

# Making Creative Things Happen

Keynote by Kresanna Aigner

Good morning

I would like to acknowledge the Wiradjuri Elders  
Past, present and emerging and thank you for the very moving welcoming ceremony on  
Thursday night and inviting me to walk through the smoke  
I draw on this now as I stand before you to share about the creative activity taking place in  
my community in the North East of Scotland

**Image: Map of Scotland**

Findhorn Bay Arts is a company based in the rural region of Moray on the North East Coast  
of Scotland

**Since 2012 we have presented a range of high quality and inclusive arts events and  
projects across Moray.**

Our core activities centre around:

**Programming (our highlight being a biennial arts Festival)**

**Creating original productions**

**Creative Learning programmes**

**Network development**

I am going to present to you the context in which Findhorn Bay Arts works, and share some  
of the challenges we have faced and the opportunities embraced as an arts organisation  
establishing itself within a rural collection of communities.

It also reflects on how our own personal journey and focus on our core purpose has  
energised and sustained us through the development of our work.

**Image: Natural landscape**

This is where I come from...

We operate within the rural setting of the Forres area –

Nestled on the edge of the Findhorn Bay which provides an inspiring backdrop of ancient  
woodlands through which the river Findhorn flows to meet miles of sandy beaches and  
opens to the sea

We are situated in the West of Moray, the area comprises of an historic market town, coastal  
villages and diverse communities that includes the internationally renowned spiritual  
community & eco village The Findhorn Foundation which is based on the edge of the once  
thriving fishing village of Findhorn,  
the military are based locally  
and we are in a region where farming, oil, fishing and whiskey make up the main industries.

The Findhorn Bay area represents an immediate population of 14,350 and sits within the  
region with a population of around 96,000 people.

**The work of Findhorn Bay Arts is rooted in the immediate communities of Forres,  
Findhorn and the surrounding rural villages and has grown to expand across the  
region.**

I invite you in to see a little more of where I come from and give you a feel for the area through this short film.

### **Film: Creative Place**

I arrived in the area at the age of 10 having spent my early years moving between three countries and several schools

As a result I was disengaged with education –  
I experienced a fragmented sense of place and lack of community.

However, I was fortunate to have moved to the village of Findhorn and to be living in this beautiful area with many creative influences around me.

It was through creativity and in the natural landscape that I found I could be myself  
I was inspired, I felt connected  
- I had found my community in this place.

As I entered my late teens I yearned for more –  
All that I had found rich to begin with no longer held me, the town seemed to offer me nothing and I was hungry for new adventures.

So – at 17 I high tailed it out of the region for the bright lights of the big city.

It was in the cities that the next 22 years of my life unfolded.  
Exploring my creative potential and the role I would eventually develop within the creative sector both in Scotland and in Northern Ireland.

I had children, twins

### **Image: Baby picture**

When my children were approaching their teens – I started to question if the life of the city could continue to provide the quality of life and experiences I aspired for myself and for my children.

I yearned, once again for open sky, green trees and the sea ...  
We knew we did not want to be completely remote and needed connection to creativity –  
We pondered and without a huge amount of thought or planning we packed up, sold up and moved back to the region of Moray.

### **Image: beach and frame**

In the 10 years preceding moving back, while visiting I had seen again how much creativity the region had to offer.

I noticed its diverse communities and stunning natural landscape.  
It was then that the idea of producing a festival had started to seed itself.

Once I returned I realised that it was time for me to bring my learning, skills and connections back home with me too.

**It was time to come full circle.**

I began to explore the idea of an arts festival for the area further, to share my vision with others ... and in doing so the vision began to take hold and grew ...

In 2012, together with a small board of 4 people – Findhorn Bay Arts was established -

### **Image: FBA ... making creative things happen**

In order to achieve our goal of producing an arts festival we were going to have to face some challenges.

We were in a rural area in a time of economic uncertainty.

- Government budget cuts were leading to closure of public libraries, leisure services and smaller schools.
- Services such as medical facilities were being centralised to city hubs.
- The Royal Air Force base was in the process of moving its operations resulting in the loss of thousands of families
- Bus links to smaller communities were being cut ... the train only offering connections between cities and two towns in the region.

Transport is a huge challenge especially for young people and our older residents.

Under these conditions it's not surprising the region experiences a net migration of young people.

When a community is faced with economic uncertainty it puts people in a position to reflect on what they do have, and what is important to them.

And Moray does have a lot going for it  
The landscape, and award winning coastline,  
Moray is Malt Whiskey Country and there are castles, historic abbeys and award winning gardens.

Most importantly Moray has an engaged community with the drive to address budget cuts, service provisions, develop the tourism economy and to maintain its position as a vibrant region in Scotland.

### **Time and time again we see creative people galvanised by adversity, we are also very good at spotting opportunities**

#### **Moray's creative sector had a desire to play their part too –**

Recognising the vitality of the creative community and the desire to come together Findhorn Bay Arts in partnership with another local arts organisation and in collaboration with individual artists started Culture Café.

### **Image: Culture Café**

Culture Café was designed as a meeting place for bringing people who work in the arts together.

A relaxed space for sharing of ideas, making connections and supporting new collaborations

...

Culture Café events centred around good local food ...

If we nourish ourselves we are better equipped to nourish others

### **At the first Culture Café we created a manifesto**

## **Image: Manifesto**

We felt that a grassroots approach to networking and realising creative potential was essential if we were going to grow to meet the challenges.

In 2012 Findhorn Bay Arts considered how we could achieve an arts festival in such a climate and in considering the context more closely –

Listening to the ambitions of the creative sector and embracing the Culture Café manifesto we agreed on a slower stepping stone approach to development –

We took the time to build partnerships, to build trust and to make connections that would create a strong foundation upon which we could develop our vision.

## **In 2013 we launched Culture Day**

### **Image: Culture Day**

A free one day event, inspired by Culture Nights held in other European cities –  
And drawing on my experience of producing the 1<sup>st</sup> two Culture Nights in Belfast ..

Culture Day provided a space for artists, community groups, heritage and cultural sector to come together and invite the public to connect with their work.

A cultural extravaganza that includes exhibitions, talks, tours, performances and participatory activities taking place in public spaces, shops, cafes, up lanes and alleyways, in bus shelters, churches, community halls throughout the town of Forres.

The first Culture Day saw over 100 participating and attracted in the region of 3000 people to explore creativity that is available to them locally

## **Also in 2013, we were the only region in Scotland to experience withdrawal of its entire arts budget!**

Culture Café events continued to provide the forum to come together, a space to talk about fears and how this impacted on each of us.

It provided space for us all to get our creative thinking caps on, we broadened the invitation to include politicians, stakeholders, voluntary sector and businesses ..

This paved the way for cross sector collaboration, new ways of working and opened out to the creative sector to provide leadership.

By definition we are creative thinkers, with communication in an inclusive outlook we are able to find positive ways forward.

**All of the ground work** as a result of the 1<sup>st</sup> Culture Day and the collaborations, partnerships developed as a result of Culture Café events and stronger networks **informed the development of our inaugural Festival in 2014.**

## **Image: 1<sup>st</sup> Findhorn Bay Festival**

The Festival offered the first opportunity for mass engagement with the general public of the area.

Through volunteering, attendance at events, participating in workshop, working behind the scenes and performing as part of our signature theatrical production – Macbeth the Remix, saw the classic tale reworked and remixed into a stunning open-air production outside a

Castle with video projections, fire sculptures, dramatic live action, and a strong community involvement from pipers, martial artists plus an especially formed intergenerational choir – over 120 local people of all ages took part!

The Festival programme showcased artists of local, national and international renown Performances, exhibitions, talks, tours and more all took place in our local spaces and landscape transformed to stage events.

Programme themes explored identity, home, language ...

We supported opportunities for local and visiting artists to make connections

Created space for emerging artists and a plethora of opportunities for sharing and developing skills

The Festival was immersed and integrate into the everyday of the local area.

**Through the Festival we engaged the local community, they took part, they attended, visitors came from afar and local business felt the immediate impact.**

The success of the Festival reflected all of our work; the cross sector partnerships, collaborations between artists and the local community who embraced the opportunity.

The renewed vibrancy and engagement of the creative sector had put a spotlight on the positive impact of the arts;

And as a result a new cultural strategy for the region was commissioned by a local government agency.

**Arts was back on the table for discussion in Moray!**

The strategy lays out a collection of ideas, values and opportunities of the creative sector. It sets out our ambitious vision for a strong creative sector that contributes to education, tourism, regeneration, health and well-being for the region.

The timing coincided with a new national strategy for Scotland's young people.

The alignment of these two strategies with the core aims of Findhorn Bay Arts opened up funding for us to establish Ignite Moray Youth Arts Hub, one of 9 hubs established in Scotland to connect young people with creative opportunities in their regions.

It supported the formation of a **youth arts ambassador team** – placing young people at the heart of decision making.

They made a film which reflected their experiences –

**Film: Ignite**

The vision for creative possibilities for young people continues to grow – with local artists, organisation, Findhorn Bay Arts along with our partners working to find sustainable creative activity for young people in the region.

In 2015 our local town was recognised with a national accolade

**Image: Creative Place Awards**

**The Creative Place Awards, given in recognition of Scotland's communities where people work together to celebrate their town and villages through arts and culture.**

This was a boost to the town and all who had been working for it.

The award came with funding, and Findhorn Bay Arts delivered a programme that supported:

- 2015 & 2016 Culture Days
- 17 public art projects that connected creativity, with local people and place
- And contributed towards the development of the 2016 Festival and provided the budget to support the participation of our local artists

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Festival achieved:

- 120 events, over 6-days featuring local and visiting artists of local, national, and international renown
- Over 14,000 attendances ticketed and free events
- Engaged with over 600 participants through workshops and education programmes,
- Connected 65 new partnerships
- Involved 190 volunteers, and
- Contributed an estimated economic impact to the region of almost 900 thousand pounds!

Boom!

### **Film: 2016 Festival film**

It was quite the journey from inception through to 2016 ....

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Festival and nearing the end of the Ignite and Creative Place programme funding,  
With ongoing financial pressures, budget cuts and further economic and political uncertainty

### **I hit a wall**

Uncertainty knocked at our door, and this created fear  
Where could we go from here  
How could we sustain what we had developed?  
And how could we continue to *make creative thing happen?*

To achieve all that we had in just 4-years we had pushed against and rose to the challenges  
We had galvanised support and people were taking notice of our work

With our success also came raised expectations about what resources we had and what we should be delivering

People wanted more from us, they assumed our role  
And if we could not deliver more for them, then this began to fuel some criticism

This cut right to the very core of me

I had invested a lot personally, and risked a lot too...  
I felt betrayed  
I felt very incredibly vulnerable in this small town, the home that I had returned too

I felt the pressure that it was my responsibility to fix things, for us to be all things for all people, and to keep everything going for the creative sector...

### **It was time to re-group**

In doing so I was reminded that it was not my sole responsibility to fix things

I had spent 4 years developing partners, collaborations, and a team ...

And it was time to bring people together and to work together to address challenges -

Through conversation with our partners, artists, stakeholders, the board and the team we evaluated

we asked questions, the right questions ....

We listened

We took time to consider what was working, what could be improved upon and our capacity to deliver

We considered balance and our boundaries too

We reflected on our journey, acknowledged our fears, reflected on our learning and in doing so we were able to find solutions.

This process provided clarity in who we are and what we sought to achieve, it focused our vision, mission and objectives.

and we came back to stand in our core purpose.

### **Image: Mission Statement**

In my experience, by building connections and working in partnership with others we can overcome challenges

and in doing so we learn and we grow ...

and this enables us to create activities and events with greater depth and quality of experience.

I'm learning to acknowledge my personal journey as it weaves itself through time, place, work and people

and to understand what drives me and how much I am truly met by connection, community and a collective creative purpose.

### **SLIDES for each**

- A month ago we delivered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Findhorn Bay Festival
- We continue to support network development
- We produced another original production
- We continue to develop projects and deliver for young people in Moray,

People often ask me why don't we produce the Festival every year ....

My reply is that it is not just a Festival –

It's about everything we are developing around this.

it's about the foundations we build to enable creativity to flourish

It's about how we connect with people, place and creativity in meaningful ways

And as our young people go out into the world, which they should

As a result of their experiences, their connection to people, creativity and place they enter the world better equipped in so many ways to embrace the unknown (and boy is that needed more than ever!)

I leave you with this

In music, composers talk about the importance of the space between the notes ... because it is the spaces between that holds the notes and that *is* what makes beautiful music.

**End Slide**  
**Findhorn Bay Arts website & hashtags**