



Theatre Porto Becomes First Dedicated Children's Theatre Venue in the UK to Achieve Theatre of Sanctuary Status

EMBARGOED UNTIL Noon, 11th June 2025

Theatre Porto, a national leader in theatre for children and young people and Cheshire's only purpose-built venue for young audiences, has made history by becoming the **first ever dedicated children's theatre venue in the UK** to be awarded **Theatre of Sanctuary** status.

The designation, granted by **City of Sanctuary UK**, recognises arts organisations that actively welcome and support refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Theatre Porto's recognition is especially significant for its commitment to creating inclusive, creative spaces where **children, young people, and families** feel safe, welcomed and valued.

This award comes at a meaningful time for the region, as **Cheshire West and Chester Council** **has recently been recognised as a Borough of Sanctuary**, aiming to actively support people seeking sanctuary through policy, practice, and community engagement.

Nina Hajiyaanni, Artistic Director of Theatre Porto, said: *"We are incredibly proud to be the first dedicated children and young people's theatre in the country to receive Theatre of Sanctuary status. At the heart of Theatre Porto's mission is **child-centeredness** - a core principle that aligns powerfully with the concept of sanctuary. Children intuitively understand fairness, kindness, and the importance of including others"*

Theatre Porto's Theatre of Sanctuary status will be officially awarded by **Chester City of Sanctuary** during **Refugee Week 2025**, a national celebration of creativity, and resilience. The

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presentation will mark both a local and national milestone, highlighting the power of the arts in building compassionate and inclusive communities.

Caz Brader, Executive Director added, *"This important recognition affirms our belief that every child deserves access to welcoming and joyful cultural experiences - regardless of their background or circumstances. Theatre should be a place of imagination and belonging for all"*

This national recognition follows Theatre Porto's strong track record in inclusive programming and new performance work, including:

- Professional productions which imaginatively reflect the lived experiences of displaced children such as **'Adrift'** and **'Baba Yaga'**
- Free, arts-led, accessible workshops designed for children and young people from all backgrounds
- Special events delivered in partnerships with schools, community groups, visiting companies, and refugee support services across Cheshire, Merseyside and beyond

Councillor Louise Gittins – **Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council commented:**

"We are incredibly proud to see Theatre Porto recognised as the United Kingdom's first dedicated children's Theatre of Sanctuary. This achievement reflects the values we hold as a Borough of Sanctuary, where compassion, inclusion and creativity are at the heart of our communities. Theatre Porto's work shows the real impact of cultural organisations in helping young people and families feel welcomed, valued, and inspired."

Theatre Porto joins a growing network of cultural organisations - such as Opera North and the Octagon, Bolton - who are working to make the UK's creative spaces more inclusive and welcoming, alongside being stronger advocates of cultural diversity.

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As a specialist children's theatre, Theatre Porto's focus on children, young people and families sets a new precedent for how sanctuary can be embedded in early cultural experiences and how we can build empathy and community cohesion around children.

Theatre Porto offer thanks to **Cheshire West and Chester Council** for their funding and support to make some of this work possible.

For more info about Theatre Porto and for upcoming performances and community programmes, visit: www.theatreporto.org

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About Theatre Porto

Formerly known as Action Transport Theatre, Theatre Porto has been creating professional theatre for, by, and with children and young people for nearly 40 years. Following a £2.8 million redevelopment, it now operates from a state-of-the-art venue in Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port, offering performances, workshops, and cultural events that inspire creativity and community engagement

<https://theatreporto.org/>

About Theatre of Sanctuary

The Theatre of Sanctuary initiative is part of the wider City of Sanctuary movement, which supports organisations in becoming places of welcome and safety for people seeking sanctuary. The designation is awarded to theatres that go above and beyond to encourage understanding and compassion within their communities

<https://arts.cityofsanctuary.org/awards/theatres-of-sanctuary>

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