

Impact Survey:  
Covid-19 and  
UK Youth Circus

Report 1  
26<sup>th</sup> March 2020



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# About this Report

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## Background

The recent crisis has hit youth circus organisations and practitioners particularly hard, as most circus schools close their doors with no idea of when they will be able to open them again. Our survey last year indicated that our sector is fragile, underfunded and staffed predominately by freelancers. Current government plans to support workers through this crisis have little to offer self-employed people, or small businesses that do not occupy property.

This is our first report on an on-going impact survey designed to find out what effects the Covid-19 pandemic is having on UK youth circuses, and what needs to be done to mitigate long-term damage.

## Participation

All of the youth circuses we are currently aware of across the UK were sent a link to the impact survey. So far, we have had 27 responses from England, 4 from Wales and 2 from Scotland. The survey was filled in anonymously, however we requested that youth circuses ensure that only one survey form was filled out per youth circus. The survey is not publically available.

## Process

Our online survey was launched on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. This report contains the responses we received in four days, between March 21<sup>st</sup> and March 25<sup>th</sup>; when this report was compiled. We are still receiving responses, and intend to compile new reports as this crisis continues, and more youth circuses respond.

As of 13.20 GMT on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, we had received 34 responses: 24 completed, and 10 started but not completed. Those that did not complete the survey have been included in this report, which is why some questions have fewer responses than others.



## Impact Survey Report 1

### Editing

We think that it is vitally important to hear from youth circuses in their own words. That being said, they had a lot to say! For the sake of conciseness, in this document we have only included a summary of the main points raised in written answers.

If you have time, please read the Supplement to this report: it contains all of the written answers by youth circuses, in their own words, and is an illuminating and emotive illustration of the circumstances that youth circuses are facing.

Questions are presented here in the same wording as they are in the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS AND ADDITIONAL NOTES ARE SHOWN IN RED.



# Immediate Impact

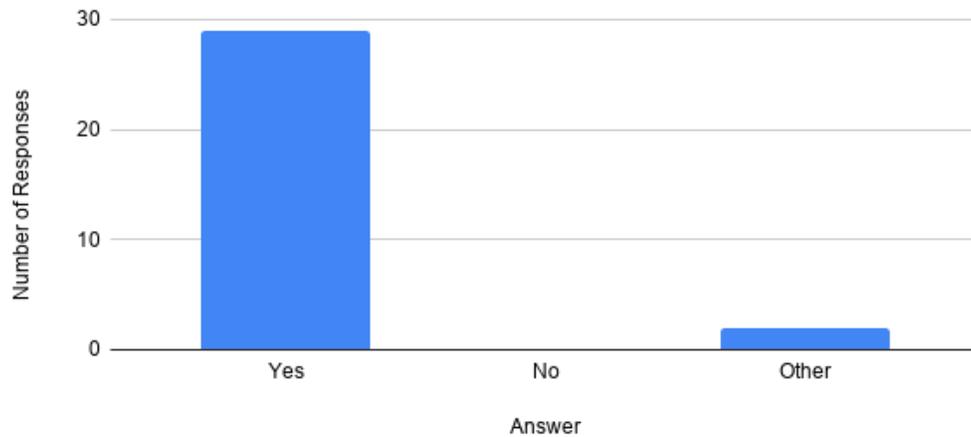
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*In the first section of the survey youth circuses gave feedback about what is currently happening, and has already happened, to their youth circus as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.*

## Extent of Disruption

Has your youth circus stopped classes and activities due to Covid-19?

Number of responses: 31



### 'Other' Text Answers:

"Moved online."

"We have stopped all our in-house classes, but we have been asked to run a few classes for keys workers' children, and vulnerable children and young adults, in a school and college in the area."

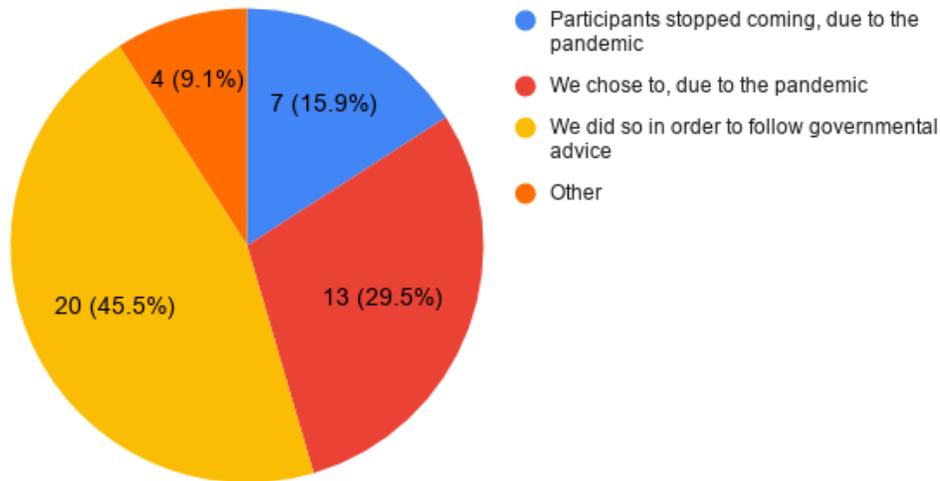
**ALL BUT ONE YOUTH CIRCUS HAVE SUSPENDED ALL CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES, OTHER THAN ONLINE CLASSES. ONLY ONE YOUTH CIRCUS IS STILL RUNNING CLASSES, FOR KEY WORKERS' CHILDREN, AS WELL AS VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS.**



## Impact Survey Report 1

### Why did you stop youth circus classes and activities?

Number of responses: 33



PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUTH CIRCUSES COULD SELECT MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE TO THIS QUESTION.

#### 'Other' Text Answers:

"We chose to, but we teach people within the vulnerable categories that needed to be protected."

"Our hall where we taught, closed."

"The community centre we work from closed due to government advice."

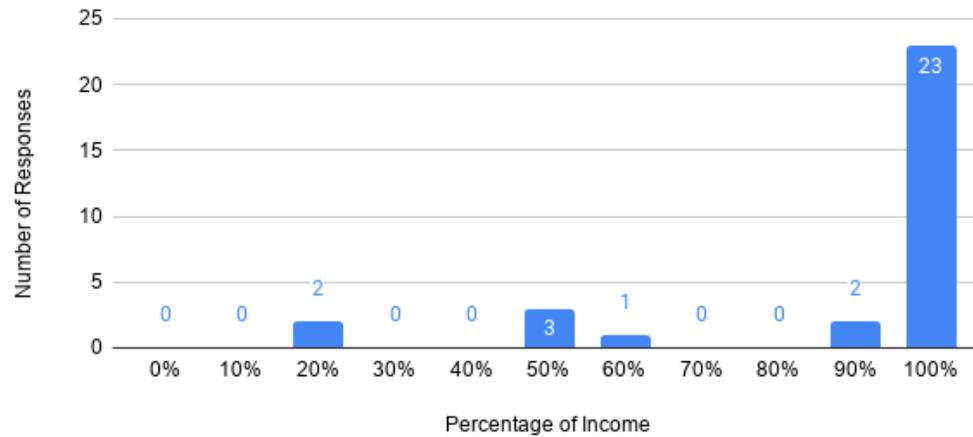
"We are based in a school hall, so we had to mirror school closures."



## Short-Term Financial Impact

What percentage of income from your youth circus has now gone due to Covid-19?

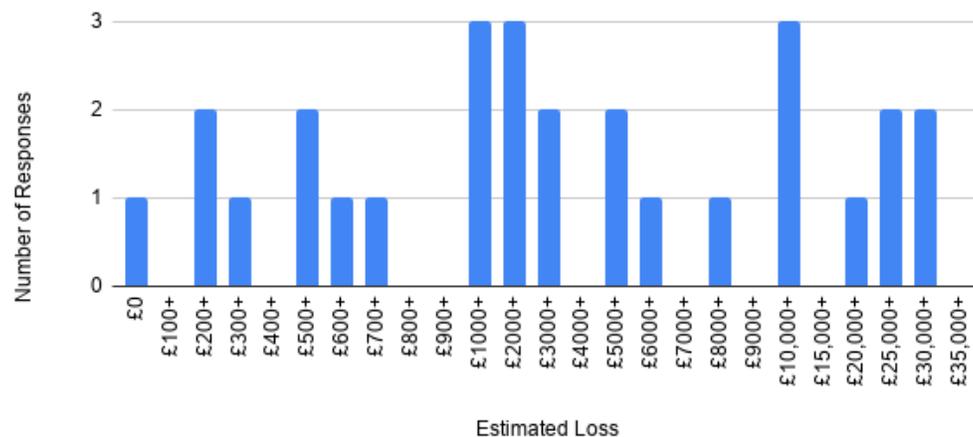
Number of responses: 31



74% (23 RESPONSES) OF YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION REPORT THAT 100% OF THEIR INCOME HAS GONE DUE TO COVID-19. 94% REPORT THAT 50% OR MORE OF THEIR INCOME HAS GONE.

Please estimate the financial impact that this crisis has already had on your youth circus:

Number of responses: 27



ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN ESTIMATES, THE 27 YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT HAVE RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION SO FAR HAVE LOST A

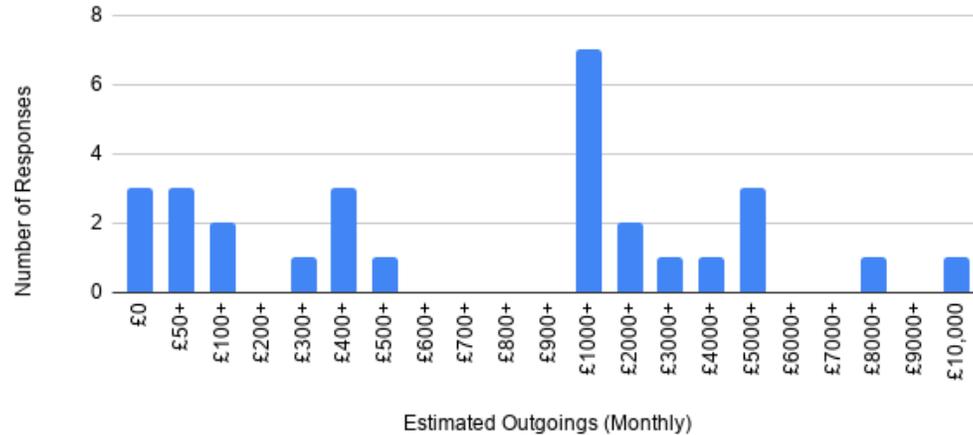


## Impact Survey Report 1

TOTAL OF £188,199.00 DUE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS. ON AVERAGE, EACH YOUTH CIRCUS HAS LOST AROUND £7000.

Does your youth circus have any on-going outgoings during this time (e.g. rent on premises)?

Number of responses: 29



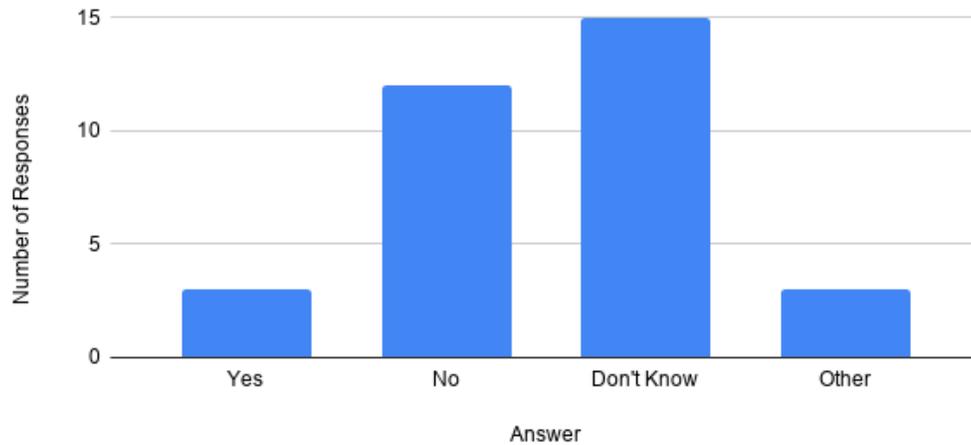
OF THE 29 YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION, 3 HAVE NO ON-GOING OUTGOINGS. 10 HAVE MONTHLY OUTGOINGS BETWEEN £50 TO £550, 7 HAVE OUTGOINGS BETWEEN £1000 TO £2000, AND 7 HAVE OUTGOINGS BETWEEN £2500 AND £5500. 2 YOUTH CIRCUSES HAVE MONTHLY OUTGOINGS OF £8000 OR MORE.



## Current Financial Relief

Will any of the financial relief that has so far been announced by the UK Government due to Covid-19 be available to your youth circus?

Number of responses: 33



### 'Other' Text Answers:

"We believe we will get a grant, plus back pay for 80% for three PAYE employees. More info is due in April from local government."

"I think so. Yet to confirm."

"Available to apply for the government loan of up to £250,000."

3 YOUTH CIRCUSES OUT OF THE 33 THAT RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL RECEIVE FINANCIAL RELIEF FROM THE UK GOVERNMENT. THE MAJORITY (27 RESPONSES: 82%) ANSWERED, "NO" OR "DON'T KNOW" TO THIS QUESTION.



### Short-Term Impact

What short-term impact, financial or otherwise, has the current situation had on your youth circus?

#### Written Answers: Summary

*(for full answers, see Supplement)*

#### Income

Predictably, most of the responses to this question concerned a substantial, or complete, loss of income.

The most common concern raised was that self-employed teachers, staff, and directors, have lost all of their personal income, and many are already financially struggling due to this.

A few youth circuses are attempting to support their self-employed staff, but most are unable to.

All of the responses gathered indicate that youth circuses have stopped all activity, except for some online content. This means that they have lost income from youth circus classes, but also ticket sales from youth circus shows and showcases, merchandise, outreach work, events, and workshops.

Youth circuses that are a part of larger organisations (e.g. professional performance companies, or larger schools that also offer adult classes), report that they have had to stop all or most of their wider activity as well.

Money that has already been spent, for example on marketing, insurance, bills, and rent has been wasted.

Funded projects have been indefinitely postponed. There is a risk that some funders will ask for their money back.

Fees already paid by parents have, in some cases, been donated to youth circuses to pay tutors, or rolled over to when the youth circus is reopened. Some parents have required refunds, however.



## Venue

## Impact Survey Report 1

Many youth circuses have paid hire fees on venues in advance. Some have been promised reimbursement, but many have not.

Some youth circuses are struggling to pay on-going outgoings, for instance rent and bills.

## Programme

There is widespread uncertainty about how much future programming needs to be cancelled or postponed. Youth circuses are not taking future bookings, as restart dates are unknown.

As previously mentioned, responses indicate that youth circuses have cancelled all activity in the short term, except some online content.

## Young People and Parents

In their answers, many youth circuses express concern about the impact this closure is already having on the young people they teach. Many are particularly concerned about participants with additional needs.

A detailed summary of concerns regarding the impact youth circus closures will have on young people is included later in this report.



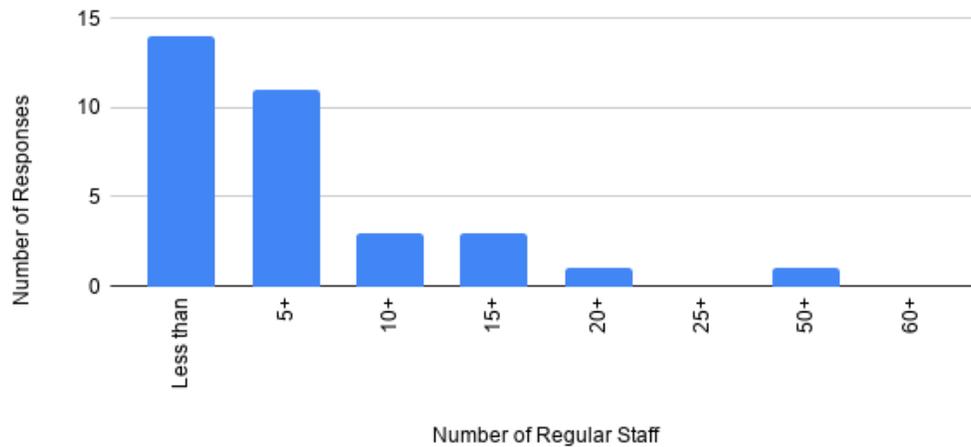
# Impact on Staff

*Youth circus staff are particularly vulnerable in this crisis, as the majority of youth circus teachers, administrators and riggers are self-employed. In our 2018-2019 survey, we found that 75% of paid youth circus trainers were self-employed.*

## Employment Numbers and Status

How many people does your youth circus regularly employ (including administrative staff, riggers, and self-employed teachers)?

Number of responses: 33



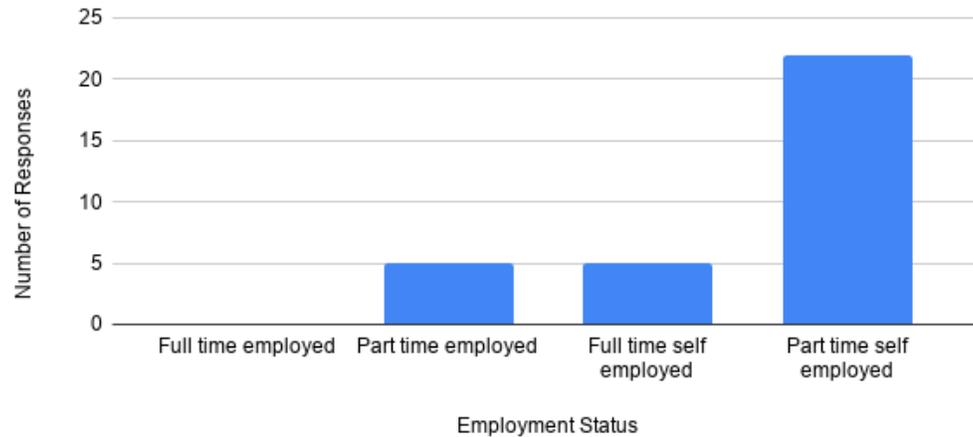
**THE 33 YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT HAVE RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION REGULARLY EMPLOY A TOTAL OF 263 STAFF.**



## Impact Survey Report 1

How are the majority of your staff (including teachers) employed?

Number of responses: 32



84% OF YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION REPORT THAT THE MAJORITY OF THEIR STAFF ARE SELF-EMPLOYED.

## Impact on Staff

What impact will this situation have on your staff?

Number of responses: 33



\*PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUTH CIRCUSES WERE ALLOWED TO SELECT MULTIPLE RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION. NUMBER ON PIE SLICE = NUMBER OF RESPONSES.



## Impact Survey Report 1

*"SAME HOURS AS USUAL FOR SELF EMPLOYED STAFF" WAS ALSO AN OPTION, HOWEVER IT IS NOT INCLUDED HERE AS IT HAD 0 RESPONSES. 'NO HOURS FOR SELF EMPLOYED STAFF' HAD THE MOST RESPONSES (28).*

### 'Other' Text Answers:

"Our teachers are all on zero hour contracts. So they are employed, and receive holiday pay, but only for the hours they work. We are paying them for the remaining 2 weeks of their current rota, but they have NO work booked for after this if we cannot run classes."

"No hours for staff, except one who is a company director and is continuing to work on a voluntary basis."

"Too early to tell. Hoping to furlough to protect staff and funding."

"Tutors have no hours, admin staff have reduced hours - all are self-employed."

"We hope we can still pay our self employed staff regardless."

"We expect core team will carry on as normal - but this could change."



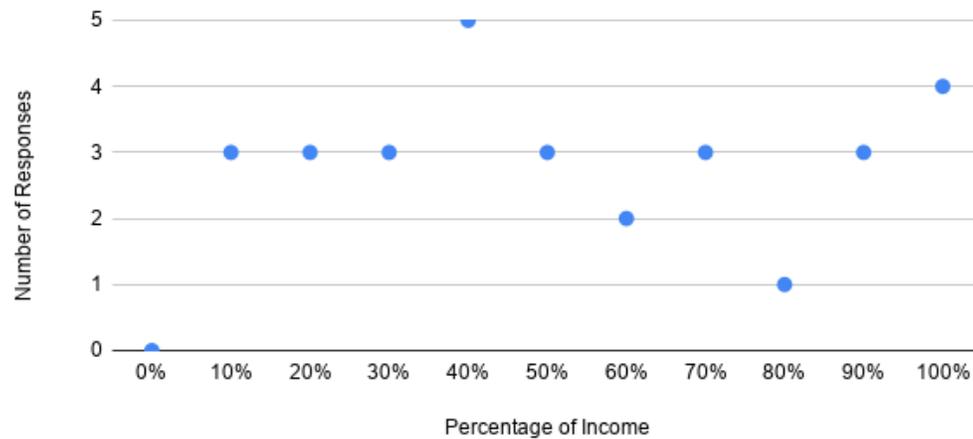
# Personal Impact

We included this section in the survey in recognition of the fact that many youth circuses are small businesses, run by individuals who may lose their personal income as a result of this crisis.

## Impact on Personal Income

What percentage of your personal income usually comes from youth circus?

Number of responses: 30



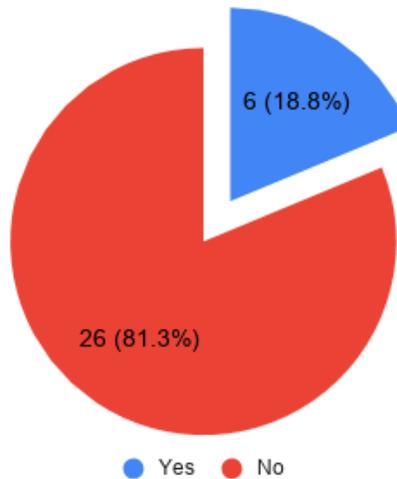
OF 30 THE HEADS OF YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT ANSWERED THIS QUESTION, 53% (16 RESPONSES) REPORT THAT 50% OR MORE THEIR PERSONAL INCOME COMES FROM YOUTH CIRCUS, 27% (8 RESPONSES) REPORT THAT 80% OR MORE OF THEIR PERSONAL INCOME IS FROM YOUTH CIRCUS, AND 13% (4 RESPONSES) REPORT THAT 100% OF THEIR PERSONAL INCOME COMES FROM YOUTH CIRCUS.



## Impact Survey Report 1

Will your personal income from youth circus be secure during this crisis?

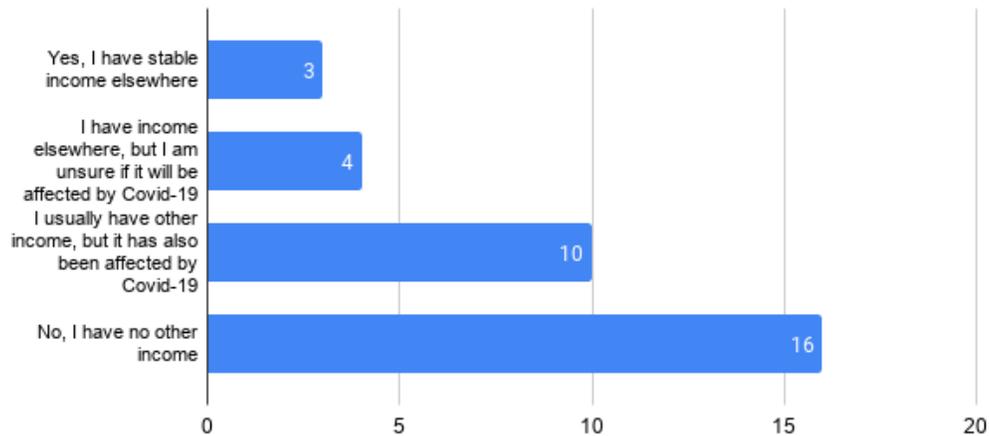
Number of responses: 32



THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE WHO RUN YOUTH CIRCUSES DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THEIR PERSONAL INCOME FROM THE YOUTH CIRCUS WILL BE SECURE DURING THIS CRISIS.

Do you have any other income that is currently stable under Covid-19?

Number of responses: 33



48% (16 RESPONSES) OF HEADS OF YOUTH CIRCUSES HAVE NO INCOME OUTSIDE OF YOUTH CIRCUS. ONLY 9% (3 RESPONSES) HAVE INCOME ELSEWHERE THAT THEY ARE CONFIDENT WILL REMAIN STABLE DURING THIS CRISIS.



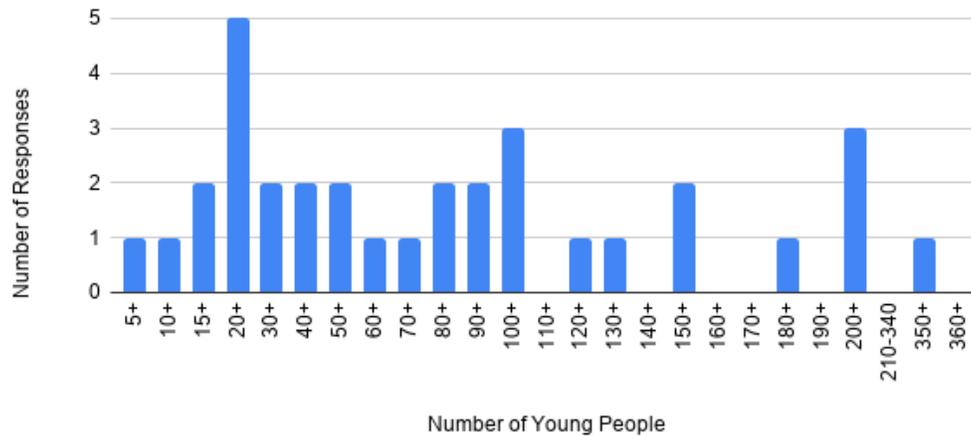
# Impact on Young People

While our main concern in this report is to assess the impact the Covid-19 crisis is having on youth circuses, we think that it is also important to call attention to the impact that their closure will have on the young people who participate in youth circuses across the UK.

## Participant Numbers

How many young people do you regularly teach in your youth circus (e.g. on a weekly basis?)

Number of responses: 33



**THE 33 YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT RESPONDED TO THIS QUESTION REGULARLY TEACH A TOTAL OF 2867 YOUNG PEOPLE.**



### Impact on Young People

What do you think will be the impact of not having a youth circus for young people?

#### Written Answers: Summary

*(for full answers, see Supplement)*

#### **Fitness**

Participants' health and fitness will suffer due to youth circus closure, and they will lose strength, flexibility, functional movement training, and skill development. Some young people might lose all engagement with physical activity in this time, as it will be up to parents to keep them active, and some may not have adequate space at home to exercise.

#### **Social**

Young people will become socially isolated, and miss their friends, as a result of youth circus closure.

#### **Mental Health**

In connection to concerns about physical and social wellbeing, youth circuses are very concerned about the effect that isolation and youth circus closure will have on young peoples' mental health. Some of the issues that they expect to see include:

- Boredom
- Hyperactivity
- Anxiety
- Isolation
- Stress
- Frustration

Furthermore, they are also concerned that this period could have a detrimental effect on young people's social wellbeing. In the words of one youth circus, the "confidence, resilience and sense of belonging they've achieved over years with us, having not had it elsewhere, could potentially unravel, and will take time to rebuild later on."



## Impact Survey Report 1

### Loss

Youth circuses expressed a sense of loss, which goes beyond concerns about young people lacking physical activity or the ability to see their friends. Many reported that their youth circus is a haven for young people, a community where they feel safe and valued. They believe that young people will suffer from losing a sense of belonging to something, as well as not being able to do the thing they love.

For many young people, youth circus is their favourite thing to do. It is a creative outlet, and without it they will lose a form of expression, a place of personal development, and with that a sense of pride. Many young people are already highly disappointed that end of term and summer performances have been cancelled.

### Safety and Safe Spaces

Youth circuses can act as a lifeline for young people, and they have very real concerns about the safety of their participants in their absence.

Some provide food, for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and are concerned that their families will struggle to feed them in this time.

Some participants struggle with issues at home and at school, and their youth circus acts as a safe space, where they can seek support and advice, as well as positive social interactions. Youth circuses also often give a sense of belonging to young people who may not find this elsewhere.

### Long-Term

A key concern raised in these responses was that young people who are looking to audition for higher circus education now lack training spaces, equipment and support, and may not be able to audition. Youth circus closure is therefore having a long-term impact on young people who want to pursue circus as a career.



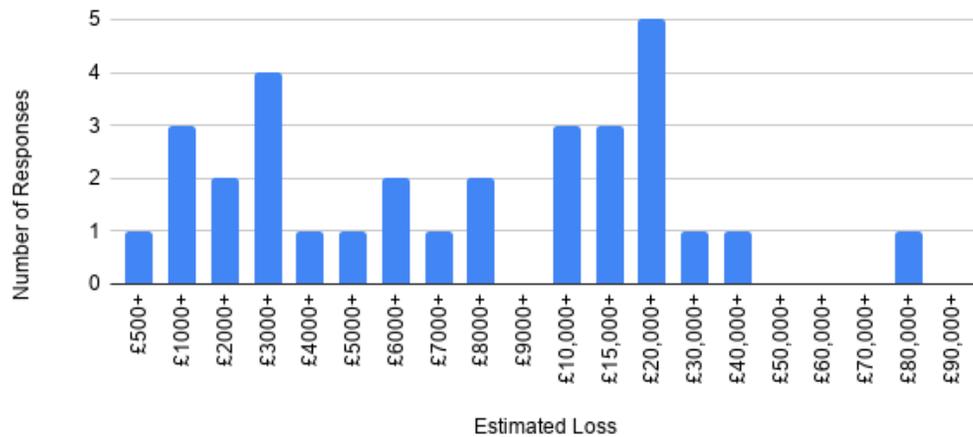
# Going Forward

*The final section of the survey focuses on the long-term impact of this crisis, and what support youth circuses need to survive.*

## Long-Term Impact

If your youth circus is closed until the end of June, what do you estimate the total financial impact will be?

Number of responses: 31





## Impact Survey Report 1

What long-term impact, financial or otherwise, do you expect this situation to have on your youth circus?

### Written Answers: Summary

*(for full answers, see Supplement)*

#### Financial Impact

Youth circuses are very concerned about the long-term financial impact of this crisis. Many youth circuses will close without external funding. Some run other aspects of their organisation on their youth circus income, and expect the whole organisation to collapse. Many face bankruptcy. Those that don't are still concerned about cash flow issues, and about going into debt.

#### Decline in Numbers

After this crisis is over, youth circuses might face a drop in participant numbers. This is due to a number of issues:

- Young people might lose interest;
- Parents, facing financial hardship themselves, will not be able to afford classes;
- Young people might struggle to keep their skill levels up in isolation;
- Parents of young people with additional needs might not want to disrupt their routines again after this crisis.

#### Loss of Staff

As so many youth circus staff are self-employed, and youth circuses cannot currently afford to pay them, they may have to seek work elsewhere during this time. This means that when youth circuses are able to restart, their teachers and staff might not be available to return. Additionally, many teachers will not be able to retain their skill level during this crisis, as they have nowhere to train.

#### Loss of Venue

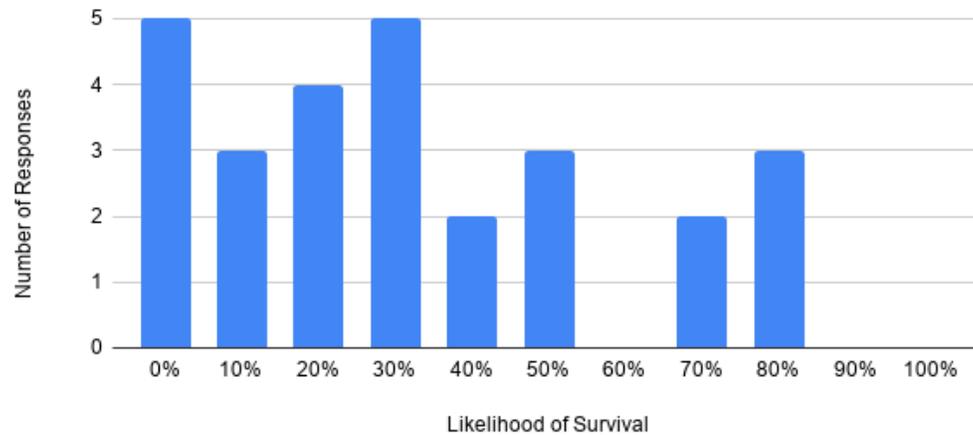
Some youth circuses are concerned that they will lose the use of their buildings during this time, as they cannot afford to pay rent.



## Support Needed

Without external funding, how likely is it that your youth circus will survive this crisis?

Number of responses: 27



OF THE 27 YOUTH CIRCUSES THAT ANSWERED THIS QUESTION, 81% (22 RESPONSES) BELIEVE THAT THE CHANCES OF THEIR YOUTH CIRCUS SURVIVING THIS CRISIS WITHOUT EXTERNAL FUNDING IS 50% OR LESS. 44% (12 RESPONSES) BELIEVE THEIR CHANCES ARE 20% OR LESS, WHILE 19% (5 RESPONSES) BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE NO CHANCE OF SURVIVAL WITHOUT FUNDING. NO YOUTH CIRCUS BELIEVES THAT THEY HAVE MORE THAN AN 80% CHANCE OF SURVIVAL WITHOUT EXTERNAL FUNDING.

What support do you require, from central government or elsewhere, if your organisation is to continue as usual once this crisis is over?

### Written Answers: Summary

*(for full answers, see Supplement)*

### Concisely: Financial Relief.

There are a variety of suggestions regarding the form that this should take, however the main issue is that the financial support announced by the government to date (26<sup>th</sup> March 2020), does not apply to many of these youth circuses: most of their staff are self-employed, and many youth circuses are small businesses without a business premises, so they cannot apply for the government's small business grant funding.



### Self-Employed Staff

Youth circuses need the government to provide an income for self-employed workers, and that this needs to be paid swiftly. This will allow youth circuses to retain their staff, ensuring that they do not move away or seek work elsewhere.

To quote one response:

“Better financial support for self-employed staff. All of us have built our lives & household expenditure around realistic expectations of regular income and long-term projects. We knew that our situation is precarious, and in normal circumstances we all take measures to mitigate that - suddenly being told that our best hope is to apply for Universal Credit/SSP when many of us have partners working in the same sector will result in extreme household poverty for all of us.”

### Wider Financial Aid

Youth circuses also need direct business funding, to cover core running costs during the crisis, and support re-start up.

Suggestions include:

- Grants towards core running costs (the current small business grants do not apply to businesses that do not occupy property – many youth circuses share buildings or rent spaces short-term)
- The small business grant to apply to charities
- Grants for re-start up costs
- A rent holiday for the duration of the crisis
- Longer term investment in youth circus

One youth circus also raised the issue that they cannot get their business interruption insurance to pay out.



## Impact Survey Report 1

How can we (CircusWorks) best support you during this time?

### Written Answers: Summary

*(for full answers, see Supplement)*

Like all organisations in the youth circus sector, CircusWorks has had to radically re-assess our purpose and activities during this crisis. Going forward, our actions will be led in part by responses to this question.

### Advocacy

Youth circuses need CircusWorks to work as an advocate for the sector: lobbying central government and funding bodies on their behalf during this crisis.

### Key Information

Youth circuses also request that CircusWorks keep them updated on key information about financial support, both for businesses and self-employed individuals.

### Online Resources

Finally, youth circuses hope that CircusWorks will act as a hub for online resources, including workshops, creative projects for young people, learning opportunities, online circus shows, and any other useful content.

### Conference

One youth circus has requested that CircusWorks run a youth circus conference at the end of this crisis, so we can come together as a sector. This is something we will look into.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this report. We hope that you stay safe and well during this crisis.