

Increasing sustainability through strengthened relationships & community impact



Case Study: Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable, Limerick
New Stream – Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland



Bread Not Profits. Photo: Caleb Purcell

Organisational Profile

Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable are two venues based in Limerick city. Founded in 1981, Belltable is a 220-seater theatre space that acts primarily as a creative development hub. The Lime Tree Theatre is a 510 seat theatre that opened in 2012 on the campus of Mary Immaculate College. Together they create a dynamic cultural venue that produces and presents high-quality cultural experiences by supporting artists and collaborating with regional and national partners. With the onset of Covid-19, Lime Tree Theatre closed its doors in 2020 and commenced the Fellowship in an uncertain period of flux. The organisation has 9 full-time employees, including 1.5 full-time fundraising staff.

“Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland has enabled our organisation to refresh our marketing and fundraising strategies. The Lime Tree Theatre celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2022 and we are confident in our strategic approach to this significant milestone.”

Gillian Fenton, Marketing & Development Manager, Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable

Key Achievements:

- 24% increase in Friends
- Positioned Lime Tree Theatre for philanthropic giving
- Supported local artists in securing €40,000 from ESB Brighter Future Arts Fund

Organisational Funds Raised:

2020: €599,310

2021: €557,067

Funds raised by Fellow:

2020: €37,800

2021: €36,800

Funds committed:

2022:
€10,000



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The Challenge

Before the Fellowship, the Lime Tree Theatre did not have a team member dedicated to fundraising. Without a strategic focus, fundraising happened on an ad-hoc basis and without direct Board engagement. Although there were a number of successes, such as an existing Friends programme and previous partnerships, Lime Tree Theatre sought a new focus through the Fellowship, in order to work towards a more sustainable future for the venues. Through her role as Marketing Manager, Gill Fenton had played a key part in the work around sponsorship and fundraising, planning events and meeting potential funding partners. The Fellowship enabled an organisational re-structure so that Gill could focus on development alongside her marketing role.

From the outset, the pandemic hit the Lime Tree Theatre especially hard as it is a venue that functions mainly as a receiving house for live performances. Shutting its doors posed an enormous challenge, both programmatically and institutionally. A key part of its fundraising activity involves inviting prospects into the space to experience the building and the artistic programme: with regular cancellations of events, this was no longer possible. Facing regular challenges, Fenton had to find new ways to enliven prospect conversations and stakeholder engagement virtually. This includes a special 10th Anniversary in 2022. By focusing on an institutional milestone, Lime Tree Theatre was able to enhance its fundraising strategy, and focus on the future with confident messaging.

Fundraising – Strategy for Success

With the support of the Fellowship, Lime Tree Theatre has developed a robust 2021-2025 strategic plan, as well as a fundraising plan that aligns with it. Both exist symbiotically to achieve the venues' long-term and short-term targets. Its fundraising focus includes growth and depth to their Membership programme (which increased 24% from 2020), and securing support in 2020 for specific programmes. These include a €20,000 grant from the JP McManus Fund for their Bualadh Bos Children's Festival On Tour, and a €20,000 sponsorship for the show Red Army as part of their LiFT Fund - Limerick Fund for Theatre. Leveraging these recent successes, Lime Tree Theatre aims to secure further long-term support.



Fellow Profile

For 20 years Gillian Fenton has worked in the arts sector with a wide variety of organisations. Gillian holds a BA in Media and Communication Studies and History from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. She joined Lime Tree Theatre in August 2012 as the Marketing Manager and was appointed the Marketing & Development Manager role in 2020, as part of the Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland programme.

Core Skills / Learning / Activities

-  Strategic planning
-  Marketing plan
-  Fundraising plan
-  Friends & membership schemes
-  Communicating organisational impact
-  Prospect development
-  Relationship management
-  Board engagement & ongoing development
-  One-to-one mentoring sessions
-  Presentation skills
-  Pitching skills and opportunities
-  Job specifications

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Marketing – Strategy for Success

Alongside its strategic and fundraising plans, Lime Tree Theatre has also focused on strategic marketing as it enters its tenth year. This has been a challenge for Fenton, who is responsible for both Marketing and Development, with increased demands on the marketing team due to constant pivoting, and a new reliance on digital communication. Despite the challenges, Fenton has turned a fresh focus on institutional marketing so that the venue can celebrate its achievements, re-establish relationships with supporters, and forge new partnerships, while also welcoming people back into the space. This includes a special 10th anniversary logo, as well as the launch of a special programme of events in Summer 2022.

Impacts of the Fellowship – Key Developments

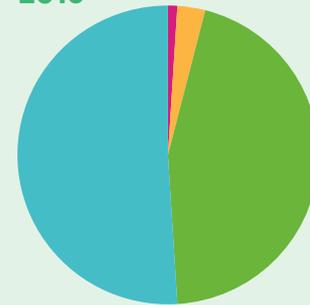
The Fellowship has enabled Lime Tree Theatre to be more strategic in the overall approach towards fundraising and institutional marketing. Development is now embedded in the venue's day-to-day planning, and is integrated into regular work with staff members and the Board. Implementing training from the Fellowship has become a regular part of Fenton's everyday life. The Fellowship has also empowered the organisation to start discussions with philanthropists, both domestic and international, to explore long-term philanthropic support.

Leaders in Limerick

The organisation has shifted its mindset from seeing itself solely as a receiving house to positioning itself as a community leader. Lime Tree Theatre has used the time with its doors closed to focus on community building, artist support, and understanding its own value. Through the Fellowship, Director Louise Donlon, and Fenton, have shifted to an investment mentality when pitching for support, using financials and impact reports to position the Lime Tree Theatre as an excellent long-term investment opportunity. This has resulted in securing a Service Level Agreement with the Limerick City and County Council which will see in excess of €1 million allocated to the organisation over the next five years.

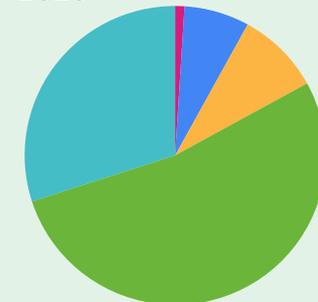
Sources of Contributed Income

2019



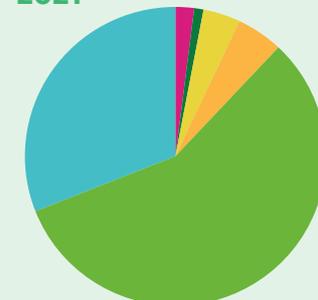
- Other 51%
- Grants 3%
- Arts Council 45%
- Membership & Friends 1%

2020



- Membership & Friends 1%
- Grants 9%
- Arts Council 53%
- Corporate Sponsorship 7%
- Other 30%

2021



- Membership & Friends 2%
- Grants 5%
- Arts Council 57%
- Other 31%
- Trusts & Foundations 4%
- Patrons 1%

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Board Engagement

Previous to the Fellowship, Fenton was somewhat familiar with members of the Board. Now conversations between her and Board members are an integral part of her role. Prospecting through the Board and Fundraising Sub-Committee have proved hugely beneficial for connecting to potential partners. Board members now actively make introductions, helping to establish a whole new network of contacts, including a potential major donor.

In response to Covid restrictions, the Lime Tree Theatre programmed an outdoor theatrical experience called *Waiting for Poirot*. In the lead up to this event Fenton worked closely with the Board on their invite list, with each Board member bringing a prospect with them. As a result, Fenton is now in discussions with two companies in Limerick about corporate support.

Paying it forward

Within her role, Fenton has witnessed the knock-on effect of the Fellowship's training. She has focused on promoting a fundraising mindset within the venues' artist network, making artists aware of funding opportunities and offering support with grant applications. One example of this is a grant for €40,000 from the ESB Brighter Future Arts Fund in partnership with *Business to Arts*. Fenton is helping to build an ecosystem of financial sustainability within the Limerick artistic community, further cementing Lime Tree Theatre's position as a community leader.

Grant writing and pitching

The Fellowship has also helped Fenton improve her grant-writing skills for the organisation as well as on behalf of local artists. A renewed confidence in the value and impact of the theatre has translated well into grant applications, prospect pitches, and presentations. This confidence-building has extended from the way Fenton talks

about the organisation, to the way she sees herself as a fundraiser.

Conclusion

The Fundraising Fellowship has embedded a fundraising and investment mentality into the day-to-day work of the Lime Tree Theatre team. Fenton has increased membership numbers, built a refreshed network of strong corporate prospects, helped secure long-term investment, and has deepened her relationship with the Board. She has also shared her training with the artistic community helping to increase its financial stability. With the support of Fellowship, Lime Tree Theatre have been able to lay the foundations for an impactful and powerful 10th anniversary year in 2022, and beyond.

'Participating in the Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland has added significant capacity to Lime Tree Theatre as we embark on a new and exciting phase in our development as a leading cultural institution. The Fellowship has given us great confidence in our ability to find and work with new partners who recognise the importance and value of our mission.'

Louise Donlon, Executive Director,
Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable

Fundraising Fellowship

Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland is a partnership between *Business to Arts* and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The programme builds capacity in cultural organisations across Ireland and addresses key fundraising challenges affecting the sector. In 2020, two cultural organisations were offered 50% matched-funding to hire a fundraising professional or marketing & fundraising professional. This case study is part of a series which highlights the achievements and challenges faced by organisations and their Fellows throughout the programme.

Over the last 12 years the New Stream Fundraising Capacity Building Project operated by *Business to Arts* has been supported by Bank of America Merrill Lynch, The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Dublin City Council Culture Company, The Ireland Funds, Accenture, The RDS and *Business to Arts*' wider corporate membership-base.