

DESIGNATHON WORKS

ANNUAL REPORT 2024 & PLANS FOR 2025



Empowering children to design a better future

Letter from the Designathon Works Board

The year 2024 has been a remarkable journey for Designathon Works, filled with growth, impact, and transformative initiatives that have empowered children globally to become changemakers. Through our unique methodology, we have continued to inspire young minds to tackle global challenges, promoting creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration. From engaging children in circular design and sustainability projects to expanding our outreach in refugee communities, we have made strides toward a more inclusive and innovative future.

This annual report reflects on our achievements, highlights key milestones, and outlines our vision for 2025. As we move forward, we remain committed to amplifying the voices of children worldwide, equipping them with the tools to co-create solutions for a better world. Together, with our partners and supporters, we will continue to shape the future of education and innovation, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to make a meaningful impact.

Join us as we look back on an inspiring year and set our sights on the possibilities that lie ahead.

Kind regards,

Michele Ernsting, Maarten Nelissen, Emer Beamer Cronin, Morgan Strecker, Satyam Vyas, Ebru Mercangoz-Ploeger, Judith Smaling and Shriya Sethi



About Designathon Works

Designathon Works is a foundation dedicated to empowering children aged 5 to 12 worldwide to become changemakers by designing sustainable futures. Through structured workshops known as Designathons, children engage in activities that foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. These workshops guide participants through the process of ideation, prototyping, and presenting solutions to real-world challenges aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The foundation's mission is to unleash the creativity of 1 million children, teaching them to become changemakers for a better future.

By focusing on inclusivity, Designathon Works ensures that children from diverse backgrounds and abilities can participate, promoting global citizenship and environmental stewardship. Their methodology combines elements of Design Thinking and Maker Education, providing a comprehensive approach to learning and innovation.

Since its establishment, Designathon Works has reached over 120,000 children across more than 50 countries, training over 1,000 teachers and inspiring an additional 1,000 educators through introductory workshops. The foundation's flagship event, the annual Global Children's Designathon, unites children from various countries to collaboratively develop innovative concepts addressing the SDGs.

Through its programs, Designathon Works aims to equip the next generation with the skills and mindset necessary to tackle global challenges, fostering a sense of agency and responsibility among young learners.

Our core values guide everything we do:

- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring every child, regardless of background, can participate and contribute
- **Sustainability:** Teaching children to design with long-term, sustainable solutions in mind
- **Empowerment:** Helping children recognize their ability to create meaningful change
- **Creativity:** Encouraging out-of-the-box thinking to address complex global problems
- **Global Citizenship:** Fostering a sense of responsibility toward the world and its future

Our approach to enabling children

Our Designathon method aligns with key learning objectives outlined by OECD, UNESCO, and the World Economic Forum, ensuring children are equipped to navigate the challenges of tomorrow. We prioritize inclusivity, working with a diverse population of students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Impact & influence

Through Designathon workshops, we've witnessed the transformative power of education at every level:

- Individual impact: Children develop competencies and agency, enriching not only their lives but also strengthening the fabric of society. Families are influenced by their children's enthusiasm and concern for global issues.
- Regional impact: Municipalities and organizations integrate children's perspectives into policy decisions, while schools report significant improvements in students' life skills, such as enhanced collaboration, problem-solving, and communication, as they actively apply our methodology.
- Global impact: By amplifying the voices of youth through research reports and collaborations, we contribute to shaping a more inclusive and sustainable world. Through rich collaborations between our network partners and sponsors, we strive to influence decision-makers on critical issues such as clean energy, water scarcity, inequality, and sustainable food systems.



Together, we create a virtuous cycle of impact, bridging communities and amplifying change on a global scale. At Designathon Works, our mission is clear: to empower children to be the architects of their own future and the guardians of our planet.

Highlights of 2024 Global Children's Designathon

2024 has been a year of growth, impact, and innovation. We hosted workshops and co-created educational programs for children to tackle real-world challenges, fostering creativity, design thinking, and problem-solving skills. Our flagship event united children worldwide to promote a circular approach, resulting in projects focused on circular design. We continued working with refugee communities, ensuring no child is left behind. Rooted in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, our programs inspire children to think globally and act locally. Through these initiatives, we continue to empower the next generation of changemakers, fostering a world where children's ideas drive sustainable innovation.

Global Children's Designathon

The Global Children's Designathon 2024 brought together 1,800 children from 15 countries—spanning from Nairobi to China, Pakistan to Sweden, Greece to India. This event was a true celebration of diversity, fostering connections among children as they shared their unique perspectives and ideas across borders.

A particularly inspiring moment was witnessing our alumni return as co-facilitators, guiding the next generation of young changemakers. Children who once participated at age eight are now leading and inspiring others—a testament to the lasting impact of our program.

Established in 2014, the Global Children's Designathon is our flagship annual event designed to ignite young minds through design and problem-based learning. Children engage in hands-on activities, brainstorming and prototyping solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges, from climate change to food security and deforestation.

In 2024, the theme was Circular Design. Children explored the circular economy, learning about the life cycle of materials, the challenges of our current production and consumption systems, and their impact on climate change. Their creative question was: "What circular design can you imagine for a better future?"

Between January and April 2024, participants across the globe worked on solutions linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, developing crucial 21st-century skills such as creative and critical thinking, technological literacy, empathy, collaboration, and changemaking. Using materials ranging from cardboard and glue to sensors and motors, they built prototypes and presented their ideas to expert panels and global audiences.

The Global Children's Designathon 2024 was a powerful example of student-centered, active learning in action—demonstrating how young minds, when given the right tools and guidance, can create real change.





EmpowerKids Designathon in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

In 2024, we brought the Designathon experience to Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, demonstrating that creativity knows no boundaries. With the support of The Contribute Foundation and our local partner, The Discover, children of the Kakuma tackled challenges within their community, focusing on access to play, health, and hygiene.

Through hands-on design and prototyping, the children developed practical and innovative solutions tailored to their environment. Their ideas—ranging from modular playgrounds to hygiene stations powered by locally available materials—reflected both ingenuity and a deep understanding of their community’s needs. Beyond the tangible solutions, the workshops fostered essential life skills, including teamwork, critical thinking, and communication.

This initiative reinforces our commitment to inclusivity, education, and empowerment. By equipping refugee children with the tools and knowledge to become changemakers, we are not only investing in their future but also contributing to a more equitable and sustainable world.

Encouraged by the success of this pilot phase, we are preparing to expand the program in 2025, increasing its reach and impact—because every child deserves the opportunity to create, innovate, and drive change.

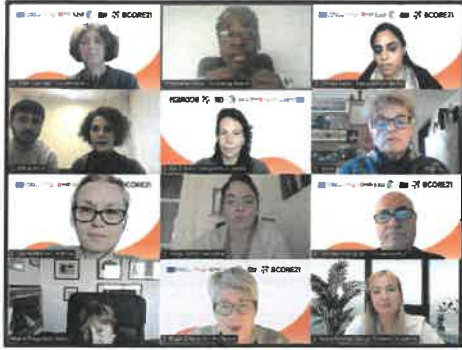
FOOD RESCUE project

After 30 months of dedication and collaboration, we are proud to celebrate the successful completion of the FOOD RESCUE project. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ program, this initiative united six partner organizations from Austria, Cyprus, France, Greece, and the Netherlands to promote climate literacy and sustainable behavior among young learners.



The project introduced an engaging, hands-on curriculum designed to empower children to tackle food waste and climate change. Through maker education and youth participation, students explored innovative solutions while fostering social responsibility. To further support educators, we launched an interactive online course (MOOC), providing professional development in sustainability-focused education.

The impact of FOOD RESCUE has been significant. A pilot program conducted in 10 schools engaged over 40 teachers and 500 students, equipping them with the tools to make meaningful environmental contributions. Beyond the classroom, we shared the project’s outcomes with a wider audience, reaching over 200 teachers, parents, and organizations. For more information on FOOD RESCUE, please visit [FOOD RESCUE](#).



Transforming Education: a new collaborative approach for the 21st century

We are thrilled to announce our latest partnership project: 'Building Collaborative Capacities for 21st Century Education Reform Through a Community of Practice' ([BCORE21](#)).

Our mission is to revolutionize education, making it more accessible, impactful, and participatory for young learners aged 5 to 12, regardless of their backgrounds or contexts.

This project is a collaborative effort involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including visionary thinkers, who work together to frame new initiatives for our community. By harnessing the expertise of individuals and organizations, we aim to promote cross-border cooperation and enhance education to meet contemporary and future needs.

As part of the Designathon Works Community of Practice, BCORE21 hosted Visionary Sessions, bringing together brilliant minds to reimagine education. These sessions explored themes such as Youth Participation, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Children as Changemakers, laying the groundwork for inclusive and forward-thinking education solutions.

We are incredibly grateful for the support of the Erasmus+ program, which has made this project possible.

Little Green Fingers project: growing a sustainable future

A big highlight of 2024 was the start of the Little Green Fingers Project—a transformative initiative blending STEAM, outdoor exploration, and design thinking. Collaborating with five European partners—Cyprus, Belgium, Ireland, Serbia and the Netherlands, we have set out to nurture a new generation of eco-conscious learners who see themselves as stewards of the planet. In Little Green Fingers, we're not just teaching children about science and technology—we're inspiring them to be active stewards of their environment. Because the future depends on it.



This project inspires children to connect with nature, think creatively, and take meaningful actions for a greener future. We are incredibly grateful for the support of the Erasmus+ program, which has made this project possible.

Education to Inspire - implementing children's ideas for lasting impact



In 2024, as part of the Education to Inspire (ETI) project, supported by the Choclonely Foundation, and implemented together with Dr. Monk, marked a significant milestone in the journey of Designathon Works. We focused on implementing children's innovative ideas generated in the previous year, transforming their visions into impactful solutions for their communities.



Five small-scale projects were brought to life across Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, addressing critical needs in education, health, and infrastructure. In Côte d'Ivoire, a solar-powered water pump was installed, reducing the physical burden of water collection and improving access to clean water. In Ghana, libraries were set up in five schools, promoting a culture of reading and knowledge-sharing among children. Although budget limitations meant adapting some ideas—such as simplifying the water pump design or creating stationary libraries instead of the preferred mobile version—the initiatives nonetheless brought meaningful change.

These projects not only addressed immediate community needs but also demonstrated the potential of children's creativity to inspire practical, scalable solutions. By amplifying children's voices and integrating their ideas into real-world actions, this initiative strengthens policy-level work aimed at empowering children as active contributors to their communities. It reinforces the importance of investing in their imagination and ensuring they have the resources needed to transform their ideas into sustainable, impactful outcomes.

These achievements reaffirm our commitment to creating a future where every child's perspective is valued and their solutions lead to lasting change.

Designing tomorrow's cities: Amsterdam Makes Space

In partnership with the City of Amsterdam, we organized a series of Designathon workshops as part of the 'Amsterdam Makes Space' initiative. These sessions brought together a lively and diverse group of children who worked on creative solutions to ensure Amsterdam remains a future-ready city. The workshops were filled with imagination, innovation, and problem-solving, culminating in brilliant ideas presented to Councilor Melanie van der Horst, policymakers and a wider audience.



This initiative goes beyond sparking creativity—it exemplifies how empowering children to contribute their perspectives strengthens policy-level efforts to include young voices in shaping their cities and communities. By integrating children's ideas into urban planning and decision-making, we help ensure that the next generation is actively involved in building sustainable and inclusive futures. Watch the [after-movie](#) of one of the sessions and read more about the Amsterdam Maakt Ruimte initiative [here](#).

Theirworld Innovation Award



We're thrilled to share that Designathon Works was awarded the Theirworld Education Innovation Award! This global recognition highlights our innovative approach to empowering children with design thinking to solve real-world challenges.

The award allows us to scale our impact, unlocking creativity for thousands of children worldwide and empowering them to design a brighter future. We're honored to stand alongside inspiring organizations



committed to transforming education for young learners everywhere. More about the award [here](#).

Bicycle Hero Challenge amplifying children's voices

The **BYCS** Fietshelden Challenge (Bicycle Hero Challenge) in Zwolle empowered children to design solutions for a more bicycle-friendly city. By placing children's perspectives at the forefront, this project inspired innovative thinking around cycling as a sustainable mode of transport. 🏆 Tijn Neuteboom was crowned Cycling Hero of the Year! He won a beautiful new bike with his brilliant idea: a glowing, fluorescent glove that makes hand signals clearly visible in the dark. Some of the finalists will join the Fietshelden Council to advise the municipality—ensuring children's voices shape safer, more enjoyable cycling infrastructure.



Datawijs Designathon

Datawijsheid voor de jongste internetgebruikers

met dank aan [Datahub & Designathon](#)



We are very proud of our collaboration with [Digital Power Datahub](#). This innovative curriculum brought together children to explore the world of data through creative assignments.

During Datawijs Designathon, children dove into hands-on activities that helped them understand the basics of data collection, analysis, and application. They worked in teams to solve real-world problems using data-driven solutions, cultivating skills in critical thinking, technological literacy, and collaborative problem-solving. Through a play-based approach, the young participants designed their solutions and built prototypes, discovering how data can be used to make informed decisions and create positive change in

their communities.

Inspiring Climate Education: Singapore Methodist Preschool Conference

At the Singapore Methodist Preschool Conference, we showcased the transformative power of the Designathon method. Educators were inspired by its ability to nurture problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity in children while addressing environmental challenges. More exciting news coming in early 2025. Watch videos of the Singapore Methodist Preschool Designathons [here](#).



Partnerships and Spotlights

Partnerships

Our partnerships reflect our commitment to global collaboration, innovative projects and empowering education initiatives. In 2024 we worked with the following partners:

- ★ Municipality of Amsterdam: supporter of the Global Children's Designathon Amsterdam and partner for the 'Amsterdam Makes Space' initiative
- ★ Theirworld: Theirworld Innovation Award helps us to scale up our projects globally to reach even more marginalized young learners
- ★ Erasmus+: funder of international educational projects FOOD RESCUE, BCORE21 and Little Green Fingers
- ★ The Discover: partner for the EmpowerKids Designathon in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya
- ★ An Taisce Environmental Education Unit Green-Schools (Ireland): partner for the BCORE21 and Little Green Fingers project
- ★ RHIZO: partner for the BCORE21 project
- ★ KidHub: partner for the BCORE21 and Little Green Fingers project
- ★ Change Of Course: partner for the Little Green Fingers project
- ★ Çocuk Istanbul: partner for the BCORE21 project
- ★ CYCERE: partner for the Little Green Fingers project
- ★ ASML Foundation: supporter of the Global Children's Designathon for 3 years, the final being GCD 2024
- ★ Patagonia: supporter of the Global Children's Designathon making it possible for children from many parts of the world to participate

Spotlights

[Refugee children design their own climate solutions](#)

[PlusKlas editie 3: van afval naar slimme arcadespellen](#)

[Aftermovie Amsterdam Maakt Ruimte](#)

[10 inspiring winners of the fourth Theirworld Education Innovation Awards](#)

[Jonge Zwolse fietshelden denken mee: zo maak je fietsen leuker en veiliger - Oost](#)

[Replication Challenge in Bulgaria](#)

[Kindertentoonstelling over schoolplein in de OBA Molenwijk](#)

[The Story of Discovery Organization: How Joseph Nduwimana is Paving Paths for Refugee Revival in Kakuma](#)

[Global Children's Designathon 2024 on Youtube](#)

[Beyond the Research – Children as Designers in an array of global contexts](#)

[Videoverslag - Werkconferentie Eén jaar Amsterdam Maakt Ruimte. maak het mee!](#)



New Board Members

In 2024, we saw exciting changes on our board. While we bid farewell to Roshan Paul as he transitioned from his board position, we are thrilled to welcome three exceptional new members: Ebru Mercangoz-Ploeger, Judith Smaling, and Shriya Sethi.

These accomplished women bring a wealth of expertise, significantly enriching the diversity of our leadership team. Their unique perspectives and extensive experience span strategy, sustainability, business transformation, education, policy, and research—each grounded in a shared commitment to empowering children to lead the way in creating a better future.

With their guidance, Designathon Works is entering an exciting new chapter, strengthening our mission to equip every child, everywhere, with the skills and confidence to design innovative solutions for global challenges. Together, we are ready to amplify our impact and drive lasting change.



Plans for 2025

Expanding Designathon Works' impact in the coming years

Designathon Works aims to deepen and broaden its influence by empowering children worldwide to become changemakers for a better future. By refining our methodologies and expanding our reach, we envision preparing a generation equipped with the skills, creativity, and confidence to co-design solutions for global challenges.

Leveraging core strengths for growth

Our proven strengths lie in our unique Designathon methodology, a collaborative and child-centered approach tied to the Sustainable Development Goals. By building on our expertise in promoting creative thinking, technological literacy, and collaboration, we plan to amplify our efforts to reach more children, educators, and communities. Strengthening our capacity to deliver transformative educational experiences will remain central to our mission.

In addition to our client-focused approach, we are closely monitoring trends in the field of primary education, with a particular emphasis on initiatives involving refugee children, environmental citizenship, and STEAM education.

We aim to align our projects with these emerging trends to maximize our impact and relevance in the education sector.



Business development/diversified funding streams

Going forward, our focus will be on building the commission and sponsored work portfolio further as well as looking at institutional funding and a product-based approach to test monetization models. This will be done through:

- Pursuing grant opportunities from institutional funders, corporations, individuals and government agencies.
- Exploring and developing fee-based services such as summer camps, or professional development courses for educators/schools, companies and policymakers.
- Exploring business accelerator opportunities to help develop skills and ideas towards sustainable revenue generation.
- Hosting fundraising events - galas, auctions, and charity walks to raise money for our organization.

Impact tracking

We will invest in the improvement of our method and tools for development and impact tracking through:

- The development of our method and tools will be highly influenced by the demand of our partnerships, network partners and education systems.
- Tracking impact to 'prove' our method and convince our partners to join forces.
- Conduct research and gather input to identify the unique needs of the children across all geographic regions.

Engagement strategy

We will invest in our engagement strategy by:

- Building on our Community of Practice that has been set up and further being strengthened through the ongoing BCore21 Erasmus+ project.
- Work towards a shared vision and a comprehensive communications plan with network partners that includes social media, email, and other channels to engage with stakeholders and promote our mission.
- Enhance our online presence with compelling content, video, and other multimedia to showcase our work and impact.
- Content development: thought leadership, white papers.

Network partner acquisition

Our network partners are organizations that have a wealth of knowledge and capacity in their region and have a large network of community-based organizations. They have a similar DNA to Designation Works. We will invest in network partner acquisition by:

- Vetting and onboarding of new network partners.
- Mission alignment on SDGs.
- Exploring ways to help network partners develop their business development practices to further scale their activities.
- Develop a targeted project with relevant partner organizations to reach underrepresented populations.



- Work with partners to develop and disseminate innovative & tailored educational content focussing on 21st century skills, knowledge and agency.
- Learn about children's perspectives as important stakeholders.

The Foundation

Organization

Stichting Designathon Works
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 Website: www.designathonworks.com
 Email: info@designathon.nl
 Chamber of Commerce: 60140615
 RSIN: 853781606
 Bank: NL77 TRIO 0197 9551 85

Board

In 2024 the board consisted of:

- Michele Ernsting: Chair Woman
- Maarten Nelissen: Treasurer
- Emer Beamer Cronin: Secretary and Founder of Designathon Works
- Roshan Paul: General Board Member (now has moved on from the Board position)
- Morgan Strecker: General Board Member
- Satyam Vyas: General Board Member

Three new Board members were onboarded in 2024:

- Ebru Mercangoz-Ploeger
- Judith Smaling
- Shriya Sethi

Remuneration

Board members do not receive any remuneration for their board activities, as stated in the Articles of Association. Designathon Works has a moderate wage policy for the management team and freelancers and aims at salary levels and working conditions that match the responsibilities. Employees do not receive bonuses for the 13th month.

ANBI

The 'Belastingdienst' (Dutch Tax Authority) authorized Stichting Designathon Works with the ANBI status in January 2017. This means that Stichting Designathon Works is classified as 'Algemeen Nut beogende Instelling', meaning that the foundation is a non-profit, aiming to have as much impact as possible and holds a certain tax exemption status.



The board confirms that the 2024 annual report is accurate and true. This written confirmation can be signed in different copies and is dated



Stichting Designathon Works
Name: Michele Ernsting
Title: Chair Woman



Stichting Designathon Works
Name: M. Nelissen
Title: Treasurer



Stichting Designathon Works
Name: Emer Beamer Cronin
Title: Secretary



Stichting Designathon Works
Name: Morgan Strecker
Title: General Board Member



Stichting Designathon Works
Name: Ebru Mercangoz-Ploeger
Title: General Board Member



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Title: General Board Member



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