

New FUSEBOX sparks the imagination of young creatives

Photo by Charlotte Levy



Archie O'Neill



Daniel Cartlidge

Creative Youth charity's new Co-Directors **Archie O'Neill** and **Daniel Cartlidge** talk to Sarah Dale about Kingston's exciting new arts space and their plans for 2024.

Archie O'Neill and Daniel Cartlidge acknowledge how "highly unconventional" it is to have two young people running a charity. Their youthful energy and enthusiasm for the arts and Creative Youth's vision have secured them both new roles as Co-Directors – and they hit the ground running by fully opening the charity's new arts space, FUSEBOX, in their first week.

"Our team is overall very young, and we are extremely proud of the way we bring everyone together to also work with more experienced members of staff,"

"We are highly unconventional as two young people running a charity. That's happened because we can respond and refine the services for young people because we're young people too. Our background is in the arts – Dan's worked in theatre and I've worked in visual arts."

They both joined the charity in 2021, Daniel, 26, working as General Manager and Archie as Community and Participation Manager prior to their new roles.

Creative Youth works with young people aged from six to 26 in a range of disciplines including music, drama, dance, poetry, digital arts, visual arts, fashion and design. Around 7,000 to 8,000 people engage with the charity

including staff, young creatives and audience members.

FUSEBOX held its official launch in July, opening its café to the public on 4th September, the same day they started their new roles. The new arts space is located under the John Lewis building and the renovation was funded by the Greater London Authority and the Royal Borough of Kingston. The charity has a 10-year lease on the property.

Not only is the site a forward-thinking arts space but it is a heritage site and visitors to FUSEBOX can view the medieval artefacts. The Medieval Undercroft is dated to c.1350 and is thought to be the cellar of a merchant's house due to its proximity to Kingston Market.

"These are really exciting times," added Archie.

"FUSEBOX is our primary focus for the new year, as well as continuing the work of the charity which began in 2009. The local authority could not have been more supportive with getting the project off the ground. We have been very well supported by our team and the Board, by other organisations and the Chamber as we've made that step up."

Daniel said: "As we establish ourselves in our roles in the new year, it will be good to continue to focus on the things that matter to



Formerly known as the Undercroft, FUSEBOX is a place for young people, emerging artists, key academic partners, and community organisations locally, nationally and internationally to come together.

our local young people such as sustainability, climate change and mental health.

"FUSEBOX is a safe, inclusive space which we plan to make as diverse as possible. It's a very creative environment to work, with really good facilities including our own café."

The charity has worked with Mind to offer a Mindful Arts project for neurodiverse service-users or those struggling with mental health issues to provide relaxed arts sessions.

The Co-Directors admit the charity is not as diverse as they would like it to be and are proactively looking to improve their diversity in 2024. The charity has 15 members of staff with up to 50 freelancers and work experience working on the popular FUSE International festival.

The festival, formerly known as the International Youth Arts Festival, is the largest youth multi-arts festival in the UK. The 10-day event will be held from 28th June to 7th July 2024 across several venues in Kingston including Rose Theatre and will have a packed programme of music, dance, comedy, theatre, and more.

The charity joined Kingston Chamber of Commerce around 11 years ago.

"The benefits of being members of the Chamber are two-fold," explained Archie.

"As a charity, it's very difficult to network and connect with other businesses in the local

area and charities can feel isolated, but as a member of the Chamber, we're a part of those key discussions and receive signposting to other organisations. That connection with local businesses is important to our ethos as a charity.

"More specifically, opening FUSEBOX has been a huge undertaking. We are now operating our own venue as a business and being able to draw on the support of the Chamber and other businesses, as well as having the Chamber use this space as a venue, which leads to other businesses having the chance to see the venue and decide to book it themselves, has been great."

Daniel added: "Networking gives you room to breathe from the day-to-day running of a business and a chance to connect with other people who run their own businesses. It can be lonely at the top. You're taking care of the business and staff and service-users so networking means you can chat to others who know what it's like. Most of the networking events happen in interesting places too such as the Rose Theatre. The Chamber is a great supporter of the arts."



Photo by Amaan Ali

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To find out more about **FUSEBOX**, visit www.creativeyouthcharity.org/fusebox



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