



2019 – 2020

# Koestler Arts Annual Review



Room with a View, HM Prison Grendon, Drawing, 2019

- 4 Koestler Awards 2019
- 6 Projects & Events
- 8 Exhibitions
- 10 Outreach
- 12 Mentoring & Scholarships
- 13 Financial Review
- 14 Future Plans

**My journey with Koestler Arts began in 2011.** I had no paper and no pencil, so I borrowed a biro and hastily drew an ink drawing on the blank side of an application form. I was astounded when Koestler Arts informed me that my artwork had been selected for their annual exhibition, and the unexpected success inspired me to continue entering the awards.

Soon after release in 2017 Koestler Arts appointed me an Art Mentor, giving me the opportunity to visit renowned galleries hosting amazing exhibitions. I couldn't believe I was looking at Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Reynolds and Rubens in the flesh rather than in an art book! Koestler Arts encouraged me to enrol at Art College in 2018...so I did but unfortunately I also suffered a relapse into alcohol dependence and within a matter of months ended back inside – a defeated soul. But during the 14 months I regained the discipline and enthusiasm to draw. In June 2020 I was – once again – released and recently finished another mural in the basement of the Approved Premises.

I'm indebted to Koestler for their support through the dark times. Koestler Arts gave me the opportunity to change my darkened outlook and explore the illuminating world of art.

– Andy, Artist

**In 1962 the Koestler Awards were born** from one man's experience of isolation, imprisonment, and the vital role that creativity played during that time. Nearly 60 years later, as we face unprecedented challenges both in criminal justice and communities, our work at Koestler Arts remains unchanged at its core – to enable those who are imprisoned, detained or under probation supervision to find positivity through creativity.

In 2019, thanks to the work and commitment of our volunteers, judges and exhibition visitors, we were able to provide written feedback to every entrant. With our partners in the arts and criminal justice sectors, we were able to showcase more music and performance than ever before, including a landmark concert in the chapel of HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs as part of the EFG London Jazz Festival. And a series of focus groups brought the voices and experiences of those held in secure settings to the forefront of our work.

On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank everyone who has helped unlock the talent inside: so that those who are often unseen and disregarded can be seen and heard, and find their voice. We know that this year we will need to adapt so that we can offer the same support, and we hope that you will join us to help build positive and creative futures for people who are changing their lives through art.

– Dame Anne Owers, Chair of Trustees

**Cover Artwork:** *Black is Every Colour*, Nottingham Probation, Castle Quay, Highly Commended Award for Portrait, 2019

**Designed by:** Frances Lucas

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# Koestler Awards 2019



*Baby Owl, HM Prison Peterborough, First-Time Entrant Award for Sculpture, 2019*

At the heart of our work are the Koestler Awards, an annual awards scheme celebrating creativity in the criminal justice system.

In its 57th year, the Koestler Awards received 7,629 artworks from 3,754 prisoners, secure patients, young people in secure children's homes and immigration detainees, a 5% increase on 2018. 298 establishments were represented, and 2,213 awards were granted by 98 expert

volunteer judges including Emma Bridgewater, Joelle Taylor and Hot Chip in over 50 categories of visual art, music and writing. Cash prizes range from £20 to £100, and in 2019 the prize money totalled over £30,000.

1,856 people entered the Koestler Awards for the first time in 2019, and we received 363 entries to our Fast Feedback programme for under 18s. This programme allows us to accommodate the typically shorter sentences of

young people by awarding their creativity outside of the usual Koestler Awards timetable.

Every entrant receives a certificate and in 2019, 100% of entrants received personalised, written feedback on their work from our judges, volunteers and exhibition visitors. This encouragement is hugely valued by our entrants, and we are delighted to be able to support all our entrants with this external feedback and recognition.

## Entrants to the 2019 Koestler Awards



**94%**

reported increased self-confidence



**90%**

reported improved achievement in art



**68%**

reported improved achievement in education



**67%**

reported improved relationships with family and friends



**66%**

reported improved relationships with officers & staff



**55%**

reported improved ability to keep free from crime

## Award Steps

**Jan – Apr**

Artwork received

**Apr – Jul**

Entries logged onto our database

**Jun – Jul**

Judging

**Jul – Aug**

Feedback writing

**End of Aug**

Awards announced

**Oct**

Certificates and prize money sent to the artists

**Sept – Nov**

UK exhibition

**Dec**

Artwork sales money sent to the artists

**Jan – Jun**

Regional exhibitions

**Jan – March**

Artwork returned to the artists

***“This yearly competition has been a massive help to me in making those changes to succeed, move on to a better way of life, and use those skills that I had, but were laid dormant in a more positive and productive manner.”***

– Koestler Awards entrant, 2019

# Projects & Events

## Jazz Festival

In 2019 we were delighted to strengthen our relationship with our neighbours at HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs. In November we welcomed 90 members of the public and 40 residents of HMP Wormwood Scrubs to the beautiful prison chapel for a unique concert.

In collaboration with the prison and with Serious, producers of the EFG London Jazz Festival, we were able to host the first public concert inside a prison as part of the Festival.

The sell-out concert featured new work by Grammy Award winner Rhiannon Giddens in an hour-long headline set, with a support act set of original material from an ensemble of prisoners.

The performance marked the culmination of a 3-week musical project with HMP Wormwood Scrubs, with 6 men from the prison taking part in 7 workshop sessions. The workshops gave those taking part in the project a positive musical experience that developed their confidence,

self-expression and ability to work with others. Participation in the workshops was voluntary and required no previous musical knowledge or skill, and lyrics were inspired by artwork from the Koestler Awards. We were honoured to be able to share the group's enthusiasm, commitment and care with the live audience as well as broadcasting the event on National Prison Radio, reaching and inspiring a potential audience of 81,000 prisoners across the UK.



***“Supporting a Grammy Award winner was an incredible experience – for her to be clapping us was amazing.”***

– Workshop participant

***“A unique evening. The combination of talented prisoners discovering their artistic capabilities and being brave enough to share them, and a talented group of professional artists was enjoyable and instructive.”***

– Concert audience member

## Poetry Anthology

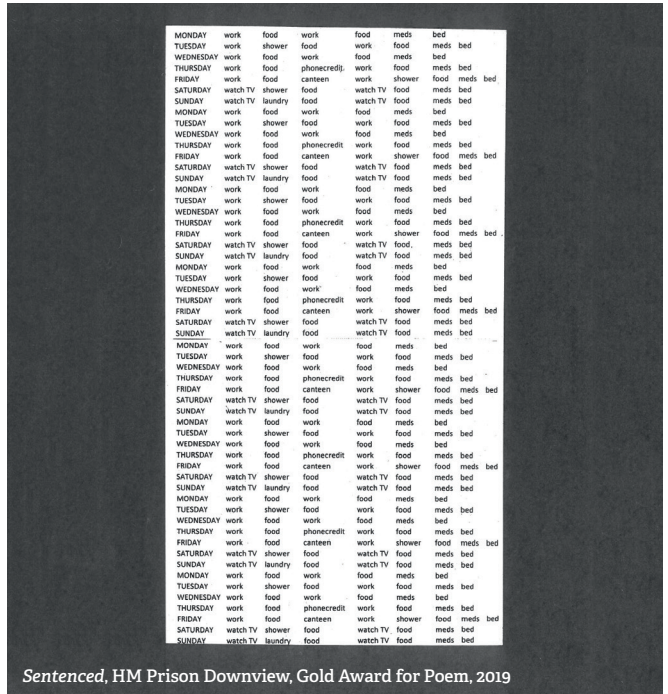
2019 also saw the launch of our second poetry anthology, Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons, Volume 2.

Thanks to a public crowdfunding campaign and support from the T.S. Eliot Foundation, we were thrilled to be able to share another 46 poems with audiences around the country, and welcomed spoken-word artist George the Poet to write the foreword to the publication.

The anthology was launched during our UK exhibition as part of Southbank Centre's London Literature Festival, and Koestler Award entrants, mentors and judges and arts professionals performed a range of poetry at the sold-out spoken word event, Voices from Prison. Copies of the anthology were sent to all the poets in the publication and to every establishment and prison library represented in the Koestler Awards.

*“Being creative has opened up a new set of doors to me, in fact if Koestler was the front door then it opened up to reveal a long corridor of other doors; a line of opportunities waiting to be explored, each door a different medium to investigate, past my present and into my future.”*

– Koestler Awards entrant, 2019 and anthology poet



# Exhibitions

## Another Me

In 2019, our UK exhibition, held annually at London's Southbank Centre, was curated by jazz musician Soweto Kinch.

Set to a soundscape of Soweto's own music, Another Me showcased the diversity and depth of experience within our criminal justice system, and brought to light the stories our entrants tell through their art.

We received a record number of feedback cards from visitors this year, with 7,853 pieces of written feedback to encourage the creativity of the exhibited artists. Through the partnerships we have built with both arts and criminal justice organisations, we were able to hold more events at the exhibition than ever before to celebrate music and performing arts in the criminal justice system.

These included free lunchtime concerts from partners including Liberty Choir, a community choir made up of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system and those without, as well as mindfulness tours and readings by actors from Synergy Theatre Project.



Another Me, Southbank Centre, September 2019



## Regional Exhibitions

Our 3 regional exhibitions shared artwork across the UK with an audience of around 114,500 visitors. These exhibitions allowed us to showcase 194 pieces of visual artwork, writing and music by 328 artists working in groups and individually. We are enormously proud of our unique position to support people across the whole of the UK, which underpins our ability to strengthen local communities and support resettlement.

**We Made This** opened in March at Turner Contemporary, Margate. Curated by a group of men on probation in Kent and Sussex, this exhibition displayed artwork by 230 people from prisons, secure mental health units and probation services across the South East of England.



**Our Journey** showcased artwork made by our mentoring alumni at House of St Barnabas in London from April to October. Pieces by 10 artists with lived experience of the criminal justice system were on display at the members club and social enterprise, and it was our first exhibition showcasing work made by alumni and current mentees of the Koestler Arts Mentoring Scheme.

**A Feeling We All Share** was held at Snape Maltings in August to coincide with their Proms, and featured artwork from our entrants in the East of England. The curation was inspired by lyrics written by prisoners at HM Prison Warren Hill, and the exhibition was opened by long-term Koestler Arts supporter Maggi Hambling.



# Outreach

## Ex-Prisoner Host Project

In 2019 our ex-prisoner Exhibition Host project involved the recruitment, training and ongoing support of 6 individuals with personal experience of the criminal justice system to host our UK exhibition of arts by prisoners at Southbank Centre. Our Hosts ran daily tours of the exhibition for the public, and we are delighted that 1 host has secured permanent employment at the Southbank Centre following the post.



Exhibition Host, 2019

*“At first, I valued just being employed, then once the training began, being treated as something more than my past. Mainly though it is being able to view myself as more than my past.”*

– Exhibition Host, 2019

## Associates Programme

Our Associates programme continues to strengthen year-on-year, giving entrants the chance to become more involved in our work. Quarterly newsletters share Koestler news and updates with this engaged cohort of 721 entrants, covering topics such as judges’ advice, competition and fundraiser call-outs, exhibition news, and awards information and deadlines. Our Associates play a vital role as ambassadors for the arts and the Koestler Awards in secure settings, and in the lead-up to the Awards we send additional marketing material for Associates to share with their peers.



*We Have Time*, Vinney Green Secure Unit, Under 25s Special Award for Themed Category: Interlude, 2019

*“The Koestler Awards are unique, seeing people behind bars as people who have something worth saying. Since first entering I have felt part of something, valued and respected. They have motivated, encouraged and overwhelmed me with their generosity of spirit. But even better, they make me want to try harder, reach further and dream.”*

– Koestler Associate

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## Family Days

Being able to maintain and build relationships with family can make a huge difference for individuals in secure settings, enabling them to succeed both inside and on release.

Through our Family Days we offer exhibited artists the opportunity to share and celebrate their achievements with friends and family. By covering all transportation, catering and accommodation

costs, we are able to make these inclusive events which reinforce the relationships which are vital to rehabilitation and resettlement. In 2019 we facilitated 2 Family Days and 1 Associates Day at the UK exhibition at Southbank Centre, welcoming 148 guests, and a Family Day at both our regional exhibitions in Margate and Snape Maltings, which were attended by a total of 78 family members and artists.

***“It has made such a difference for my son to have his art to focus on, and the success he has achieved has given him a huge burst of confidence and continues to inspire him. As a parent, I can honestly say that this has made me so proud and it continues to help shine a light in the gloom and is such a positive force in helping his mental wellbeing.”***

– Father of Koestler Awards entrant



## Visits

Our establishment visits celebrate achievement, encourage art and creativity, and support prison staff in inspiring learners to work individually and collaboratively. Building transferable skills, as well as confidence in themselves and their abilities, can lead learners to participate more positively in formal education, increasing experience, knowledge and qualifications to better equip them on release.

Since December 2018 we have visited 2 secure mental health units and 43 prisons and young offender institutions, 7 of which were in Special Measures. Offering and celebrating purposeful activity in these establishments is a vital step in addressing the problems associated with limited opportunities for prisoners.

***“Thank you again for your visit, it has had a real impact: several of the men you spoke to have signed up for art and the Koestler Awards are being actively and positively spoken about on the wings.”***

– Art Tutor, HM Prison Exeter

# Mentoring & Scholarships

Our Mentoring and Scholarship programme allowed us to identify 32 individuals in 2019 with artistic talent and an enthusiasm to continue developing their skills after leaving prison. Since 2007 our Arts Mentoring has aimed to harness the uniquely transformative power of the arts to help individuals learn the skills and gain the confidence to live creative, positive and productive lives through working with a volunteer arts mentor.

Arts mentoring helps mentees become more resilient, utilising their motivation and ability for the arts and supporting them to build positivity during the often difficult and chaotic transition from prison to the community or on completion of a community sentence. In 2019, we were delighted to be able to develop our offer for mentees by producing our first exhibition of artwork made by our mentee alumni, on display at House of St Barnabas, London.

***“The scheme has been absolutely life changing, and I do not mean that lightly. Prior to being on the scheme, I would never had considered taking the route I have, now I am building a career from what I have learned.”***

– Koestler Arts mentee



***“I felt that in being seen as a writer who happened to have gone to jail rather than as a prisoner who could write, my own perspective on who I was and what I was able to achieve was transformed. I think one of the things my mentor pushed me towards was being able to think critically not only about the society I live in but also about myself. If anything has armed me against re-offending it is this.”***

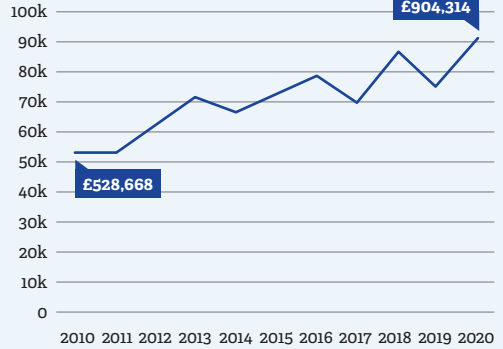
– Koestler Arts mentee

# Financial Review

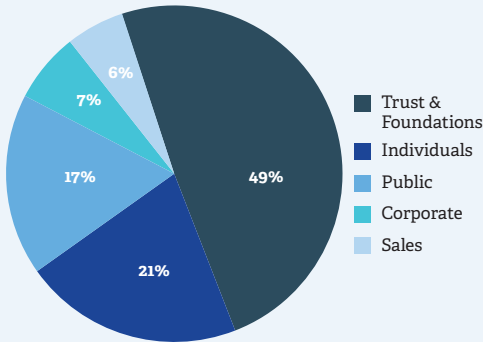
Koestler Arts has made considerable efforts to diversify our income and protect our capacity to support as many people as possible. With increasing expenditure to cover our ambitious exhibition and event programme, as well as investments in sales and communications, in 2019 Koestler Arts raised over £900,000.

Our Awards and exhibitions are strengthened by our individual supporters and partners Elysium Healthcare and Sodexo, as well as the Monument Trust and the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. The Henry Smith Charity and Monday Charitable Trust support our mentoring programme, and we are grateful to all our Scholarship funders.

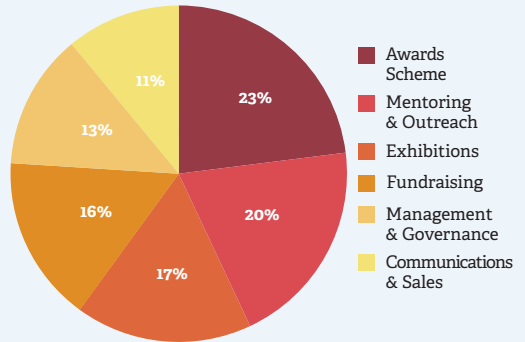
## Income 2010 – 19



## Income 19 – 20



## Expenditure 19 – 20



***We are hugely grateful to all the individuals, trusts and foundations, businesses and organisations who support our work. Koestler Arts is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, and receives ongoing support from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.***

# Future Plans

## Research & Evaluation

While the people we support are so often voiceless and overlooked, Koestler Arts is committed to ensuring our work is informed by those it most benefits. In the last 12 months, the need for our work has been identified by countless individuals, both those living through criminal convictions who find benefits in creativity and the staff working to support them.

Evaluation is built in to all our projects and exhibitions and last year we turned our attention to investigating the impact of our core work across the UK.

Academic research commissioned by PERU at Manchester Metropolitan University explored the impact of entering the Koestler Awards for people in prison, particularly concerning changes in behaviour and outlook which participating in the Koestler Awards could engender. The findings confirm much of the anecdotal evidence we have heard over the years, and we are delighted to have been able to use these results to shape a new Theory of Change model, which centres around the demonstrable impact our work has on building higher levels of wellbeing including self-reflection, hope and resilience among those in prison.

We have expanded on this research through a year-long programme of 23 focus groups conducted between August 2019 and March 2020, to find out how we can improve our offer to those using creativity in the criminal justice system. The groups included 7 community focus groups, 17 prison focus groups and 1 group of art practitioners working in criminal justice settings, representing 30 different establishments.

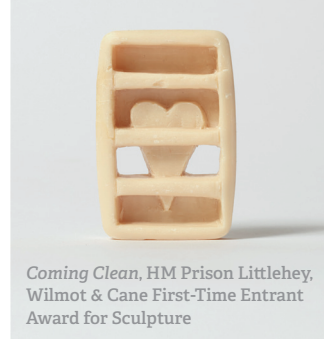


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## Prison in Lockdown

Since 1962, Koestler Arts has existed to give voice and positivity to thousands of people each year, and we are determined that 2020 will be no exception. As the nationwide prison lockdown has stripped away invaluable opportunities for people in prison to work, study and – most importantly – any chance to see friends and family, we have had to re-evaluate how we work, what we offer and the value it brings.

Lee, a colleague and former Koestler Awards entrant, was recently asked to write an expert survivor's guide to isolation for those of us who had never, before March, experienced a lockdown.



***“In limbo, I spent days and months on end in a single cell with only myself for company, locked up for 24 hours a day, with access to two phone calls and two showers a week. The prison was overcrowded, understaffed, and those under 18 were given priority to work and education. I was unlucky. I was 18 years old.”***

– Lee, colleague and former Koestler Awards entrant

At Koestler Arts, all our work is now concentrated on reaching as many people as possible in this same position, and offering a chance to re-connect, be heard and find positivity and focus. In collaboration with education provider Novus, weekly Art Aid packs have been sent into prisons around the UK, to ensure as many people as possible are able to be creative during this lockdown.

These simple activities only require a pen or pencil and some paper to get started, and we know that the arts can be a lifeline for those in secure settings. We will be working hard over the coming months to make sure the Koestler Awards can still offer our entrants the benefits of feedback, awards and certificates to celebrate their creative achievements, and we are committed to continue producing and distributing these packs throughout the year.

***“I am and have seen the results of what being part of the Koestler family is and does. I owe so much to the Koestler and I will always champion them even after my sentence. They change lives, I know this as they have changed mine!”***

– Koestler Associate

**“Prison is not the end of the story, for  
some people it’s the start of a story.”**

– Focus group attendee, HM Prison Brixton