



Connecting Communities through Culture

Year 2 evaluation report



OUR OAKLANDS COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL DIRECTORY FOR YARDLEY DISTRICT



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Bringing Birmingham's Communities together through Culture



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I. Introduction

The Connecting Communities through Culture programme¹ in Birmingham was part of the *Arts and Communities* initiative jointly funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Arts Council England (ACE) National Lottery grants, and Birmingham City Council.

Arts and Communities supported programmes in Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol and Burnley to increase participation in arts and cultural activity within local communities, encourage people to identify common ground and promote stronger and more integrated communities. Each programme within the initiative took a different approach to achieving its aims over two years. Birmingham allocated equal amounts of funding across the 10 Districts of the city in each year, as part of its cultural strategy to stimulate engagement with the arts in areas with historically low participation rates and to strengthen arts infrastructure across the city.

Merida Associates were able to follow the development of the Connecting Communities programme over both years of delivery and the preceding pilot project², designing and supporting the use of an evaluation framework for reflective practice and the identification of formative learning. This report presents additional evidence from Year 2 of Connecting Communities and a summative review of the overall outcomes of the programme and learning points for the future.

While the aims for both years of the programme were essentially the same, Year 2 included an additional focus on building capacity within local arts infrastructure to support the sustainability of good practice emerging from Connecting Communities³.

Aims for the programme (Year 2)

- To allow people of all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in high quality arts and cultural activity
- To create opportunities for people to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground between local communities through arts and cultural activities
- To strengthen local arts and cultural infrastructure using cultural co-design

¹ Known as Connecting Communities

² [Igniting a Spark](#): An evaluation of the Birmingham Cultural Pilots programme June 2014 (Merida); [Towards Cultural Co-design](#) Connecting Communities Through Culture Year 1 June 2015 (Merida)

³ See Appendix I

1.1 A model of Cultural Co-design

The Connecting Communities programme was delivered by 10 arts organisations operating across Birmingham as part of the Local Arts Forum (LAF) network.

Each LAF identified a Ward or neighbourhood within the District they cover as a focus for Connecting Communities activity, 7 out of 10 LAFs chose to build on the relationships built in Year 1 to develop their approach to cultural co-design in the same area in Year 2; 3 LAFs chose to extend their reach into new areas, including one LAF that delivered in both the previous area and a new Ward.

Each local project was commissioned to follow an overarching model of cultural co-design, mapped against the aims and outcomes of the programme.

The model⁴ became clearer over the two years of the programme as it was tested and informed by the experience of Producers and participants.

It allowed projects to be developed in response to the ideas of local people in each area, resulting in a wide variety of arts and cultural activity delivered across the city.

Appendix 2 presents a summary of the projects delivered in Year 2 and their outputs. At the end of the report there are 5 project summaries which illustrate the range of activities and outcomes achieved in Year 2.

Cultural Co-design model

1. Identify a Ward or neighbourhood as a focus for the project
2. Recruit a Producer to facilitate a cultural co-design process
3. Conduct research in the local area to identify existing arts infrastructure and activities and make contact with venues, groups, organisations and individuals who can help make the project happen
4. Listen to local voices and work with key stakeholders to identify the project vision and goals
5. Plan arts activity to achieve the vision and goals – using cultural co-design approach where possible
6. Commission support from professional artists – using cultural co-design approach where possible
7. Create a ‘Focus of Enquiry’ question, linked to the project vision, to gather evidence of the difference the project will make and decide with a steering group how information will be captured
8. Provide a range of opportunities for people to take part – as participants, audience members, steering group members, technical or event management support etc
9. Deliver activities
10. Capture monitoring and impact evidence
11. Provide opportunities for local people to showcase their achievements

⁴ CHOICES cultural co-design model adapted by BCC Culture Commissioning Team from C2 Positively Local model <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/HSMC/publications/2011/positively-local.pdf>

The cultural co-design model is an asset-based approach to engaging communities with arts and culture through which local people worked with skilled Producers and professional artists and made use of local assets – people, places and resources. Asset-based models of community engagement have been developed in different contexts in recent years including health and wellbeing and housing services. The Connecting Communities model adapted an approach, which had been successful in a neighbourhood regeneration context, to ignite participation in arts and culture in communities not traditionally engaged.

Definition of Cultural Co-design

Cultural Co-design is a way of creating a product, programme or cultural activity where arts professionals empower, encourage, and guide participants to develop solutions for themselves.

Co-design encourages the blurring of the role between participants and artist, focusing on the process by which the art product or programme is created. This approach believes that by encouraging the artist and the participant to create solutions together, the final result will be more appropriate and ‘owned’ by the participants

Source: CHOICES model
BCC Culture Commissioning Team

A key aspect of the approach is that professionals are open to doing things differently, are prepared to change their practice working alongside local people in order to respond to a locally-owned vision and to achieve shared goals.

The process for agreeing shared goals and deciding how to achieve them is called co-design; the process of implementing action and achieving the goals is called co-production.

The impact of this approach is evaluated in the following sections of the report, in relation to the aims and outcomes of the programme.

The Producer role is central to the delivery of Connecting Communities in Birmingham. The attributes needed to facilitate cultural co-design were developed from the Creative Agent role in the Creative Partnerships initiative⁵ that was delivered in schools. The refinement of the Producer role has become clearer

during the delivery of Connecting Communities and a key aspect of the programme has been the development of a group of arts Producers who had opportunities to come together to share and compare their growing understanding of the role.

In response to feedback in Year 1, a ‘light touch’ model of evaluation was introduced for Year 2, with data capture roles shared between the evaluation team and Producers. The co-design of Focus of Enquiry questions for each project was described in the 2016 Interim Report⁶⁷. For this report, the evaluators visited projects to review the available evidence against Focus of Enquiry questions with Producers and project Steering Groups, where possible in reflective discussion sessions. A knowledge exchange workshop was held with Producers to gather qualitative data on what they found had worked well, what people had learned and what they would do differently in the future. Additional findings have been drawn from information captured by projects and formal monitoring data.

⁵ See <http://creative-partnerships.com/>

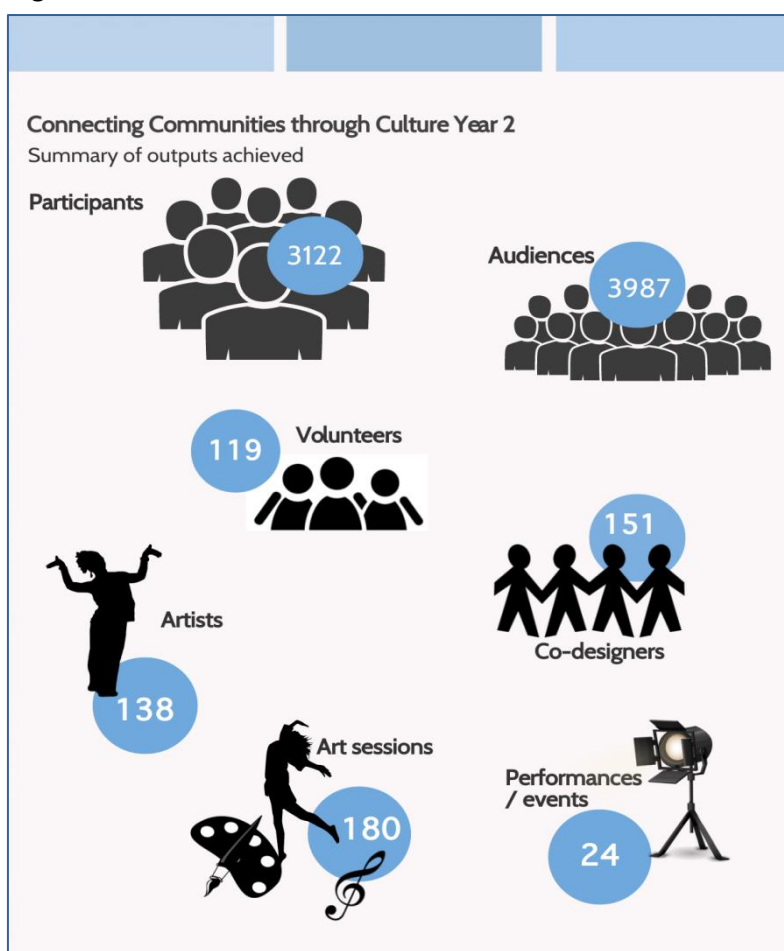
⁶ *Connecting Communities through Culture Year 2 Interim Evaluation Report* April 2016 (Merida)

⁷ See Appendix 3 for evaluation framework and summary of Focus of Enquiry questions

1.2 Programme activity figures

Evidence gathered by project Producers shows that in Year 2 the Connecting Communities programme engaged 6,340 people, about 1,200 more than in Year 1⁸. Some of the people recorded in Year 2 were introduced to arts and cultural activity in Year 1 of the programme and their engagement was sustained. The data indicates a similar ratio of males and females as in Year 1 and an increase in engagement with broader ethnic and religious groups. High numbers of people recorded as 'not known' against the demographic categories, however, prevents the possibility of presenting a full picture of the reach of the programme into different communities.

Figure 1



Source: project monitoring forms (9 projects)

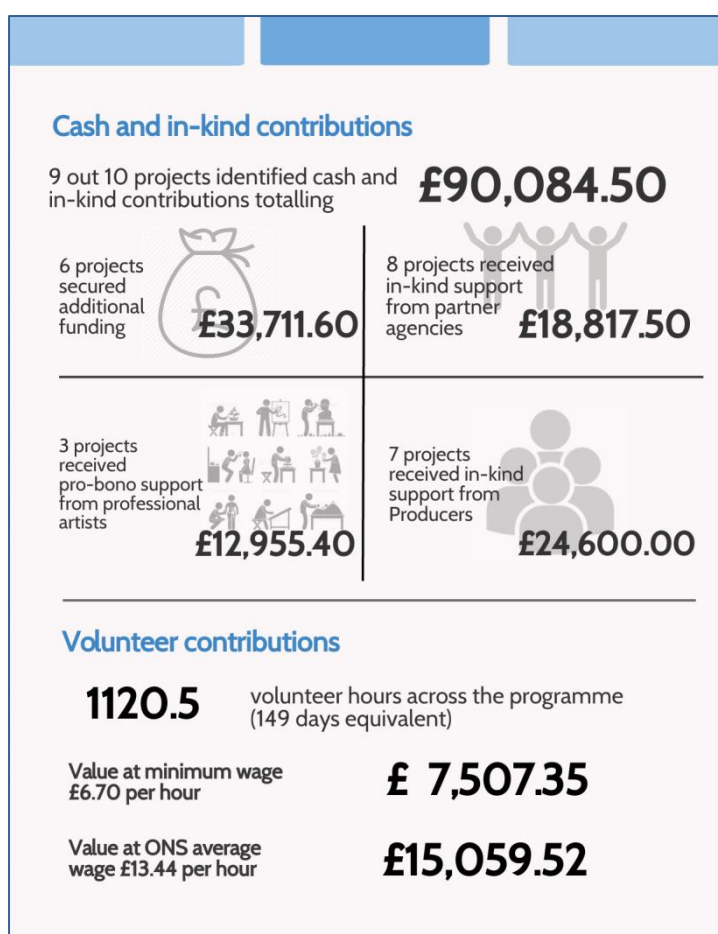
The emphasis on embedding cultural co-design in the programme encouraged Producers to work with steering groups of local people, residents and partner agencies, to develop and deliver each project. Monitoring data captured the numbers of people who were involved in influencing and planning the projects. Most projects had a very local focus, several working to build on the achievements of Year 1 with relatively small groups of people, to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence as arts participants and organisers. Increased participation in arts and cultural activity and opportunities for communities to come together were the aims, rather than large-scale performances, however this did not preclude the achievement of performances and creations

⁸ See Appendix 4 for summary of programme demographics

of significant artistic merit. New dance pieces were co-created with professional choreographers, performed, filmed and shared online by two projects. Another group produced a film of their area, to redress negative perceptions and present a more positive view of living there. There were events that brought diverse communities together in large or smaller numbers to establish common ground and build a shared identity of place.

The large number of sessions and artists involved reflects the wide range of artforms that were made accessible for people to engage with and express themselves through; these included dance, film-making, pottery, felting, music, drawing and painting, crafts, drumming, textiles, poetry, storytelling and animation.

Figure 2



Each of the 10 projects had a budget of £9,000, including £1,000 for local research.

9 out of 10 projects were able to supplement their project budget with cash and in-kind contributions to enhance delivery on the ground. One project secured additional funding of almost £30,000. Collectively projects achieved the equivalent of 100% match funding of the overall budget available for the programme.

Volunteers also made significantly valuable contributions to local projects.

The cash, in-kind and volunteer contributions achieved are a good indicator of a strengthening infrastructure for arts and cultural activity in the neighbourhoods engaged with the Connecting Communities programme.

2. Achievement against programme aims

This section considers to what extent the Connecting Communities through Culture programme has achieved its aims and how the cultural co-design model has supported achievement.

2.1 Participation in high quality arts and cultural activity

One of the benefits of receiving funding for Year 2 of Connecting Communities was that it enabled 7 Local Arts Fora to build on the successes of Year 1 by working in the same neighbourhoods. In Year 1, Local Arts Fora were encouraged to target areas with little, or no, existing arts or cultural activity and to introduce residents to arts in their communities. These tended to be areas with higher levels of deprivation, including health inequalities, and poor access to mainstream arts and cultural activity which are mostly based in the City Centre. The targeting of the programme across the city was in response to research commissioned by the Birmingham Culture Partnership⁹ which found that the 10 Birmingham Districts, which are in themselves the size of small towns, have fewer cultural venues and local facilities than might be expected in towns of a similar size; with the research describing some Districts as ‘cultural deserts’. The overall infrastructure for arts has decreased further still in recent times.

The challenge of engaging people in these neighbourhoods in arts activity became apparent during the research phase in Year 1 when people expressed the established view that arts and culture are the preserve of well-educated, affluent, mainly White people and ‘not for them’¹⁰¹¹.

Determined and innovative work in Year 1 of Connecting Communities established community engagement and laid the foundations for sustainable arts activity in some areas. In Year 2, project leaders, now known as Producers, welcomed the opportunity to develop relationships further with people who had been engaged and to work with them through a fuller cultural co-design process, giving them more ownership and control over the artworks produced.

What this achieved, in terms of participation in Year 2, was a deeper, richer form of participation for those local people who were able to maintain their involvement. Whilst in some projects these were relatively small groups of people, the impact for them was significant; through the process of cultural co-design they were able to participate at a more intensive level on the engagement scale (see ‘Work Together’ in Fig. 3) and as result they have experienced first-hand the power of arts and culture to create freedom of expression, increase their confidence and develop new skills and knowledge.

People have been able to collaborate more effectively and meaningfully with professional artists in Year 2 and as a consequence the artistic products they have created have been more authentic, more relevant to their local visions and of higher quality in production value.

⁹ Ecotec: *Identifying the Barriers to Cultural Participation and the Needs of Residents of Birmingham* BCP (2010); Vector Research: *P1473 Cultural participation* BCP (2011)

¹⁰ 2015 Needlands et al; *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth: The 2015 Report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value* The University of Warwick

¹¹ For other barriers to arts for people living in deprived neighbourhoods see [Igniting a Spark: An evaluation of the Birmingham Cultural Pilots programme](#) June 2014 (Merida); [Towards Cultural Co-design](#) Connecting Communities Through Culture Year 1 June 2015 (Merida)

Figure 3: Connecting Communities engagement scale

INCREASING LEVEL OF INFLUENCE AND OWNERSHIP					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	WORK TOGETHER	EMPOWER
Community engagement goal	To provide the people in CC areas with information about arts and cultural activity and how to get involved	To engage people in the local research to generate ideas for the Connecting Communities projects	To provide opportunities for people to take part, as audiences, participants or volunteers in local arts and cultural activity	To partner with local people in developing ideas, options and preferred solutions and implement them	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed about arts and culture opportunities	We will listen to your ideas and provide feedback on how what you said has influenced decisions	We will provide a range of ways for you to be involved	We will work together to develop ideas for local arts and cultural activity and make them happen	We (or you) will implement what you decide
Connecting Communities ways to engage	Promoting arts and cultural activity	Research phase for Connecting Communities	Participatory arts and cultural activities	Steering Groups Co-design and co-production	Budget devolved to local group
Evidence for Connecting Communities	Number of events and activities How were these marketed?	Local research reports	Participation in workshops/creating art and cultural activity with a maker, artist or Producer.	Involvement on Steering Groups Local people design/plan/commission/ implement arts and cultural activity with Producer/partners/artists	Community-led and managed arts and cultural activity

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation IAP2 Public Participation spectrum see <http://www.iap2.org>

In Yardley, for instance, an artist worked with residents to design a logo for their Connecting Communities project, the brief asked for something to represent the specific local space that participants live around. Although a small commission, the logo turned out to have significant resonance for the group, as it encapsulated their vision for the project and the local area.

The Yardley group also challenged the notion that their area is a cultural desert. They decided to find out what arts and cultural activities were already going on in their neighbourhood, showcase them to local people at their event and promote them in a directory to increase participation in existing groups. They discovered a lot of groups and activities they did not previously know about.



Two other projects, in Edgbaston and Erdington, created original dance pieces with professional choreographers and to perform and film them (see project summaries pp. 28-31). Participation in these projects engaged people more intensely than just learning a piece someone else had devised, they felt ownership of the work and were able to express themselves through it on both personal and collective levels.

Projects starting in a new location in Year 2 employed different approaches to stimulate participation by local people. During the initial project research, all identified a theme that might resonate with people. In Hodge Hill the theme was mental health and wellbeing (see project summary pp. 34-35) and people were initially engaged to think about what they do to support good mental health and what arts activities they would like to try to enhance their wellbeing. This theme created a safe space and common ground for people to try a wide range of arts and crafts without consciously signing up to do 'arts'.

In Perry Barr, a partnership with a local supermarket enabled access to large numbers of local people from diverse communities as arts activities were delivered in the store. People were engaged to create designs to reflect and celebrate their local area and these were developed into large, colourful fabric banners that were then displayed outside the supermarket. People were surprised the banners were not vandalised and felt it was because they clearly depicted local people's ideas¹².

A small project in the Nechells Ward of Ladywood, an area with no existing arts activity, used storytelling around the theme of how people had come to live in Nechells, a community of many communities reflecting different generations of immigration to Birmingham, to engage people and enable them to hear each other's stories.

The project on the Falcon Lodge estate in Sutton secured considerable additional funding from a local Trust and has been able to offer residents the opportunity to learn a musical instrument by providing instruments and lessons, with potential for participation in musical activity over the longer term.

¹² See <http://www.edgemagazine.org/perry-barr-arts-forum-designs-in-the-sky.html>

Success factors in creating opportunities for participation

Producers identified a number of factors which enabled them to increase participation in arts and culture in areas with little previous activity.

- It is important to build relationships with existing groups and agencies in the target area, to enrol them in the aims of the project and work collaboratively with them as partners, with a shared stake in achieving the outcomes. Groups and organisations with existing links into communities act as a gateway and help to build trust with local people. Partners across the programme included health and social care services, community facilities such as churches, community centres and libraries, a supermarket and a community café.
- In new areas, established in community development practice indicates that a 'way in' to communities is to engage with children and, through them, reach parents and wider family members. Producers engaged with schools and out-of-school providers such as dance schools, and responded to requests for activities that all the family could take part in, to encourage wider participation. People engaged through family activities then feel more confident to try things for themselves.
- The model of cultural co-design has been tested over the two years of the Connecting Communities programme and the evidence is that a key tenet of the original C2 Locality framework on which it is based, of the importance of identifying key individuals in the community who can help to drive the project – known as locating the energy – is an important factor in increasing participation. Key individuals provide leadership, generate enthusiasm and give people permission to try something out of their comfort zones.
- The opportunity for people to shape and co-produce arts and cultural activity and artworks enables a shift from superficial engagement as participants to deeper and potentially more sustainable engagement as co-designers.

2.2 Enabling people to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground through arts and cultural activities

As the largest local authority in Europe, Birmingham is home to more than 1 million people, around 40% of whom are under 25 years old¹³, and over 187 nationalities¹⁴. What might be perceived as a traditional model of distribution of communities across the city, of broadly White, South East Asian and Black communities in specific areas, is in fact a constantly changing picture. New communities have increased diversity in traditionally White working class neighbourhoods and, as new communities become established in the city, there is a historic pattern of moving out from the centre into the Districts. These areas have gradually become more diverse in population but often lacking in opportunities for people living side-by-side to get to know one another and understand what they have in common, as well as their differences.

¹³ Source: <http://birminghamtoolkit.com/birmingham-facts/youthfulness>

¹⁴ Delivering in the age of super-diversity: Newall D, Phillimore J. University of Birmingham (2012)

Research has shown that encouraging individual creativity and building confidence through collaborative cultural co-design and co-production processes can help to strengthen connections between neighbours and support community cohesion¹⁵. The Connecting Communities programme aimed to create opportunities for people to talk with their neighbours from other communities; to understand more about other cultures, faiths and abilities and to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground through arts and cultural activity.

In Year 2, projects have worked across Birmingham with communities of place and communities of interest. One aspect of the cultural co-design model is to identify a theme or goal for each project that will resonate with the wider community and encourage their participation. For several of the projects, the unifying theme was to explore with residents their shared identity as a community of place. In Druids Heath, Selly Oak District, a cross-generational project had a focus of challenging negative perceptions of their outer-city estate to present it as a place where people were glad to live. Residents filmed their area to show the beauty there and interviewed older people to capture their positive stories about coming to the estate when it was newly built. Children were involved in creating an animation that was edited into the film and people from all three groups came together to launch their film which was then posted online¹⁶. The development of work from Year 1 had laid the foundations for more openness and reflection by local people in Year 2.

The project in Yardley was all about people from different communities that live around a green open space reclaiming the space for shared community use. By the end of the project there was a powerful sense of shared identity of place and achievement from the steering group members who reflect a range of groups and communities in the area.

In Edgbaston, the project worked with a community of interest, a group of people with learning and/or physical disabilities, their carers, support workers and families (see summary pp. 28-29). It created an opportunity for people with disabilities to challenge how they are perceived by society at large and to develop new means of communication through mime and movement. A choreographed work, called 'A New Light', was created and performed. It has been used as a catalyst to stimulate discussion both within the group and with parents, carers and audiences about the restrictions people with disabilities face and how they are often defined by what they cannot do, rather than what they can do.

The project in Hall Green set out to create safe spaces for people to have conversations about differences and similarities between their communities by exploring the customs in different cultures around drinking tea (see summary pp. 32-33). By choosing something that everyone does, the project established common ground early on and people agreed to host tables at a giant tea party to share their tea customs with others. This led to conversations about other areas of common interest and new connections were made.

"Today we come to know about different other cultures. Indeed it was great experience. It was indeed a great tea party we enjoyed a lot." Pushto participant

"We told people about Kashmiri tea and why it was pink. People were really interested." Kashmiri host

¹⁵ 2015 *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value University of Warwick

¹⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VU7wflxiDfA>

The small Ladywood storytelling project illustrated how sharing stories can help to overcome cultural differences between communities¹⁷.

There is quantitative and qualitative evidence from Years 1 and 2 to suggest that as a result of being involved in Connecting Communities projects, people:

- met new people from their neighbourhoods
- felt that the project had brought different communities together
- felt taking part made them feel more of a part of their local community
- felt their area was a nicer place to live in as a consequence
- agreed that arts and cultural activities can make an area feel safer
- felt proud of their neighbourhoods

These outcomes reinforce the findings of previously collated research on the social gains of community arts¹⁸ which found that community-based arts projects have the potential to bring about social change; build cross-cultural community understanding and a stronger sense of 'locality' by bringing different groups together in shared creative activity.

Success factors in creating opportunities for identifying common ground

- As part of the cultural co-design process, understand the different kinds of 'community' and discuss with local people what makes sense to them – community of place, community of interest, community of identity – then develop the goals for the project in this context.
- Tap into themes or issues that are important locally or have universal resonance and around which people feel they have something to say or to contribute. Be prepared to follow a theme if it catches the imagination of people.
- Work with partner agencies to draw on their local knowledge and networks to open the project up as widely as possible and increase inclusion – there are likely to be groups a Producer new to the area might not know about.
- Work with people to recruit artists who can add new dimensions to the emerging theme and support people to create beyond their expectations – a shared 'wow factor' is very powerful for creating a sense of unity across a diverse group.

“When Somali’s first came here. They were disgusting. Everything gets thrown out of the windows, spitting on the floors. Things have changed for the better. People complained so they’ve improved. People got mice. We had never heard of things like that before. I was negative towards them before, but meeting them and talking to them is different. They are a laugh. They are normal people like us.”

Participant

¹⁷ See blog <http://nechellsonthemap.blogspot.co.uk/p/blog-page.html>

¹⁸ 2001 Newman T, Curtis K & Stephens J: *Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of literature* Barnardos

2.3 To strengthen local infrastructure for arts and culture

A core aim of the Connecting Communities programme over both years was to strengthen the infrastructure for arts and cultural activity across the city. Birmingham has had Local Arts Fora (LAFs) in each of its 10 Districts for some time and this programme offered an opportunity for LAFs to extend their reach into new neighbourhoods and into communities that traditionally tend not to engage with arts and culture.

The programme has achieved a number of outcomes that together have built up the local arts infrastructure and made it potentially more sustainable in very challenging times in the context of constraints on funding for the arts in Birmingham and across the country.

Most importantly, projects have built relationships with partner agencies and local people through the cultural co-design process that has engendered a willingness to continue to engage with arts and culture and increased the numbers of volunteers to make things happen. The strong partnership with the Kingstanding Food Community in Erdington ensured the local people could continue to take part in arts and cultural activity in the period between Year 1 and Year 2, to maintain momentum. The support of the partner agency enhanced the local ownership of the project and facilitated cultural co-design.

Some projects have been able to open up community facilities as venues for arts and cultural activity. For instance, in Yardley the Year 1 project influenced the opening of an unused community centre which is now staffed and offering weekly arts, dance and music sessions. This venue stepped in when the weather affected the Year 2 event and enabled it to go ahead. In Hodge Hill, a wellbeing centre has been opened up to arts activity and the link between arts and good health, especially mental health, has been established with local partners who are willing to support on-going activity. In Druids Heath, an existing venue for older people was encouraged to open its doors to younger residents through working together on the film project. The opening up of community venues means that people who are unable to travel into the city centre to engage with the arts have an opportunity for engagement on their doorsteps, in keeping with Birmingham's previous cultural strategy.

Whereas projects in Year 1 were mostly led and driven by the Producers, even where fledgling steering groups were convened, by Year 2 over half of projects had steering groups that were engaging in cultural co-design and taking on practical roles to ensure the delivery of the agreed activities. When, for instance, the Producer in Yardley was injured, steering group members rallied round to ensure tasks were completed. The steering groups are important building blocks for local arts infrastructure as they have acted as a gateway for some people onto the committees of LAFs and into volunteering to support further arts work in Wards and neighbourhoods.

A couple of projects have specifically aimed to offer opportunities for young artists to develop their skills as arts Producers, with a view to building the base of arts Producers in the city with the right skills to facilitate cultural co-design and enable more community-based arts activity in areas that still have not been reached. The Northfield project recruited two young people as trainee facilitators/Producers and paid them to develop the NAF Café (see summary pp. 36-37) and activities that flowed from it, mentored by the Producer. Other young people, mostly artists in

their own right, joined the team as volunteers and were also supported to develop organisational and production skills while working directly with local people and artists.

Connecting Communities created opportunities for artists to develop their community arts skills and be introduced to sharing the development of artwork and the incorporation of people's ideas through cultural co-design, something that some found challenging at first but most embraced and eventually really enjoyed.

Such a range of artforms were employed throughout the programme that artists made new connections with other artists and had the chance to collaborate creatively in developing themes and ideas with local people.

The most significant outcome of the programme in relation to strengthening infrastructure was the creation of a new organisation made up of the previously separate Local Arts Fora. Over the two years of the programme Producers and LAF leaders have built strong relationships, they have had opportunities to share learning and to reflect on the development of Connecting Communities and this helped to create the conditions for the new organisation, called No. 11 Arts, to be formed.

*“Four of the ten artists engaged are fairly early on in their workshop-leading careers so this project gave them the opportunity to hone skills in a friendly, relaxed environment with a clear focus and strong support base”
(...)*

*“The lead artist had her first chance to lead a project of this size, proving a valuable experience and learning curve, including the chance to receive feedback on performance”
Producer, Hodge Hill*

Success factors in strengthening local infrastructure

- Connections made between projects and existing groups and partner agencies (public, private and voluntary sectors) to create new relationships and opportunities for future working, including the opening up of community facilities as venues for arts and cultural activity.
- Development of steering groups to engage in all the stages of the cultural co-design process, to commission great artists, create relevant artworks and firmly locate projects in their neighbourhoods with local drive and ownership.
- Additional funding and in-kind resources raised from local sources (see p. 5) enhanced projects and in some cases enabled them to happen.
- Opportunities for young and amateur artists to develop their skills in facilitating community arts using a cultural co-design model and to learn how to organise activities and events in community settings, strengthening the talent base for local arts.
- Empowered and inspired local people who have developed an appetite for more arts activity and are prepared to keep doing creative things together in their neighbourhoods.

3. Learning from Connecting Communities

3.1 Cultural Co-design

The majority of Producers for the Connecting Communities programme had some experience of providing arts activity in community settings. They would previously, for instance, have been commissioned to work at a particular site, provide materials and help people to create something or deliver an activity like storytelling. Several came into Connecting Communities with the same pragmatic mindset, determining what could be delivered within the budget and timeframe, identifying artists, often people they already knew, and delivering sessions. This approach, whilst efficient, is not consistent with cultural co-design.

In the first year only one or two people were experienced practitioners of this facilitative way of working and advocates of its efficacy, for most Producers Year 1 was a process of 'learning by doing' as they delivered projects with only a broad outline of the concepts of co-design and co-production available to them. It was a steep learning curve that some could not see the value of at first, however by Year 2 Producers had reflected on what they had learnt and they felt overall more confident about using cultural co-design.

They recognised that new Producers need access to training and mentoring support in the cultural co-design process to help them develop the necessary skills to facilitate it effectively. Several projects in Year 2 built in an element of training and mentoring for trainee Producers and artists to develop these skills (see 3.2).

Co-production when thoroughly and consistently implemented, flexibly applied and genuinely conducted as a collaborative undertaking is indeed a powerful tool in enabling local people to take responsibility for developing and sharing their own cultural identity and capacity. Producer

What Producers learnt about co-design and co-production

- The 7 steps from the C2 Positively Local model work well and are easy to understand¹⁹.
- It takes time to build relationships with people and this is more difficult in areas where there has been little arts or cultural activity in the past.
- Working with trusted local organisations provided a way in to communities and supported continuity between Year 1 and Year 2.
- Introduce co-design earlier in future work and allow people to identify and bring their strengths and work on things that they feel comfortable with before gently stretching them to do other things.

¹⁹ C2 Positively Local model <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/HSMC/publications/2011/positively-local.pdf>

- Power needs to be shared, Producers should facilitate and gradually transfer leadership to co-designers and trainee Producers. Roles should be agreed and mentoring provided for people taking on these roles. There should be a tangible sense of people working together, deciding together and acting together.
- Build in time for everyone to be involved in reflection to recognise learning and celebrate success.
- Trust the co-design process to achieve a result, even if it is not the one you were aiming for – *“co-design is a journey that helps people to want to be exposed to art in all its forms”*.

Artists and Cultural Co-design

Producers, usually creatives themselves, have learnt from Connecting Communities how crucial it is to commission artists with the necessary skills for cultural co-design. At least 2 projects developed artist briefs with participants that did not specify a required artform but instead requested evidence of an artist’s ability to work collaboratively with local people.

Many artists are not used to co-designing art with groups of people who may not be artists themselves. Often they will either create work alone or show people how to make elements of a piece that they will take away to turn into something beautiful.

Cultural co-design can be as much of a challenge for artists as for Producers. Often an artist spends time thinking about what the finished work will look like before commencing on making it and for successful cultural co-design artists need to be comfortable with an organic process, willing to change designs and products in response to input from participants. This means sharing the power of creation and not knowing what the finished work will look like until it gets there. Artists reported great satisfaction in working in this way, once their initial reticence was overcome.

As with Producers, artists need support to develop the necessary facilitation skills for cultural co-design.

3.2 Producer role

The role of the Producer is most effective when held by someone with an arts background as a producer/creator balanced with knowledge and experience of community development processes and techniques.

There is a Producer skill set that lends itself to the transfer of power, skills and confidence that supports local people to engage in co-design and co-production. In practice, Producers need to be able to act simultaneously as the provider of inspiration, advice and challenge, as a negotiator, an advocate, a diplomat, a project manager and someone who stimulates and drives delivery. A key element of the role, identified by Producers, lies in making connections, putting people in touch to work together, bringing new people in and building consensus around common ground. Equally important is actively listening to people, not having preconceived ideas, taking every idea people put forward seriously and modelling that

approach so that local people can see the importance of valuing every contribution. Flexibility, the ability to adapt to an every-changing environment, is a core attribute of the role.

Producers who have been involved in Years 1 and 2 demonstrated and reported increasing confidence in employing these skills. Across the programme it has been acknowledged that a skills development pathway for new Producers would help to support the future infrastructure of community-based arts and culture in Birmingham. There is an opportunity to build on previous learning²⁰ and existing training resources²¹ in developing a pathway.

Producers reported that they found the reflective practice and evaluation elements of the cultural co-design process useful and that they would take them into their future arts practice. Some reported that the introduction of the Focus of Enquiry question approach to evaluation helped them to focus on the evidence they needed to gather to show the difference their projects made towards the aims of the programme. For some, the theory of the approach was understood but they felt less confident about putting it into practice and identified a need for further training and support on implementing the approach.

3.3 Other learning

Overall, Producers found that people in areas designated as ‘cultural deserts’ have an *“inexhaustible fund of creative strength and capacity”*²², a wealth of untapped potential and talent waiting to be discovered.

They also found that co-designed and co-produced arts and cultural activity that resonates with local people through a shared theme or vision can provide genuine opportunities for people from different communities to come together and address the barriers and perceived differences between them that can be obstacles to a shared sense of ‘community’. Connecting Communities created safe spaces for people to have conversations that helped them find common ground and get to know each other better.

²⁰ See Creative Partnerships <http://creative-partnerships.com/research-impact/>

²¹ Training Requirements and Key Skills for Artists and creative practitioners to work in participatory settings (TRaKSforA) EU Leonardo programme <http://icenet.ning.com/page/traksfora-leonardo> <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/Self-Assessment-Competency-Framework-for-Creative-Practitioners.pdf>

²² Quote from Producer reflection

4. Conclusions

Birmingham's aspiration for the *Arts and Communities* initiative was to create sustainability for local arts infrastructure within the context of changing public services. The approach was to introduce a process of cultural co-design whereby people in local communities developed the skills, networks and confidence to engage actively with creating their own community arts projects, take on leadership roles and work collaboratively with professional artists.

The model of cultural co-design has been tested over the 2 years of the programme and has become more clearly defined as a result. A core set of skills and attributes for an arts Producer facilitating a co-design and co-production process has been mapped out and the need for training and mentoring of new Producers has been established to ensure they are familiar with the definitions of terms and process from the start.

Producers became advocates for cultural co-design. They found it to be an organic process, reflective of the people and context in which happens; one that empowers and enables people to engage actively and creates an environment of shared responsibility for a project. Shared ownership builds a good foundation for sustainable activity as the success of the project is not then solely dependent on the Producer. Producers witnessed that co-design produced more inclusive outcomes and that, as a process, it allowed room to try things which might not be successful and for learning to take place.

As a process, cultural co-design changed people's perceptions of themselves as individuals, what they could create and contribute, and what they could achieve by working together. Producers learned how they could move from being directive to facilitative as people's confidence and abilities grew, by supporting people to recognise their individual and collective strengths and abilities.

The collaborative model encouraged innovation and enabled the creation of artworks that truly reflected the communities involved and what was important to them. Producers, professional artists and local people produced work with meaning and relevance and of the high quality born of a shared vision and passionate engagement, challenging the view that the products of participatory arts are somehow of lower value. The artworks challenged negative perceptions of neighbourhoods, people with disabilities and people from different cultures and fostered better understanding between individuals, groups and communities. This model has the potential to be replicated in other areas to address issues of misunderstanding and negative perceptions within and between communities.

As a consequence of using cultural co-design, the principles of reflective practice are better understood and embedded in practice across the Producer network and Producers have more experience of developing mechanisms for capturing evidence of the difference projects make for people and communities.

The legacy of the Connecting Communities programme includes the impact it has had in the communities where it was delivered, raising awareness, bringing people together and introducing them to arts and cultural activity, some for the first time. Groups have formed

to support on-going arts activity and skills, confidence and partnerships to keep going have been developed. People have seen for themselves that cultural co-design can work, particularly when additional resources and in-kind contributions can be harnessed.

During the delivery of Connecting Communities, the Local Arts Fora and Producers formed a strong core group that is now shaping the way forward for local arts delivery in Birmingham. In uncertain times for the arts infrastructure in Birmingham and elsewhere, due to austerity measures and the resulting cuts in funding, the formation of a new organisation, No. 11 Arts, offers the opportunity to build on the success of Connecting Communities, as local arts organisations unite to become stronger together and to prevent the fragmentation of the outcomes that have been achieved in the last two years.

Appendix I

Aims for Connecting Communities through Culture (Year 2)

- To allow people of all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in high quality arts and cultural activity
- To create opportunities for people to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground between local communities through arts and cultural activities
- To strengthen local arts and cultural infrastructure using cultural co-design

Objectives

- Increased participation and engagement in arts and culture across a range of diverse groups and communities, including vulnerable and isolated people
- More people from diverse communities engaged in local areas to express common interests, themes or goals through cultural co-design
- More people from local neighbourhoods will showcase their contribution to the cultural life of their community and the city as a whole
- Local arts infrastructure will be strengthened through resident and artist engagement in co- design and co-production of local arts and cultural activities
- More local arts leaders are supported and mentored to undertake future roles in steering and developing local arts organisations and infrastructure
- Local arts organisations will become more robust and sustainable due to improved fundraising, partnership working and cross-sector networking and alignment
- A public programme to disseminate the learning from cultural co-design developed with support from other public and private agencies including Higher Education
- Evidence of good practice is used to inform the development of local and national policy with a tested model of cultural co-design

Appendix 2: An overview of Connecting Communities through Culture delivery²³

Area	Arts and Cultural Activities					
Edgbaston	Re-Act and A New Light: focused on perceptions of disability using the life experiences of adults with physical and or learning disabilities who attend Cerebral Palsy Midlands. Re-Act weekly dance, movement and mime workshops to create the work culminated in a public performance of A New Light a dance/mime production.					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/ sessions	Performances/ events
	5 paid 4 unpaid	14 / 73	3	10	12	1
Erdington	Many Hands: celebrating differences and using hands to explore connections to others. Regular workshops to create the dance/physical theatre work, filmed sessions to create a recorded dance piece, live performance and the transformation of a community space through art.					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/ sessions	Performances/ events
	2 paid 6 unpaid	103 / 190	6	10	25	2
Hall Green	Exploring welcome and hospitality through tea: three strands of work; adults workshops, children's workshops and intergenerational workshops leading to a community tea party where those attending found out about tea traditions, welcome and hospitality across a range of Christian and Muslim cultures and communities.					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/ sessions	Performances/ events
	13 paid 3 unpaid	367 / 200	16	45	26	2
Hodge Hill	Mindapples - 5 a day for your mind: using arts activities to care for mental wellbeing. Regular weekly arts sessions helped those attending to increase their awareness of how they can influence their own mental health.					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/ sessions	Performances/ events
	16 paid 6 unpaid	235 / 400	10	6	33	4

²³ Source: Project monitoring forms

Ladywood	Storytelling: storytelling and poetry workshops encouraging local people (mainly women) to develop story telling skills and to share their own stories of living in Nechells.					
	Artists	Participants	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/sessions	Performances/events
	1 paid 1 unpaid	8	2	8	12	0
Northfield	Music! Dance! Draw! 2: a monthly community arts space was established offering local artists, musicians, poets and performance groups a free space in which to showcase and develop their work in front of a live audience, and local residents a free evening of music, performance and activities. NAFzine launched in March 2016 and produced monthly. 2 events raised the profile of local artists and engaged people from 4 wards across the District. 6 artists (under 30 years), mentored by the Producer, gained experience of running events, developing projects and organising arts activities.					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/sessions	Performances/events
	20 paid 40 unpaid	1,300 / 400	45	20	14	5
Perry Barr	Designs in the Sky & Craft Group; Designs in the Sky produced banners of participants' designs hung on lampposts outside the local Tesco (partner) and Craft Group activities in local library (partner).					
	Artists	Participants / Audience	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/sessions	Performances/events
	3 paid 1 unpaid	309 / 1492	2	10	19	1
Selly Oak	Art Soak: Felting Project / Film-Making workshops. The felting workshops brought local mums together and gave them an opportunity to learn a new skill, co-design a piece for display and to sell their art. Local people used film making as a medium to share positive stories about the area.					
	Artists	Participants	Volunteers	Co-designers	Workshops/sessions	Performances/events
	4	58	0	7	10	2
Sutton	Live in the Lodge: free musical activities including a community choir/singing lessons, guitar and ukulele. No data available.					

Yardley

Our Oaklands: working with local residents and voluntary and community organisations to develop an annual celebratory event in the local park as a communal space for art and cultural activity and enable people (whatever their ethnicity or background) to find a shared identity around which to build relationships.

Artists	Participants/ Audience	Volunteers	Co- designers	Workshops/ session	Performances/ events
9 paid 4 unpaid	728 / 1232	35	35	29	7

Appendix 3: Connecting Communities through Culture Evaluation Framework – Year 2

Aims	Outcomes	Focus of Enquiry Questions
To allow people of all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in high quality arts and cultural activity	Increased participation and engagement in arts and culture across a range of diverse groups and communities, including vulnerable and isolated people	Hodge Hill "How can we introduce shared creative participation as a way to mental wellbeing using Mindapples as a framework?"
	More people from local neighbourhoods will showcase their contribution to the cultural life of their community and the city as a whole	Sutton "How can a broad range of musical activity increase participation and develop / inspire sustainable individual and community confidence / pride?"
		Perry Barr "How can we use co-design to increase participation in arts and culture in Witton?"
To create opportunities for people to identify shared values, aspirations and common ground between local communities through arts and cultural activities	More people from diverse communities engaged in local areas to express common interests, themes or goals through cultural co-design	Yardley "How can people from different groups from around Oaklands work together to host a celebratory event?"
		Edgbaston "How adults with mental and/or physical disabilities can gain self-esteem through participatory arts practice, and how publicly demonstrating the results can enable them and the general public to interact more confidently with each other."
		Hall Green "How can the creative interpretation of tea (traditions/customs) help people to understand other communities in Springfield?"

		Ladywood "How can we use the arts to share the stories of expatriates in Nechells to enable individual voice and community integration?"
Aims	Outcomes	Focus of Enquiry Questions
To strengthen local arts and cultural infrastructure using cultural co-design	Local arts infrastructure will be strengthened through resident and artist engagement in co-design and co-production of local arts and cultural activities	Selly Oak "How can we build on learning from Year 1 to further support people to develop an infrastructure for a more sustainable culture of artistic activity?"
	More local arts leaders are supported and mentored to undertake future roles in steering and developing local arts organisations and infrastructure	Erdington "How do you engage and support local people to organise cultural and artistic activity?"
	Local arts organisations will become more robust and sustainable due to improved fundraising, partnership working and cross-sector networking and alignment	Northfield "How do/can NAF support existing / build new community through creative arts?"

Appendix 4: Programme reach – participants and audience members combined²⁴

Categories		Year 1	Year 2
Age	18 and under	1969	2559
	19 - 64	3096	1905
	65 and over	87	528
	Age Not known	0	1348
	<i>No. recorded</i>	<i>5152</i>	<i>6340</i>
Gender	Male	1345	1437
	Female	2288	2522
	Gender Not known	340	1855
	<i>No. recorded</i>	<i>3973</i>	<i>5814</i>
Ethnicity	White	2422	1058
	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	141	220
	Asian/ Asian British	1866	2315
	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	475	531
	Any other ethnic group	33	26
	Ethnicity Not known	221	1989
	<i>No. recorded</i>	<i>5158</i>	<i>6139</i>
Religion	No religion	44	125
	Christian (all denominations)	829	582
	Buddhist	4	5
	Hindu	29	75
	Jewish	0	0
	Muslim	1311	1794
	Sikh	86	57
	Any other religion	5	49
	Religion Not known	1637	2840
	<i>No. recorded</i>	<i>3039</i>	<i>5527</i>

²⁴ Source: project monitoring forms (9 projects)

Changing perceptions of people with disabilities through participatory arts: Edgbaston

In Year 1 the Producer and an artist facilitator from Edgbaston Arts Contact Group developed a positive working relationship with Cerebral Palsy West Midlands (CPM), an organisation whose members represent a community of interest in Birmingham. In the period between Year 1 and Year 2, they explored with the group what they would like to achieve from a new project. The group wanted to work together to develop their community identity and to present a different view of people with disabilities who are often defined by being *unable* to do things. The group wanted to share their poor experiences of access, restrictions to their freedom of choice and frustration with decisions being made for them rather than by them. The cultural co-design process enabled them to make the decisions on the artform and content of the Year 2 Connecting Communities project and to participate in its creation and performance.

Cultural Co-design

A steering group made up of the Producer, the Arts Facilitator, disabled people and staff from CPM worked together to:

- design the artist's brief
- interview and select the artist
- recruit disabled people who use CPM to get involved.

The artist's brief set out what the group wanted to achieve but did not prescribe the artform to be employed. It required the artist to deliver creative workshops, first to clarify the aims of the project with

CPM members and then to create a piece to present at a public showcase or performance. The criteria for selection of the artist focused on proven experience of working collaboratively with adults with learning and /or physical disabilities.

Once the artist, Ray Jacobs from Shropshire Inclusive Dance, was appointed the steering group was able to plan for a performance on a professional stage in a venue that was gifted to the project. It was important for all concerned, CPM group members and supporters, that the piece produced was of a quality of performance that was in keeping with a professional venue and could convey the powerful messages of the participants.

During the creative workshops (known as Re-Act), the artist encouraged CPM members first to express themselves through gesture and then to progress to gestures that communicated with others and eventually to collective and individual interaction between groups. The narrative of the eventual performance grew organically from the input of CPM members. The final piece called 'A New Light' was rehearsed, performed and filmed in the Elmhurst School of Dance theatre (see <http://www.cpmids.org.uk/news/a-new-light/>). The opportunity to perform in a high quality theatre space was in itself a means of participants developing self-confidence and enhancing their own self-esteem: they were performing in a real theatre.



Outcomes

CPM members, people with learning and/or physical disabilities and those who care for and support them created an art work to achieve a better understanding of our collective perceptions of learning and physical disabilities. In the process, they supported each other and enhanced their own sense of group identity, and increased their self-esteem and confidence as individuals.

Evidence collected by the Producer, and the film of the performance itself, showed that CPM members really ‘owned’ the project and, as a result, they made huge efforts to actively and effectively contribute. Staff at CPM commented that they had not seen people they support

put so much into what they were doing and consequently got so much out of it in terms of a sense of personal achievement. The project generated this by focusing on and celebrating collectively what each individual could do.

“It’s just the most empowering, energetic experience I’ve ever had ... the most moving thing I’ve ever been involved with” CPM staff member

- Members of CPM reported increased self-esteem and a change in their perceptions of themselves.
- Audience members, including family and friends, CPM staff and volunteers all reported seeing the performers ‘in a new light’, communicating through movement and mime in a way they had not seen before and with a powerful message.
- CPM shared the film of their performance to wider audiences to continue changing perceptions of people with disabilities, stimulate discussion and pursue further projects.
- CPM members have participated in wider Local Arts Forum activities.



Embedding Cultural Co-design: Erdington

Strong relationships were built with Kingstanding Food Community (KFC)²⁵ and a committed group of local residents through the Connecting Communities Arts Cafe project in Year 1 which enabled local people to choose and experience a range of arts and cultural activities with professional artists. In the space between Connecting Communities Year 1 and 2, a local resident was supported by the KFC Co-ordinator and the Producer to organise and run regular crafts and coffee mornings which helped to maintain the continuity of activity in the neighbourhood. The commitment and energy of the KFC Co-ordinator, as a partner agency, was crucial throughout the two years of the project.

Cultural Co-design

In Year 2, the Producer and KFC Co-ordinator were able to build on the foundations of Cultural Co-design laid in Year 1 by forming a Steering Group with residents from the start, to create a vision for the project and to then lead on project planning; allocating budget; recruiting artists; marketing and recruiting participants/audiences; delivering the activity and evaluation. The Steering Group designed a brief for artists which requested:

- a track record in community arts
- artists with the confidence and warm personality to engage people who are nervous of, or new to the arts
- artists who can work with and engage people of different ages and

background, able to understand and support their different needs

- artists to be visionary and ambitious as well as realistic of the budget and timescales.

From experience, the Producer knew these attributes would form the basis of successful engagement by artists in a Cultural Co-design process. Shortlisted artists were invited to deliver short workshops with members of the public, at which the Steering Group were 'mystery shoppers', as an opportunity to assess them against the requested criteria. Residents on the group gained experience of assessment and interviewing skills from the recruitment process and learned that not every artist can take people with little arts experience on the journey and create something of artistic interest, and even when you find the right artists it still takes time and patience.

The successful artists, Infuse Dance, worked with residents to create a dance performance and film themed on 'Many Hands' (see

https://youtu.be/CPi84H_HjUE)



The project Focus of Enquiry question was: "How do you engage and support local people to organise cultural and artistic activity?"

²⁵ A Forest Schools Birmingham CIC project

The following answers to the question were identified:

- Create the right space to have the necessary conversations
- Provide support from experienced people at every step
- Provide structures for creating the vision, aims, outcomes and artist brief
- Provide choices throughout and a voice to discuss differences of opinion
- Ensure that the ideas are exciting and ambitious as well as realistic and achievable
- Ensure that ideas are broad enough to give access to a range of people
- Provide lots of different types of leadership that allows buy-in with support

“The participants should, I hope, feel so much invested in the project because they have ownership over the work, it’s really important that it is collaborative (...) I know myself, as a dancer, that when I create movement ... it is so much more authentic and (here) it shows in their performance of the movement.”

Dance artist

Outcomes

The project aimed to support and mentor local arts leaders to undertake future roles in steering and developing local arts organisations and infrastructure.

The Steering Group gathered evidence that:

- More people have been involved in local activities
- More people have been involved in arts activities
- People from different communities and cultural backgrounds worked together
- Local people have been equipped with skills to run locally-based arts activities and are doing so through church and at KFC café
- Some local people have continued participation in the arts e.g. seeking out local dance groups to join
- Some people have independently accessed wider arts activities in the District and in the city centre and are continuing as audiences to local and city arts events.



Celebrating Cultural Diversity through Tea: Hall Green

The aim of the project was to use tea and its traditions as a metaphor for valuing difference and as a tool for bringing people together to create a shared experience. Informed by tea ceremonies and traditions from Christian and Muslim communities in the neighbourhood, the Producer explored how people from different ethnic groups and communities drink, serve and share tea as part of their approach to hospitality and welcome.



Cultural Co-design

The project brought together people from the local Church, a local non-denominational secondary school, an Asian Women's Group at the Springfield Project (where the Connecting Communities project was based) and the local Mosque, as the principle partners in co-designing and delivering the project.

The project involved local people working with visual artists in workshops to make a giant willow tea pot lantern, papier-mâché cups and other highly decorated tea-inspired objects.



The project culminated in a Community Tea Party attended by 200 people who

came together to share tea traditions from around the world.

Tables at the party were hosted by people from local groups and there was an opportunity to sample a range of teas and tea-making traditions including Somali, Yemeni, Bengali, Kashmiri, Panjabi, English Afternoon, Caribbean, Fair Trade, Black Country, American Iced and Gujarati.

The Producer supported volunteers who were hosting tables to share stories about tea traditions with participants taking tea.

"I showed them the popcorn and dates we eat with our tea. So many people wanted to know how I make the tea. I told them how we drink it at home in Somalia. We talked women politics." **Somali Host**

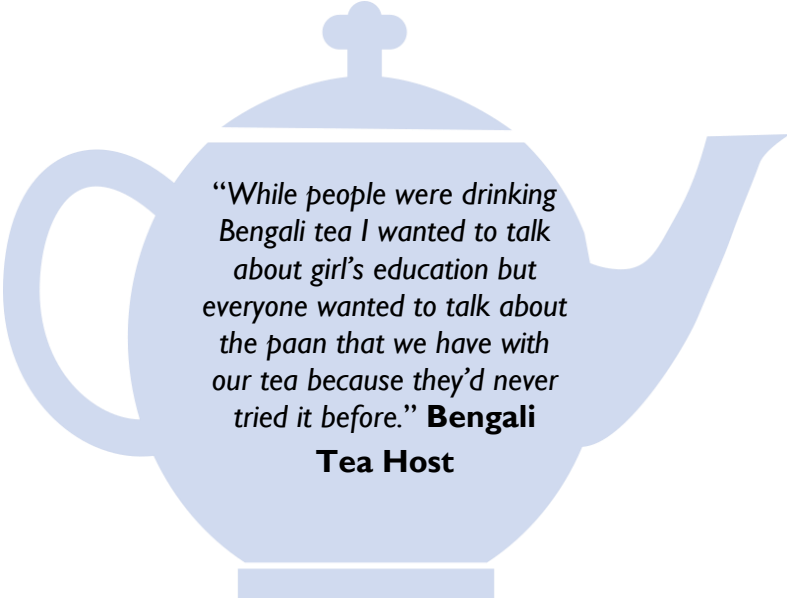
"It says in the Quran that all faiths and cultures must get to know each other. This is why I wanted to be a host and I was able to talk about Yemeni tea and customs to plenty of people. They were all interested." **Yemeni Host**

Outcomes

- The event stimulated "some excellent one-to-one conversations about faith, food and community."
- As a result, the Head of the secondary school was invited by the Imam to join the members of the Mosque in the *iftar* ceremony, breaking the early morning Ramadan fast.



"Bitter herbs, if it tastes bitter then it must be good for you, this is what Jamaican teas are like. They do you good and lots of people were interested in this." **African-Caribbean Host**



"While people were drinking Bengali tea I wanted to talk about girl's education but everyone wanted to talk about the paan that we have with our tea because they'd never tried it before." **Bengali Tea Host**

Arts and Mental Wellbeing: Hodge Hill

The project was delivered in Bordesley Green, one of the most densely populated wards in Birmingham, where the majority of people are of Black, Asian or other ethnic minority origin and almost 40% of residents report a main language other than English. From the Year 2 Connecting Communities research the key issues in the area were loneliness and isolation, depression (including self-harm) and domestic abuse. Parents identified a lack of activities for families where they could interact positively with their children. These themes shaped the project and led to a focus on improving mental wellbeing through arts activity. The Producer introduced the Mindapples '5-a-day for your mind' framework²⁶ as a neutral and accessible tool for engaging people from different communities in the project, building the common ground that everyone has an interest in their own mental wellbeing and that of their friends and families.



Cultural Co-design

The project aimed to collectively create a piece of art to celebrate the things Bordesley Green residents do to take care of their minds. The Producer worked with a women's group (WEW) to compile a list of possible art forms and then consulted 150 residents to choose the activities for the project: Pottery, Painting on Canvas, Textiles, Drumming, Recycled Card Creations, Henna Art and Bhangra Dancing.

Each artist worked with people towards the creation of a collaborative artwork comprising elements from each of the artforms, based on the theme of a tree with apples representing Mindapples. There was open discussion on the theme and ideas sharing in all workshops. Residents reported that their ideas were listened to and helped to shape the final work.

As well as the women's group, partners in a local church and a Wellbeing Centre provided space for people to meet and create, establishing these local centres as venues for arts activity for all ages.

The co-produced artwork was exhibited at a showcase event and remained on display in the Wellbeing Centre.

²⁶ See <http://mindapples.org/>

Outcomes

- The theme of mental wellbeing was maintained through the variety of arts workshops across 3 community venues. As a result people reported increased awareness of how they can influence their own mental state through positive, preventative self-care, including engagement with the arts, and encourage those around them to do the same
- Women who became involved in the project have gone on to join WEW, reducing their social isolation
- The project brought between 60 and 80 people into the Wellbeing Centre who otherwise may not have known about it or accessed its services
- Health professionals have taken the Mindapples idea away to use in their workplaces with colleagues and clients
- At the final sharing event, participants described themselves as happy, excited and satisfied about having their work exhibited publicly

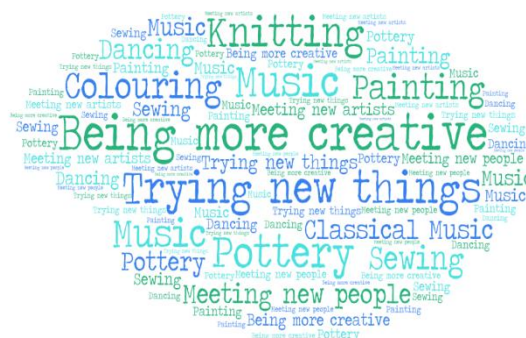


Impact

The project made links between artists, trainee artists and the Wellbeing Centre. The staff experienced the arts activities first-hand and saw the enthusiasm of residents as they engaged with pottery, dance and textiles. The centre extended the range of activities it offers to support wellbeing to include arts and culture. Two artists gained more work in the area and weekly art sessions continue at WEW, funded by an adult learning organisation, as a direct result of the project.

The Producer used the WEMWBS mental wellbeing tool²⁷ to measure the impact of the project. A sample of ‘before and after’ wellbeing scores showed people recorded improvements in their mental wellbeing of between 2 – 17 points. This evidence was supported by qualitative feedback.

At the end of the project, people were asked how they look after their minds and more people recorded arts activities as tools for their mental wellbeing.



²⁷ See

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

Strengthening infrastructure for local arts: Northfield

The Northfield Connecting Communities project built on Year 1 to expand its successful Music! Dance! Draw! event and create a space for regular community arts activity in the centre of the Ward. The on-going monthly NAF Café was introduced at Northfield Baptist Church at the beginning of 2016 and offers open access arts and crafts activities, performance spots for musicians, poets and groups as well as home-cooked meals on a pay-as-you-feel basis. Local artists and musicians are able to showcase their work to a live audience every month. There is no charge for entry and the NAF Café is run by volunteers.

In addition to creating opportunities for people to participate in regular arts activities, the project aimed to build local arts co-ordinator/Producer capacity by training and mentoring 2 creative artists (paid) to become capable and competent at facilitating large, multi-format events and groups.

The team of 3 were supported over time by other volunteer creatives who were keen to learn new skills and contribute to furthering arts and culture in Northfield. The Producer encouraged volunteer co-ordinators by sharing with them the vision of the project to promote local talent and create connections across communities.

Volunteers started by contributing to existing activities, like the NAF Café, and showing commitment. They were then empowered to develop something they were interested in, using the skills they brought to the team. Each role was tailored to their interests and professional ambitions, for instance one of the trainee

co-ordinators is a sound engineer and he was responsible for the performances at the monthly Café event. The Producer supported the trainees and volunteers with mentoring and shadowing opportunities.

Cultural Co-design

Working with the Producer, the trainee co-ordinators helped to set up and run the NAF Café every month, including booking artists and musicians to perform (for free), drawing together local community creative groups (such as arts and dance groups), facilitating how the groups want to run events or develop and show their work, and capturing participant profile information and feedback.

A small team of creatives developed a magazine for the project called the NAFzine, it is produced every 3 months, distributed at the NAF Café and on the NAF website (<https://northfieldartsforum.com/naf-zine-2/>). A journalism graduate interviews local artists for copy and pulls the magazine together. It provides an opportunity for writers and poets to be published and for other arts to showcase their work.

Participants at the NAF Café are regularly encouraged to suggest ideas for activities and projects and can volunteer to help make them happen.

Local groups were supported to develop performances to contribute to the large Music! Dance! Draw! event.

“We’re working towards creating a little arts community ... it’s starting to happen.” Trainee co-ordinator

Outcomes

- Establishing a regular event/space has grounded NAF’s activities firmly in Northfield. The momentum it has gained has empowered local artists and residents to shape the monthly evenings to what they want/need, and in many cases has acted as a recruitment drive, with several regular attendees going on to volunteer either at the Café itself or for other NAF activities.
- A diverse group of trainee co-ordinators and volunteer apprentices (including volunteers with learning disabilities and receiving mental health support) gained significant experience, with some able to take more active roles in the development of NAF and

arts activities more widely across the city.

- Regular opportunities for artists to showcase their work or try out work in progress with a live audience.
- An emerging arts community in outer Birmingham.

