



ANNUAL REPORT
2024
Cirkaskina
par





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1 Social Circus Foundation,
Vancouver, CB

2 Green Fools,
Calgary, AB

3 Artcirq, Igloolik, NU

4 Socirc and Lookup Theatre, Toronto, ON

5 TEVA, CIUSSS
Centre-Sud de l'Île, **Le Petit Cirque Sablon,**
Centre Père Sablon and **Cirque Hors Piste,** Montreal, QC

6 Cirkana, Mascouche, QC

7 Ô Cirque,
Sherbrooke, QC

8 Caravane Philanthrope,
Trois-Rivières, QC

9 Cirque du Monde QC, Centre résidentiel
et communautaire
Jacques-Cartier,
Quebec, QC

10 Cirque du Monde Atikamekw,
Conseil de la
Nation Atikamekw,
Manawan &
Wemotaci, QC

11 Forum Jeunesse Charlevoix,
Baie-St-Paul, QC

12 Cirqiniq,
Kativik Regional
Government,
Kuujuaq, QC

13 Wonderbolt,
Happy Valley
Goose Bay, NL

14 École de Cirque des Îles,
Magadalen
Islands, QC

15 Halifax Circus,
Halifax, NS

16 Wonderbolt and Autism Society / Ignite Circus,
St-John's, NL



About

Cirkaskina's main objectives

Facilitate networking activities between youths, practitioners, researchers and social circus coordinators;

Promote and reinforce the recognition of circus arts as a tool for social transformation;

Support young leaders' involvement and development of life skills.

Cirque Hors Piste

Cirque Hors Piste (CHP) is a Montreal-based organization dedicated to social circus intervention. With the help of circus arts, CHP offers marginalized youths or those at risk of exclusion an alternative path to personal development by providing a social support that allows them to move forward and fulfill their potential as citizens. Its impact on people in precarious situations is unequivocal, in addition to contributing to the wider well-being of the community.

The social circus approach combines artistic expression with social intervention. Personalized support helps participants access experiences

that have a positive impact on their self-esteem and identity. This then enables them to draw from their marginality as a way to create new relationships in a society that often rejected them. Because it makes room for freedom and creativity, circus enables people in precarious situations to blossom and express themselves. Social circus encourages them to trust and challenge themselves physically as well as socially. The ultimate objective is not only to learn circus skill but to forge interpersonal connections, develop social skills, trust others and draw on inner strength to develop tenacity, perseverance and technical discipline.

Cirkaskina

Meaning "all together" in the Atikamekw Indigenous language, Cirkaskina is the Canadian social circus network that gathers twenty organizations that use circus arts as a tool for social transformation tool with marginalized youth. This Cirque Hors Piste component supports the countrywide mobilization of communities as well as long-term collective actions adapted to their realities



The Community in Figures

20

COMMUNITIES represented in youth actions, including **5** Indigenous communities

This year, our partners worked twice as hard to reach more youths, not only through their regular social circus activities but also with various civic engagement opportunities like exchanges with other social circus groups. Thanks to the

strong feeling of belonging and the trust that has been built through the years, our social circus community continues to deepen its impact all over Canada.

87

YOUNG LEADERS in social circus from **7** Canadian provinces involved in their social circus group

1

ORIENTATION COMMITTEE comprised of **5** representatives of partner organizations

12

YOUNG LEADERS from **8** communities who took part in **2** virtual advisory committees

3191

YOUTHS REACHED by circus workshops



Social Circus Community Outreach in 2024

March

Quebec Young Leaders
Virtual Advisory Committee

Young Leaders Committee on the importance of play in the social circus approach, Eastern Townships

Virtual talk about ethics in social circus in a context of limited mental health resources, facilitated by Marilou Vinet, Cirque Hors Piste

May

Virtual talk about communication tools to broadcast the impact of social circus, facilitated by Anne-Marie Hivert, Green Fools

June

Publishing in the Journal of Childhood Studies of the VOICE scientific article
"I Feel Seen": Creating Safe Spaces to Foster Self-Understanding and Agential Expression Among Youth Through Social Circus

Presentation and interactive workshop at the Children, Youth, and Performance Conference in Toronto

Read the article
["I Feel Seen"](#)

September

Young Leaders in Social Circus Committee in Wemotaci

November

National Young Leaders
Virtual Advisory Committee

Presence at Caravan Circus Network's general assembly in Barcelona and presentation of the results of the VOICE research

5 ORIENTATION COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Sarah Bédard-Dubé from Cirque du Monde QC, Mike Hirschbach from Halifax Circus, Anne-Marie Hivert from Green Fools, Charlotte Navet from Petit Cirque Sablon and Karine Lavoie & Daphné Morin from Cirque Hors Piste



Young Leaders in Social Circus

Young leaders are social circus participants that naturally become role models in their communities. Through their commitment to social circus programs, they develop their ability for teamwork, self-expression and learn how to mentor other participants. Here's a glimpse of their achievements in 2024.

This year, young leaders experienced significant moments of learning, self-actualization and sharing with others via circus arts. We recognize their sustained commitment and essential contribution to a vision of collective leadership. For example, many Inuit young leaders trained to become social circus instructors or photographers for social circus projects in their communities. Youths from Socirc in Toronto went back to the school where they first participated in circus workshops and performed in front of the students. A youth from Green Fools got involved in the organization of circus workshops by supporting the team of instructors.

This year, the personal and social development of our young leaders is outstanding. They have taken risks, innovated and dared to step

out of their comfort zone, which comes with its own set of challenges. We would like to acknowledge the courage of young leaders who struggled with social anxiety and still managed to go on stage, travel outside their communities for the first time, and make new connections. It was the case for one Montreal participant and others from Nunavik. For some, social circus events are an opportunity to have experiences outside their daily routine which allow them to pinpoint skills that they would like to develop. A participant from Halifax who was going through hard times a few years back decided to pursue their studies after graduating from a social circus program. Another youth from the Magdalen Islands got inspired after a Cirkaskina event to transmit their social circus knowledge to children in their community. Our young leaders' perseverance inspired many others to follow in the same direction. Importantly, these successes are supported by incredible youth workers and social circus instructors who facilitate the creation of safe and inclusive spaces.



Quebec Young Leaders Committee in the Eastern Townships

" This adventure was something totally different from anything that I have ever experienced. I had the opportunity to meet plenty of new people and strengthen my ties with those I already knew. Right from the start, on the bus, a participant suggested we play a game and so I appreciated the weekend even before getting there! Apart from that, the activities were really captivating, the food was delicious, the atmosphere was good and the venue was magnificent. I learned to get to know the other participants better, and I really liked that. Finally, I would like to thank those who made this unique experience possible. "

- Young leader the
Magdalen Islands, QC

See the
**Documentary
Film** at Camp
Jouvence

This year, **23 young leaders from 7 Quebec communities** had the opportunity to experience a young leaders' committee rooted in nature and the pedagogy of social circus. Around the theme of play, they were able to deepen their knowledge of social games and how they could be used in social circus workshops.

The weekend unfolded in the spirit of **connection, sharing** and **collaboration**. It started with a warm opening evening organized by Ô Cirque, our Sherbrooke partner. Afterwards, participants enjoyed the mesmerizing site of Camp Jouvence with programming focused on circus, social topics, and informal exchange surrounded by nature.





29 **YOUTHS** from
**14 Canadian
communities**

1 **PARADE**
dans la
communauté

200 **AUDIENCE MEMBERS
ATTENDED THE
COMMUNITY SHOW**

12 **CULTURAL
AND CIRCUS
WORKSHOPS**

1 **POW-WOW**
simulation
with **10 LOCAL
ARTISTS**

40
**HOURS of
activities**

1
**DOCUMENTARY
film**

See the
**documentary
film** at
Wemotaci

Young Leaders Committee In Wemotaci : Spotlight On Atikamekw Culture

Thanks to our partner, the Atikamekw Nation Council, we were able to learn more about the local culture. Co-organized with them, the event spanned over four days: one day at the Domaine Notcimik, a mesmerizing site on the outskirts of La Tuque followed by three days of circus and cultural activities in Wemotaci. The exchange highlighted the Atikamekw culture, promoted cultural exchange between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous youth as well as opened up spaces for circus exchange by and for the youth. We are grateful for the warm welcome we received from the entire community and would also like to thank the Domaine Notcimik, the Nikanik High School and the Seskitin Elementary School teams who were an essential part of this collaboration.





“When we step out of our comfort zone, we realize that we still have a lot to learn.”

- Participant

Observation report from the University of Montreal School of Social Work research team

“We found that the participants were aware of the meaning and outcome of such events, and the experience seemed to be memorable for everyone on a personal, collective, and cultural level. As the journey began, some effects were already evident: on the bus, participants started relaxing from accumulated anxiety, talking with others and expressing themselves through games. In the opening circle, the Atikamekw hosts (Madeleine and Alain) set the tone with regards to openness, respect and the sharing of culture. The youth were moved by this welcome and responded with an overall attitude of respect. The community of Wemotaci manifested enthusiasm and pleasure in hosting this group by sharing what is most dear to them. The Atikamekw culture and circus clearly share common values—openness, respect, resilience and connection with the environment — and

organizers talked about the ‘synergy effect’ meaning how they felt like they were “harvesting the fruit of seeds that were planted over the years”[1]. Two significant moments illustrate this : 1) a false fire alarm at the school interrupted the ongoing Pow-Wow. The long wait led to a dance to the rhythm of the alarm initiated by the Atikamekw women and soon followed by the youths; 2) In the closing circle, a participant who was previously more isolated expressed in tears how much they felt accepted for who they were. ‘It is not a therapy, but its effects are therapeutic’ (said a youth worker). When we ask what they are getting out of their trip, we notice that circus is an excuse for human interaction. Social Circus is all about the social aspect, exchanges, getting to know each other and feeling safe enough to be oneself.”

[1] Freely translated from the *Rapport d'activités / formations du Programme Kweskatsiwin*, Rassemblement national des jeunes leaders Cirkaskina Wemotaci 2024, p. 12.

Youths' Testimonials

"I felt accepted for who I am, and even if I don't always openly show it, I want you to know that I am grateful for that."

- Participant from Kuujjuuaq

"It was beautiful and heart-warming to connect to my Indigenous culture this way, even if I'm Anishnabe not Atikamekw — our cultures have such similar songs and dances."

I've never met so many different Indigenous people in my life, the feeling left me speechless, the feeling of having my people around me, of not being the minority - the only native. Even if they live all the way in Nunavik I'll never forget the amazing friends I made."

Participant from Toronto

"I feel really lucky to have been a part of this event. The cultural exchange activities made me feel powerful emotions towards the Atikamekw community. These effects have helped me deepen my relationship with the notions of 'truth' and 'reconciliation'. Even after this gathering, I am still filled with all sorts of questions."

- Participant from Quebec







Success Stories in 2024

Beginning of
intergenerational
social circus workshops
in Magdalen Islands
and St. John's

Social Circus
training camp in
Puvirnituq with more
than **40 youths**

Social Circus
workshops focused
on **self-confidence** in
Mascouche

Youths from Labrador
try new disciplines
like aerial arts and
unicycle



Cirque du Monde
Atikamekw **starts a**
partnership with the
Centre Mihawoso, a
social pediatrics centre





Another Year Of Youth Exchanges In Communities

In 2024, 190 youths participated in one of the 10 duo exchanges that took place across Canada. These exchanges aim to create knowledge-sharing opportunities between social circus participants as well as to emphasize the diversity of practices. This action is part of a larger aim to build a sense of belonging while laying the foundations for youth to find their voice and engage with their communities.



This year, two things stand out: the forging of a strong bond between social circus organizations and a more profound reflection on the challenges and joys of co-organizing of these kinds of events. For the youths, the impact is felt in terms of the trust developed over time with other participants as well as learning skills that are not always easily accessible. For example, Halifax Circus took part in puppetry workshops with Green Fools in Calgary and aspiring social circus instructors in Igloolik joined the Puvirnituq instructor training in Nunavik, a rare opportunity considering the high costs of transportation. For the youths of l'École de Cirque des Îles, the reality of living in a remote community makes opportunities to participate in new activities even more meaningful. Cirkana, from Mascouche, got the chance to visit the Tohu and the National Circus School in Montréal. Performing in public space with their Socirc counterparts in Toronto was an unforgettable experience for TEVA and Cirque Hors Piste from Montreal. All our partners put in hard work in order to support the youths throughout the process.



In Mars
**L'École de cirque
des Îles** visits
Cirkana in
Mascouche



In June
Cirkana visits
**L'École de Cirque
des Îles** in the
Magdalen Islands

In May
**Cirque Hors Piste
& TEVA** visit **Socirc**
in Toronto



In July
Halifax Circus
visits **Green Fools**
in Calgary



In June
Artcirq visits
Cirqiniq in
Puvirnituq



In August
**Le Petit Cirque
Sablon** visits
**Caravane
Philanthrope**
in Québec



In April
**Cirque du Monde
Québec** visits
**Social Circus
Foundation** in
Vancouver



In November
**Social Circus
Foundation** visits
**Cirque du Monde
Québec** in Quebec

In August
LookUp Theatre
visits **Ô Cirque**
in Sherbrooke



In Septembre
**Autism Society of
NL** visits **Cirque
Hors Piste** in
Montréal



Community
Exchanges



“We loved spending time with the people from Montreal. **One of the highlights was listening to transition stories of queer folks from other generations** at a Toronto theatre. Our other favourite moments of the exchange were the group pyramid we built together, performing our collective creation at the Kensington Market Street Festival and the day at the beach.”

- Socirc, Toronto



Research On The Effect Of Social Circus: Follow Up On Duo Exchanges



9 INTERVIEWS
conducted

The research has been ongoing since 2024. We can already say that the duo exchanges left a deep, meaningful imprint on youths and youth workers both on a personal and collective level. From the first interactions, we observed a transformative effect: participants relax, exchanges increase and a trusting dynamic takes place. These exchanges are the perfect places to overcome differences, share knowledge and find new ways of discovering. These moments foster self-confidence, openness and sensitivity towards others, all the while creating lasting

bonds, when possible. They enable participants to focus on human interaction beyond technical practice. However, the return to reality can be difficult and be accompanied by loneliness or despondency. Preparation ahead of time and adapted support are likely to maximize the benefits of this experience and turn it into leverage for personal and collective growth. The next steps for the research team are to identify the positive effects of this experience, tips and tricks to make the preparation easier, and put together a list of elements to keep in mind.

1 PREPARATION
TOOLKIT for future
exchanges in the
works

9 COMMUNITIES
consulted

“My experience in Vancouver (and the young leader committee at Jouvence) allowed me to discover new skills related to the circus world in an entertaining setting. I met wonderful people who accompanied me in my explorations and shared their knowledge with passion and enthusiasm. I’m coming out of this experience with a bag filled with beautiful memories and new acrobatic figures that I can now pass on to my peers.”

- Participant, Quebec



“ I received
gifts and
hugs! ”

- Participant, Wemotaci



“All the people that I met
over the week were so lovely and
kind and accepting. As an Autistic
person, there are not a lot of places I feel
like I fit in. During my time **at Cirkaskina,**
I felt like I could take off my “mask” and
be my authentic self. That meant the world
to me. It was so wonderful to share space
with this group of diverse humans who all
have the same thing in common, life threw
us a curve ball so we are using circus to
help us overcome. **Among social circus**
performers, I have found my tribe.”

- Participant, St-John's





“No pressure,
no judgment, it’s an
inclusive space to meet
new people full of humanity,
where friendship spontaneously
emerges, where we can nurture
our inner child and step outside
of our comfort zone while
feeling safe and respected.”

- Participant, Magdalen Islands



Youths' Testimonials

"It was my first time by a campfire, under the stars, in a group where I was feeling good and included."

- Participant, Montreal

"Understanding that circus requires persistence and is a group effort pushed me to come and get involved in a creation inspired by all the participants. I also rediscovered my body and reconnected with my coordination."

- Participant, Montreal

"Social circus feels like home where I belong and am really comfortable; there is no pressure and built strong and meaningful relationships with people there."

- Participant, Magdalen Islands



OUR PARTNERS



Conseil de la
Nation Atikamekw



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Canada

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*Secrétariat
à la jeunesse*

Québec

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