brought together practicing story-artists (including other graduates of the Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme) with local musicians, visual artists and others whose work potentially aligns with theirs, consciously widening the community of participants and audiences in Glasgow's growing storytelling scene. In this way, the influence of the Village Storytelling Centre can be seen impacting beyond its direct projects and initiatives, resonating through the work of its new storytelling practitioners as they develop their own creative networks, platforms, collaborations, and careers.

As the reflection of a New Scot who has enriched her sense of belonging through storytelling, Frankie's Story also highlights the potential of this emerging storytelling scene to celebrate the extraordinary range of Glasgow's voices, in a city which has a long heritage of welcoming and sheltering displaced people and diasporic communities, from the Highland Clearances to twenty-first-century asylum seekers and migrants. Her experience highlights how the progressive development of contemporary storytelling ecosystem in Glasgow can recognise, amplify, and celebrate the many different storytelling heritages and voices found within the city's diverse, urban communities.

Dan's Story also highlights the need for this widening storytelling ecosystem to root itself in a sensitive awareness of the cultures, narratives, and story-sharing practices already present in the city. As an accomplished storytelling performer, Dan has created critically-praised long-form works for national and international events including the Village Storytelling Festival; the Scottish International Storytelling Festival; the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; Festival at the Edge; Moth and Butterfly International Festival; and Storytelling Festival Zwolle Unlimited. But in reflecting on his work as Artform Development Lead for the Village Storytelling Centre he stresses a different aspect of his role, identifying listening as a key skill for practitioners aiming to grow inclusive, sustainable storytelling cultures.



Dan's Story



Before coming here, I'd been telling stories in a specific set of contexts: festivals and street-theatre; and in education. I'd been doing that for years. And an opportunity came up to apply for this job, as a storyteller with the Village.

Coming here, I had to understand more about the depth of story. To see how storytelling can be used as a driver of community development, and community cohesion. Story in unconventional, community spaces. And with people who are coming to it with a particular level of vulnerability; a sense of needing this process in some way. So the work has forced me to look quite closely at the process of what is occurring when storytelling is happening. Here, there's a need to celebrate what already is; who people already are.

Now, I'm Artform Development Lead. It's a role that looks at the artform, and particularly its applications in the city. What it means to have a storytelling scene. And part of my job is about leading training, trying to build a wealth of practitioners within the city of Glasgow.

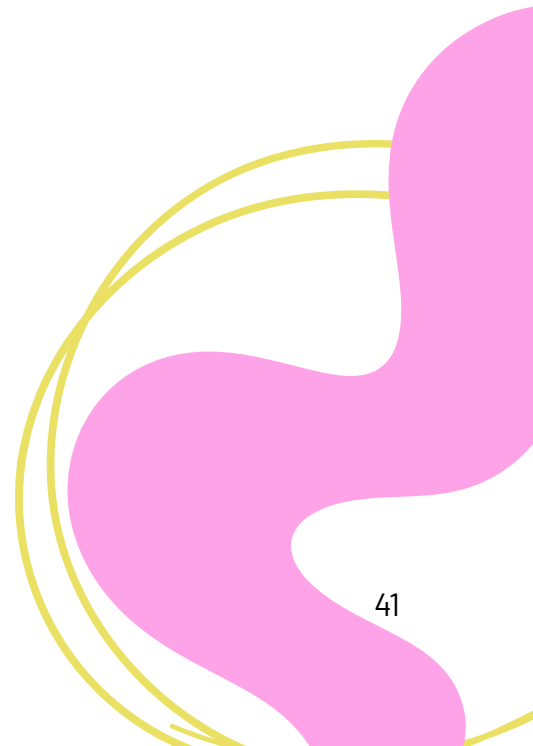
To be doing it, and to be professional, and to be in Glasgow is wonderful. It's an incredible experience. And I'm very lucky and privileged to be invited into spaces, and confident enough to know that I can demonstrate what storytelling is. And also humble enough to want to hear what's here. I want to listen. And that's something that's grown over the last thirteen years. The understanding that this is as much a listening artform as a speaking artform. Being a storyteller in Glasgow is really exciting in terms of the diversity of voice within the city. And that means there's always opportunities for it to evolve.





Dan's Story conceptualises the work of developing a Glasgow storytelling scene as a process combining several strands. His work involves both strengthening community cohesion and resilience through creative experiences with story, and training and nurturing new cohorts of storytelling practitioners to apply their skills, and instigate new creative work, within the city. Running through all this work is a commitment to cultivating attentiveness towards the experiences and stories of communities whose voices have frequently been sidelined, silenced, or marginalised within wider Scottish and UK culture.

This is a view of place-based artform development which prioritises ethical relationship-building, based in respectful, mutual interactions with the people and communities the Village Storytelling Centre develops its work for, among, and with. Conceptualising storytelling as a listening artform means creating opportunities, pathways, and platforms available to all: actively curating a range of spaces where the differently-experienced voices of Glasgow's diverse folk, from keen novices and established community tellers, to emerging and more established professional artists, are all empowered to tell the stories that matter to them, in their own unique way. The aim of such work is to encourage the emergence of a sustainable, inclusive storytelling ecosystem within the contemporary city, with a growing network of professional practitioners matched by flourishing grassroots communities of storytellers, each playing an active, creative role in shaping the future of Glasgow's storytelling.



5.2 REPORT CONCLUSIONS

As this report has documented, the impact of the Village Storytelling Centre radiates outward from its homebase in Pollok. It simultaneously supports the creation of grassroots communities of storytellers in its own locality, and in collaboration with other Glasgow organisations, while empowering the growth of city-wide networks of emerging and new storytelling professionals. According to the Centre for Cultural Value and The Audience Agency, cultural vitality is central to 'the cultural and artistic health of places', involving 'dynamic interactions between cultural activities and opportunities, participation, diversity, access and infrastructure' (2025). In these terms, the Village can be seen to play an essential role in promoting cultural vitality both in the cultural and social lives of its local participants and communities, and in creating the conditions for the sustainable growth of a storytelling ecosystem, including the emergence of diverse new artists and audiences, within the city of Glasgow.

These two aspects of the Village Storytelling Centre's remit are deeply intertwined. Its skilled professional (and emerging) practitioners lead regular community and project-based activities, building warm, respectful, and supportive relationships with long-time community participants. The existence of these relationships of trust, in turn, makes it possible for community storytelling participants to take the risk of engaging in story-led performance projects, both in their neighbourhoods and in the wider city. Meanwhile, the activity and visibility of the Village's new and emerging storytellers helps other participants - including children and young people - to visualise themselves undertaking comparable journeys of self-discovery, skills-building, and career development through storytelling and the creative arts.

The Village Storytelling Centre is also innovating in creating clear flows of creative interconnection between local activities, and professional arts events and platforms within the city of Glasgow. Its own biennial festival not only brings national and international artists to the city, but provides supported platforms for its communities of storytellers, of all ages and backgrounds, to raise their voices alongside these, as equal participants in the project of giving storied voice to a contemporary Glasgow. Commissioning processes and creative collaborations, both towards and beyond the Village Storytelling

Festival, also actively seek to widen the pool of Glasgow artists with a stake in the making of narrative-led and oral storytelling performance. At the same time, practitioners trained through the Village's Emerging Voices in Storytelling programme are turning their energy and skills towards the creation of new events, platforms, and performances, widening the range of performance opportunities available for would-be tellers; as well as forging new creative relationships with artists in a variety of neighbouring artforms; and encouraging new, urban audiences to explore an accessible, pleasurable experience of live storytelling. These combined activities are progressively leading to the emergence of a dynamic Glasgow storytelling ecosystem, its growth shaped by the creative interactions and experiments of multiple artists, producers, collaborators, and audiences.

All of this work is rooted in the cultivation not of individual artists, but of communities of storytellers. Both at grassroots levels, and through its professional development initiatives, the Village promotes the emergence of storytellers who understand themselves to be listening to, imagining, and performing stories as part of a wider network of enthusiasts and practitioners. This sense of networked, ecosystemic creativity is supported by an applied storytelling, training, and producing culture which stresses flows of energy and activity between groups and platforms. The essence of this model is the potential for development and mobility, whether from workshop participant to community performer; from youth participant to festival performance-maker; or from emerging artist to professional practitioner. By enhancing access to storytelling creativity for people at every life-stage, and empowering every participant to realise their full potential as part of a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community of storytellers, the Village Storytelling Centre functions as an essential agent of cultural vitality within the city of Glasgow.

6.1 END NOTES

1. Arts at the Old Fire Station is based in Oxford, and focuses on stories, creativity, and the arts
2. Creative Scotland is the public body that supports the creative and cultural sector across all parts of Scotland.
3. Duncan Williamson (1928-2007) was a storyteller and tradition-bearer belonging to the Scottish Traveller community.
4. Linda Williamson (1949-) is a folklorist and storyteller who was married to Duncan Williamson.
5. A Glasgow charity providing refuge and support to women, children, and young people from Asian, Black, and Minority Ethnic communities experiencing domestic abuse, forced marriage, and honour based abuse.
6. The Guid Crack Club is an Edinburgh institution, having hosted live storytelling sessions for more than three decades.

6.2 WORKS CITED

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6.3 PHOTO CREDITS

p.3	Karen Gordon, 2025
p.9	Karen Gordon, 2025
p.13	Karen Gordon, 2025
p.16	Euan McGlynn, 2024
p.19	Karen Gordon, 2025
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6.4 THANKS

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