

# Streetwise Community Circus CIC

## Malone College Project Evaluation

10/3/2014  
Streetwise Community Circus CIC  
Dr Nick McCaffery



### Summary:

In September 2013 Streetwise Community Circus CIC initiated a pilot project in conjunction with Malone Integrated College, Belfast to investigate the potential impacts of running a social circus program with young people at risk of disengaging with the school.

The project was designed to address 2 key aims:

- 1 *To make the school environment a more positive place to be, by associating the space with a fun and worthwhile activity, (and one that offers the opportunity for personal, social and skill growth)*
- 2 *To reinforce the concept that learning a circus skill can have a direct correlation to learning in an academic setting.*

Self-reported impacts noted by the students include:

- *Increased engagement with a project in school*
- *An improved attitude towards the school environment*
- *Positive changes in mood, confidence, pride, positive risk-taking, and general wellbeing whilst at school*
- *The acquisition of skills, such as stilt-walking, unicycling, juggling and plate-spinning*

Impacts upon the participants noted by staff include:

- *Improved attendance*
- *Improved mood*
- *Increased instances of positive behaviour*
- *Better concentration, communication, confidence and enjoyment*
- *Increased levels of resilience in dealing with failure*
- *Increased praise/positive attitude shown towards participants from other pupils and staff*

Observations noted by the circus tutors include:

- *A high level of circus skills attained*
  - *Every participant learned to juggle 3 balls and control a diabolo*
  - *Each students also chose another 'specialist skill' to focus on*
  - *Several became confident stilt-walkers*
- *Generally high levels of enthusiasm and commitment to a project*
- *Indications of ability to learn a skill and focus on a task*
- *Indications of resilience in learning difficult skills(i.e. learning how to deal with failure)*

For the tutors involved, the most notable impact was the shift in attitude that the school had towards this group. At the beginning of the project we were given a group of young people who were seen by the school to be at-risk, and who were often presented in terms of negative behavior and attitude; at the end of the project the group was invited to represent the school to visitors at their annual open day. In just 8 weeks, this is a clear indication of the potential transformative power of social circus. However, this was a temporary transformation, and the short timescale of the project was clearly a disadvantage. Future projects need to consider a much longer period in order to be truly successful.

In addition, we learned much more of the issues facing young people in school (see p 16), and as an organisation we have more of an idea on how to address these issues (where appropriate) using the medium of social circus.

Author note:

Dr Nick McCaffery received his PhD in social anthropology from Queen's University Belfast in 2005. Since then he has worked as a researcher for both Queen's University, The Institute of Conflict Research, and as an independent researcher. In addition, Nick has worked as a circus performer and tutor with Streetwise Community Circus. He is a founder member of the Global Institute for Circus Studies and a member of the UK and Ireland based, Circus Research Network. Although Nick is both a clown and a doctor, he is not a clown doctor.

Photographs:

All photographs in this report were taken by Margaret Fleming, Malone College

Thanks:

My thanks go to all of the participants who took part in this pilot project, the staff at Malone Integrated College- in particular Maire Thompson who took the big step in agreeing to this pilot, as well as all the teaching staff who accommodated us in the school and made us feel most welcome. Comments on early drafts of this report were offered from around the globe, special thanks must go to Paul Woodhead in Australia, whose lifetime of supporting circus in education is invaluable, and Jackie Davis of the University of British Columbia who is a leading light in the research of social circus with young people.

Streetwise Community Circus is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council.

### Background:

Streetwise Community Circus CIC (hereafter Streetwise) has been delivering circus workshops throughout Ireland since 1995<sup>1</sup>. As a part of our strategy for establishing new clients and developing the concept of social circus in new areas we instigated a pilot project for a secondary school in Belfast to investigate the potential positive impacts upon students who may be identified as at-risk of disengagement, poor attendance or leaving school early.

Malone Integrated College, Belfast *"is an integrated, all ability, Co-education College educating together 11 - 18 year old students from all traditions. Malone College is committed to developing students' confidence, self-esteem & self-discipline"*<sup>2</sup>. The school has a population of around 750 students and is *"committed to making a positive contribution to the local community and to being a school of which the entire community can be proud"*<sup>3</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> [www.sccw.co.uk](http://www.sccw.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/MaloneIntegratedCollege/info> accessed 08/05/14

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.malonecollege.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=63](http://www.malonecollege.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=63) accessed 08/05/14

This project ran over 8 weeks, on Monday afternoons from September to November 2013. The sessions ran from 13:30 to 15:10 each week. Of the 11 students who took part, we had a regular average attendance each week of 9 or 10.

The project was designed to introduce circus skills to the students; skills such as juggling, stilt-walking, unicycling, and other skills under the 'equilibratics and manipulation' category of circus equipment. We did not introduce any acrobatics or aerial skills in this project. Although, we recognise the potential for positive impacts in this area, and we would certainly consider including these skills on future longer term projects.

The project was developed in the context of 'social circus': a philosophy of social intervention aimed at developing positive impacts in the lives of its participants:

*In this approach, the **primary** goal is not to learn the circus arts, but rather to assist with participants' personal and social development by nurturing their self-esteem and trust in others, as well as by helping them to acquire social skills, become active citizens, express their creativity and realize their potential.(La Fortune 2011)*

Students were invited to take part in this project via teaching staff at the school<sup>4</sup>. At a meeting with the school in the early summer of 2013, we identified some of the potential impacts of social circus in a school setting that we had gleaned from similar projects around the world (e.g. Woodhead and Duffy 1998, Woodhead 2003, Sugarman 2001, McCutcheon 2003, Kekalainen 2014). These impacts included:

- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- Learning how to learn
- Increased levels of resilience/managing failure
- Increased levels of physical activity
- Managing risk in a supportive environment
- Having fun
- Social impacts
- Creating a positive environment in which to learn

We considered this project to be best treated as an investigative pilot project, and as such did not set out to measure any specific impact; rather we entered into this project with an open mind, and endeavoured to attempt to record any of the noticeable changes that occurred during the life of the project.

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<sup>4</sup> 12 students were invited to participate, but 1 declined the offer.

The only stipulation that we asked for was for the school to invite those students from year ten who were due to make their choices for GCSE at the end of the year, and who were considered to be at risk of withdrawing from school. We therefore believe that the key thrust of this project was to identify the way that learning circus in school addresses 2 key aims:

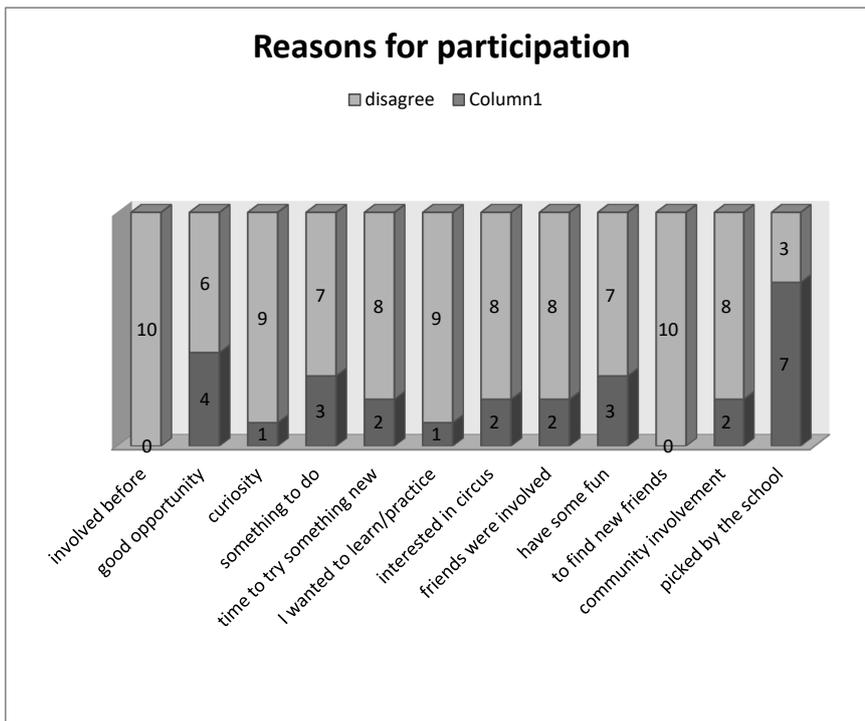
- 1 to make the school environment a more positive place to be, by associating the space with a fun and worthwhile activity, (and one that offers the opportunity for personal, social and skill growth)
- 2 to reinforce the concept that learning a circus skill can have a direct correlation to learning in an academic setting.

Whilst we recognise that these aims are extremely difficult to assess with any accuracy – especially over such a short time frame, we believe that any information that does connect these themes can be observed through efficient observation and evaluation. The following data then includes observations made by the circus tutors on the project, the participants themselves and staff from the school.



### Feedback from participants:

The following data was collected via questionnaire at the beginning of the final session.



The most striking piece of evidence here is that most of the students involved in this project were very aware that they had been placed into this project by the school; as opposed to having had much choice. Very few responses indicate a desire to engage with circus – only two were interested in circus, one was curious and only one stated that they wanted to learn or practice. None had been involved in a circus workshop before.

This certainly had some impact on our role as tutors. It was clear from conversations with the participants, and comments from other students at the school, that there was an awareness that this circus project was for the 'bad kids'. Several other students from the school commented to us whilst we were on school grounds that it was unfair that the poorer achieving students were being 'rewarded' with circus workshops. It is difficult to say whether this reaction had any impact on the participants. It was certainly clear to us as outsiders that our participants were recognised in the school as the more difficult students, and they were now being given access to what was becoming seen as a privilege.

Indeed, this perception of circus as a reward was evident amongst members of staff as well, as this extract from an interview with the head of year 10 explains:

[I]t's actually quite funny because as year head we take out a pupil, pupil of the month ... out of each class every month, a star pupil, and we take them actually for lunch now. I take them for lunch just up to the wee coffee shop here at Finaghy erm and that's their treat, and the rumour went around school which I heard from a few people that said ..., 'yeah, circus school yeah that's brilliant that is, but you have to be like really bad to be in circus school and like really good ones get to go for lunch with the year head it actually should be the other way round, really good kids should get to do circus school and the bad ones should be made to go and have lunch with the year head', I thought that's actually probably truer than you think

Whether this increase in kudos led the participants to relish their new found position is difficult to ascertain. However, by the second session, these conversations became less of a priority as the serious business of learning circus skills took more precedence.

Clearly, the majority of students considered the acquisition of new skills an important aspect of the project, but several also reflected on the emotional impact of the project-getting over fears, and improvements in mood.

The positive impacts of the project are reflected succinctly in the response that 9/10 'loved it' and 1/10 'liked it'.

The impacts were then elaborated upon through the following self-ascribed observations from the participants:

"What is the most important thing that has happened for you since starting this project?"

*Learning stuff*

*Learning to juggle*

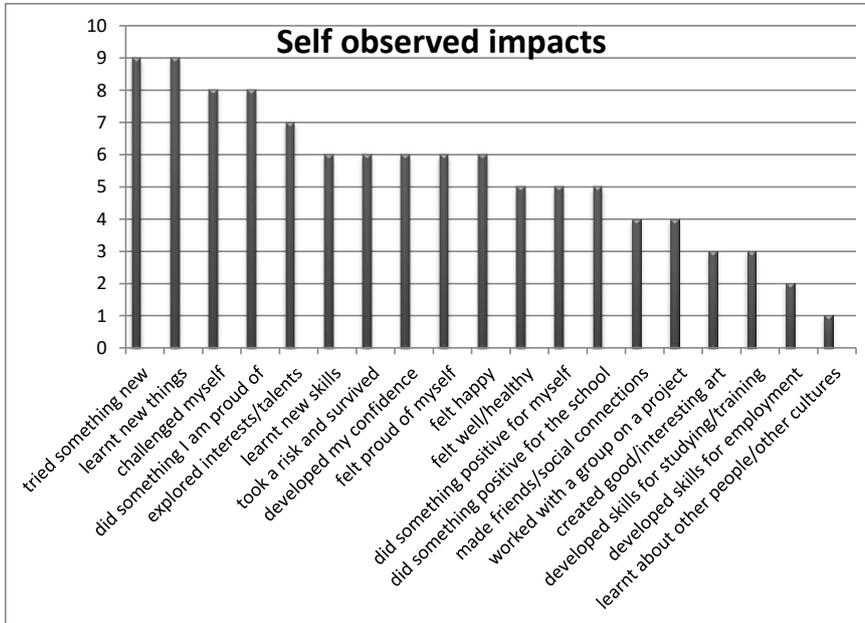
*I have been in a happier mood and it has been very fun*

*My hat tricks*

*I got to try new things*

*I've learnt how to use the diabolo*

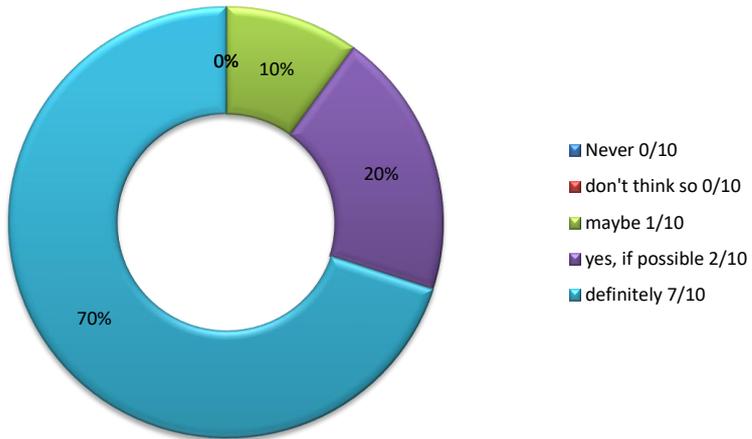
*Learn to do stilts, got over my fear*



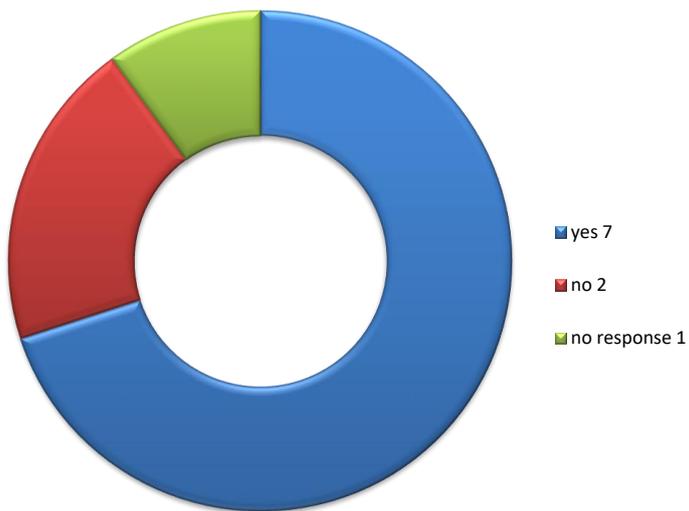
The majority of participants related the circus project with a positive impact of learning new things and increasing levels of well-being. Also, whilst 5/10 students consider that they had done something positive for themselves, 5/10 students also considered that they had done something positive for the school. Scores below 5/10 are still worth noting – some participants considered the skills that they had learned in the 8 weeks were indeed transferable, relating to skills for studying/training and employment. And one respondent claimed to have learnt about other people/other cultures, although this was not a stated aim of the project's design.

When asked for negative aspects of the project, 5/10 said that nothing was negative, 1/10 did not know, 2/10 left the answer blank and 2/10 claimed that they did not like juggling. Similar results were noted when asked for ideas on how to improve the workshops – 4/10 left the space blank, 5/10 said there was nothing we could do to improve it and 1/10 stated that we did not need to improve the workshops.

### Would you like to be involved in another project?



### did circus make you feel better about coming to school?



Attendance record:

| Name            | 30/9 | 7/10 | 14/10 | 21/10 | 04/11 | 11/11 <sup>5</sup> | 18/11 | 25/11 |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| <b>Charlie</b>  | X    | X    | X     | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Aaron</b>    | X    | X    | X     | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Graham</b>   | X    |      | X     | X     | X     |                    |       |       |
| <b>Chloe</b>    | X    | X    | X     |       |       |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Alix</b>     | X    | X    |       | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Brooklyn</b> | X    | X    | X     | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Ryan</b>     | X    | X    | X     | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Carter</b>   | X    | X    |       | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Jayden</b>   | X    | X    | X     |       | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Morgan</b>   | X    |      | X     | X     | X     |                    | X     | X     |
| <b>Raymond</b>  | X    |      |       |       | X     |                    | X     | X     |

Overall attendance was excellent, suggesting a genuine engagement with the project as a whole, and a willingness to attend. Of course, the project was held as an alternative to scheduled teaching, and so there is an obvious suggestion that spending time doing circus is more appealing than spending time in lessons. However, the fact that the students were in attendance at the school on these days is encouraging – and is reflected in comments offered at the school open day from some of the student’s teachers that participants were “*always in school on circus days*”.

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<sup>5</sup>No register taken this week.

Outcomes:

Throughout the life of the project, the circus tutors kept a log of the skills that each student had chosen to practice, and on the final week we recorded the levels of accomplishment in these skills<sup>6</sup>. In weeks 1 and 2 we took 2 smaller groups for 45 minutes each, by week 3 we combined the 2 groups and ran the workshops for 90 minutes.



In general the level of skills observed in this group was very high. Each participant acquired a basic understanding of at least 2 or 3 different skills, with one or two individuals excelling in such a short time frame.

- Every participant learned how to juggle 3 balls and control a diabolo
- Several became confident and independent stilt-walkers
- Each student also chose a 'specialist' skill to focus on from unicycle to plate spinning

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1

### Conclusions:

Overall the participants in this project seemed to react favourably. In addition to the broad range of skills learned in such a short time, several of the students recognised positive impacts in other areas: such as their relationship to school, the emotional and social benefits of being involved in the project; and of course the opportunity to do something new and interesting.

Did we achieve our 2 objectives in the eyes of the participants?

1 to make the school environment a more positive place to be, by associating the space with a fun and worthwhile activity, (and one that offers the opportunity for personal, social and skill growth)

70% of the respondents recorded an improvement in attitude towards school through the life of the project. Data from the questionnaire allowed us to explore suggestions as to why and how this response is evident: The participants reported improvements in:

- mood
- confidence
- skills
- pride
- challenging themselves
- taking risks – and
- Generally having an increased sense of wellbeing within the school environment.

Attendance throughout the project was excellent, and engagement in the workshops each week was generally (though not always) very positive<sup>7</sup>.

2 to reinforce the concept that learning a circus skill can have a direct correlation to learning in an academic setting.

The answer to this question can not necessarily be answered with any accuracy by the participants themselves. Whilst it is clear that every participant on this project achieved a certain level of competence in least one – but more often several – circus skills (which therefore suggests an ability to learn with resilience and perseverance), it is less clear how transferable these skills are. There are several suggestions that the participants saw the correlation between learning in the circus and learning in an academic context (e.g. developing skills for studying, for employment). There is also some indications to suggest that the participants understood that this project was not simply about learning circus, but had wider reaching implications (learning new things, developing confidence,

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, behaviour overall was extremely good - with only a single instance of a participant being given a 5-minute time out for continued disruption. The biggest challenge for us as tutors was finding creative ways to sustain engagement with ground based equipment once stilts had been introduced as an option.

challenging themselves), despite the fact that these elements were never made explicit in conversation with the participants.

Whilst the self-proclaimed benefits of these participants are encouraging, it is important to place them in a wider context of the school environment, and as such we now look at the impacts of the project as recorded by staff at Malone College.



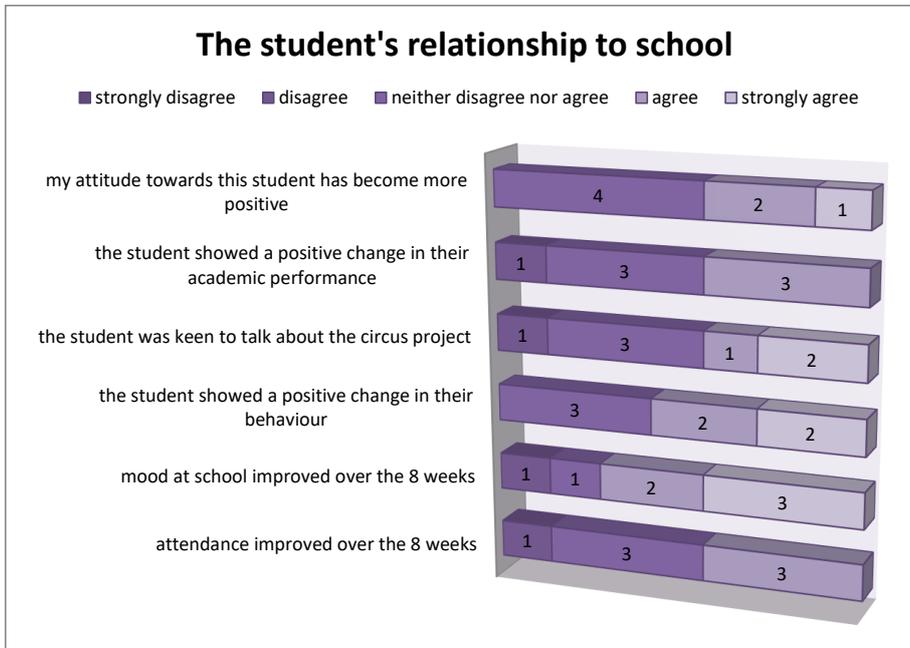
### **Feedback from Staff**

Information from staff at Malone College was recorded via questionnaires sent to 5 of the student's form teachers and an interview with the head of year 10. Three of the 5 form teachers returned questionnaires, representing 7 of the 11 participants. In addition, overall data was collected from the head of year regarding all 11 participants on a separate questionnaire, and in interview.

Whilst it was difficult to assess with any detail the precise ways in which this short project affected 1) the students' relationship to school and 2) the other impacts upon the students that this project may have had, there were certainly enough observations made by several staff members that support the efficacy of this project across these aims. As such, the questionnaires incorporated a mix of scaled responses to specific question, and open questions that required a more qualitative response.



### Staff perceptions of the student's relationship to school:



Several of the staff noted improvements throughout the life of the project which suggest that the participants' relationship to the school changed for the better. Attendance at the workshops was excellent, and most staff noted that this was true throughout the 8 week life of the project. Mood seemed to improve, as did behaviour. Some staff even asserted that academic performance was improved throughout the life of the circus project.

In order for these kinds of assertions to make much sense though, it is necessary to put them into some kind of context. I asked the head of year to identify if possible the relevant general challenges that affect these students in school:

*they could be quite volatile, ... in their attitude to staff, and to other pupils, ..., sometimes that's born out of a frustration of not being able to do the work, but sometimes it's just lack of interest in what they're doing and so they, they kind of you know, become, ..., can be quite aggressive some of them in class, they could be argumentative and aggressive, ..., difficult to engage them really would be their, their primary thing 'I don't care, I don't care' you know ... some of the children would have after school detention, like nearly permanent, after school detention, subject detention from other teachers or general after school detention, ... the punctuality would be poor, in the mornings a lot of those children wouldn't come into school on time. Erm,*

*lack of homework ... lack of books, equipment, bag, you know they just wouldn't bring it.*

With regards to specific students we were able to identify issues according to the following 4 areas:

Academic:

- struggles with settling in class and focussing on work
- struggles to concentrate
- often had difficulty concentrating in class, ... is a weak pupil and struggles to grasp some concepts
- is bright academically, but doesn't have the self-motivation to do well

Social:

- has a wide circle of friends, but behaviour within this is often unacceptable
- struggled to follow school rules when outside of constant adult supervision
- very easily influenced by peers
- finds it difficult to accept criticism and build on mistakes

Emotional:

- difficulty identifying emotions
- struggles with childhood trauma
- lacks confidence, struggles to articulate feelings
- emotional behaviour is unacceptable for the most part as is often rude to staff and fellow pupils

Physical:

- has shown physical violence towards fellow pupils
- often do not participate in PE

It should be reiterated at this point that this project was not designed to deal specifically with any of these issues; indeed, no information about the participants was requested or collected by Streetwise circus tutors prior to, or throughout the project. We approached this project with the aim of identifying the range of areas that a well-managed and professionally delivered social circus project could impact. What this post-project data suggests is that our own expectations of the impact of this project were mostly underestimated.

For example, the consistently high levels of disengagement from the participants as noted by teaching staff in the school, was dealt with directly within the circus workshops:

*HOY<sup>8</sup> these children quite often would be very reluctant to listen and would find that aspect of organising themselves even too, you know you could ask them six times to get their book out and six times they would say 'I don't even know what I'm doing I don't even know what we're doing I don't even know what page we're on'*

*I've said 'open at page twelve, open your book at page twelve, open at page' ... you know and there's this inability to take what you're saying process it and do something with it.*

*I would've thought that that would have been good because there's a better carrot at the end of the stick in circus school than there is in an ordinary routine in class you know. So that's what I would see as being a good focus for them, you know, ..., because they've got to listen very clearly I would imagine to the instructions to do some of the skills that they're being taught to do they've got to listen really carefully and they've got to process the information and, and act on it*

*NMcC<sup>9</sup> Yeah a lot of it's kind of backed up with physical processes as well*

*HOY Yes, yes and they see it and its demonstrated for them and whatever but they've still got to see it and follow it rather than see it and then go 'I don't know what we're doing, I don't know what he's doing, I don't know what the deal is I don't know what he's standing there with those poles for, I don't know' you know but I imagine there was much more engagement with that.*

Clearly these students did show a certain amount of engagement in the project, which is evidenced by the level and range of skills acquired in such a brief time. These are skills which need to be learned, and the technical knowledge required to achieve these skills was passed on from circus tutors to participants – the students engaged with the learning process! If they had not, they would not have been able to demonstrate the skills.

And so, we asked for more details as to how the circus project affected the challenges faced by these participants – positively or negatively:

*"Saw themselves as a valuable member of the school community after completing the project"*

*"Took part in physical activity despite reluctance to do PE – this skill has allowed them to take part in other physical activities in the school"*

*"Was provided an opportunity to succeed at something in school and be praised by staff. Also had to apply resilience to failure at first - a great skill for them to learn"*

**Commented [DrN1]:** Use this to show background of participants and how circus relates to academic learning – learning how to learn

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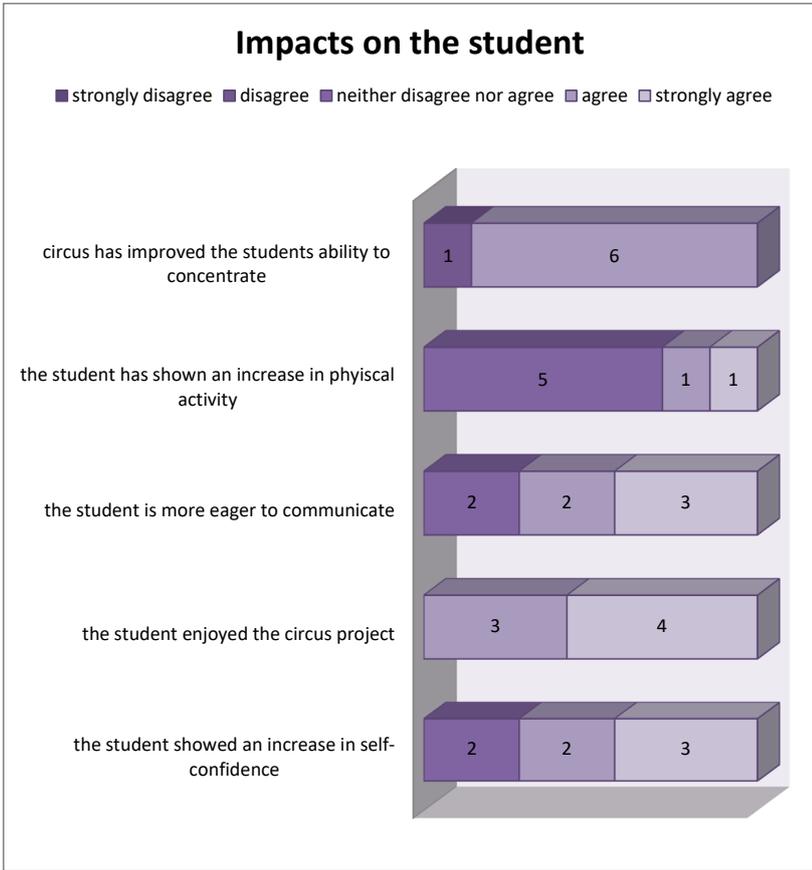
<sup>8</sup> Head of Year

<sup>9</sup> Author

*“Interacting better with pupils and myself in registration. Less complaints about his behaviour from his teachers. Seems to be listening better therefore less likely to take wrong attitude to what he is told”*



Staff perceptions of impacts upon the students:



Information from the head of year supports the generally positive reported impacts by staff at the school across these areas:

|                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Ability to concentrate</i>        | <i>Agree</i>                      |
| <i>Increase in physical activity</i> | <i>neither agree nor disagree</i> |
| <i>Eager to communicate</i>          | <i>agree</i>                      |
| <i>Enjoyed the circus project</i>    | <i>strongly agree</i>             |
| <i>Increase in self-confidence</i>   | <i>agree</i>                      |

When asked in what ways the circus activity has had a positive impact, the head of year noted “*enthusiasm and self-confidence*” across the board, whilst individual responses noted:

*“X ... was confident in displaying her skills in front of many people – she has never shown this confidence before”*

*“X’s opinion of himself as part of the school community”*

*“It allowed teachers the opportunity to praise him”*

*“His attendance at the event. X was generally present for these”*

*“Communication skills better, more mature in behaviour”*

*“Communication skills better although always on one on one will engage in mature conversation, more mature in behaviour”*

Whilst one comment suggested that there were no noticeable positive or negative impacts noted about one of the participants, only one comment was recorded as negative at this stage:

*“He enjoyed getting out of class”*

The impact of the project on the students themselves was elaborated upon in interview with the head of year:

*[T]here was a lot of self-confidence and that was backed up by what other people thought of them as well, that made them feel better about themselves too their self-esteem was boosted. Because the other kids had seen them do things at open day and out in the yard when they were outside and they knew they were doing it as well*

In addition, the head of year noted that she was receiving a lot of praise regarding better behaviour and increasing levels of engagement with school from other teachers. This praise was then discussed with the students themselves to reinforce the positive impacts:

*form teachers were telling me and other people were telling me how well they were doing at it, ... in regards their attendance was great I noticed that their perseverance at the classes, was great ... [X] was a wee bit reluctant ... at the time and wasn’t very keen to do it but he still kept going, for some unknown reason he still kept going to it.*

An interesting, but perhaps inevitable factor with regards to the benefits of the project was the temporal nature of the impacts:

*You know so the highest effect would have been noticed immediately after or even during, probably actually during, because it was always the threat of being taken away from, from circus school, so they would have been very keen to ..., follow rules and, and you know to be sociable and to not get into trouble with friends there was very few instances of, of you know squabbles or rows or anything amongst those particular kids, they would have been very compliant, now a couple of them it's kind of its tapered away and we've found a few difficulties in a few other areas, but yes immediately after, during and immediately after it would have been the strongest.*

In short, staff at the school noted a generally positive impact of the project amongst the participants; behaviour improved; communication with the students was good; levels of self-confidence and self-esteem seemed to be raised; and the participants seemed to be enjoying an activity that was taking place within the school environment – and doing their best to turn up for this activity.

## Discussion:

The idea of using circus as a positive intervention tool within formal education is not new, and is a well attested concept on a global scale (Bolton 2004, Woodhead 2003, McCutcheon 2003). However, it is by no means common practice in Northern Ireland.

Many accounts of circus in education projects attest to evidence of the potential gains in 4 different areas; physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively (see e.g. Maglio and Mckinstry 2008, McCaffery 2014). These gains are often mirrored in social circus programmes with other populations; e.g. homeless youth, older people, individuals living with physical and/or learning disabilities, migrant or refugee communities, etc. (e.g. Cadwell 2013, Kekalainen & Kakko, 2013, Kekalainen 2014, McCauley 2011, Trotman 2012)

This pilot project hosted by Malone College sought to test and clarify some of the issues that Streetwise needs to be aware of when designing social circus projects within the context of education. The data collected post-project (p16) has particular salience here, and will be utilised in the planning stages of future projects.

We were given 11 young people who were seemed by the school to be at risk of disengaging with the school at a crucial time in their educational path. **Within just 8 weeks** we saw:

- 70% of participants noted an improved attitude towards the school
- Indications of an improved attitude towards the participants from the school
- Indications that the participants were able to engage with enthusiasm in a project that focussed on learning new skills
- Indications of improved confidence, communication and concentration amongst the participants
- Evidence of the acquisition of new skills
- Noted improvements in attendance, mood and positive behaviour, from both participants and staff.

This reflects the key findings from circus in education projects around the world:

*That participants not only achieve growth in physical and circus skills, they also achieve positive growth in: intrinsic values including self-confidence and self-belief; intrinsic virtues including perseverance and trust; and social, group and personal skills including life skills, co-operative skills and creative skills respectively. [...] that circus is a positive sporting and personal development alternative for those youth deemed 'at risk' in our schools, and for those looking for an alternative to the more traditional options available (Woodhead 2003)*

I believe that if we had had more time at Malone College to focus with depth on the specific areas relevant to these participants, we could have made a more lasting impact and had a more valuable effect on their long-term relationship to the school.

Evidence collected from staff and participants suggests that we did indeed achieve our first aim of making the school environment a more positive place to be. However, whilst

there are some indications that the skills acquired in a circus project do have transferability to learning in an academic context, it was beyond our means for us to provide any reliable evidence of this, other than *indications* that there may be a genuine connection between learning circus and increasing academic skills. In real terms, we saw an improvement in attendance – “they were always in school on circus days” – which is encouraging; it is always easier to teach a student if they are actually turning up to school.

In addition, we did manage to illustrate to staff and other students that the participants were indeed *capable* of learning, as evidenced by the extraordinary range of skills learned, and the level attained with these skills (see below.) The range of skills acquired by this group reflects a certain amount of focus and resilience from the participants, as well as positive risk-taking and dealing with failure – in order to learn how to ride a unicycle one has to keep falling over and keep getting back on, there are no secrets and no shortcuts; it is a very basic and simple physical process that requires practice and determination. The same is true of learning to juggle, to spin a diabolo, and to walk on stilts.

### **Recommendations for future projects:**

Through this pilot project at Malone college, Streetwise has learned a number of lessons:

- That the social circus philosophy and methodology it has developed over the past 20 years is an effective tool for use in an education setting, and has a global context.
- That there is a range of issues specific to working with young people in education that can be dealt with through circus skills. Greater planning with potential partners is necessary in order to address these issues specifically.
- An 8 week project is not long enough to develop long term benefits
- A project that is aimed towards greater ownership of a circus programme by the school (staff and pupils) would have a more lasting impact (see Sugarman 2001, 161-166)
- That more research is needed to support the idea of transferability of skills between learning circus and learning in an academic context.
- That Streetwise should consider incorporating more physical skills into it's repertoire – such as tightwire, acrobatics and acrobalance, and even aerial skills where time and space allows. The development of physical literacy and capability will complement Streetwise's expertise in skill acquisition, and personal and social growth, and thus make it more appealing to potential partners.
- That Streetwise should incorporate more activities (such as warm-up games and exercises) that directly target issues of trust, social integration, creativity, tolerance and other social and intrinsic values and virtues.
- That Streetwise is in a good position to develop a circus in education programme on a much larger scale, and should pursue this area with a range of potential funders and other partners.

## Appendix 1 notes from tutors logbook

**Week 1** – general open workshop, introduced all skills to all students

Comments: 2 good groups – group 1 seem more enthusiastic than group 2. Good potential for skills development across both groups. Participants chose to try unicycle, juggling, diabolo, flowerstick, handheld stilts.

**Week 2** – spent time as a group on hat manipulation and ‘walkabout juggling star’, remaining time encouraging individual skills.

Comments: both group work and individual skills seemed to work well. Free practice time saw half the 1<sup>st</sup> group focus on a single skill – diabolo, whilst the other half moved quickly from one skill to another. The 2<sup>nd</sup> group saw individuals focus on unicycle, club manipulation and diabolo.

**Week 3** – 1<sup>st</sup> week together. Goals for the week were to identify as a group, identify individual ‘favourite’ skills, and introduce strap-on stilts.

Comments: identified ball juggling as a group activity. Despite some distraction, the ball star seemed to work as a larger group game (as both groups had experience of this game, it made sense to use it as an integrative tool). 3 female participants took to stilt walking very quickly and very successfully. Remaining male participants focussed on ground skills. Some encouraging unicycling this week.

**Week 4** – Aim to push ground skills, identify ‘second skill’ and have 3 new stiltwalkers. Reiterate prior work on hat manipulation and do some group work with flowersticks.

Comments: Ball juggling as a group activity is ok, but there is a loss of focus. This seems to be down to the disparity between those accomplished jugglers and those who do not enjoy ball juggling. Finding a middle ground is difficult, and this has led to some disruption. Overall, there seemed to be more distraction amongst participants this week. Whilst one tutor focussed on stilts, the other pushed individual skills; both seemed to be generally successful. We have 6 stilt walkers who are ready to become independent next week, and a range of good ground skills – need to reiterate goals for each individual. Ball juggling, diabolo, ring pass juggling and unicycling all coming along very well.

**Week 5** – Aim to get stilt walkers independent and establish goal for ground skills.

Comments: All the stilt walkers who were ready to go independent are now trained to fall. One or two have ‘given the stilts a go’ but would be happier not to push this area. Generally there is willingness for individuals to develop their own skills and keep pushing themselves. However, there are occasional instances where individuals can become despondent/bored and will readily (and easily) distract others. Need to keep focus and

keep all participants inspired! Skills include ball juggling, diabolo, and unicycle. Some ring pass juggling (up to 5 rings between 2 people)

**Week 6** (no notes)

**Week 7** – Aim to establish levels of skills learned so far, and to keep focus on ground skills – rather than just stilts.

Comments: In general the session went well. There was less distraction from despondent individuals, but more distraction from those who wanted to just go on stilts, and not engage with ground skills. We chose to postpone stilts until we had seen some level of improvement in ground skills, and this was generally effective. The group as a whole are split into those who have really engaged with one or two skills and are keen to improve these skills, and those who are very keen to stick to stiltwalking. This situation is not unmanageable, and I think that the tutors worked well to encourage the participants across the board.

**Week 8** – final week, aim was to gather info on skills learned, and feedback from the participants.

Comments: We recorded the skills level of each participant as follows:

- Charlie**      Unicycle: can ride 20 metres in a straight line without difficulty, can freemount and do star. Is working on figure of 8, and slalom.
- Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.
- Flowerstick: tick tock X 20, ½ flips and full flips.
- Diabolo: Can get it spinning and keep it controlled. Tricks include under the leg and flip over.
- Aaron**        Ball juggling: 100 throws and catches with ease. Body bouncing tricks (knee, foot, head, elbow) under arm and leg, and passing 6 balls with tutor.
- Club juggling: 6 good throws and catches recorded.
- Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled.
- Graham**      [not present] had previously worked well on both unicycle and diabolo. Some 3 ball juggling (at least 5 throws and catches recorded)
- Chloe**        Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.
- Juggling: can pass 5 rings with a tutor face to face. Also 3 ball juggling

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled. 5 throws and catches recorded

Unicycle: worked very hard, rode up to 10 metres several times throughout the project.

**Alix** Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.

Juggling: can pass 4 rings with another participant, some ball juggling, and plate spinning

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled.

**Brooklyn** Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled.

Unicycle: worked very well early in the project – was pedalling away from the wall on several occasions.

Juggling: can pass 4 rings with another participant, some ball juggling.

**Ryan** Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled. Throws and catches no problem – including passing with tutor, some other tricks.

Flowerstick: tick tocks X 20, ½ flips and full flips.

Juggling: 3 ball juggling – c.10 throws and catches

**Carter** Stilts: tried strap-on stilts 3 or 4 times, confident walker, but not yet independent.

Hat manipulation: good throws onto head, flourishes and rolls

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled.

**Jayden** Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled. Throws and catches no problem, some tricks

Hat manipulation: good throws onto head, flourishes and rolls.

Juggling: 3 ball juggling 10 throws and catches

**Morgan** Stilts: confident, trained to fall, has walked outside, up and down slopes and steps.

Juggling: 3 ball juggling 3 throws and catches. 5 ring passing with tutor

Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled. Throws and catches X5.

**Raymond** Diabolo: can get it spinning and keep it controlled.

Stilts: tried strap-on stilts a couple of times, confident walker, but not independent.

Juggling: 5 ring passing with tutor.

## Appendix 2 Survey forms

**Malone College Circus Project 2013****Staff evaluation form**

Thank you for your recent participation in our social circus project. This survey asks the questions:

1) What impacts did you notice upon the students as a direct result of taking part in the circus workshops?

and

2) Do you think the circus project has positively or negatively affected students' relationship to the school?

Please use this form to describe the observations you have made regarding the participants on this project. The results will remain anonymous and will be used, and shared, as part of Streetwise Community Circus's continuing aim of assessing and understanding the effects of social circus programmes.

Name and position: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of student/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1: Impacts on the student**

Circle the appropriate number on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree ... 5=strongly agree)

|  | Strongly disagree | disagree | Neither agree or disagree | agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| The student showed an increase in self confidence        | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student enjoyed the circus project                   | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student is more eager to communicate                 | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student has shown an increase in physical activity   | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| Circus has improved the student's ability to concentrate | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |

Complete the sentence:

The circus activity has had a positive effect on:

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The circus activity has had a negative effect on:

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**2: The student's relationship to school:**

|  | Strongly disagree | disagree | Neither agree or disagree | agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| The student's attendance improved over the 8 weeks                 | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student's mood at school improved over the 8 weeks             | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student showed a positive change in their behaviour            | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student was keen to talk about the circus project              | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| The student showed a positive change in their academic performance | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |
| My attitude towards this student has become more positive          | 1                 | 2        | 3                         | 4     | 5              |

Please give examples of the relevant challenges that affect this student at school in the following areas:

Academic:

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Social:

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Emotional:

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Physical:

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Has the circus project affected these challenges in any way, positively or negatively? Please explain how.

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**C Any other comments:**

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Thank you for your time!

Streetwise Community Circus  
Malone College Pilot  
PARTICIPANT EVALUATION SURVEY

1. Why did you get involved in this project?

- I've been involved before  Friends were involved
- Good opportunity  Have some fun
- Curiosity  To find new friends
- Something to do  To become involved in the community
- I felt it was time to try something new  I don't know
- I wanted to learn, to practice  Other reasons:
- .....
- I am interested in circus  .....

Were your expectations met? Yes  No

2. What is the most important thing that has happened for you since starting this project?

(One example only please)

.....  
.....  
.....

3. Did you enjoy being involved in the project?

- Loved it  Liked it  Neutral  Didn't enjoy it
- Hated it

4. Did any of the things from the following list happen through being involved in the project?

- |                                  |                          |   |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| tried something new              | <input type="checkbox"/> | felt proud of myself                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| challenged myself                | <input type="checkbox"/> | felt happy                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| took a risk and survived         | <input type="checkbox"/> | felt well, healthy                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| did something I am proud of      | <input type="checkbox"/> | learnt about other people; other cultures | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| created good / interesting art   | <input type="checkbox"/> | learnt new skills                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| made friends, social connections | <input type="checkbox"/> | developed skills for employment           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| explored interests, talents      | <input type="checkbox"/> | developed skills for studying, training   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| worked with a group on a project | <input type="checkbox"/> | did something positive for myself         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| learnt new things                | <input type="checkbox"/> | did something positive for the school     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| developed my confidence          | <input type="checkbox"/> |   |                          |

5. What didn't you enjoy or like about the project?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. Would you like to be involved in another project?

Never again  I don't think so  Maybe  Yes, if possible  Definitely

7. Did this project make you feel better about coming to school?

Yes  No  Not sure

8. How can we improve our circus projects?

.....  
.....  
.....

Thank You!

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