

CIRK HES

THEORY OF CHANGE

Learn • Train • Perform • Progress • Contribute

Using inclusive circus arts and physical theatre to strengthen people, creativity and community in Cornwall.

Our core Theory of Change

If people are given affordable and equitable opportunities to learn, train, create and perform circus within a safe, inclusive and supportive community, they can build the physical skills, confidence, resilience, relationships and sense of belonging they need to thrive. If those opportunities are sustained over time and connected to progression, volunteering, education and professional pathways, individuals are more able to contribute to their communities and creative industries — strengthening Cornwall’s social, cultural and creative ecology in return.

1. Our purpose

Cirk Hes exists to make the benefits of circus arts and physical theatre accessible to people across Cornwall, particularly those who face barriers to participation, education, wellbeing, progression or creative opportunity. We combine high-quality, industry-standard resources and rigorous safety practice with an inclusive, trauma-informed, non-competitive approach to learning.

We create affordable opportunities for children, young people, adults, disabled and neurodivergent participants, emerging artists and professional practitioners to learn circus skills, train safely, develop creatively, perform with confidence and progress into further opportunities.

At the same time, we support grassroots projects, visiting and locally based artists, coaches, technicians and production professionals, helping strengthen Cornwall’s wider circus and creative-sector ecology.

2. The need we respond to

Cornwall is a rural county where many people experience barriers linked to low income, transport, social isolation, SEND, neurodivergence, anxiety, disrupted education, limited specialist provision and reduced access to high-quality cultural and creative opportunities.

Young people may struggle to engage with conventional education or sport. Adults can face isolation, disability-related barriers or lack of accessible opportunities. Emerging artists and freelancers can struggle to find affordable specialist facilities, rehearsal space, professional development, technical support and progression routes without leaving Cornwall.

Cirk Hes responds by creating a place where people can participate differently: physically, creatively, socially and at their own pace.

3. What we bring

Cirk Hes brings more than two decades of experience using circus and physical theatre for learning, inclusion, performance and community development. From our dedicated Helston circus space we provide specialist aerial and

ground-based equipment, professional rigging, safety systems, high ceilings, accessible facilities, experienced staff, visiting artists, partnerships and progression routes.

Our work is strengthened by our role within the National Centre for Circus Arts CAT network, our EOTAS and SEND provision, our relationships with schools, local authorities, cultural organisations and community partners, and the trust built through long-term work with participants and families.

4. What we do

LEARN — People can try and develop aerial and ground-based circus skills including silks, hoop, sling, rope, static and swinging trapeze, cloud swing, aerial apparatus, trampolining, parkour, acrobatics, acrobalance, juggling, tightwire, handstands, equilibratics, hula hoop, flow arts, unicycling and stilts. Provision includes after-school classes, Home Education, Saturday circus, teen-only activity, adult classes, SEND and neurodivergent provision, EOTAS, holiday programmes, outreach and introductory workshops.

TRAIN — Participants can develop skills through structured classes, Open Training, masterclasses, specialist coaching, advanced training, rehearsals and independent practice. Emerging and professional artists can access rehearsal, R&D, residencies, specialist equipment, safer-working support and opportunities to work alongside other practitioners.

PERFORM — People can take part in showcases, community events, theatre performances, outdoor events, big-top productions and touring activity. Performance is treated not simply as entertainment but as a tool for confidence, teamwork, discipline, creativity, communication and progression.

PROGRESS — Cirk Hes creates routes into volunteering, work experience, leadership, mentoring, Arts Award, Duke of Edinburgh activity, advanced training, CAT pathways, higher education, professional development, employment, self-employment and creative careers.

CONTRIBUTE — Participants, artists and partners are encouraged to give back through volunteering, peer support, coaching, performance, mentoring, collaboration and community activity. Cirk Hes also supports artists, coaches, technicians and production professionals through facilities, training, R&D, networking and performance opportunities.

5. How change happens

Circus creates a distinctive learning environment because it combines challenge, creativity, repetition, managed risk, play, teamwork and visible achievement.

Participants are supported to try things that initially feel difficult or impossible. They learn that falling, missing, failing and trying again are normal parts of progress. In a non-competitive environment, success can be individual rather than comparative.

Strong relationships with trusted staff and peers create safety and belonging. Participants gain more choice and autonomy over what they learn, how quickly they progress and how they contribute.

The physical nature of circus develops strength, coordination, balance, flexibility, spatial awareness and physical literacy. The creative and collaborative nature develops communication, imagination, responsibility and trust.

Performance provides opportunities to be seen, valued and celebrated.

The Cirk Hes “shoal” principle underpins this approach: the group supports the individual, and the individual contributes to the strength of the group.

6. What we produce

Our work generates sustained participation in circus, regular classes and training opportunities, free and subsidised places, SEND and alternative education provision, outreach activity, masterclasses, performances, volunteering and work-experience placements, professional-development opportunities, artist residencies and R&D, community partnerships and routes into advanced training.

The value is not only in the number of sessions delivered, but in the depth and continuity of engagement: people can remain connected to Cirk Hes over months and years while moving between learning, training, performing, volunteering and professional development.

7. Short-term outcomes

- Increased confidence, enjoyment and willingness to try unfamiliar things.
- Improved physical activity, coordination, balance and creative expression.
- Greater trust in self and others, communication and social connection.
- A stronger sense of safety, belonging and pride in achievement.
- Practical circus skills and a better understanding of how to assess and manage risk.

8. Medium-term outcomes

- Stronger resilience, self-esteem, independence and teamwork.
- Sustained physical activity and positive relationships.
- Improved engagement with learning and other structured activity.
- Progression into volunteering, mentoring, performance, advanced training, further education and creative career pathways.
- Greater access for disabled and neurodivergent participants to creative activity, social connection and progression opportunities designed around individual strengths.
- Artists and practitioners gaining skills, facilities, networks, employment opportunities and reasons to remain creatively active in Cornwall.

9. Long-term impact

Our intended long-term impact is healthier, happier and more connected people living within stronger, more creative and resilient communities.

We want more people in Cornwall to have meaningful access to circus and physical theatre regardless of income, disability, neurodivergence, educational background or previous experience.

We want young people to have alternative routes into education, leadership and employment; adults to have opportunities for participation, wellbeing and belonging; and artists to have the infrastructure and professional opportunities needed to develop sustainable creative careers in Cornwall.

Over time, this contributes to a more diverse, accessible and sustainable circus sector, strengthens Cornwall's creative economy and cultural landscape, and increases the capacity of communities to create, participate and support one another.

10. The Cirk Hes pathway at a glance

LEARN	TRAIN	PERFORM	PROGRESS	CONTRIBUTE
Try circus, discover strengths and build foundations.	Develop technique, confidence and safe independent practice.	Create, share and perform work; be seen and celebrated.	Move into leadership, qualifications, advanced training and careers.	Give back through volunteering, mentoring, coaching, collaboration

LEARN	TRAIN	PERFORM	PROGRESS	CONTRIBUTE
				and community.

11. Our long-term proposition

When Cirk Hes invests time, energy and resources in people and community over the long term, participants are more able to invest back into each other, into their communities and into Cornwall's creative life. By nurturing local cultural practice, supporting accessible participation and strengthening pathways from first experience to professional practice, Cirk Hes contributes to a healthier, more confident, more connected and more creatively resilient Cornwall.