

18th October 2025

BIGLITTLE Arts Support Trust (BLAST)

Annual General Meeting — Chair's report.

Introduction

The BIGLITTLE Arts Support Trust have continued to support opportunities in the performing arts throughout the year whilst promoting its benefits across the community. We were delighted to receive a generous external grant early in the year that allowed us to significantly increase our support to young people, and yet again the hospitality committee have worked hard to raise funds to allow us to achieve our aims.

The Alumni Sub-Committee has celebrated a plethora of Alumni activity and achievements over the last 12 months on social media including engagements, weddings, new babies, music releases, amateur dramatic performances, live music performances and a wide selection of professional musical theatre roles. We have promoted local events featuring our alumni to our members, and for the first time featured a selection of their accomplishments in a pull-out BLAST flyer at Broadway Showtunes 2025.

It is always very special to see former students returning to support the next generation in their productions throughout the year, either by turning up to watch or by being involved in the creative process with Colin and his team as returning practitioners. In July it was lovely to see former students and current students sharing stories after Broadway Showtunes 2025 over a glass or two at the Marsham Court Hotel. We even managed to capture three BIGLITTLE alumni who were former, current and future 'Arts Ed' students swapping notes and giving each other encouragement! I would like to thank BIGLITTLE Alumni James Dixon-Box for his generous support in hosting our annual reunion at his venue.

I would also like to thank Charlotte Clitherow (BLAST Alumni trustee), Michelle Guy (BLAST Alumni Ambassador), Kelly Pope, Colin Billing, Darrell West and Jennie Penney (BLAST trustee), for their support in maintaining and engaging with the alumni network and of course a big 'Thank You' to those alumni that reach back and tell us about their adventures – keep those great news stories coming!!

A huge thank you must also go to the Hospitality Team who have again provided hospitality throughout the year in support of BIGLITTLE (school) events, and have organised and run events on behalf of the charity. It is great to have such a supportive team of people who can help with event preparations and their execution; every contribution is highly valued and the combined effort is phenomenal. Some balance chaperoning/ wardrobe etc with helping at events, others have one particular event per year that they love to help at, some work in the background collecting and returning items to Christchurch (or washing up!) and others just come and help at as many events as they can! Whatever the contribution it all adds up to make a fantastic team – I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in any way - it has been a fun year...

Many parents that currently help have children coming to the end of their BIGLITTLE journey so we are very keen to encourage those with younger students to come forward and join the crew so that we can continue to run events going forward. The BIGLITTLE staff front of house at classes are always willing to introduce new volunteers to the team, or as always, volunteers can get in touch with me via info@blast-artstrust.org.

So what have we achieved in terms of meeting our charitable objectives?

Fundraising through hospitality, other initiatives and stewarding for Glastonbury Festival raised over £11,500 towards BLAST objectives and a generous external grant of £5,000 enabled us to increase our support further.

We were once again able to offer over 160 BIGLITTLE students the wonderful experience of performing with a live orchestra for Broadway Showtunes, whilst concurrently supporting musicians from the industry, including a BIGLITTLE Alumni. (£6,000)

After careful consideration by trustees of a situation where a BIGLITTLE student needed financial support to continue their training, a grant was made for one year towards their fees. (£1,400)

Outreach to local primary schools again identified a number of young people who had not, and would not due to financial reasons, have the opportunity to participate in any performing arts training outside of school. Endorsement by the schools that they would benefit from such training allowed us to sponsor five children on junior summer schools. In addition, BLAST were able to fund six workshops delivered in primary schools to promote performing arts to a wider audience, and sponsor two senior students on summer schools and workshops. Funding forty seven young carers on one-day summer workshops gave them the opportunity to take a break and become immersed in a creative experience, hopefully making lifelong memories. In addition, a number of tickets for Broadway Showtunes 2025 were offered to local youth groups to enable them to introduce young people to the musical theatre experience. (£4,101)

Providing this outreach is important to BLAST, and these initiatives were expanded this year thanks to the generous grant received, and funds raised at Glastonbury.

'The Secret Garden' production in February 2025 provided a rich and broad educational experience for the Professional Development Programme students, significantly advancing their skills and delivering valuable training benefit. This unique and challenging opportunity, demanding high production standards, not only provided immensely important training to those involved, but inspired younger students who aspire to partake in the Professional Development Programme in the future. BLAST granted funds to enhance the limited sound provision at BSG and fund live musicians to support the production. (£1,500)

So what is next?

The focus for 2025-2026 will be to continue funding similar projects with an aspiration to secure more external grants to enhance the BIGLITTLE Theatre School curriculum for current students and extend opportunities in the performing arts.

We are close to launching our new website, membership system and event ticketing system, and huge thanks must go to BIGLITTLE Alumni Suzie Wheeler, who has generously built it over hundreds of hours in her spare time at no charge to the charity.

Of course we look forward to continue sharing the successes and experiences of our alumni, and identifying opportunities to extend our reach.

And finally...

On behalf of the trustees and I would like to thank Colin for his unconditional support and encouragement and for allowing us to deliver our objectives through his fabulous school. Thanks also to Mechelle and the office team at BIGLITTLE who have helped BLAST in so many ways throughout the year.

Thanks must of course go to all of our members for their continued support - we look forward to an exciting year ahead and are grateful to have you on board.

Debs Douglas
Chair
BIGLITTLE Arts Support Trust