

# STORIES that MATTER

Skimstone  
Arts





## About this zine

*Skimstone Arts Mission: To support diverse artists, people, and communities at risk of social isolation to create work with, for, and about the world that matters to them.*

This special zine celebrates the wonderful diversity of artists' and communities' stories. It also highlights the experiences of working together from often forgotten parts of the UK and around the world, throughout the last 18 years. Together, we have created an annual programme of moving and joyful events, gigs, and festivals, and people whose paths would probably never have crossed had we not shared a common purpose: to create.



Skimstone Arts has sought to position these acts of creation to remove the barriers, divides, expectations, and limitations that society or policies place on us, and instead open a myriad of possibilities for creating something unique, and working with respect and in unity.

This zine tells the story of this unifying power and the difference it has made, including songs, poems, performances, exhibitions, films, and albums that were commissioned and/or created. It also highlights the positive impact on individuals' own lives and the regional, national, and international communities surrounding them. But how do we know they matter? Is this only to the storyteller? Or to the zine reader? Who decides if it makes a difference?

This zine shares stories from diverse professional and emerging artists and communities that often face society caused marginalization, and therefore initiates negative experiences. These include living with neurodiversity, migrant or refugee experience, LGBTQA+, disadvantaged young people, socio-economic deprivation, dementia and ageing and individuals who have experienced racism.



In our projects, these communities and artists consistently showed resilience and regular attendance, demonstrating innovation, creativity, dedication, and commitment.

Throughout our projects, communities have come together in shared spaces including community centres, cultural venues, our studio space, recording studios, churches, market squares, and university galleries.

We worked hard in all these projects and events, often with long hours of commitment to secure funding and support diverse groups who were struggling. Together, we explored current themes and real life experiences, constantly sharing skills and knowledge that aimed to make artworks that reached and inspired new and existing audiences.



This zine also hears from commissioners and funders who took risks and gave us freedom. They supported us in learning together and helped us to create and celebrate the collected data and research and impact of each artwork.

These stories are also not about hierarchies. They're about unity, mutual respect, striving for quality, originality, as well as questioning, giving new meanings and insight into the everyday or global events such as war, oppression, survival, cohesion, cultural appreciation, togetherness, celebration of humanity and our natural world.

We hope you enjoy *Stories that Matter*, beautifully illustrated with colour, textures, and patterns that we made together at the Hatton Gallery Learning Space in Newcastle University. We view it as a gift. A gift that might matter, when reading about hope, not hate. A gift of cohesion - creating, editing, curating, exhibiting in unison, not division. A gift that stirs ripples of new understanding, reflecting equality and freedom, respect and human connection, confidence and recognition.



How does this challenge those who hold the power to make a difference? Is that you?

What story or print will you positively leave in the world... that matters?

Claire Webster Saaremets  
(Artistic Director/ Co-founder with Peter Saaremets of Skimstone Arts)

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Or visit our website [www.skimstone.org.uk](http://www.skimstone.org.uk)



**Jess** Reality Boots Musician/songwriter, Gold Arts Award achiever, composer photographer, film maker, Trustee on Skimstone Arts Board of Trustees, from UK



My role with Skimstone Arts is one of evolution. I began in 2011 and I started to do my Gold Arts Award and Claire prompted me to do something original instead of editing other people's work into things. With Skimstone Arts being so interdisciplinary, I tried a variety of artforms, photography, creative writing and performance. Then I went on to perform in the band Reality Boots with the ocarina. I would never have taken a chance to do this. I went on from being a young person doing Gold Arts Award to being part of the Leadership Team, then to being nominated to speak at national Arts Awards conference in London as I was sitting on a young people's think tank representing the North East. Then I did Arts Award Advisor training and helped the young people at Skimstone Arts with their Arts Awards then came back as a Trustee on the Board of Trustees and as a published author.

We were given a lot of practical experiences that have helped us later with our own work. I have my own recording set up with a screen and blankets that is inspired from the set up Simon created that we recorded our first album. We all went to the Apple Store and played around with Logic and Garageband. We also had someone who came in and showed us the music software Reaper. We learned ways of filming like we did for Time Share. So now as author I'm delivering speeches and presentations online / YouTube and on marketing as result of this.

We gained so much confidence from the filming / editing/performing and presentations.

Skimstone Arts worked with autistic people, I didn't realise I was autistic til 25.

But Skimstone gave me a lot of structured ways of doing things and ways of handling this and working with other people. Everyone had a purpose there, we

all had a interest in each other's work and would link up and share what we were doing. Very empowering and critical to socialise for us all.

A core memory of ritual of reflection after every session was critical for us. To see people flourish eg one young person committed to saving up and buy a bass so that they could practice. So many people coming out of their shells and get the highest qualification of their lives with the Arts Award. I saw the young people being helped to meet professional standards, for some that was a shock to the system and I think it set them up for future pathways like in future work or other opportunities. Claire and Peter treated people as professionals and expected a lot, but this gave so much confidence to everyone. I remember when we played at Juice Festival at Shipley Gallery in Gateshead all those years ago, we were a band, a presence, and this young audience boy said looked and said "they're giants." We were so nervous but we played so well.



When I came back as Trustee seeing how much Skimstone Arts had grown. Spanning a lot more people with social isolation eg refugees. It's grown beyond anything I could have thought. Its been so heartening. It was so impressive to see how much Skimstone Arts had reached people with social isolation. Sometimes the artists change, the people and projects change but their essence for the Skimstone Arts experience remains the same.





Olha

Member of Ukrainian UNITY Tree performance group, from Ukraine



My professional life has never been rooted in the arts, yet I have always longed to explore something creative – drama, performance, the alchemy of the stage. Playing with words is the only art I'm easy with. Telling stories, knitting connections out of my observations, bringing new senses into the words, those are the things that help me to colour my life. Skimstone Arts opened a door, inviting me not only to perform but to let my stories breathe in front of others.



A language barrier muted me, and I became a shadow of who I had been. Through cooperation with Skimstone Arts I reclaimed that voice – first through movement and performance, and gradually, through telling my stories as I used to do before. Claire and Peter taught me a lesson I now carry everywhere: nothing is insignificant.

Our journey together has not always been easy. It led us back through what we left behind – our country, our loved ones, our real lives in Ukraine. Revisiting those memories was painful yet also healing.

Sharing the grief allowed us to shape it into purpose.

I want to keep exploring this new dimension – perhaps as a performer, perhaps managing creative projects, perhaps both.



I felt voiceless.

with Skimstone Arts I reclaimed that

# VOICE

UKRAINE

This experience has given me both joy and a restless curiosity to choose living over merely surviving.

The path that began with Skimstone Arts still unfolds before me, and I walk it knowing they believe in me, knowing their belief is teaching me to believe in myself.



UKRAINE

Every word, smile, thought or dream carries weight;

each can alter another life.



**Lanre** Artist, Poet, Community Member, Steward, Volunteer, from Nigeria



Working with Skimstone Arts was deeply transformative for me. As an artist, it's easy to feel isolated, but this experience gave me the rare and valuable opportunity to collaborate meaningfully with others. Skimstone provided not just a platform but a community where my work could be seen, heard, and genuinely appreciated.

The experience significantly boosted my confidence and validated my voice as a multidisciplinary artist. Through Skimstone, my work has reached wider audiences, which opened doors to further collaborations both here in the UK and back home in Nigeria.

Skimstone has become an integral part of my artistic journey. It's more than just an organisation I worked with, it is a space that nurtured my growth, challenged my creativity, and amplified my voice in ways I couldn't have imagined on my own.

Right now, I feel well-positioned to step fully into my identity as a poet on a broader scale. I'm not only writing and performing. I am also helping to shape the artistic ecosystem in Nigeria as a cultural curator. I lead monthly poetry and artistic gatherings that bring writers, visual artists, illustrators, music producers and other creatives together. My goal is to reimagine how poetry is experienced such as infusing it with sound, image, and performance, while also addressing pressing social issues.



Poetry for me is more than a personal expression; it's a tool for connection, for healing, and for sparking conversation. By working across mediums and cultures, I've begun creating new pathways for audiences to engage with poetry in dynamic and meaningful ways.




### My Voice Found A Home

At first,  
It was about playing a part  
In a community of creatives.  
But then,  
I found the perfect medley—  
Voices soft as a lily.  
Here, art is a tool,  
A channel, a call to action.  
Skimstone Arts gave me a platform,  
A rare privilege to collaborate.  
My journey became clearer, like a blue lake.  
From workshops to grand stages—  
The Great North Museum—my words  
Found a place with historical memories.  
To Kirkleatham Museum—oh, please take me back  
To this surreal experience.  
Honouring and advocating for a better tomorrow  
At the Holocaust Memorial—my heart was overwhelmed.  
A stranger from across the ocean, now more than acquainted.  
My work mattered.  
I was heard. I felt the freedom to express.  
For once in my life, saying thank you didn't feel enough.  
Skimstone Arts is home.  
I was embraced with tenderness and kindness.

HOME





With continued consistency, collaboration, and growth, I believe I can do so much more both locally and globally. My vision is to keep expanding the reach of poetry, while staying rooted in community and storytelling that reflects both the beauty and complexity of the human experience. I can't take all the credit to myself. I learnt a great deal from working with Skimstone Art. My appreciation goes to Claire Webster Saaremetts.

Iryna *Member of Ukrainian UNITY Tree performance group, from*  
Ukraine

I have always expressed interest in drama and occasionally performed on small stages. With Skimstone arts, I have explored performance in way of telling my own story rather than pretending to be someone else. This persona has helped understand myself better and explore feelings that were hidden deep inside. Before I met Claire and Peter, I used poetry to express myself in my hidden notes, but I didn't feel confident enough to share these experiences. They have showed me how much people around me care about it, so I was brave to display some of my poems to share something not everyone talks about.

These types of performances were very new to me and at first I was very sceptical (sorry Claire). However, I quickly realised that this process helped me ground myself and discard any negative thoughts from the surrounding world. Sometimes I was feeling too lazy to wake up and go to a 5 hour rehearsals, although in only 5 minutes in, I have felt relieved and energetic. I am utterly grateful to Skimstone for teaching me how to control myself when things seem hopeless.

The journey of self expression and self reflection was something I didn't know I needed. It allowed me show myself for who I am - not a lowly refugee - but I strong person with an influential voice.

Thank you for this opportunity

THANK  
YOU







Clare

Poet, Performer,

Community collaborator,

from UK

For me Skimstone was always a part of

the standing up, part of a humanity

learning from and liberating each other.

seeking that liberation.

Within my limitations I

will seek to follow the learning and

example from all the people I met in

Skimstone, to learn more and more how to stand up.

# WAXING UP

## First Awakening

In 2022 I received an invitation to be part of a Skimstone Byker steering group connected with events and work happening in Byker. I didn't believe I could contribute much to it but attended anyway, overcoming my fear. During the autumn the group participated in a series of writing workshops ready for Holocaust Memorial Day. I wrote two poems, one in collaboration with another group member and one on my own. It felt liberating to write again and I'm still proud of what we wrote.

My solo poem began in doubt that I had anything worthwhile to say because "I've been through no holocaust, I've never had to flee." From complacency and comforts I turned to awareness, to a fear as I watch events and narratives developing in the UK especially, because it's personal to me, in regards to transgender people and how being told human rights here are safe was no comfort. I thought of Germany in 1933. Did anyone then foresee Auschwitz?

I hadn't dreamed that two and a half years later a holocaust watch group would send a red notice to the UK about the harsh possibilities for trans rights here, how rights have already been lost and how the Supreme Court and EHRC seem determined to remove many more. I hadn't thought there would be race riots or how even in the last week violent neo-Nazi groups would organise protests in our land. Back then we hadn't spent two years watching an almost livestreamed genocide with our government standing with companies making the weapons, including in my own city or seen the US government do and try to do so much to many vulnerable communities, how they now have a prison for immigrants some have called Alligator Auschwitz.





So how do I want to react? In fear? In defeat? By losing hope? All those would be so easy. But the last verse of the poem still stands:

Teach me to stand up for the poor and for the refugee.  
Teach me to stand for equity, compassion, liberty.  
Teach me to stand for human rights, a world community.  
Or there'll be no one at my back when hatred comes for me.

Hatred is coming. It's come. Perhaps it always will to different groups of people as we're encouraged to fear each other and push each other away rather than learning from and liberating each other. For me Skimstone was always a part of the standing up, part of a humanity seeking that liberation. Within my limitations I will seek to follow the

learning and example from all the people I met in Skimstone, to learn more and more how to stand up. It's the only way we have a future worth holding hope for.

# AWAKE

First came an art project working with local people and refugees to produce large scale collage art works. I have almost no artistic confidence and wondered what I could really offer. I discovered I could offer and achieve far more than I'd thought, within the safety and support that Skimstone so often gave to artists, participants and volunteers. We had to work quickly and even more quickly when those of us who returned for a second long morning decided to almost completely redesign the aims of what we were doing. Somehow we ended up with five large collages relating to events in many countries. Powerful works with strong photographic images and extraordinary words written in other Skimstone groups including a writing group I'd helped run – entirely out of my comfort zone – with refugees mostly from Teesside. I'm still dead proud of everything we achieved and of the works we produced and that they were able to be displayed both in Newcastle and in Hexham Abbey.

Then came the week itself. Three performances one day, three more the next day. I think every participant taught me something from their experiences, their artistry and the compassion in their beliefs and actions. Those days will probably stay with me as long as my body carries me. My small part was to perform a poem I'd written and I learned that poems aren't necessarily ever finished. It changed with every performance as improvised lines were added or changed or improved. I spoke out hope, immense hope, in the reality of the horrors we humans are capable of. What Skimstone created for that week was incredible. I was exhausted by the end but immensely thankful, moved, and I knew in those days that if we truly want it, all can be well. That our species still has a choice either to build or break a future.

Later some of us had the opportunity to take part as artists in a peace event at Hexham Abbey commemorating the second anniversary of the most recent invasion of Ukraine, sadly still continuing today but mostly forgotten by headline writers. At the end of that event we held ribbons attached to a giant heart, suspended from the roof. It was much better than my description sounds. Surrounded by such mutual respect, such compassion, such hurt and hope, such vision for the future in a difficult present I cried, as I had when a Ukrainian lament was sung earlier in the evening. That moment with Skimstone and the Hexham peace group was everything. It was an almost overwhelming picture of what we all need, now, today, every day. I will never forget. I can never forget.





**Simon** *Chair of Skimstone Arts' Board of Trustees, from UK*

I've had the privilege of being Chair of Skimstone Arts for the last three years, and as we come to the end of this chapter, I wanted to share a few thoughts—not just about what Skimstone has achieved, but what it's taught me.

When we made the decision to close the organisation, we wanted it to be a positive ending. One filled with pride and care. And that's exactly how I feel—grateful, changed, and proud.

Skimstone has always been about people and stories. We worked with young people finding their voice, with older people sharing their memories, and with refugees and people seeking asylum who brought powerful, courageous stories into the light. Our work was never just about the art—it was about connection, confidence, and creativity.



As Chair, I helped with governance and strategy, yes—but what I loved most was supporting our board. I saw trustees grow in confidence and clarity, and I'm proud to have helped build that strong, thoughtful team.

None of it would have been possible without the leadership of Claire and Peter. Their vision, creativity and integrity were the heartbeat of Skimstone. I've learned so much from how they led—with care, conviction, and courage.

Of course, it's sad to say goodbye. But we're not closing because we've run out of ideas. We're closing because we chose to finish well—on our own terms, with our values intact.

I'll carry what I've learned at Skimstone into everything I do in the future: the importance of listening, the strength of co-creation, and the power of making space for voices that need to be heard.

To everyone who was part of Skimstone—thank you. Thank you for your trust, your stories, your creativity. It's been one of the great honours of my life.

Skimstone may be closing its doors, but its spirit will continue—in the people, the memories, and the ripples we made together.



## Helen and Claire

**Commissioner – St Anthony's of Padua Care Services, Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne from UK**

We started our fabulous journey with Claire and Peter in 2017 through an "artist in residency" project supported by Newcastle City Council. The residency explored "Across the Ages in Walker" running a joint project with our local youth service - the Bostey, our Day Service and Assisi House, our housing with care scheme. It was a wonderful experience, with Skimstone working with people to create a film, "In the blink of an eye" which was premiered at the Alphabetti Theatre. Everyone involved got so much from this experience that we have continued our journey with Claire and Peter, initially with a few more short-term projects which has now evolved into being a core part of what we do. A few years ago, we developed our overarching Health and Wellbeing Plan with one of the four key strands of work focusing on Mobility, Connectivity and Visibility for people as they grow older. The work we do with Skimstone Arts is critical, ensuring that the people we support have a voice, are heard and have opportunities to create, perform and engage with the communities around them.



Over the last few years as we have been embedding new ways of working, it has been inspiring to watch how people we support grow and flourish as part of the journey with Claire and Peter. Our St Anthony's band, the Upstartz, rehearse every week, have launched their first CD and are working on their second, have performed in public and have been recognised. Being part of the band, being involved in writing and composing and performing has had a significant impact on their lives, which they can tell you themselves. It reaches far beyond the rehearsal studio into other aspects of people's lives which has brought about positive change. For many this is the first time they have had the opportunity to create.

The Upstartz performed at the Unity Festival in October 2024, the first time performing away from St Anthony's. We shared with Claire and Peter at the time that it had been the best Upstartz performance we had seen to date, all members of the band really rose to the occasion and yes, the turnout was fabulous. What Claire and Peter have created is amazing, for all those that had perhaps doubted the power of musical engagement and performance are now converts!! At the time we were worried that the band hadn't rehearsed for a week, but we had nothing to worry about. The question at the time for the band was, when is our next gig!!! This is why the journey with Skimstone Arts is and continues to be important to us all at St Anthony's. Thank you, Claire, and thank you Peter.





**Natalie** Research Fellow in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences  
Northumbria University, Commissioner, from UK

I have worked together with Skimstone over several years and hugely value our partnership. The creative expertise contributed by Skimstone has helped us to unearth and give voice to perspectives in ways that we struggle to do through more traditional research methods.

This has included the use of theatre to provoke conversation about the challenges people face when thinking about their future housing options, and a radio broadcast to raise awareness of the educational experiences of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater Communities.



Skimstone have also contributed key learning opportunities for our Northumbria Health and Social Care students

have been supported to

participate in, and witness first-hand

the benefits of the arts for health and

wellbeing.

these experiences were transformational

The creative expertise contributed by Skimstone has helped us to unearth and give voice to perspectives in ways that we struggle to do through more traditional research methods.

when I work with Skimstone I know and trust absolutely that people and their

# STORIES RESPECTED

will be

That's not always the case, and having that trust is really important, particularly when you're working with groups such as Gypsy and Traveller Communities who are often misunderstood or misrepresented.



Charlotte Commissioner from Edinburgh University and Durham University, from UK



The significance of working with Skimstone Arts opened up a whole new way of communicating research findings and engaging with a wide range of people, from members of the public experiencing dementia to senior policy advisors and those delivering front-line services. I could never have imagined (or had the skills!) to create plays that launched at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival or films that have been watched by audiences around the world; and yet these creative pieces were developed in partnership and were wholly true to the original research projects. These were simply a joy to create with Claire and Pete and colleagues at Skimstone Arts.

The importance of this journey was finding ways of engaging people with discussions about the stigma, challenges and joys of living with dementia is critical if we are to shape a world in which people with dementia are valued and cared for as the amazing people with full lives that they are.

# WORDS

Words flow, people dance



Voices call, a story to tell



From you to the world



**Shirley**

*Community Collaborator as musician/songwriter with Shirley & the Gang, from Botswana*



For me it was a path of discovery .. of myself, working with Skimstone Arts, this had given me another side of me I did not know. But a side of me I like, I enjoy, more confident, to do my best. The singing part – I wasn't even sure I was a good singer, but now I know I can do it. It's something I want to do in the future.

It has given me confidence to sing in public, since then I have made a poem for Cancer Research. It has really changed me, I was shy and afraid of people. Being the lead singer, it has moved me to say to myself don't hold yourself back.

I was a bit surprised when the audience liked us, I was very happy, it showed me I am doing something great. The message in the songs changed us and the perspective we have of life.

We still talk a lot with each other, when we came back from the festivals. When we are having a difficult time, or stressed, we remember our songs, like That is Life. Life can be like a puzzle and we just have to keep being hopeful that the life will be bright. Our songs have messages of survival and speak to the soul. To think we came up with that and how they can change our lives.



It's important because like me, it was a path of discovery or renewal, reviving yourself, to understand what is going out there, coming together to write the songs, and to hear someone say life is a puzzle. How did they come up with that concept? It must be like that for them. Life is a song.. well that is an emotion, everyone coming up with the ideas for Life is a... I can say life is like this.. but part of the song is happy and we can think about that.

It created a connection and a family amongst us. So even when we see each other, we can have that ever lasting connection.

After we had recorded the songs in the recording studio, people have been emailing me and asked me to talk about the music. This gave me a bigger connection and also with Refugee Futures and we did an interview with The Mirror newspaper about how we integrated, so we told them about Skimstone Arts as this was important for us– and we sent them one of the songs. This provided a bigger connection for me.

This work has helped us to express ourselves. It doesn't end with Skimstone Arts, it continues. I love writing!





Shaho

Photographer, videographer, video editor, from Kurdistan, Iraq

I worked as a photographer and video editor with Skimstone Arts

PEACE

This is very important as Hollywood tells us we need this all but working together it's made me realise we can make a film using phone and camera, it made film making more accessible for us. We are often told when we are students we need this and we need this but we are showing how we can make the story using what we have.



What mattered most to me in this role was the opportunity to empower artists like myself to showcase their creative talents to a wider audience.



My time with Skimstone was more than just a professional experience; it was a humanitarian journey. Together, we shared our stories with British society and had the privilege of partnering with prestigious universities like Durham and Newcastle—important hubs of knowledge and innovation.

ART

One of the challenges was making films with limited finance and usually needing many people. But we made it easier by using less equipment and because we really believed in it, to deliver these importance stories to the community and public, we worked carefully with the shooting and editing to make the films.



Through this collaboration, I connected with a diverse community of artists, talented individuals, and everyday people—all coming together to collaborate, exchange ideas, and engage actively in artistic endeavours.





**Ako** Photographer, videographer, video editor, presenter, from Kurdistan, Iraq



I've contributed to various Skimstone projects over the years, including Holocaust Memorial Day Events, Refugee Week, and Unity Festival, as well as exhibitions, films, and other artistic collaborations. I can confidently say that my experience with Skimstone has been the most meaningful and enriching part of my artistic journey this past decade. They didn't just allow me to bring my ideas to life—they helped me refine and amplify my work.



I truly can't imagine my life or art without Skimstone. This organization has been a powerful, humane, and beautiful voice, helping me and my work reach every layer of society.

ART



What kept me coming back was Skimstone's mission: to celebrate art and voices across communities, regardless of background. Everyone who works with Skimstone feels at home.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Skimstone redefined art and community for me. They revived marginalized voices and listened to them all. They gave me opportunities to share my art in universities, museums, parks, and libraries—spaces where art is elevated and human stories are heard.



# The Upstartz

Band members, songwriters, performers from St Anthony's Care services UK



"It's about coming together and contributing, and we've all contributed to the songs."

"It keeps Peter and Claire off the streets!!"

"We work together as a band, this creates inclusivity and it doesn't matter about your age, ability or background, we're all members of the one band. Even if it's just one word we contribute."

"I've enjoyed every minute of it."

"I live on my own and feel lonely so it helps to be part of something. In this band, I don't feel so lonely."

"I liked it when we performed in front of people, I was glad. I was proud of myself."

"It's nice to make other people happy."



"It's a proper confidence booster."

"The band is about our hidden talents and our emotions about life. I love it. It's very important to share our songs in public. It challenges the stereotypes of what people think of older people."

"We also learn about music, song composition, arrangements, vocal warm ups, percussion to help us craft the songs."

"We decide on the theme and make our songs say something about the world or us to think about."

"We do use humour too."





**Carlene** *Young artist, volunteer, member of Leadership team and Reality Boots, from UK*

I started with Skimstone Arts when I was young, I was 17 and has gone to a course that Claire ran on self employment and the arts. I took part in quite few creative projects. The Amaze project at The Alnwick Gardens where we filmed birds and nature, we done a soundscape and film and photographic exhibition.

I wrote a poem ,with the help of Claire for a project at Washington Wildlife and Wetlands Trust in Washington. That was nearly 18 x years ago. I took part in doing me Bronze, Silver and Gold Arts Awards. I was one of the first to get the Gold Arts Award in the area.

I recorded my singing for the first Reality Boots album and I learned to play an instrument. I've had a mixture of everything. And I've supported others as a volunteer and been part of the leadership team.

Skimstone Arts, like Peter & Claire, were very supported and got the best out of people and give everyone a voice. This is what I took out of Skimstone Arts. I feel like I will always go above and beyond and help others, this is what I took from Skimstone Arts and I learned a lot of tolerance. I've learned a lot about myself mentally. Even if I didn't have confidence and believe in myself Skimstone Arts saw the potential and encouraging people to try new things like singing.

Like I when I stood up and sang in front of people like at the Shipley Gallery, part of Juice Festival and we all wore the blue T shirts, it was daunting but quite enjoyable, I kind of was .. probably .. did I just do that. I had the confidence to stand up and do that. So if Claire and Peter ask me to do more things I'll think yes I'll do that.

When Skimstone Arts did Doorbells performance and even though we weren't part of it I supported it by being an audience member.

Cos I felt like I've been through a lot, mentally and even in my bad days I always had somewhere to come to and forget what was going on and be creative.

When it's hard to speak and explain myself, I struggle with this sometimes being creative helps that so like music, you can say it differently, or photography you can do this. Like when we were in the old building in Newcastle, we used the space and I photographed Steven (another young person) and did photo manipulation and it showed a feeling of being sad and we used this in the exhibition. I'm always happy when my work is shown to the public.





**Eddie** Community collaborator, volunteer, steward, photographer, supporting youth projects, from Poland



It was good to express my feelings about Skimstone Arts and how they affected my life and not only my life but the lives of others, a hug amount of people. They help us with attention to details, with telling all the world about our surroundings, about nature, they always care about the younger, the older people and people from different countries.



I feel honoured to be part of the Skimstone Arts family. I had an opportunity to be part of many projects but I will highlight three of them.

Fear or Freedom at Newcastle Library for Holocaust Memorial Day. I was able to become the artist and they helped me to tell the story and give justice of my grandmother Helena, she and her little brother, were the only survivors of my family of Second World War. I felt full feeling when the story of my granny was included in the exhibition.

Another project I most appreciated was being part of UNITY Festival 2024 and I could learn to be part of the commissioned team and choose the right artists for the Hancock Museum and also learn the best skills to be a steward. I had training and opportunity to learn many things behind the scenes at Hancock and Redcar Museums. I was so happy to see from A to Z how the festival looked like and own importance to make the festival happen and help to make it is a huge success. To help people to understand what is going on, when I leading people to different events, and also to show how Claire and Peter to trust me as one of the lead stewards. So happy they did this and they helped me to feel a better person, to value me, understand how important the role is there.

As for being part of UNITY festival, helped me understanding how the impact of Claire and Peter and all the team put for other peoples' lives and how we can do positive changes, showing different exhibitions, different performances, different workshops, helping people learn new skills, this was so amazing for me. Meet other artist and learn form them, make new connections and be inspired and be a positive influence to others as well. I so appreciate that. I am so much happy that I have been part of the UNITY Festival.



The third thing I want to say, I was part of the Holocaust Memorial Day and I so much appreciate that Skimstone Arts gave me the trust to lead on interviews on of participants on the day at Newcastle Library. I feel so happy that I did it and it helped me to understand my potential and showing me I can do more things.



The journey with Skimstone Arts was very important for me as helped me to more believe in myself as a true leader, an artist with potential to being more visible and understood. I so much appreciate Claire and Peter's efforts to help me during this journey. I am so sad that Skimstone Arts is finishing but I believe that it is not end, but beginning of something new and I feel happy to be part of the journey, the positivity, people of open hearts.



**Martim** Actor, performer, Facilitator of movement, Artist in Residence from Portugal

What struck me most about our work together from 2007 to 2024 within Skimstone Arts was how we managed to, through daily actions like tea rituals how we can approach people, creating connections and empathy. That is one of the main characteristic of those performances of Cold coffee at Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Tea Side, A Travelling Tearoom which we performed in market squares across the North East. How the empathy and connection through a personal confession story, could be established. The little acts that we unfolded had a basis of a personal and intimate aspect of ourselves, and through a common ritual of a coffee or tea, we were able to bring others people's stories in.

Another element, we were very playful and acknowledging our clownish personas and we used those personas to play around and reach other people and we did this using story telling, mime and choreography and routines, and those little things came from a truthful place within ourselves and expose them to the other people. This is theatre in a very horizontal way.

We both felt the power in this type of work. We knew we were stepping on something gold as we were alive and drank from the excitement and energy of playing with ideas and most of it we let the other (public) be the recipient of that exchange and become a sort co-author, because we would engage in their stories. The tea and coffee would invite their stories and this was so special. This was an environment of trust and intimacy. And in the back of our converted tearoom truck!

With Skimstone Arts I developed a sense of pride of using theatre tools to reach real people and perhaps making a more significant impact in people's lives.

Skimstone Arts grew to be a hub to show different practitioners and communities in the world especially with those left out of society. There is now a clearer political/social action take. Skimstone Arts' concerns became more a reaction to society and providing for all communities and artists that are neglected or in the arts.

This was important to me because it was and it is important as there is some humanity and makes sense to me. Using these tools, movement workshops, allows me to be more in what I believe is important in life. For me as a human being what do we give and receive in return. I'm more aware of that social role as an artist than I was before.





## Reality Boots and Young Artist Collective members (Phillip, Raf, Arthur, Verity, Nicole)

Song writer, band members, singers, drummer, Musicians, assistant tutors, stage management, mentors, collaborators, role models, poets, film makers, event management, evaluators, photographers, stewards, programmers, from UK

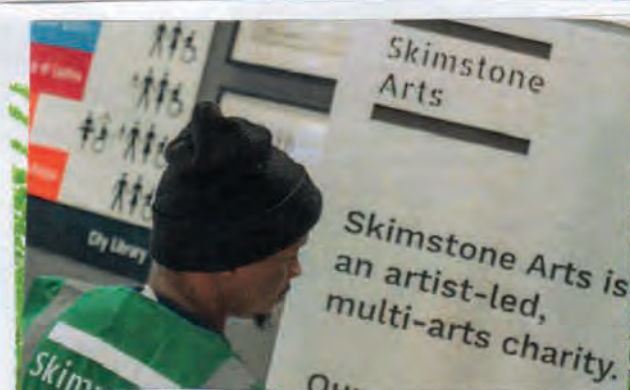
"Working with Skimstone Arts has been an inspiration to other young people"

"Watching other people grow and working with professional musicians to create different styles of music, it builds confidence in people"

"Developing my leadership and project management skills and my ability to creative control has been amazing"

"It's a lot more inclusive because no educational and professional requirements however if you want to get an Arts Award, a nationally recognised qualification, and find your main artistic interest, you get a lot of benefits and support that you wouldn't get in other education environments"

"Collaborating with a wide variety of people with professionals, like working with Skimstone Arts 'artists like Claire and Shaho and student or less experienced people. Working together to produce a piece of work for a project that is shown in public. This for us is a major creative milestone if it is displayed at a public event and your name is credited on it"



"Gaining skills for employability, eg like people skills – learning to coordinate a band, to archive the different things we do, learning song writing process and how to support people and step back and listen, rather than influence. so useful to have stuff and building networks within the art world. Having a purpose for playing your instrument for personal interest."

"Nurturing people's abilities so learning the technical side of things, for example setting up musical and film making equipment"

"It's given us a chance to get everyone's perspectives on different subjects like a personal refugee story and being able to put their story into lyrics and a create a song like Memories Lost and Land on Fire"

"Working as part of Skimstone Arts improves confidence, like working in the band as people can mentor you, and then when you are feeling confident you can mentor someone else. Everyone has someone to talk to if you are not feeling confident"





"Skimstone Arts is massively different to other music projects as no one has ever had to pay, it's been totally accessible. People have different things going on in their lives, and different abilities, so coming together creates a different energy and unique music and songs. We are not a group for a silo or ring fenced group, Skimstone Arts is different and we can all come to same place"



"There isn't a top down approach. Skimstone Arts has a different feel and we all have different skills, no hierarchy, when we do gigs we all play together."



"There's a messy nature to creating and trying to bring a lot of things together, and clashes of ideas, but we work through these things together and take the things that work forward together or put them into something else"

"It's a spiritual thing really, when we see other artists, like spiritual people, a sense of peaceful. The new songs we did for Holocaust Memorial Day and meeting people from Bosnia and people from other cultures"

"Music is an amazing and inexplicable thing but the way Skimstone Arts does it is to show us how to take the time to listen to everyone's perspective, as a group and not one person's voice is there, we can all be heard"

"Improving your mindset and your own skills"



"This is so important for our mental health – being in social group and having something to look forward to"







# COMMUNITY PASSION

"Recording work in the studio and our visits to see other artworks like at Glass Centre and meeting other people from other communities"

"Sharing skills and bringing out skills I didn't think I had, like playing clarinet and supporting someone else to play them"

GROW

PURPOSE

HOPE



"Broadening your sense of the world with people from different communities and cultures, countries and settings"



"The visibility of being able to show work that is viewed by the public so reaching audiences you wouldn't otherwise be able to has meant a lot to me"



**Nicole** Young band leader, lead singer with Reality Boots, running sessions, stage management, photographer, bass player, from UK

This has been a journey of discovery and also a chance to express things that I would not have been able to do elsewhere. I've been coming for a long time now to Skimstone Arts. I like writing songs for Reality Boots. Some of my songs are about myself and others are about other's experiences like lived refugee experience, and seeing how other people write songs. Getting a platform to perform has given me a massive chance to build confidence and to record our songs so we can get them out into the world, they are not just hidden away.



The social side of it's been very important for me. Meeting new people and when new people come to Skimstone, welcoming them in and hearing their life journeys. I have lots of examples of this, like when I first joined, I was with other people who also struggled with their mental health and then Martin, a professional artist, and seeing his art work, seeing art installations and soundscapes from other professional artists who worked with us.



Seeing some of the theatre shows that Claire did with the Ensemble, seeing different sides of Skimstone Arts working together. We get to help out and give feedback, we have our say, it's interesting coming together to discuss this.

This has given me a structure in my life and keeps me from being isolated. I'm a busy Mum with four children and this keeps my mental health positive. If I didn't come to Skimstone, I wouldn't be doing any song writing, performing, expressing myself and meeting up with the band. It is so important as everyone is so welcoming, no matter what you are going through in your life. We do music every week and trips out to new places. The band is so accommodating to everyone who joins and helps people advance as musicians like timing, hearing keys. Keith's warm ups help us with rhythm as he shows us intricate things, but he shows us in such a way, even beginners can get it. Keith is very important because he has a broad range of musical expertise but he knows how to organise things for everyone. So parts we need transposing into clarinet he helps with this. He know how to talk with people in a way that they understand. He's very empathetic to people's abilities and strengths.



When Claire wasn't very well with her brain surgery, I went into St Anthony's Day Centre with Peter and we worked on the songs they had written. I handed out percussion stuff, I learnt there are many different stages of being older and having dementia, good and bad days and it helped me to understand about how to be positive with them, and listen to them.



We can become very focused when we work towards gigs and get the music to a good place. Claire will come in and give us some positive but also critical feedback which encourages to practice more and what we need to work on so we can give of our best performance.

Being in the leadership team we know what's going on and we can take on jobs which helps things to run smoothly. When we work with Peter, he helps us to find ways of what we want to say Peter is fun and calming but if we need something doing, he does gently move us on He gives important pastoral care and has helped me when I've been going through hard times.



Long term I still think about writing music and doing my own album. My songs would be about going through difficult things like in my childhood and what helps and overcoming struggles and opening up chances for people to now feel alone. It would be a positive message.

My highlight was I really liked Claire's Birthday Party last year, the atmosphere was great and seeing how much Reality Boots has come on and seeing people really appreciate us. It was such a positive event and everyone was on the ball and so organised. I still had the song we made for Claire playing in my head on repeat, humming it in my kitchen, all weekend!





Nataliia

visual artist, performer with UNITY Tree Ukrainian performance group, from Ukraine

I first met Claire at the end of 2023, during the preparation for Holocaust Memorial Day 2024. Under the guidance of Claire and Theresa, together with other artists and photographers from different countries, we created panels and explored how war and other social conflicts affect the lives and freedom of people who find themselves in such conditions. Each participant brought their own difficult life story, and the photographs and drawings helped surface suppressed emotions. What stood out to me was the care, compassion, and deep respect Claire showed to every individual involved.



# LOSE TO GAIN

My very first experience in performance art happened thanks to Skimstone Arts. One of the most challenging and essential aspects of creating a performance is reaching a shared understanding of the concept and vision among all participants. For a performance to feel alive and unified, everyone must connect with the intention, embrace it, and contribute their energy and unique experience. This process requires open communication, trust, and a willingness to listen to one another, allowing us to co-create a harmonious space for creativity and connection with the audience. This meaningful experience became possible thanks to the talent of Artistic Director Claire Webster, who knows how to create such a space for artistic expression.



I was also involved in creating the performances Peace Journey at Hexham Abbey, Manifestation at Great North Museum and Kirkleathma Museum for UNITY Festival 2024 and Turning to Face the Sun for Holocaust Memorial Day Events 2025.



Carol Trustee, from UK

There is a place...

where all like minded people are welcome to share their thoughts and experiences; where diverse artists come together with creative communities to make a difference; where audiences are challenged to think about the world that matters to them and take action; and where connectivity, confidence and well-being are nurtured and grow. This place is 'Skimstone Arts'.

with us

HOPE

creative, fearless



I'm Carol and I came to this place when it first appeared on the map. I was an evaluation specialist from a funding organisation keen to learn from, and share the inclusive and collaborative way Skimstone worked. I was so caught up in the place that 5 years later I volunteered to become a Trustee and have felt like part of the Skimstone nation ever since. I have experienced a world of wonderful and uplifting art, been part of some incredible, inclusive and joyful events and met inspiring people who have come from difficult places to land in Skimstone and share their creativity and their stories.



The people of Skimstone Arts have helped me through some challenging times and I hope I have been able to contribute to helping some of them to find a safe and welcoming place to land. Skimstone will always be a place in my heart - and in the hearts of all those who have found friendship and creativity there.





**Kema** *Community Facilitator, Song writer, Performer, Rap Artist, from UK/Zambia*

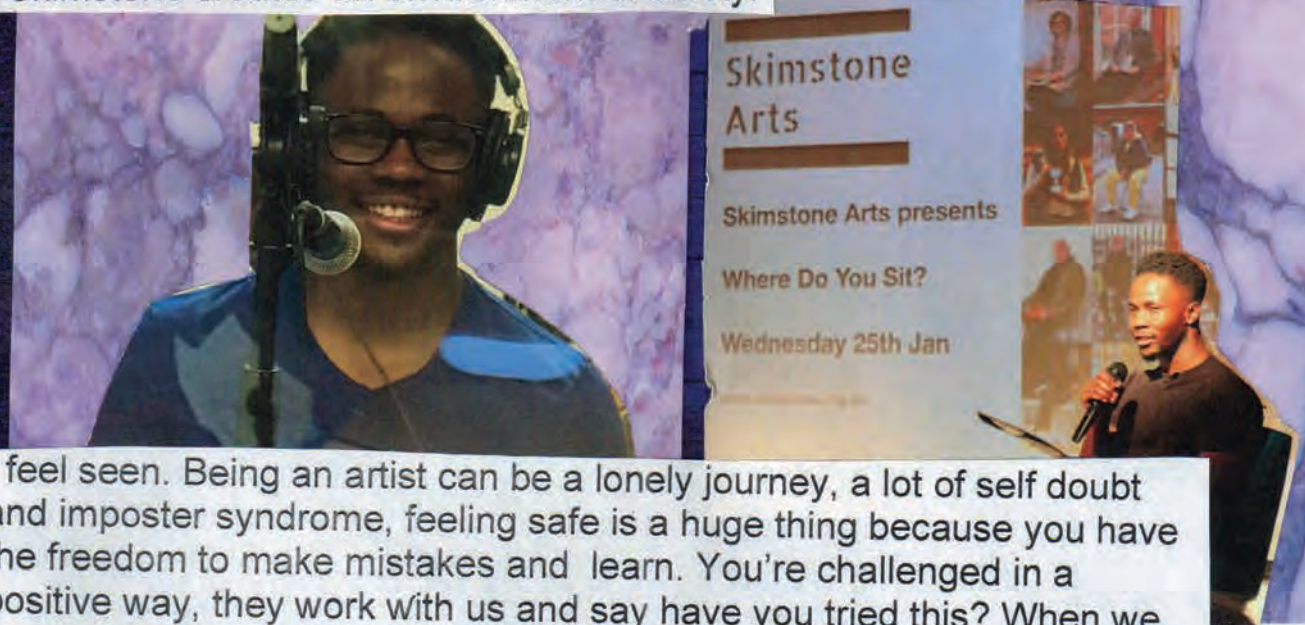
The way Skimstone Arts looks after artists, doesn't feel like you're in a job, you're being paid but this way helps us to self develop. In other situations no one checks in but with Skimstone they look after you and check in at the beginning, in the process and at the end.

This gives a level of value. Empowering people to carry out what they are doing. Working with L on the estate in Byker I felt abit out of my depth, Peter and Claire gave me support. Doing the evaluations afterwards helped me to learn different ways of working.

I use Skimstone Arts way in my practice. It really focus' on development rather than just delivering a workshop or sessions.

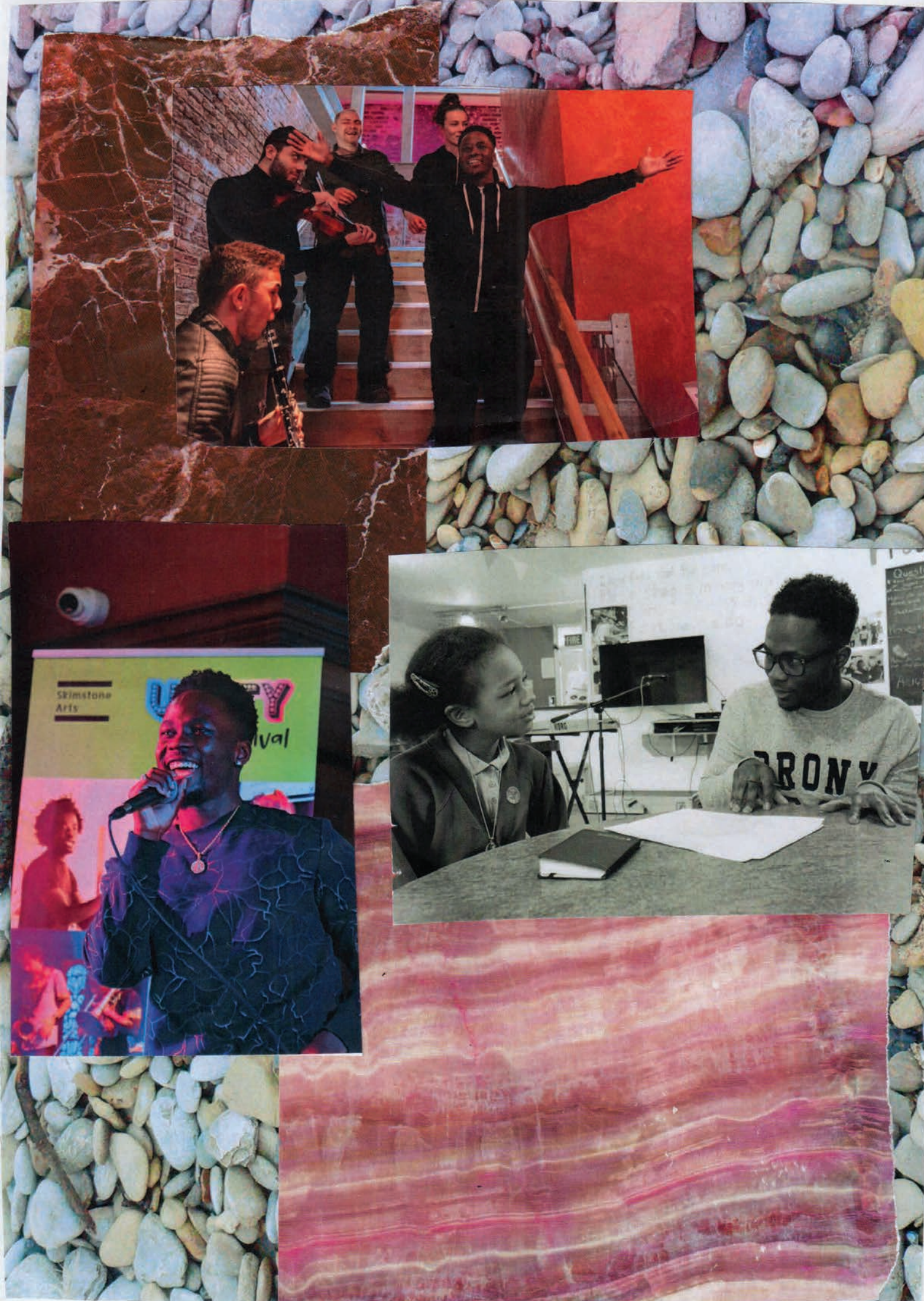
UNITY Festival 2023 was great because when I've done shows it's brought you're on .. but with Skimstone, it's the interaction and connection, real life stories, brining the people and the artists together. So performing with UNITY Festival, my set was great, but before that audiences got a chance to take part in my song writing workshop and see how the process works.

It's a unique way, I love it, it feels really connected. I also feel supported. It would be terrifying performing in front of all those people but Skimstone creates an environment of safety.



I feel seen. Being an artist can be a lonely journey, a lot of self doubt and imposter syndrome, feeling safe is a huge thing because you have the freedom to make mistakes and learn. You're challenged in a positive way, they work with us and say have you tried this? When we created songs ... Claire gave me some feedback to sing a certain a way to help stretch the notes. When song writing with Peter, there's a certain language with him, he knows exactly what I mean like when I ask him for something... if we're making songs with children, and he explains to me the musical terminology and starts to play it. It's a relationship, I think wow, I can help other people with this. We work together.

All this is important for me as it gives me hope for humanity. I sometimes don't understand why certain companies get funded. With Skimstone it restores my faith that there good people who genuinely want to make a difference. And they do.





Verity Marketing Assistant (Also Musician with Reality Boots band (see their story))

# UNIQUE



Three years ago when I first started, my main role was getting delegated tasks from Skimstone Arts' Creative Producer and Marketing Manager. Over time my responsibilities have grown from that.

In that first year I was learning things like WIX website software, how to edit that, update it and set up Mailchimp newsletter, using the content/work handed from someone else.

So I've grown in confidence in using those things - now it's up to me to manage them, get newsletters out and manage the website.

This feels good and it's nice to develop new things and makes me more confidence in the role I've been doing.

# VOICE!



Both have been creative, including with social media. I was delivering social media stuff that someone else had planned. But gradually over the three years, when I was given the freedom to do it myself, it's very satisfying to do something so visual and tangible. And to see people interact with it, it was really lovely. It's a unique position to be in as I had only been working with Skimstone Arts from Holocaust Memorial Day Events and UNITY Festival 2023, and then the Ouseburn Festival 2024.

During that time I began taking on more marketing responsibilities by that point. In other organisations a relatively young freelancer wouldn't be trusted to take that on. So it was a bit scary but really empowering as someone trusts you to do a good job.

Then I went on to work on UNITY Festival in 2024 and HMD in 2025 it's helped me to learn a lot of things in a quicker time period. I made a few mistakes but I learned how to change things. I really enjoyed having that creative freedom. I think it's interesting how much creativity goes into marketing.



**Rafael** Assistant Project Manager (Also Musician with Reality Boots band (see their story)

One of the major key roles has been supporting volunteering at various different events. A lot of it was the planning and creating spreadsheets in order to figure out where people needed to be at different times, to allow the festival or events to run smoothly. On the day a lot of it was bringing the volunteers together and making sure it was clear what their roles were e.g using the documents I had created. I had to make sure that people who were based in single locations knew what to do, when to take their breaks, who's roles was flexible.

I was applying and developing skills I already had but in a very different context. A lot of it is communication and people skills and trying to make them feel confident. I learned you can do a lot of planning but there are always things that come up, so I learned how to catch things before they happen. So for example the flow of the festival - one of the things that was a great challenge was how big the Great North Museum Hancock was so we had to funnel audiences into where activity was happening and guide them there. Physically having people coming up and getting them interested and explaining what was going on was really important.

One of the things I've really enjoyed is the early process thinking, first steps and visioning and we've been able to do this more over the three years. I've never really done this before, be part of the creation. I particularly enjoyed for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) curating the space to make it feel more intimate. Then talking to people how this affected them. I was involved in gathering evaluation from audiences for HMD 2025 and I hadn't done this before. It's a lot about listening and coming up with open questions that allow them to come up with what they have experienced.



Hearing people's reactions to the UNITY Festival and HMD it created a sense of achievement and satisfaction that the intentions behind what we had created were realised, it had an emotional impact, that they wanted to do something, to create change. If you don't have an evaluation you don't hear what they are pledging to do, what difference it's made.





**Sam** Grant Manager – Youth Music, from UK

When I first started at Youth Music in 2022, I was given a long list of notes on the North East grants I'd be taking over. Next to Skimstone Arts was written, "I LOVE Skimstone. They are LOVELY people and do incredible work.". In my three years at Youth Music, I have only ever found this to be true.

Skimstone were the first of my projects to send me something in the post: a Reality Boots album that sounded like everything that makes the North East what it is: heart, passion, and the courage to be yourself. And that's Skimstone. Never once in any of my time working with them did I feel as if they were anything but genuinely kind, genuinely interested in what I had to say, and always just *genuine*.

Not many people know how hard it is to make a youth project sing to the tune of the young people involved. Youth voice isn't a box you tick or something you just assume will come without having to find it, meet it where it is, and nurture it.

In everything Skimstone do they show what it means to put young people first – to give them the confidence not just to be loud but to be true to who they are, and to grow as part of a community.



I, like everyone who has worked with Skimstone, will miss them and following their journey as an organisation. But I also know that what they have built means that the journeying is not over, and never will be, because the torch they are handing over to their community is brighter than ever.

Aside from Peter giving me a long list of niche Jazz-oriented guitar players to listen to, and Claire reminding me that I need to listen to more Stevie Wonder: this journey is one which has constantly reminded me why I do what I do. From being sent that Reality Boots album, to the latest Unity Festival booklet, Skimstone have shown me that amid the busy grant cycles of the funding world, there are people proving every day what it means to be human.

I do most of my work at a desk, but every time I would check in on Skimstone, I'd feel like I was right there with them, and it's that kind of experience that reminds me always to look for life, for joy, and for reasons to keep doing what you love.





Artist, from Ukraine

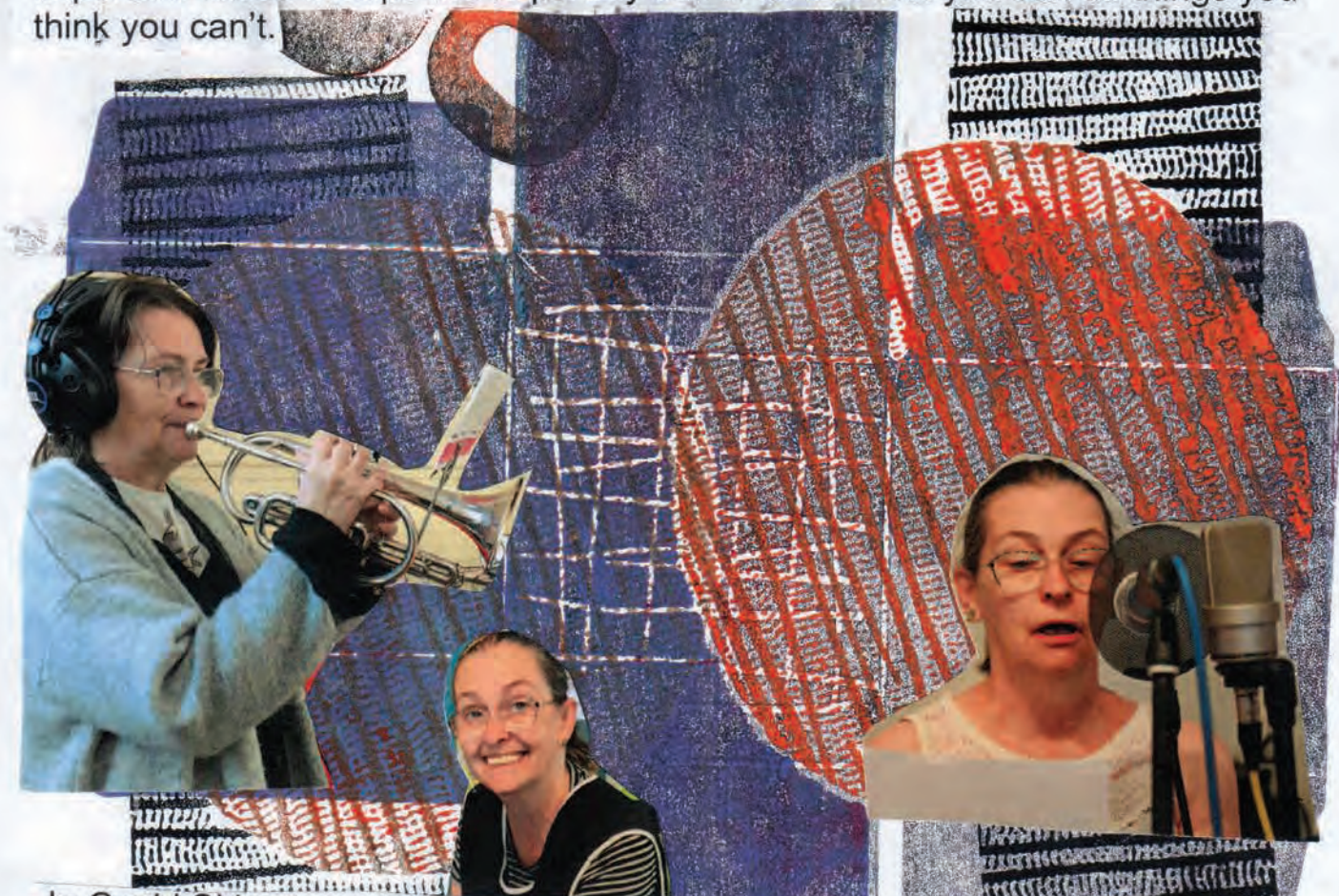


When I joined the Unity Tree group initiated by Skimstone Arts, it was already a friendly community, and I was delighted to contribute my artistic expression to the idea of unity and mutual support. This story remarkably brings together very diverse individuals and creates an atmosphere of trust and safety. For me, Unity Tree represents new connections with like-minded people, which is a significant value not only for forced migrants but for any creative individual.

**Penny** *Caterer, Community collaborator as a poet, songwriter, musician, from UK*



Working with Skimstone Arts made a lot of difference to my life, opening up channels. I had the chance to be more creative and also be nurtured. I can do things in the public eye that I always shy away from. The songwriting I did with Peter was really special for me. Peter would give me a word and I would go off on one and by the end of a session there's a song. All the songs that we made together sum up what I am about – community, cooking, and helping others. It's important cause it helps me to portray this to others that you can do things you think you can't.



In Covid Skimstone Arts gave me what I needed to cope with the loneliness aspect. They reached out despite the pandemic into your own house. It became part of a new way of doing things together. It was very uplifting for me because my health wasn't the best. With them, I could still do some of the things I wanted to do, and that they encouraged me to do, like play my instrument. I couldn't go back to band practice but I could make songs with Peter at Skimstone Arts.



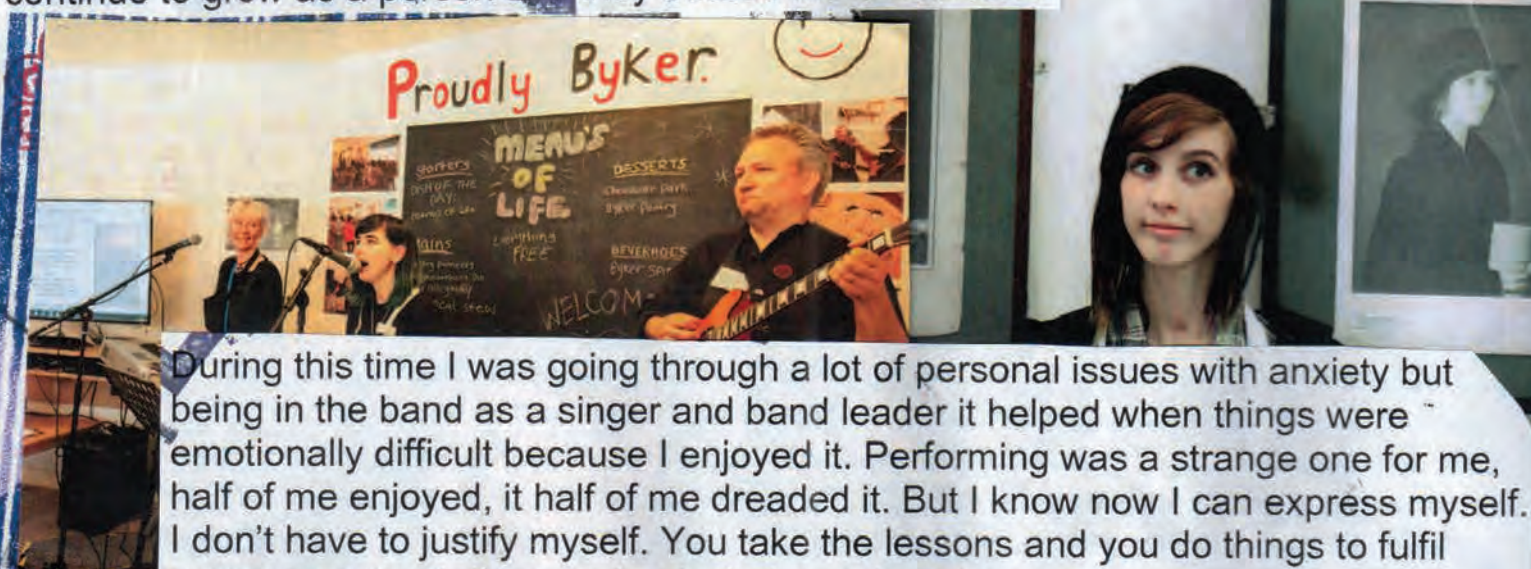
They led me through this and gave me confidence so much that I wouldn't be able to do half the stuff I do now. I wouldn't be able to perform the way I do now with my British empire medal. I can now talk to politicians and work with Liverpool University on social justice. Skimstone Arts helped me to do this.



**Quinn** Reality Boots musician/songwriter, assistant project manager, Marketing assistant, from UK

I enjoyed working with Skimstone Arts to explore very different roles. When I look back in my 20s I realised it was harder to see the impact then but now I look, I can see what I had with Skimstone Arts. The space to be free and explore who you are creatively, and the resources you have. I couldn't do this in other areas of my life for other courses. You needed a degree or to go to university but Skimstone Arts doesn't have this barrier, they welcome everyone who works with them.

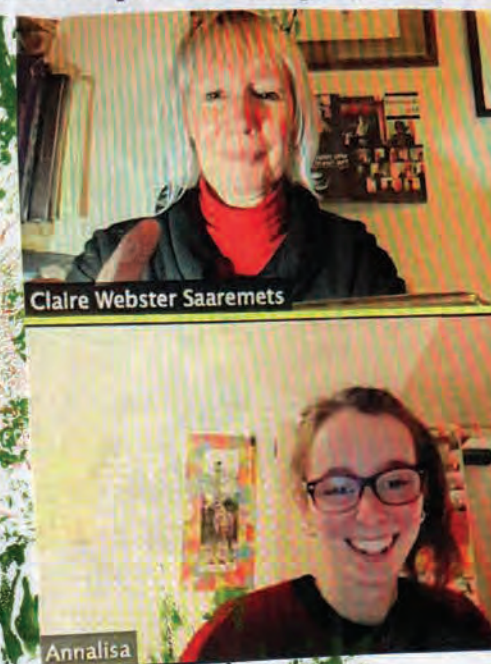
The chance to explore different roles was a highlight for me. Our album Void/Evolve was a point where I had reached being able to do different roles. I had creative control on the album cover and the songs I wrote, and the exhibition I created. I spent a number of years with Skimstone Arts and it was great that they gave me more and more responsibility being able to do my own music, record it and my own visual work. If I look back at the other albums we made I can see my journey of the way to express myself. I wrote the song Not in my Head and everyone loved it. I look back and it was very political for me. I still continue to grow as a person and they treated me as an adult.



During this time I was going through a lot of personal issues with anxiety but being in the band as a singer and band leader it helped when things were emotionally difficult because I enjoyed it. Performing was a strange one for me, half of me enjoyed, it half of me dreaded it. But I know now I can express myself. I don't have to justify myself. You take the lessons and you do things to fulfil your own expectations and not what people put on you.

Skimstone Arts brought out the leader in me. Before I was anxious. I couldn't even get on a bus or go to college. They gave me an opportunity to do things at my own pace. I'm a natural leader but Skimstone Arts nurtured it out of me. I wouldn't be able to do what I do now and have social skills learn to be diplomatic, meet so many different people from different cultures at Skimstone Arts. Meeting neuro-diverse people, people from refugee communities, trans people, if I hadn't gone there I would've been at home just watching TV. I think people should have this opportunity to express their creative ability, creativity nurture your own being and how you fit into the rest of the world.

**Annalisa** Assistant Project Manager, Project coordinator, from Italy



I got to discover and be involved with Skimstone Arts in 2018 with the role of young leader to support the management team with the Reaching Out Project. Continuing working with them in 2019 I then became Project Coordinator until 2022. Reaching Out Project was a programme of creative events and leadership opportunities for young people in targeted areas of Newcastle upon Tyne. The Reaching Out team delivered free workshops and sessions for 14-25 year olds in Newcastle and beyond. These young people were invited to discover new artforms, learn new skills, and explore their creativity — whether in visual arts and crafts, songwriting, being in a band or learning an instrument.

Working with Skimstone Arts has been significant because I had the pleasure to be involved and collaborate with young people in local settings, to undertake studio workshop sessions in multiple artforms with lots of different talented artists. Each week I could see participants blooming and be proud to share their stories through the work they were producing. For many of them it was the first time they were involved in creative activities and could then share their works at the final community events across Newcastle and also at the bigger final event of the Unity Festival. This project allowed participants learn new skills, to build their community pride and make them feel part of a bigger community.

Working with Skimstone Arts gave me the possibility to grow professionally and personally. On a personal level it helped me to build confidence and develop my communicational skills and on a professional level it gave me the fantastic opportunity to work with wider communities and a variety of skilled team members. The management team has been supportive in helping me with my professional progress by giving me a bit more responsibilities and supporting me while doing this journey. Also working with the rest of team, helped me to see the project from different perspectives and value the work that everyone put in. Everyone have different talents and I loved to work with such a bright and talented team.



Over two years I contributed my story to Skimstone Arts collection for Holocaust Memorial Day.

As a Syrian who has lived and worked in Newcastle for over two decades and have had both my boys born and raised here, I am privileged to belong to two special places. Being filmed by Claire on both occasions, her questions invited a lot of reflections about identity as a professional migrant and meanings of place, belonging and community. I have conveyed the feeling of having my roots in one homeland that extend to another. It is like having both my parents. Each has a special place in my heart.

**Balsam**



And I always describe myself as a citizen of the world.

**Community collaborator, story sharer, from Syria**

In my interviews I talked a lot about loved ones, especially my late granddad as he symbolises for me the unconditional love to the land and the love his land gave in return.

Skimstone Arts gave my stories wings by presenting them to the world, something I am very grateful for. Filming me in my heritage handmade embroidered dress Claire's meticulous filming brought to life its soul and beauty. This is what creative arts allows. It brings the best in us humans. It allows connection and shows us again and again there is a lot more in common than what divides us. That is what this contribution and journey with Skimstone means for me.

I began in 2008 when we worked with the pupils from a local special school. was the sheer variety of people that came to Skimstone Arts that was important to time. Meeting people from so many different backgrounds, people I would never have met before, people who have different circumstances to me. Making a lot of new friends with Magpie and Quinn and gaining inspiration from their voices and experiences.

**Tom**

**Reality Boots Musician/songwriter,  
Gold Art Award achiever,  
composer keyboard tutor,  
from UK**



For some people it was amazing to see other people who have never created before. Getting lessons from Claire, Peter, Liz, Simon, Keith – professional musicians who gave their time and gave us pastoral care. They helped to channel our passions and follow these passions. The Skimstone Arts effect also meant that I could come back to Skimstone Arts around my problems. We're not judged for our circumstances.

We have been able to write and play our own music, learn basic musical skills and some of us have even become semi professional, this is a confidence boost.



The commissioned work gave me a direction and a purpose and achieved a new journey for me. The sheer fact that it was going to be performed in a public platform, it will always be there. Even when the event is over, it's still there. I had some wonderful times. I still talk with Magpie about how we collaborated together. We text each other nearly every night and have conversations about what we have been working on. When I can't sleep Magpie is there to answer a message.

I also did Arts Award Assistant Training and helped to support the Advisors in working with the young people on their awards. This helped me to get paid employment in a school and a lunch time supervisor. With the performing skills I also became a volunteer teaching assistant and played the piano for their school performance, so I helped young people in the school orchestra. I would never have had the guts to do that without Skimstone Arts.

I am still song writing and have released album no1 and am now working on album no 2 called Perspective.

On my Gold Arts Award I worked with Bulgarian composer Roumen Dimitrov as he was working with Claire on a project here in the UK. That was amazing.

I think the reward of being able to have my music performed by people like professional composer and pianist Steve Luck at UNITY Festival 2024 and also just the fact that I could have my music played by Reality Boots and professional musicians. It's one thing to play it in your living room, it's another to have it played in front of others. My confidence was raised a lot by that.



**Bathusi** Young musician/songwriter with Shirley & the Gang, from Botswana



Playing in the band helped me to grow in confidence and made me feel happy and it was a great experience for me. There were people watching and that was a good thing, they were clapping hands and being nice and they liked the songs. I like drama and now I can be more confident when I am performing some stories.

**HAPPY**

**Ruth**

Commissioner from St Peter's Church, Stockton-on-Tees, from UK

Here at St Peter's Church in Yarm, Stockton-on-Tees, we have coordinated and enjoyed the activities and musical interaction that took place over the 3 x projects with refugees and asylum seekers with Skimstone Arts.



It was a revelation working with Skimstone Arts on the first project. How skilled Claire and Peter were in enabling people to tell their story and create the atmosphere and the environment, and the activities, in the music and dance. This was with people from entirely different backgrounds and languages, yet they became one body, one performance group. As I said, a revelation to me.

# REVELATION

Skimstone Arts' approach enhances the sense of welcome that families feel, interaction and value, valuing the individuals and how they each have something to contribute and give. People from such different origins work together to produce something really worthwhile.

Claire and Peter create the story that people want to say, in the poem and the music, that goes with it. It becomes a living thing which enhances their performance at various events. It's the fact it is all original, it is real, authentic and comes from the inside and from people who often don't know each other at all.

Also Shaho's exhibition of his photographic stuff. His photographs and what was written was very impressive and challenged the general image of asylum seekers and refugees, that Skimstone Arts has supported. It's demonstrating the skills that people bring and their qualities and the value they bring to this country, with the visual art and music and also their telling the stories of the trauma they had left. It's so positive and impressive. When Claire and Peter came to the summer fair, people remember them playing, with some of the band Shirley & the Gang, really positively reminding the folk who attend this church and what we do, Skimstone Arts' are a part of that.





**Samuel** Actor, community artist, from Ghana

My role was a storyteller a conveyor belt to delivering a message driven by deep reflection that we do in collaboration with Claire. In this we pull out on Skimstone Arts processes of a deep reflective way of working internationally that has produced great art and collaboration.

I was intrigued with the whole process having to create together even though we were far apart in different parts of the world, yet we felt close when we were creating. There was not a single point when we felt our creative partners were far away. It was almost like we could catch what we were making together feel a connection and work closely. That made it more special for us. The stories of the marginalised were amplified through our process together and we had this opportunity to get your listeners to share and understand these many voices through the audio track we made and I narrated.

There was room for creative freedom. I felt there was always room for me as an artist with no form of censorship or trying to gag the things we made.



Skimstone Arts has the values, that working together with incredible artists like my Nii Kwartelai and Claire at Skimstone Arts, gives me an opportunity to tap deep into my creativity, challenge myself and find new ways of creating, narrating and producing the stories.

**Nii Kwartelai** Writer, community artist, from Ghana

I am a storyteller in the context of building communities of sharing stories with communities that we brought to Skimstone Arts coming from a very different cultural background a different collective.

What stood out for me was we created a space that otherwise would have no voice. The refugees and sex workers who lived outside Acra in Ghana.



Skimstone Arts commissioned us to compose a song with this group, in COVID, something they have never done in their lives, making the song 'refugee refugee' felt like giving birth to a child. They knew that they were goddesses that these women were good, taking them through those activities to help them compose their song and then see it played internationally at Skimstone Arts' UNITY Festival was an amazing experience for us. These were women who wouldn't have that space here was a chance to make themselves heard, to be amplified in the silence.

We don't seek to empower people but we create a platform to be empowered and environment where people get the tools. It's like using an organic manure to grow a healthier society

For me as an artist to work together with other artists here and with Skimstone Arts, was an opportunity for us to be co-creators. For me as a professional and personally, this opened up new ways of seeing life in a new context. I have continued this freedom that it has given me and helped me to keep seeing new possibilities to create with those who should be heard.

# FREEDOM



**Daniel** *Young musician/rap artist, from Syria*

My role in Skimstone Arts was to help create music as an artist and contribute to Holocaust Memorial Day Event in 2021. I was also involved in events previously too.

I found it really positive to work with Skimstone Arts, as it gave me the opportunity to make the best of what I could do out of a particularly tough situation when I was in hospital.

Skimstone Arts enabled me to release my rap song "day by day" and getting me linked with a fantastic North East artists such as Magpie and Kema Kay. That process was fantastic and really helped me progress as an artist. Hence it holds a lot of significance to me, especially the support in a situation where I was at my lowest point. Even before my illness I was involved as part of a smaller band. Skimstone Arts enabled my songwriting and my songs to be heard by an audience while I was bedbound in hospital. Writing day by day was so important as it helped me come to terms with a life changing illness.

The journey was so important for me, as it allowed me to progress and build up confidence to write more music, as well as fall in love more with music and appreciate it more in many different ways, especially considering I got to understand the process of how it was done.



# ARTIST

Yaryna



Ukraine

**Yaryna** *Member of Ukrainian UNITY Tree performance group, from Ukraine*

I am very lucky to meet and work with Skimstone Arts! It was incredible friendly collaboration. We had few projects together and always it was fulfilled with creativity and enthusiasm. I would like to say thank you to Claire, Peter and all artists for the fantastic art work together! I felt like this is my new family!



**Tugay** Community artist, Folk Musician, from Turkey

My journey with Skimstone Arts began years ago at the Unity Festival, and it quickly became a meaningful chapter in my life. As a Water Marbling artist and Anatolian Folk Musician, I've always been passionate about sharing culture through creativity—even though my professional background is in Human Resources and Finance.

Skimstone Arts gave me the space to express my heritage, connect with people from different cultures, and experience the beauty of diversity in the arts. Every program I joined was not just an event—it was a chance to learn, grow, and form real friendships.

What makes Skimstone special is its ability to bring people together and create a true sense of belonging. I'm proud to have been part of this journey and grateful for the inspiration it continues to give me.



**Smajo** OBE, speaker, community collaborator, from Bosnia

For me if I can go back to.. reconnect to summer of 1994, we came from Bosnia, it was sunny that July in my memory, compared to Bosnia, where it was grey skies, shelling and shooting, we couldn't hear the birds. Coming to the UK the first thing I heard was birds, that was amazing. Reconnection to that path with Claire before Skimstone Arts. We were put into a house in Byker, all the support disappeared, we had no case workers, we were on our own. We went to school, I couldn't speak any English. Claire was my teacher, for me 30 years later, I still speak about it. I still remember it. How Claire taught us a song in Bosnian so I could join in.



I remember the first Peace procession and my story was used in this and a Syrian story (I now know Balsam). I saw people lining up on the balcony, there were people singing the songs from the performances, how it was meaningful. When I heard parts of my story in the performances, or radio shows, it was the recognition and so everytime my story is used in their work, it's a form of justice and reclaiming who we are. To have people who were strangers, using my story for something so beautiful. When I went down to the performance space, for that very first performance of Peace Procession at Newcastle City Library in 2019, people hugged me.

A lot of organisations miss this critical thing, with Skimstone Arts, you get a sense of the life, love and belief for each other. To use music, art, culture that we all have - that brings us together, connects us all. With Skimstone Arts we can celebrate differences yet recognise humanity..





The 'Doorbells' project we did together involved four partners – Skimstone Arts, Northumbria University, Care and Repair England and Elders Council – in other words, juggling a variety of expectations. We journeyed through several iterations of the Doorbells, involving lots of conversation and exchange of idea

I had to learn to let go and trust Claire's artistic process. It wasn't always easy. We had our tussles.



The performances were always better than I dared to hope and produced one of the most effective and impactful pieces of work I have been part of.

The topic we worked on is very important to me. We had a great group of partners I greatly valued. Although we had some challenging moments during the creative process, we always respected each other's views and perspectives.

Learning to trust Claire's artistic process was a big learning curve for me, and it's a lesson I will always value.

I remember the heart-stopping moments of seeing a performance for the first time. I was always amazed and moved.



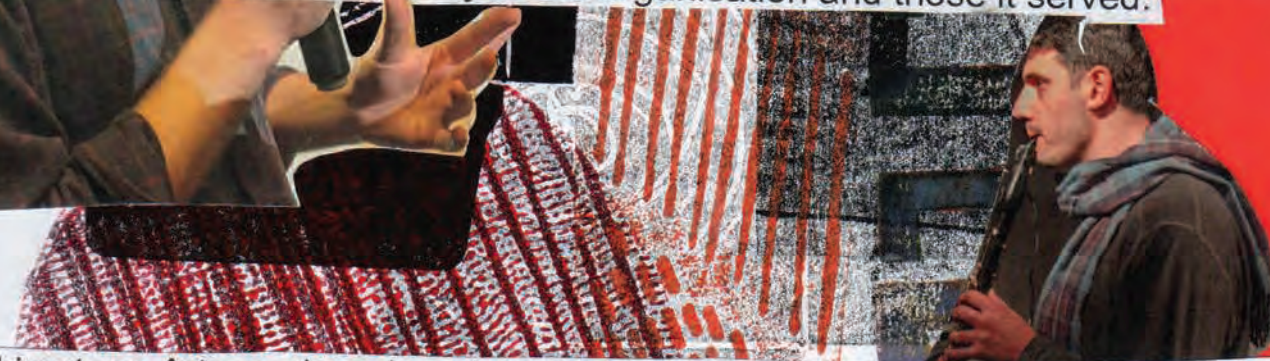
**Barbara** Elders Council, funding partner, from UK

**Talha** Trustee, musician, community volunteer, from Turkey



I am a trustee and was a community volunteer at Skimstone Arts. I also joined some of the music sessions as an amateur musician.

My role combined governance, community support, and participation in events — always with the aim of contributing meaningfully to the organisation and those it served.



Skimstone Arts made a deep impact on me from the start. It was one of the first organisations in Newcastle that offered not only a welcoming hand but a genuine sense of belonging. Through events like the Unity Festivals, Holocaust Memorial Days, and creative projects in care homes, it created space for diversity, dignity, and shared experience. These activities allowed voices from all backgrounds to be heard and celebrated. Being part of such an environment gave me hope — and reminded me of the power of arts to connect people.



I came to the UK as a political refugee. From the very first month of arriving, I felt a deep sense of responsibility to give back to this country that granted me safety and dignity. Volunteering — first at the Refugee Council and later with Skimstone Arts — became my way of expressing both gratitude and commitment. For me, this is more than civic duty; it is a moral and spiritual responsibility. When I was invited to become a trustee at Skimstone, I was honoured. It was a chance to contribute not just with my time, but with my heart and values. This journey has shaped me. It helped me connect, grow, and stand alongside others in solidarity. Being part of Skimstone's story will always remain one of the most meaningful parts of my life in the UK.





**Arun** *Film maker, volunteer, artist, from*



In 2011, while pursuing my Master's in Film Studies at Northumbria University, I volunteered at Skimstone Arts, where I had the opportunity to collaborate closely with Claire and Peter on several audiovisual projects. I worked with two groups from the Young Artists' Collective and contributed to a film created by an elderly group from South Shields. This hands-on experience deepened my understanding of community-engaged art practices and the power of collaborative storytelling. These projects also informed my academic work, becoming key reference materials for my final-year thesis.

What was significant to you about working with us?

Coming from a country like India, where cinema is often celebrated primarily as a medium of entertainment rather than as a form of art, my time at Skimstone Arts was transformative. Collaborating with the collectives to craft audiovisual artworks helped me recognize the medium's profound potential as a tool for mental health and community expression. What struck me most was not just the final films, but the creative process itself—collaborative, evolving, and deeply democratic. It was through this process of shared storytelling that I discovered the true artistic strength of cinema.

One moment that still brings tears to my eyes was when a young autistic participant began to interact with me during an editing session—an experience that underscored the healing and connective power of creative collaboration. What I admire most about Skimstone is the vibrant energy it cultivates—an energy that flows naturally from Artistic Director Claire herself. From the moment you step into the space, you are embraced by a warm, dynamic collective that dreams, discusses, and creates art together. The young people I worked with in Newcastle have become like family to me. I owe that sense of belonging and inspiration to Skimstone, and it continues to shape both my creative path and academic journey.

After returning to India, I have written, directed, and produced four feature films and several documentary projects. I can say with confidence that it was my time at Skimstone Arts—working closely with Claire, Peter, and the Young Artists' Collective—that shaped me into a more responsible, reflective, and committed artist. That experience didn't just influence my creative practice; it redefined it. I continue to cherish those days as some of the most formative and meaningful in my life.



## Keith *Music Leader with Reality Boots band, Musician with Ensemble*

My role was as a music leader working primarily with the band Reality Boots to write original songs that convey their immediate concerns as well as their general views on the world. I was also part of the professional ensemble within Skimstone Arts, co-creating and performing works such as the site specific 'National Anthem' and "who Holds The Torch" co created and recorded virtually during the period of the Pandemic Lockdown. In addition I was also an Arts Award Adviser, successfully mentoring ensemble members to achieve their certificates.

Most significant to me was being able to use music as a medium for growth and collaboration. Seeing members of Reality Boots grow in confidence and ability over a long period (in some instances), was extremely rewarding for me. Also, the absence of hierarchy within the songwriting process allowed unusual and original innovations to surface.



The work was important as it enabled me to use and share my skills as a musical artist with the band while leaving room for constant improvement within my practice. This included learning new instruments (such as piano and bass guitar), developing my song writing methods and arranging for wind instruments.



**Rapasa** *Artist/dancer/ multi instrumentalist, from Kenya*

What was significant to me was be able to exploring other ways of working, presentation and meeting new audiences. This helped me when I was commissioned to make work for Skimstone Arts' national Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 Event at Newcastle Library and for UNITY Festival at Great North Museum in Newcastle and Kirkleatham Museum, Redcar

This journey was important to me in keeping my identity and still accommodating new discoveries along the way as I got to meet different people, all ages and from different countries.

# JOURNEY



## Special thanks

**Special thanks** to: everyone who contributed their story and also to those who helped to creatively print the pages; The Passionist Fund and also Community Foundation North East for supporting the creation and production of this zine. **Thanks** also to the skills and inclusive practice of print maker Theresa Easton and The Hatton Gallery Learning Space at Newcastle University.

We wish to acknowledge the tremendous support from funders and partners for all the core, projects, bursary's and events that supported Skimstone Arts to collaborate with artists and communities during the last 18 x years. These include; Youth Music, Garfield Weston Foundation, Newcastle Cultural Investment Fund, Community Foundation North East, Arts Council England, Durham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Northumbria Universities, Elders Council Newcastle, St Anthony's Care Services, Care & Repair England, Newcastle City, Sunderland, Durham, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool Councils Council, Jean Monaghan, Big Lottery, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Rural Arts Touring, East Durham Creates, Arts Award, St Peter's Church, Stockton-on-Tees, Ouseburn Trust, West End Refugee Service, Quaker Legacy Fund, Ringtons, Thomas Bewick School, Newcastle, Awards for All, Sir James Knott Trust, WellNewcastle Gateshead, Helix Arts, East Durham Creates, Jack Drum Arts, Rayne Foundation, Wellesley Foundation, Preston Park Museum, Great North Museum: Hancock, Kirkleatham Museum, Redcar, The Sage Gateshead (now the Glasshouse), Fittings Multimedia Company, Liverpool, Theatre by the Lake, Cumbria, Barnsley CIVIC Theatre.



**Special thanks** also to all our Skimstone staff and volunteers, who made all our Skimstone projects happen and be supported during the last 18 x years. There are too many of you to list but we are grateful to each one of you for bringing your unique skills in working with us over the years. Also to all the young people who have been part pf our Leadership Team and also Reality Boots band.

And last but by no means least.. an amazing **thank you** to all our Trustees, especially those who have been with us for the last two years: Simon (Chair), Carol (Vice Chair), Talha, Jess, Lya and Angela, whose dedication and commitment, strong governance and care, supported Claire through her brain surgery and recovery.

Claire would like to give a heartfelt **thank you** to her co founder, colleague and husband Peter Saaremets for all his creative, musical and people passion, pastoral care, operations and technical experience.





Freedom  
 FEAR OR FREEDOM?  
 FEAR OR FREEDOM?  
 Can I be free if you are not?



Skimstone holds a safe space for young artists to explore and be curious.

I pledge to welcome everyone to Newcastle where they can make their home

I pledge to always love and support diversity and tolerance  
 Beal live

I will take hands & see them in my home are share a meal & a bed!

Pledge Wall Info & Social Action Space Pledge Wall

Community Foundation North East

Passionist Fund

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