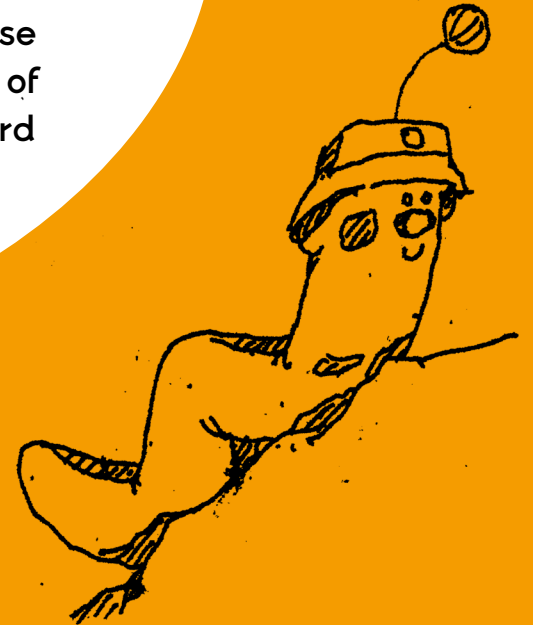


Two Queens

5 Lessons about forming a Board of Trustees

During Spring 2021 Two Queens undertook a virtual residency with East Street Arts' GUILD programme, investigating the purpose and functions of a board of trustees, with a view to forming one of our own and becoming a charity in the near future. Our own board is still a work in progress, but here's 5 lessons we have learnt so far during the residency period.

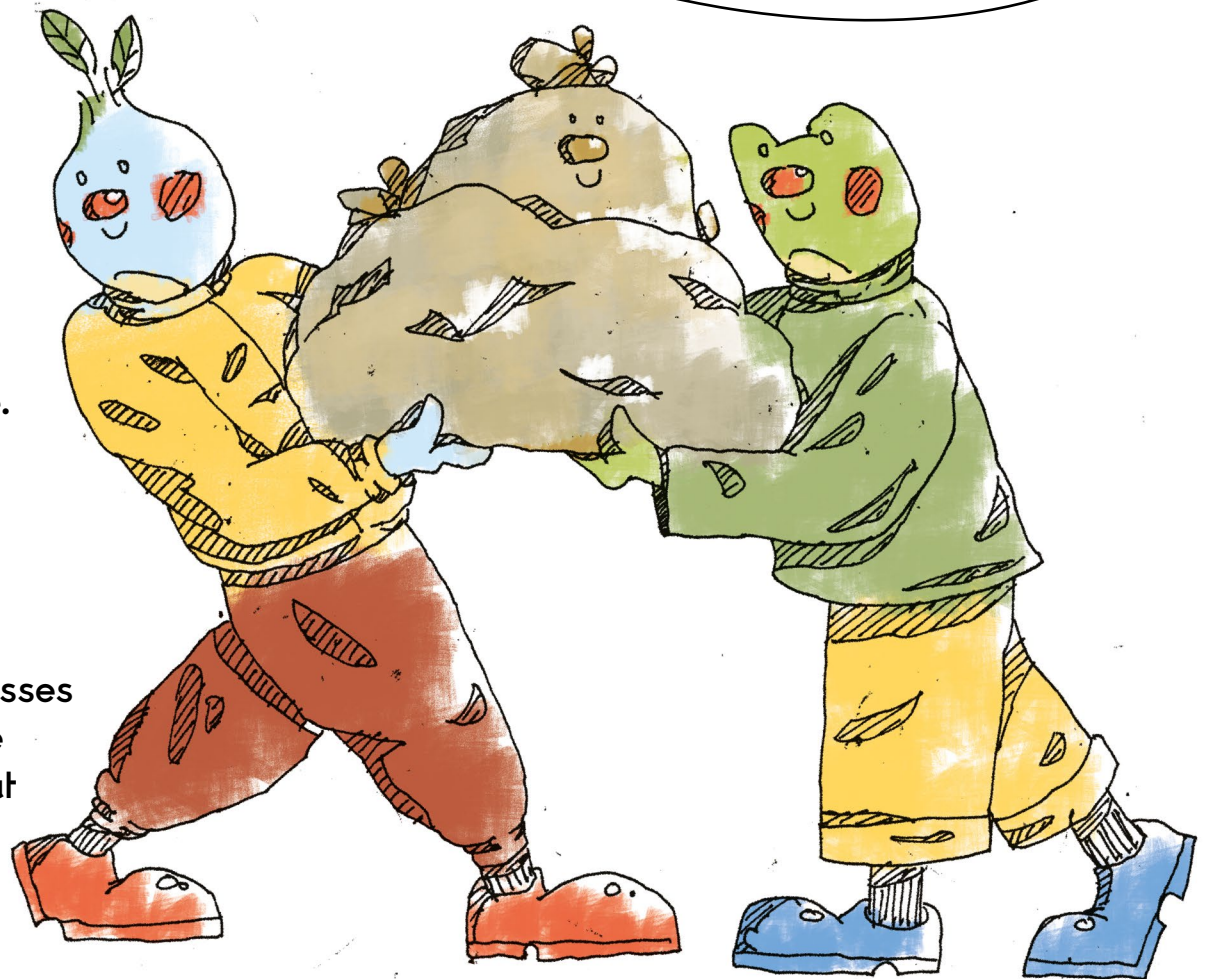


Because Two Queens has always had a D.I.Y ethos from the start, sometimes we forget to ask for help - we automatically try to work everything out for ourselves, becoming Jack-of-all-trades. The world of company structures and charity law is very complex - there is so much written guidance available that we very quickly became stuck trying to read it all and take it in.

Instead, the most useful thing we did during the residency was have as many conversations as possible - in the end managing 10 between March - May 2021. We spoke to organisations who do similar things to us (i.e. running artist studios alongside public gallery programming), some had been charities for a long time, some had recently gone through the process, and some were at a similar stage - researching and trying to find the best route. We also got professional insights from a Solicitor, an Accountant and an organisation supporting Co-Operatives and Social Enterprises.

The lesson here was that asking for help is vital - there are organisations that exist to develop businesses and not-for-profits, whose job it is to understand the intricacies of charity law so you can get on with what you do best. When it comes time to finally opt for a new structure we will definitely be seeking practical help with the process as well. 😊

Talk to People,
and Ask for Help



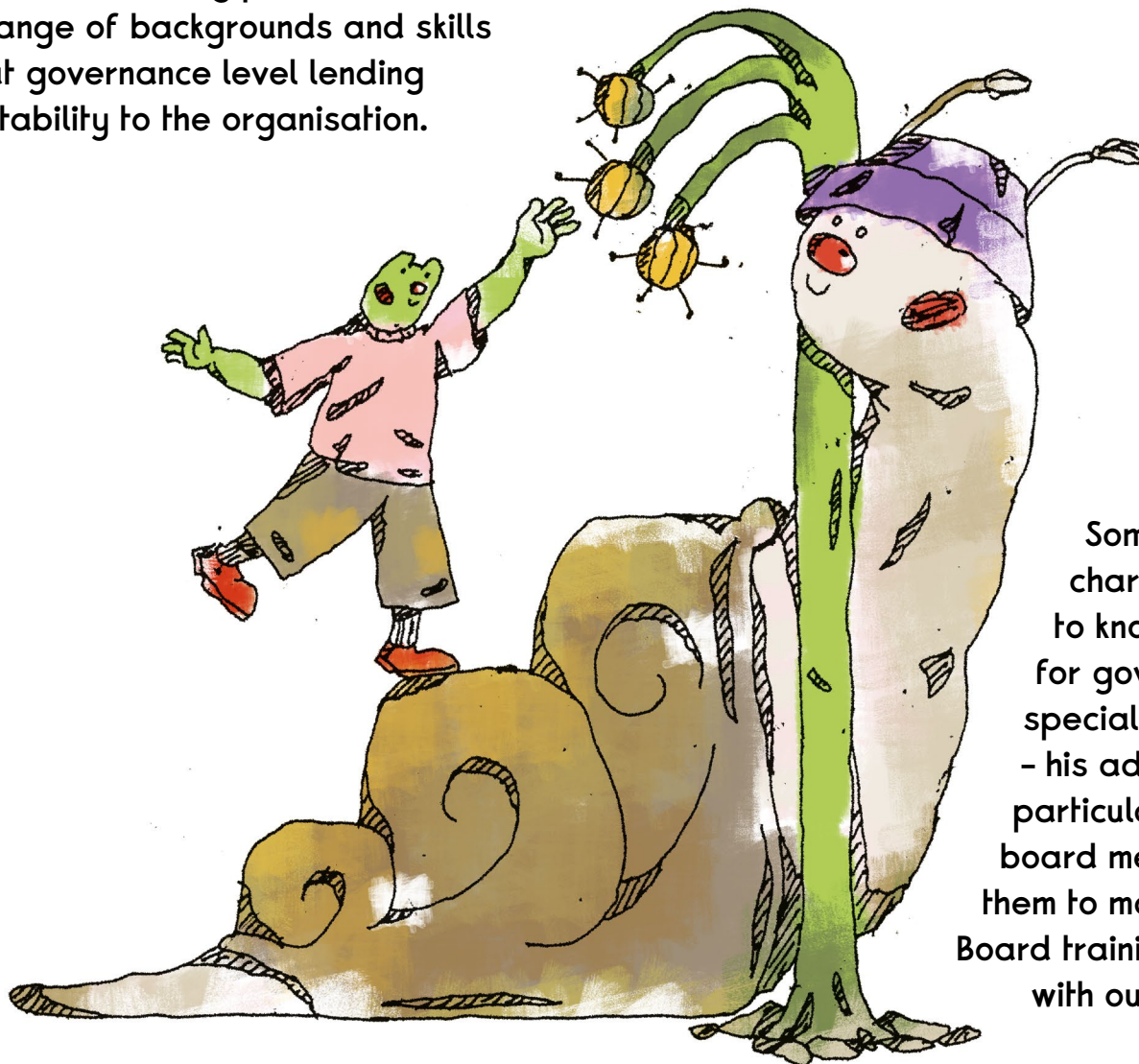
Recruit both Openly and Privately

A bit of background to this project – in 2019 we advertised for a chair to help us form a board of trustees. We got no applications – people told us they were interested but didn't want to take on the responsibility of the chair's position. Our next step was that we would approach people directly and ask them to join our board – then the pandemic happened and it all went out the window for a bit.

We spoke to other organisations about how they recruit trustees, and the pragmatic answer is both openly and privately; Openly to encourage applicants from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible, including those with particular skills we might be missing from our network, and privately where we feel an individual would be a really good fit or gets what we do – this is the tactic we're planning to use going forward. The board also needs to be both small and big – small enough that we can work effectively with them as a team, big enough to include the range of skills and experiences that will benefit us. 😊



In a lot of ways, we went into this process seeing the Board as a by-product of charitable status, but now see it the other way round - a board will help us to become an organisation that safeguards public benefit at our core; through accountability beyond our staff team, input from our wider community in decision-making processes, and a wide range of backgrounds and skills at governance level lending stability to the organisation.



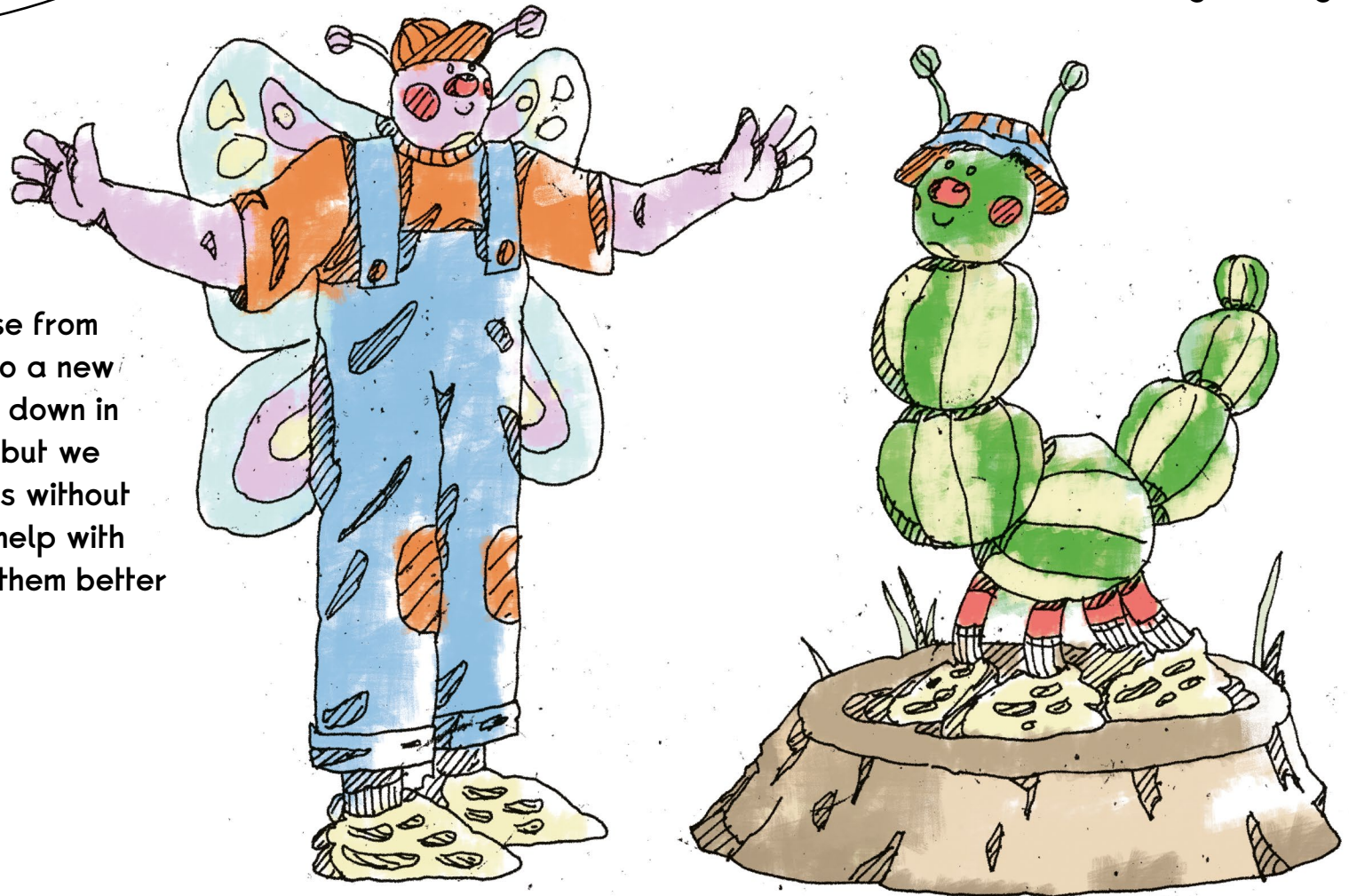
Know Why We Need a Board, and the Board Know Why We Need Them

Someone with a long history of involvement with charities told us the most important thing is for trustees to know their purpose, and understand the processes for governance. Many boards include members with specialist skills, like a background in law or accounting - his advice was that these skills are great to have for particular projects, but it's not as important as having board members who understand their purpose, allowing them to make a positive impact within the organisation. Board training is the first activity we will undertake together with our new trustees. 😊

Work Backwards (and Forwards)

Deciding the specific company or charity structure to go for was another minefield - there are many structures available and many complications that arise from converting an existing company to a new form. It was easy to get bogged down in trying to make this decision first, but we can't work out all of those details without Board involvement. Having them help with the process will ultimately make them better advocates for our cause. 😊

It very quickly became apparent that the nature of our board would need to follow the charity structure that we opted for, which in turn would need to suit our medium-long term aims. We have had vague plans for our future for a while, but undertaking this exercise made us really sit down and work out more of the detail and fill in some gaps and work backwards to the trustees we would need to help us along the way.



Our plan going forwards is to form an initial Advisory Board, working together with them and seeking professional help and guidance to decide the most appropriate structure to fit our future aims. Advisory Boards can also be assembled alongside constituted trustees to help with specific time-limited tasks such as a capital project.

Becoming a trustee is a big commitment, carrying specific legal responsibilities and ultimate oversight of the success or failure of the organisation. By bringing a board together in an advisory capacity to begin with, we will be able to test out how we work together and give board members the chance to decide if full trusteeship is right for them. Ultimately, without having a Board in place first, we can't start to make the big decisions that will shape the future of our organisation. 😊

Board First

