



# Belfast Circus

## Building for the Future



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# Background and history of Belfast Circus

Belfast Circus was established in 1985 after 2 drama teachers, Donal McKendry and Mike Moloney, met whilst working on an Arts Council drama outreach project. They quickly established that circus skills (and everything about the circus) was a great way to engage young people at risk of being drawn into riots and other difficult behaviours. Having seen the impact of circus on young people in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Belfast, they formed the Belfast Community Circus School (known as Belfast Circus), a charity dedicated to the promotion of circus and street arts.

Circus has no history of belonging to one 'side' or the other and so is a great vehicle for bringing together young people from all kinds of different backgrounds and uniting them in creative endeavours. For circus to work, participants have to cooperate with each other, help each other out, communicate with each other and trust each other. With this understanding embedded in our thinking, we have grown over the past 30 years to the point where we work with more than 1,000 children and young people across Northern Ireland each year.

We are currently based in our own, but modest Circus building in Gordon Street, Belfast. In 1999, we became the first arts organization to take on a building in the newly launched Cathedral Quarter – a building which was purchased by us with funding from Peace 2 just 5 years later.

Since then, we have played a pivotal role in attracting the public into the area with the presentation of street theatre as part of the annual international Festival of Fools, which draws tens of thousands of people to see more than 100 shows over a Bank Holiday weekend. In addition, the weekly classes are attended by more than 400 children and young people throughout the year with hundreds more attending performances staged as part of the circus training they receive.

The move in to Ireland's only dedicated circus facility in 1999 has seen the organisation grow and expand to the point where there is no more space in the calendar

for classes after school and there are more than 1,200 names of children on the waiting list to take classes. This has been achieved through delivering the highest quality training for young people and by having unbroken access to a dedicated training facility based in the centre of Belfast and accessible to young people with just one bus journey from anywhere in the city.

*"Having spent the past 30 years working with circus around the world, I have always been struck by the quality of work being carried out by Belfast Circus. We have been brought in for consultation by Cirque De Soleil; collaborated with La TarumbaCircus in Peru; Co-founded Caravan Circus Network comprising 18 EU partner companies. At each stage it has been apparent that our work with children and young people is ground breaking and of the highest calibre"*  
**Will Chamberlain, CEO of Belfast Circus**



Caption to go in here



**Our vision:**  
That Belfast is a beacon for participation in the arts.





## Our mission:

To transform lives and communities through the power of circus arts and street theatre.

## Facts and figures about the Belfast Circus

- Founded in 1985 as a vehicle for personal and community development and as a means for engaging young people in a cross community context
- Moved to Gordon Street premises in 1999 -the only dedicated circus building in the whole of Ireland
- 2004 Established Festival of Fools annual international street theatre festival attracting more than 25,000 audience members to Belfast City Centre
- Staged 823 performances free of charge to public in 2014/15 seen by more than 210,000 in Belfast, the rest of Ireland and even into Europe
- Held 1,015 participatory sessions working with a total of 2,338 young people and 200 adults in 2015/16
- Trained 20 young adults to become circus teachers and artists in 2012 as part of a 10 month full time training course, CAFÉ (Circus Arts For Employment) funded by Legacy Trust and Leverhulme Trust
- Initiated and co-presented Land of Giants on Titanic Slipway in 2012 -the biggest ever outdoor arts event ever staged in Belfast
- Turnover for the group of businesses has risen from £60,000 in 1998 through to £760,000 in 2014. Around 30% of this self generated revenue (Social Enterprise / Class fee's)
- Belfast Circus currently has a waiting list of 1,337 names for of young people who want to take Youth Circus classes
- Belfast Circus purchased its current premises in 2005 thanks to funding from Peace 2
- Activity is held in the Belfast Circus on 7 days a week. The building is in use for 70 hours per week, 50 weeks of the year
- Belfast Circus is involved in EU funded activity including Leonardo Transfer of Innovation; Youth in Action; and Active EU Body in the field of Youth.
- Belfast Circus receives support as a key client from Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Belfast City Council
- 60% of annual income is generated through fees and donations
- Demand for activity continues to grow year on year
- Each week of the school term, BCCS stages workshop projects with at least 23 different groups and more than 520 young people.
- BCCS has taken young people on circus training exchanges to Scotland, Wales, Finland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, France, Holland, Australia, USA and Peru.
- BCCS is a founder member of Caravan Circus Network –a pan European company devoted to then promotion and development of high quality youth and social circus. The Network currently has 18 members from across Europe.
- BCCS has delivered professional training for trainers in a year long training programme and also in a 20 day compact course.
- BCCS has provided the only professional training for circus artists and teachers in Northern Ireland.
- BCCS has trained 45 professional performers and trainers in the last 15 years.
- Performances staged by Festival of Fools, BCCS and Premiere Circus are seen by more than 240,000 people each year in Northern Ireland.



# Vision for the Circus in Belfast

## A circus building that puts Belfast on the world stage.

While many people think of circus as something rooted in the past and taking place with wild animals in a Big Top, the truth is that the form has moved on in the past 30 years. Companies like Cirque de Soleil, Circus Oz and Cirque Plume have brought circus performance into the 21st century with critical and box office hits. Around the world, new circus schools have been emerging in many major cities with National Circus Centres being built in London, Melbourne, Paris, Berlin and Moscow.

*"The new building will be a statement to the world outside of circus that Belfast is a beacon for participation in the arts. It will also act as a catalyst to deliver the same high quality of artistic endeavour, which has seen companies around the world transform circus into a dynamic accessible art form. We will be building on this for the coming years to establish Belfast as the circus capital of the UK and Ireland."*  
**Will Chamberlain, CEO of Belfast Circus**

**At Belfast Circus, we aim to achieve the following at our new state of the art Circus Building:**

- Creation of an iconic building attracting tourists and citizens of NI alike
- Establish Belfast as the leading destination for Circus Arts Residencies in the UK and Ireland
- The UK's largest programme of youth circus training
- An extensive programme of aerial / acrobatic classes for adults
- A range of professional artist training initiatives
- Creation space for new shows
- Create the UK + Irelands only dedicated circus performance venue encompassing state of the facilities

- Public zones where visitors can view the artist training programmes whilst enjoying the café and circus shop
- catering facilities for a cafe during the day and meals during performance nights
- Promote health and wellbeing amongst 100's of children and young people each year
- The first circus shop on the island of Ireland
- Onsite vocational training programme / venue in back stage technical skills.

Belfast Circus would welcome the building being located in either the Titanic Quarter, the Sirocco Works or in Belfast City Centre. It will have an iconic design both internally and externally. It will be designed and equipped with the latest green technology and help to attract people irrespective of their interest in circus. It will be a building that Belfast will be proud of. The iconic building will be recognised locally as a shared space in the heart of Northern Ireland's capital city, actively contributing to the City Tourism and Cultural Strategy and helping to reinforce the city as a creative, innovative and exciting location for people who love to play hard and work hard.

**A new Belfast Circus Building will:**

- Attract 1,200 people each week into the building to train and master circus techniques such as trapeze, silks, tightwire, stilts, unicycle, acrobatics and juggling
- Stage regular circus cabaret dinner nights attracting an audience of 400 people each week
- Establish Belfast as one of the world's leading destinations for contemporary community circus
- Provide employment for 70 people including 45 circus artists and teachers
- Animate outdoor zones and public spaces in surrounding the location of the building in conjunction with planned public events in the area.

Belfast Circus are keen to employ the services of a creative and imaginative design team to help bring the idea for this world class space to life. The building is likely to have a construction cost in the region of £5 million although this will be further defined as the technical assistance support is accelerated.

The building will be approximately 25,000 sq ft – 30,000 sq ft in size and have a number of defined areas and spaces that the majority of circus spaces across the world exhibit. These are;

### Performance Spaces



### Training Spaces



### Social and Catering Spaces



### Administration Spaces



### Early Identification of Facility Requirements:

The following facility development elements will be provided for in the new building;

- Main performance space should be able to host Circus Cabarets of up to 350 people
- Circus Shop
- Catering facilities
- At least 4 training areas
- Solar Panels
- Sauna
- Weights Room / Gym / Cross Fit Area
- Physio / First Aid Room
- Homework / Education Space
- Café
- Viewing Gallery
- Offices
- Storage
- Residential apartment for circus residencies
- Maintenance Rooms
- Costume Store
- Props Store
- Showers and Changing rooms
- Toilets
- Aerial Access
- Floor Mounts
- Foam Pit
- Aerial grid
- Classroom
- Main Space
- Creation Space
- Performance Space
- Should be finished to a high standard, with some areas 10-15m ceiling height



# Learning from best practice examples

## Examples of other world class Circus buildings in Europe.



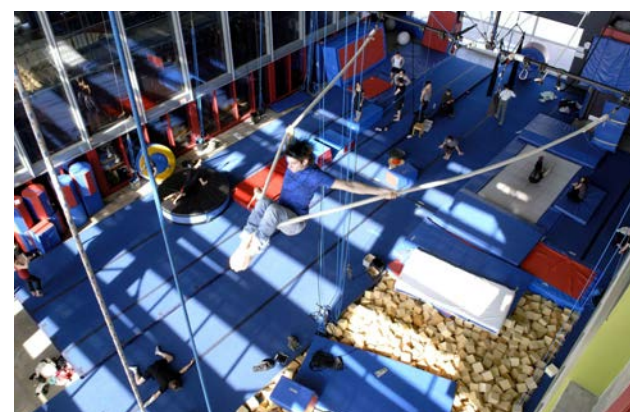
### Plus Petit Cirque du Monde – Paris

A Social/ Community Circus School in a suburb of Paris known locally as the Cathedral of Circus. This wooden framed building is 18 metres from floor to peak and plays host to a range of youth circus classes and professional shows.



### Tohu

An environmentally neutral circus performance and exhibition zone in Montreal.



### Ecole de Cirque, Montreal

This professional circus arts training centre is located next to the Cirque de Soleil Headquarters and provides degree and Masters level training in circus arts.

# Our first steps to achieve the vision

At this stage, the potential for developing a new Belfast Circus Building is an idea. A concept. An ambitious concept. But like all successful ideas, they must start somewhere. The key now is to understand our next steps and to move this project from concept to reality:

### Key Next Steps –September 2016 –March 2017

1. To carry out a detailed feasibility study and site options appraisal for the building
2. To agree on the location of the new Belfast Circus Building and to enter into a formal agreement with the current landowner for this site
3. To submit a range of small scale funding applications to help secure the financial resources for the first stage technical assistance budget. An initial budget of £30k would allow the design team to produce concept plans, feasibility study to be completed and initial PAN process to be commenced with Planning office
4. To secure services of an architect led design team and submit planning application and establish the future cost of achieving this vision
5. Develop a combined business plan for the project and begin an economic appraisal
6. To complete a detailed cost / benefit analysis for the development of the Project
7. To meet with the Belfast City Centre Area Working Group and Present Our Vision
8. To establish a steering group / project board to drive this project forward and develop momentum
9. To secure the Minister for DfC support for the concept
10. To secure the support of a sponsoring Government Department
11. To develop a range of community, political and civic champions for the proposed project
12. To launch the plans for the project to a wider Belfast Wide Audience
13. To create a fundraising strategy for the project
14. To appoint a Client Adviser who will act as a link between the Belfast Circus Project Promoters and the Core Funding Agencies.







## **Belfast Community Circus School**

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