



Pride In Place 2023-2025 Final Project Evaluation



Swarthmore
Education Centre



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Introduction

The Creative Communities, Pride in Place project worked in South Leeds, targeting areas that are affected by poverty and social exclusion and where people might be furthest from education and training.

The original four target areas were Hunslet, Holbeck, Middleton and Belle Isle. We extended the work into Beeston on agreement, as engagement in the Holbeck area was challenging.

Over two years the project aimed to work with adults in their local areas, providing access to arts and crafts activities usually out of the economic reach of the targeted beneficiaries, to help improve mental well-being and overcome social isolation, and to promote inclusion. Arts and crafts were chosen as they have been proved, at Swarthmore and elsewhere, to inspire creativity and imagination, increase confidence and self-esteem whilst also providing an accessible early route for progression into education, volunteering, and employment. To improve access to engagement, the activities were delivered in the local areas, free of charge, with refreshments provided and childcare offered.



Planned Outcomes

- Pride in Place aimed to achieve a number of outcomes:
- Improve mental well-being of the participants and overcome social isolation through the delivery of 72 arts workshops per year in the target areas, reaching approximately 200 participants over the course of the two years.
- To introduce participants to new skills and creative activities that they might not previously have had access to, developing confidence and self-esteem.
- Engage with approximately 20 volunteers to support participants and improve their own employability and confidence. As the project developed, participants would be encouraged to become volunteers.
- Promote community connections through using community venues and working with key local community partner organisations, building links to existing groups and facilities.
- Promote inclusivity by engaging people from diverse backgrounds and across all ages, over the age of 18.
- Engage participants and volunteers through active participation in community events and a variety of marketing strategies, aiming to develop the project in response to the community.
- Develop our board of trustees through widening community links.
- Signpost participants and volunteers where possible to further opportunities for support and well-being and progression.



Measuring Outcomes

Numbers and demographics

To gather evidence on numbers and certain demographics of participants in the main body of the project, we used traditional methods such as equality and diversity forms and forms gaining further information to assess people's needs. Whilst essential information such as access needs was gathered as much as possible during enrolment, the formal forms were completed by via google forms during people's first attendance. To avoid literacy / digital competency issues the forms were completed individually with support from staff or volunteers, making the participants feel as comfortable as possible.

Attendance was variable within groups and from area to area. We kept registers of attendance, non attendance and apologies.

Impact and achievement

Many of the people engaging in our project were finding life difficult with poor mental health and self-esteem. From staff experience, we did not feel it appropriate to do baseline or formal surveys on people's well-being, as this could be seen as intrusive and make people feel uncomfortable. Instead, we have gathered information on the impact in other ways:

- We collected photographic evidence of activities undertaken and work produced.
- Using these photos, we kept scrapbooks, encouraging people to add short sentences on how they had found each workshop.
- At the end of each block of sessions, participants completed visually attractive and accessible forms to give feedback. Although not including a specific question about well-being, the responses given frequently referenced well-being.
- We collected feedback through a creative process at our final event.
- We had catch-ups with volunteers at the end of each session to offer support, to assess how the sessions had gone, share observations around how participants were getting on, and discuss how best to support people. Some catch-ups were recorded formally. When time was pressured at the end of the session, some catch-ups took place more informally.
- Volunteers took part in regular reviews and additional reviews at the end of the project.
- At a thank you event for the volunteers we collected feedback through a creative process.
- We spoke to staff working in the community-based centres about the impact they thought the project had had on the participants and the local community.

Delivery

The project has been delivered in the target communities over two years. In the first year 71 sessions were delivered in Holbeck, Middleton, Hunslet and Belle Isle. The aim was that people would attend sessions at centres in their own specific communities, nearby where they lived.

In year two, 72 sessions were delivered in Beeston / Holbeck, Hunslet, and Belle Isle / Middleton. Responding to feedback and experience in year one, the areas became more blurred. We found that a significant proportion of people would have links to other nearby areas and venues and would come where they felt most comfortable. We still targeted residents of the core areas, but widened our approach when advertising and engaging.

Although originally we aimed to engage new people at each block, we had many requests for people to return. We decided to offer this opportunity to people most in need especially where there was space and devised a form to assess this. We limited returners to two people per block.

The funding for the delivery of the workshops included refreshments and some childcare. We provided drinks, snacks and lunch at every workshop. Lunches were sourced from local providers or where possible, from the venues themselves. This ensured that funding was concentrated in the communities in which we were working.

Childcare was provided at 3 blocks of workshops.

In year two, we added the delivery of two community artist residency projects. These were developed in response to the needs of the Community, on agreement with the Lottery and were funded by an underspend in a specific part of the budget.

Exhibition and celebration events occurred in all areas at the end of Year one, with additional events celebrating the installations of the outcomes of the Artist residency projects. A final celebration event was held at the end of Year two.



Engagement Overview

Community engagement

We engaged participants through a variety of avenues. Primarily we devoted time to visiting local areas and finding or creating opportunities to meet people face to face. This gave people a chance to meet us, ask questions and gave them the reassurance that they would meet a friendly face when first attending. We started off with launch events in each of the areas, but more successful engagement included:

- Attendance at local events and festivals - showcasing the project on stalls with taster activities.
- Visiting warm space and meal events at local community events - ie, food cycle evening meal at St Luke's Church in Holbeck, breakfast club at Bitmo's gate, Soup and roll at Hunslet Involve.
- Holding pop-up information spaces at the local libraries
- Visiting support groups such as well-being groups / toddler groups / food pantries / knit and natter groups.

Social Prescribing and referrals from community professionals

We made contact with social prescribing networks and well-being / community professionals in South Leeds early on in the project. Around half way through the first year, as the project became more established and trust was earned, this approach began to reap it's rewards and we received referrals from different agencies.

We were invited to the Belle Isle Network meetings and worked closely with Asset Based Community Development Workers (a Leeds City Council initiative) based in Belle Isle and Beeston. We became known by councillors in Hunslet and key people in other areas. These connections enhanced our knowledge of people and places in the communities.

We became part of the Inner South Leeds Community Network group facilitated by Forum Central Leeds and were invited to meetings and events which enabled us to reach the people that needed it most.



Volunteer Engagement

Initially, we promoted volunteering roles on 'Be Collective' - Voluntary Action Leeds' online platform. This was the most successful tool for recruiting volunteers from across Leeds. Additionally, we created social media posts, connecting with other organisations, who shared our posts on their pages. We distributed posters and flyers in the City centre volunteer drop-in centre and at festivals and events we attended. Creating adverts on Swarthmore's website was less successful for recruitment, as we had interest from individuals who were interested in volunteering at the Swarthmore Centre, rather than in South Leeds.

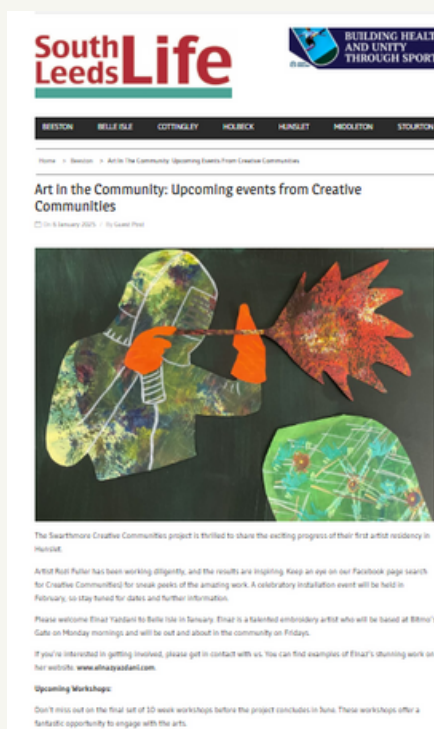
Through building relationships with participants at our workshops and conducting informal chats with them, we were able to support them to progress onto volunteering with us. Having these conversations with participants over a few weeks, rather than asking them to commit, gave them the opportunity to ask questions about the volunteer role, the DBS and references.

When advertising for volunteers to support us to plan, prepare and put on our exhibitions in year one, we partnered with the University of Leeds and Leeds Arts University, publishing the role on their online student platforms and in their newsletters. Out of the three candidates we interviewed, we were able to offer them all voluntary roles with us. Two of these volunteers supported our exhibitions in our first year, with one of these volunteers, Lily, going on to support our weekly art group working with the Community Artist in Hunslet and covering volunteer absences at other workshops.



Publicity and Social Media

In addition to face to face engagement we produced printed flyers and posters which we distributed at events and placed in local areas, including community venues, doctors surgeries, supermarkets and Community hubs and Libraries. We also sent them to Social Prescribers and Community organisations to distribute amongst their networks.



We established a good relationship with South Leeds Life, and our articles which were regularly published in their monthly Newspaper. South Leeds Life is widely read and distributed, both hard copy and digitally. Articles were written both reporting on events and publicising sessions and activities. Reports were also written by South Leeds Life journalist Jeremy Morton who regularly attended our events. These can be found by following these links.

[South Leeds Life - Creative Communities](#)

[South Leeds Life - Belle Isle Tapestry Unveiling](#)

[South Leeds Life - Celebrating Hunslet](#)

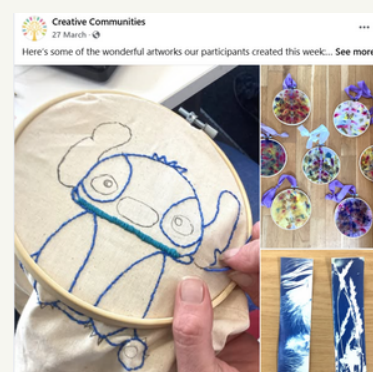
[South Leeds Life - Talent and Pride at Leeds City Museum](#)

In year one, social media was via Swarthmore's main Facebook page and shared by the local community group and organisation pages.

At the end of our first year of delivery, we created a Creative Communities Facebook Page to engage with individuals who had participated, those who were interested in participating, as well as organisations and individuals we worked with on the project. Partner organisations sharing our posts was useful for promoting our project and for recruiting participants. We aimed to do weekly posts during the times we were delivering the workshops, which we mostly achieved, although it was difficult, as we had limited capacity. Using the platform to showcase participants' creations was a great way to promote pride and to maintain communication and engagement with participants.

Please follow this link to view the Facebook Page we created:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61564447587186>



Delivery methods

Year one

In the first year, workshop delivery took place in 6 week blocks. In each of the 4 areas we delivered 3 blocks over the course of the year. Two blocks ran concurrently, so we had 4 blocks taking place in each term, one in each area. The second block in Holbeck ran for only 5 sessions, due to low numbers, and an awareness that the last session was due to take place in the school holidays. We offered participants the opportunity to take part in an additional session of their choosing elsewhere.

We tried to offer each block of sessions at a different venue in order to maximise reach. This was successful everywhere except for Hunslet where we found there were few appropriate venues for the workshops to take place. In Hunslet we worked in two venues only.

In each block of sessions a different professional artist delivered a workshop showcasing a different technique. Participants were encouraged to attend every session in the block to come and try something new, even if they thought they weren't going to like it. Two immediate benefits to this were that people might find they did like it and also they would maintain the social contact.

We invited two volunteers to support each block of workshops. Some volunteers supported more than one block of workshops.

The focus of the workshops broadly followed the theme of Pride and Place. Artists were given a brief and supplied with information and images about each area, looking at history, community, places, people, the local landscape and maps of the area. Many artists also did their own research. It was easier for some disciplines to adhere to the theme than others, and quite often the participants would choose to follow their own ideas and/or journeys. This was very much accepted and encouraged.

Year two

Regular sessions

Before the end of year, we had realised from feedback from participants that they were finding 6 weeks too short, and they wanted more sessions. As well as enabling them to learn additional skills, this would also allow more time for the group to gel and forge more substantive friendships. Therefore in year two, we extended the block lengths to 10 weeks. We delivered 3 concurrent blocks across the areas during the Autumn and Spring terms. The focus and format of the individual sessions remained mostly the same. For a couple of disciplines, such as mosaic and clay, the artists delivered two consecutive sessions, which allowed people to build on their skills and also produce both individual work and group pieces.

We also encouraged people to attend where they felt most comfortable. On occasion this meant transferring some of the budget for volunteer travel to facilitate access for some participants. This was for people who were unable to afford bus fare, or use public transport for access reasons.

Again, we invited two volunteers to support each workshop. In year two most volunteers had been participants on previous blocks.

Community Artist Residencies

In Year two we also delivered two, 3 month long artist residencies. These took place in Belle Isle and in Hunslet, in the places where we most successful in engagement and had forged strong relationships with the community.

The artists were engaged for 2 days a week and were based in venues in the Community. They also visited many groups and venues away from their base, delivering workshops and capturing stories.

4 Volunteers assisted the artist residency in Belle Isle and 3 volunteers supported the Hunslet project.

Final workshops

At the end of year two we had 12 sessions to deliver in the Summer Term. We took the decision to deliver these as 3 x 4 week blocks. We invited participants who had shown good attendance and / or showed a particular need to come back. Each block was delivered by a single artist, delivering a different technique and the participants were given the choice of which to attend. Two of the blocks took place in the target areas and one took place at Swarthmore. This approach enabled people to develop their skills in a single technique and allowed them to focus more on their imagination and creativity. Inviting people to Swarthmore enabled us to introduce them to a technique we couldn't take out to the Community and to visit our Centre.

Trips and partnership with Leeds City Museum

Leeds City Museum agreed the use of the Broderick Hall fairly early on in the project. As part of this agreement we were offered the use of the community corridor for a longer exhibition. They also offered us two trips to their archives at Leeds Discovery Centre. One of these took place in Summer 2024 and one in Spring 2025.



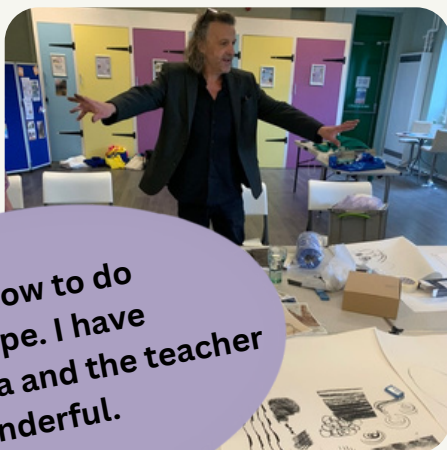
The artists and techniques

The recruitment of artists to deliver the workshops was considered carefully. An artist brief was written and distributed around people known to Swarthmore, artists networks and ArtsJobs UK, with an invitation to submit proposals for suitable workshops. Artists were invited to deliver sessions after discussion and meeting if they were unknown to us.

A total of 26 artists delivered workshops. Information was supplied about the areas and support was given to the artists to understand and manage the needs of the participants, with either the project coordinator or volunteer coordinator attending each session. We ensured that each workshop in a block showcased a different media.

Workshops included: clay, embroidery, lino printing, drawing, oil painting, watercolour painting, collage, puppetry, mask making, needle felting, natural dyeing, upcycling fashion, jesmonite moulding, rag rugging, wirework, book binding, photography, screen printing, animation, cyanotype printing and mosaic.

For the Artist residencies a detailed brief was circulated and advertised. Applicants had to apply by submitting a brief CV and a project proposal, outlining their ideas and delivery methods. We were particularly interested in people with experience of co-creation. Out of over 20 applicants we interviewed four artists, and two of these were offered the work.



I learnt how to do Cyanotype. I have aspahsia and the teacher was wonderful.

Meeting Engagement Targets and outcomes

The target reach for the project was 200 participants.

300 people completed the initial application form for the sessional workshops

Of these at 182 attended at least one workshop.

151 attended 3 or more workshops.

We reached around 125 additional people via the community residencies.

Activity	Numbers	Comments
<p>Workshop delivery in year 1</p> <p>The workshops were delivered in 6 week blocks, 12 blocks of workshops were delivered.</p>	<p>117 people attended at least one workshop. 7 people attended more than one block. 99 attended 3 or more workshops 78 attended between 4 and 6 workshops.</p>	<p>Overall, this was good attendance and reached target figures for the first year. Some of the blocks had better attendance than others. This varied from area to area and largely depended on make up of the areas and our success in forming positive working relationships within each area.</p>
<p>Year two - Sessional Workshop delivery.</p> <p>Workshops were delivered in 10 week blocks. 6 blocks of workshops were delivered.</p>	<p>64 people attended at least one workshop. 51 attended 3 or more workshops 49 attended 5-10 workshops 30 attended 8 or more workshops.</p>	<p>We did not reach as many people because we had reduced the number of blocks. This was in response to feedback. We felt that the longer blocks had a greater, positive impact on well-being and reducing social isolation, giving people more time to feel the benefits during the project and afterwards.</p>
<p>Year two - final 4 weeks.</p> <p>Workshops were delivered in 4 week blocks. 3 blocks of workshops were delivered.</p>	<p>21 people attended at least one workshop. Of these 1 was a new participant and the rest had engaged in previous blocks. 18 attended 3 -4 workshops.</p>	<p>These workshops gave people a chance to consolidate one set of skills and gain confidence by having the chance to create a more substantial piece of work, as well as contributing to a group piece to go on public display in the museum.</p>

Meeting Engagement Targets and outcomes

Participants

Activity	Numbers	Comments
Year two Community Artist residency in Hunslet	80 people engaged overall 10 people engaged in the core group, with 8 attending on a regular basis.	During the residencies the Core groups were designed to let people attend more informally, at times discussed with the venue and the participants. The artist visited existing groups to engage them in workshops and gathering stories about the area.
Year two Community Artist residency in Belle Isle	71 people engaged overall. 22 people attended the Core group with 6-10 attending at one time.	The core group meetings was held twice a week at a fixed time. People were invited to come when they were able. The artist visited existing groups and centres to engage them in workshops and gathering stories about the area.

We reached our target in terms of number of people engaged. Commitment to attending all sessions was difficult people for reasons including managing their mental or physical health, attending appointments, caring duties and instability and demands in their personal lives.

Volunteers

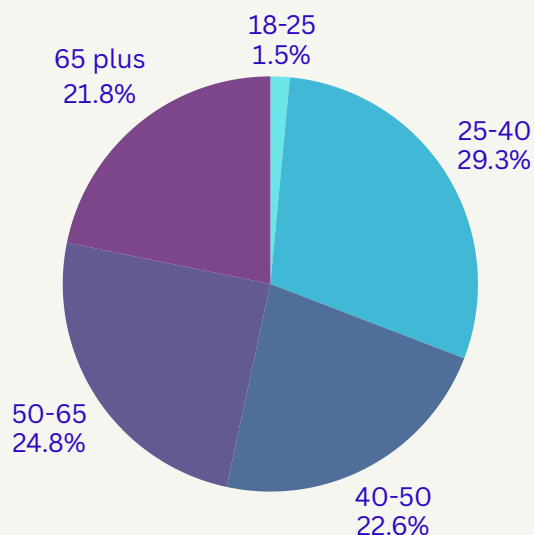
- Over the course of the project, we **contacted 31 individuals** who had applied to volunteer with us through our website. We had **12 workshop participants express interest** in volunteering with us.
- We conducted **35 initial chats** with prospective volunteers from across Leeds.
- Out of the 12 workshop participants who we spoke to about volunteering, **10 of them became volunteers**, supporting at least one block of workshops.
- Overall, we had **22 volunteers, who supported at least 1 block** of workshops on the project.
- We aimed to have **2 volunteers supporting each block** of workshops and we achieved this at every block throughout the project, except one where we had 1 volunteer.

Inclusion

We aimed to be as inclusive as possible. The only criteria people had to meet was that they were over the age of 18 and were resident in or had strong links to the target areas. We collected data that we felt would be useful to Swarthmore and to ensure we were reaching the audience we were targeting.

Not all participants completed an Equality and Diversity form or answered all the questions.

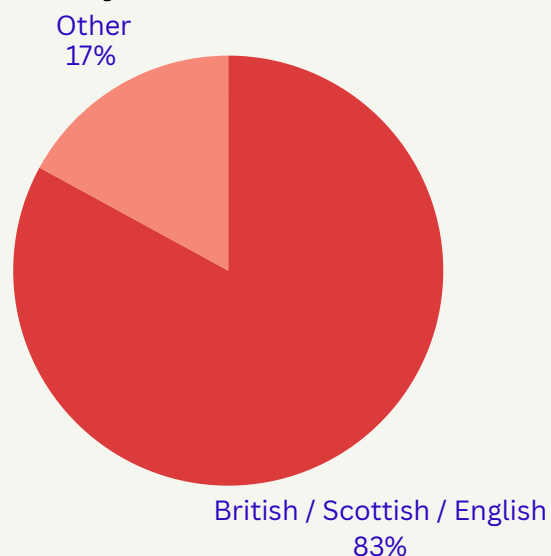
Age



The age range was spread fairly evenly from 25 upwards.

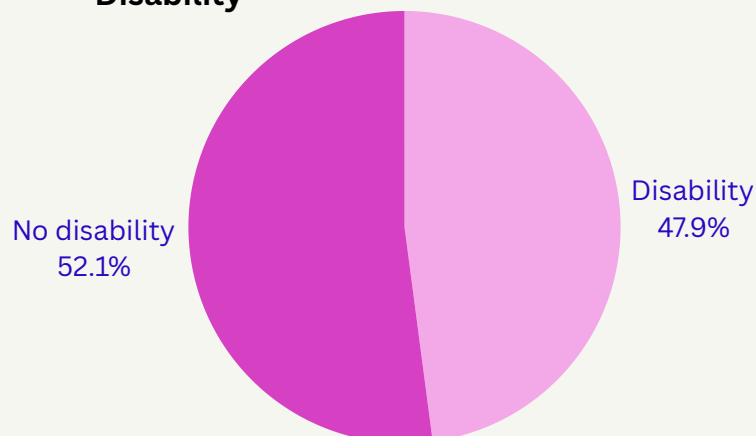
We only had two people under the age of 25. Reasons for this might be that younger people may have more opportunities elsewhere, be less settled or prefer to look for opportunities and support networks aimed at a younger age group.

Nationality



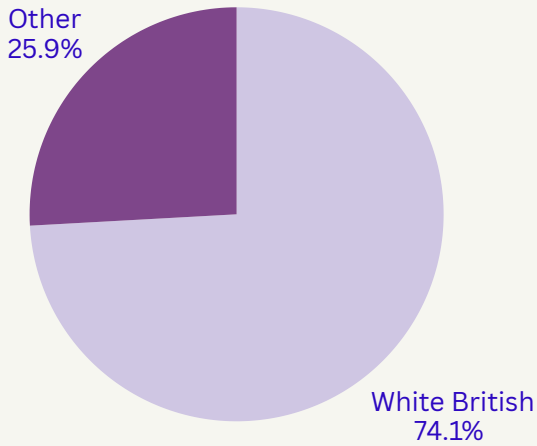
The majority of people identified as being of British Nationalities, reflecting the demographics of the areas.

Disability



A large proportion of people identified as having a disability, learning disability or learning difficulty.

Ethnicity



Overall, the ethnicity of participants broadly aligned with the predominant ethnicity in the target areas. Included in 'other' are 19 different identified ethnicities.

Employment status



Reasons for not looking for work included carers, people with disabilities, people unable to work due to poor mental or physical health.



Accessibility

We only asked people to let us know conditions that we needed to be aware of for safety or access reasons, or so that we could provide adequate support, or if we needed to know in case of an emergency. We felt that asking too many personal questions would hinder the building of trust and relationships.

69 people identified as having a disability or learning difficulty / disability. This was a large proportion of people and we endeavoured to make sure everyone felt welcome, comfortable and could access the workshops. This was done by visiting the venues beforehand, working with the artists to ensure the workshops were accessible and people could access at any level. The support of the volunteers was invaluable in helping to make sure everyone felt supported. Volunteers received training to help them understand the best way to support people with different needs.

We also welcomed people with hearing impairments and 2 with partial or total visual impairment

Mental health - around 18 people disclosed having a mental health condition initially, but during the sessions, as people became more comfortable, many more divulged poor mental well-being and anxiety.

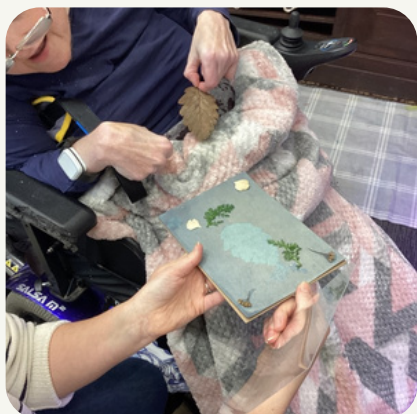
A number of people had diabetes.

There was a large variety of dietary needs and we made every effort to accommodate everyone.

A notable number of people talked about having some level of neurodivergence, including ADHD, Autism. This wasn't always declared on the form.

A notable number of people declared physical health issues, including arthritis, Fibromyalgia, heart conditions and a variety of other conditions.

In some areas we worked with people who spoke English as a second language or minimal English. We were unable to employ interpreters, but used translation apps, visual clues and in many cases encouraged friends or other participants to help translate.



Key Achievements

A total number of 332 participants were engaged in either workshops or artist residencies, giving people opportunities to try new techniques in safe space.

22 volunteers were engaged in supporting at least one block of workshops and/ or one of our exhibition support roles (engaging for at least 6 weeks).

10 Participants went on to become volunteers in the project.

The project has enhanced participants well-being, self-esteem, confidence and sense of community.

We have established a presence and built up trust in South Leeds within the communities and with community organisations.

The project was adapted in response to feedback which increased meaningful engagement



Permanent artwork created by participants has been installed in local areas in and outside 11 community venues in the target areas.

26 professional artists delivered the workshops enabling people to create their own work, think about all the positive aspects of their community and develop creative and additional transferable skills.

Belle Isle Tapestry was co-created and is on display in Leeds City Museum

The Celebrating Hunslet artwork animation has been turned into a video in partnership with Opera North.

An exhibition of work by the people of South Leeds has been installed in Leeds City Museum, which will remain in place for a total of 12 weeks, encouraging people from South Leeds into the City Centre and showing the general public the pride and talent that exists in South Leeds.

Impact on Participants

The reported impact on participants, particularly in terms of well-being, has far exceeded expectations.

After completion of the initial application form we contacted people shortly before the start of each block to ask if they would still like to attend and advise them in more detail about timings and workshop delivery. We contacted people in the way they felt most comfortable, via email, phone, text, WhatsApp and letters. Establishing personal contact and giving accessible information increased understanding of the project and made people feel more comfortable entering the space. This contact was maintained throughout the project.

It is known that engaging with art can lower stress hormones like cortisol and increase the production of endorphins and dopamine, which are known to improve mood and reduce anxiety and depression. Creative communities showcased that. By focusing on the different workshops, participants had a break from thinking about their problems. They had a chance to do something for themselves and work creatively. Self-esteem was lifted by sharing work and confirmation of its value. This was embedded when people had the opportunity to have their work on public display and exhibited professionally.

Participants also met and talked to people who had similar challenges, and this reduced their sense of isolation. Concentrating on the art allowed these conversations to develop naturally and at a comfortable pace.

In addition to learning new techniques, art and working in a supportive atmosphere can boost transferable skills such as communication, decision making, problem solving, time management and adaptability. We ensured there were opportunities to work individually and collaboratively.

The feedback from participants has been very positive and has been reinforced by comments and conversations from partner organisations. In addition to feedback about the workshops, outcomes and new skills, people have expressed how they have felt included, how much they have enjoyed meeting new people and feeling part of a group and how their confidence has increased.

We have chosen three participants who agreed for us to share Case Studies, but it was very hard to choose just three.

Lexi

Lexi found about about the project through the church she attends which was the venue for the workshops .

Lexi says “I’m interested in art and craft so it was a really exciting opportunity.”

Lexi contacted us and we first met her at a public event organised by the church, where we had a stall and activity. We discussed how she would be able to access the workshops as Lexi is registered blind. Lexi had a support worker who was able to come along to give her 1-1 support at all times.

Although feeling excited Lexi still felt nervous in case the sessions were difficult to engage with. Having had the early conversation it enabled us to help Lexi access the workshops and make her feel comfortable. I was able to inform the artists and discuss with them ways that we could support Lexi to be fully involved. Lexi would discuss her ideas with her support worker and the artist and ways were found for Lexi to paint what she was imagining. All Lexi’s work was very much her own.

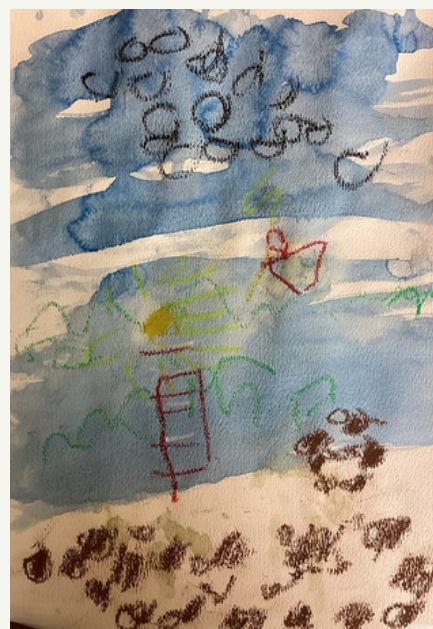
“I had a time carved out with support and materials to be creative, I was able to focus on exploring visual experience that I don’t have for myself particularly around colours and when I painted a view with a lot of guidance from my Support Worker”

“It’s definitely helped me start having more ideas. One thing that’s helped my confidence is that one of the things I’ve made was a mistake that I’ve been using as a drink mat in my room and I can touch that and know that I made it and people look at it and like it, I even had someone say they would’ve spent money on that.”

Lexi put the view that she painted with “from the Cliff Top” into a competition at the great Middleton Park show and got third place.

“I didn't expect much to happen because I've had to explain to people what it is, so to help it along as well as the credit I gave it a title, ‘View from Cliff Top in Storm’. It was judged anonymously, it came third in category! And I think there were more than three in the category! I'm ecstatic and mind blown”

Using oil pastels enabled Lexi to feel the picture and navigate where to put her marks. She discussed with her support what she was imagining and was supported to find the right colours.



Since completing the block of sessions Lexi came to the exhibition we held at the end of year one at Middleton Baptist Church and also to the final event. Thinking about Next Steps, Lexi says

"I have studied art before but I stayed around the conceptual art and didn't try to explore a visual media very much in their own right and I didn't have many skills to bring to it. In this class I learnt and tried out some techniques. I was really surprised how much I got out of the painting and I also explored what things look like and started working on colour and how you might look and became interested in that. I used to be a bit immature about visual things, feeling that everybody talked about them all the time, and they were just boring and normal. I know now that there's a lot going on, and I can learn about it and be excited about it. These workshops put me in a position where I can imagine how to make more things, I can see how I could apply real craft to what I do. I've got quite a lot of ideas and things on the go, but I need more support hours to be able to really work on it. I want to upcycle more stuff. Doing that T-shirt was incredible! Feel like when I did my studies, I was really fixated in a particular corner, so I feel like now I wanna come out and explore the whole thing. Or at least maybe a different corner or two. I've asked my social worker about Day services, when I might be able to be supported to carry on doing arts and crafts. I used to think that would be a really negative thing to use a day service, but now if it means I get to actually do the things that I've got in my head Instead of just imagining them and being frustrated because I haven't got the support hours, I think it might be alright because it's what I'm achieving rather than what type of work environment it is."

Many hands supporting Lexi to decorate her t-shirt and Lexi modelling her t-shirt.



Carol

Carol went to the Food Bank at Middleton Family Centre and saw one of our posters. She was going through a lot and wanted to do something. She knew she liked art and it came at the right time. Carol said she wasn't really nervous as she thought it might help her. Before attending the sessions Carol had been working in a hospital, a job she had to give up because of what she was going through with her child. She became very isolated.

Carol attended the first set of sessions at Middleton Family Centre, but this was a poorly attended block of sessions, so when Carol asked if she could attend more sessions, she was given the opportunity. The second set of workshops Carol attended were well-attended and gave Carol the opportunity to meet more people and make more links in the Community. When Carol had her 60th birthday, she sent an invitation out to everybody and asked us to share it.

Carol tried everything. Her self-portrait using oil paints was a standout piece. This was the first time Carol had used oil paints, let alone try and paint a self-portrait, and she expressed doubts that she could do it. The artist, Luke Thompson, guided her through the process, breaking the teaching down into manageable steps. On learning that this piece was to be exhibited at Leeds City Museum, Carol wrote this testimony to sit alongside it.



The First Stroke

This Self-portrait was painted during a difficult season as a mother navigating trials with my child. I felt the heavy weight of life pressing in and joined a local community arts programme not because I saw myself as an artist, but to avoid falling into depression. That self-portrait was my first piece. It's not about perfection - it's about survival, healing and choosing to express instead of collapse. Each brushstroke as a prayer, a colour, a cry of faith. Consequently now, being shown in Leeds City Museum as proof that light can break through even in dark moments.

That's more than a portrait: it's a testimony.
Thank you for standing here.

-Carol Williams

After attending the two sets of workshops, Carol volunteered with the project: “Attending the sessions helped me, I saw what it did for me, and I wanted to see if I could do the same for anyone else and meet people at the same time.”

Carol started looking for work. As she left her last session of volunteering in Beeston, she saw an advert for a course and signed up for it. She completed a level 3 ESOL teaching course and also a level 3 Teaching Assistant course.

“It was just being with people, because I spent a lot of time on my own, and it really helped. When I came to Beeston I just loved it. It was good just being in the presence of people.

Doing the art, being in that environment, is so good. The art is so good for the brain, focusing on the art and being relaxed. It makes me feel so good. When I retire I am going to take it up .

I didn't expect it to turn out so wonderful, to be honest... it was amazing”.



“Thank you so much for the opportunity to be part of the arts sessions and to volunteer. It came at a very emotional time for me, and it truly helped me more than you know.

Seeing the artwork on display moved me deeply – it was healing and right on time. “

Marie

Marie found out about the Project via an exercise class she attended at Beeston Village Community Centre, where the sessions were to take place. She decided to apply to help her with her social skills and distract her from her mental health issues. She said that she spent too much time in her bed and away from people, depressed and lonely.

Before she started she said felt very anxious and uptight about coming, overwhelmed and worried, but was helped a lot by Penny, the project coordinator, and the volunteers.

Marie was very quiet and didn't talk to many people at first. One of the volunteers, Lauren, noticed this and sat next to her, just talking to her. After a while, Marie started responding to her and then joining in conversations with other people more.

Marie said: *"The project made a massive difference to me and my mental well-being in that I was looking forward to coming each week and feeling less overwhelmed. As I got used to the surroundings and feeling supported, I knew if I got overwhelmed, I could go to a quiet place to calm down with my earplugs in."*

"I learned a lot about other people, what they struggle with and their coping strategies, which in turn has helped me too. It was a breath of fresh air. Very enlightening and fun. Lots of laughter and nice food."

"I was pleasantly surprised by the things I was able to make and felt proud and less useless."

I liked the glass painting workshop the most as it had me deeply engrossed and I was able to forget my problems, create a masterpiece and feel good about myself and my creativity.



Towards the end of the course Marie divulged more of her troubles. She was worried that she would “*digress back to her bed*”, she wanted to reduce her Isolation. She had been in bed for about 5 years, with depressions and anxiety, triggered by the menopause. Before this happened Marie had been an active person with a good job.

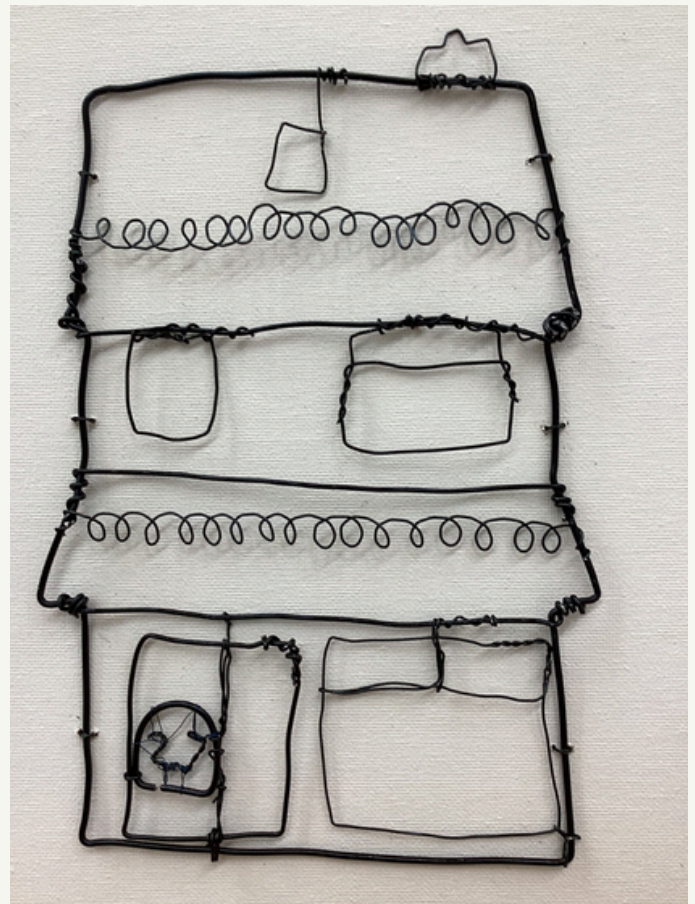
Over her time on the course Marie found it easier to get out of bed and it helped her with her social fears. We were due to start another block of sessions in Hunslet. Initially it was full, but shortly before it started a space became free and we invited Marie back as she demonstrated a real need.

Reflecting on what next, Marie still felt really sad that the workshops had to come to an end because she still felt overwhelmed with people she didn't know. She would have liked a long-term programme as it really helped her be distracted from her health problems and learn to be more confident in herself.

“However, my experience of being in the group was very encouraging and in the future I may reflect on that to help me move forward.”

During one of the sessions, thinking about the community they lived in, the group thought about the terraced houses and buildings that are traditional in the area where they live. They used wire to depict these houses during a workshop facilitated by Charlotte Whitmore.

At the end of this project ten pieces of art work were chosen and made into greetings cards. Marie was delighted and proud when she heard that we used this image of her work.



Additional Participant Feedback

As a participant, the quality of the supplies and artist activities are proper. It's not doing lip service to artistic pursuits. It validated me as worth it. It wasn't half hearted. It wasn't about filling time. It was about nurturing creativity and the wellness that brings.

I found the drawing with Boris enlightening, even though I didn't think I would like it. It was good to get my feelings onto paper

In every class that I attended I learnt brand new skills. I did not know any of the skills that had been taught,

Being involved in the art workshops taught me patience. If something wasn't going my way or how I wanted it to look I would get frustrated and annoyed. But I took a breath and my artworks often turned out quite nice. I've learnt to persevere.

It was a very supportive place. I felt safe enough to come when my mental health was bad, and when I got my cancer diagnosis, Just such a nice place to be when I was struggling

I liked that each week was different and it was long enough to complete something to be able to take our work home each week.

Volunteer Impact

When we first recruited a cohort of volunteers in the summer of 2023, we held an in person volunteer training day. During delivery, volunteer recruitment was more incremental and so we conducted inductions individually and with small groups of volunteers, inviting them into Swarthmore to do this at the same time as filling out their DBS forms. We adapted the training presentation into scenarios, which we discussed with the volunteers, exploring support strategies and helping them to understand their role in safeguarding. Over the course of the project, we made improvements to our support and monitoring strategies, conducting reviews during mid points and at the end of volunteers time with us, enabling us to reflect on their goals with them, support their wellbeing and signpost them to other relevant opportunities.

After collecting feedback from the volunteers about what training they'd find helpful, we collaborated with the two Community artists, who designed a bespoke training session on supporting participants with different needs. 11 volunteers attended this training day, with 10 of them saying that it helped them work towards their goals for further volunteering. At the end of the project, we held a Volunteer Thank You event, collaborating with Voluntary Action Leeds, who came to do some signposting with the volunteers. We also worked with a bookbinding artist to design a creative feedback session, with the aim of collecting feedback about the volunteers' experiences in a more engaging and open-ended way. 11 volunteers attended this event.

Many of our volunteers told us how much the volunteering increased their confidence. Participants who went on to volunteer were often very nervous at the start of their volunteering and felt it was a big step for them because they had not been in work or doing any kind of volunteering for a long time. Many of them told us about their social anxiety. We emphasised the value of lived experience of mental health difficulties in providing peer support. Indeed, it was really evident that the volunteers used their understanding and empathy that came from personal experiences of mental health difficulties, to support the wellbeing of others in the workshops.



Case Studies have been undertaken for three volunteers.

Lauren

Lauren, from Beeston, applied to volunteer with us after coming across our Facebook post, which had been shared by Voluntary Action Leeds. Lauren's only other work experience before this was volunteering in a charity shop. She began volunteering with us in Beeston in April 2024 and went on to volunteer at 3 more blocks of workshops as well as at events promoting the project.

Lauren said that her goals for volunteering were, *"to develop her confidence with talking to people and having structure in her week."*

Lauren talked about some of the challenges of volunteering, saying

"At the beginning it can be difficult to judge when I don't know someone, how they like to be talked to."

However, gradually she began initiating conversations:

"I ask the participants how they're finding the workshops and I can see the changes in people over the weeks. I feel more confident introducing myself to the artists."

Over the course of volunteering with us, Lauren's confidence increased and guidance was provided about supporting participants with different needs, which helped her to develop her approach.

Lauren worked on breaking down instructions when a participant was struggling to understand, finding it frustrating at first. Lauren persevered, stopped worrying so much and developed patience. Lauren was using the experience to support her work with participants with different needs, reflecting on and overcoming some of her personal challenges to do this. Lauren found it helpful to listen to what others had to say in the debriefs.

After a year of volunteering Lauren's confidence in communicating with others and her trust in her own instincts had improved a great deal. She said:

"Now I take the time to judge it and get used to how to support people. I ask more if there's anything I can do. I'm more comfortable with asking people if they need help. Before I could see that people needed help but didn't always feel confident enough to ask. Because I've done a few of the workshops, I feel I can judge situations better."



In January 2025 . Lauren was supported to apply for her first paid role, as a Learning Support Assistant at Swarthmore and was successful in her application. She continued to volunteer with us.

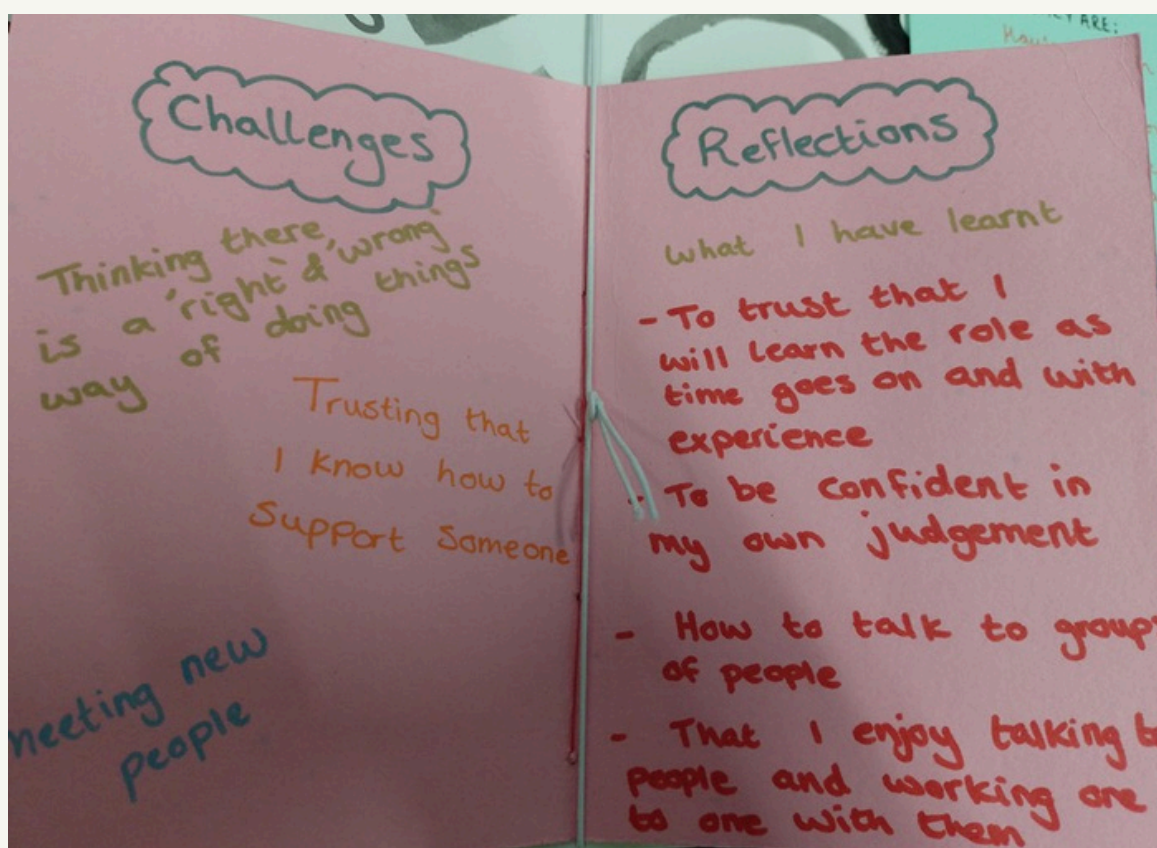
During her LSA role it was clear how the volunteering had helped Lauren prepare for it. Lauren spoke about how she reminds herself of how much she developed over the course of her volunteering. At the beginning of working with a new group she always feels nervous and daunted but is able to use her experience to make judgements.

“I think it's been helpful to look back at how I feel more confident since I started volunteering”

Lauren gave us valuable and competent support during the final event. She now volunteers with Involve Leeds, one of the community centres we worked with.

Reflecting on her time during the project at the volunteer thank you event, she said she had learnt:

*“to trust that I will learn the role as time goes and with experience,
to be confident in my own judgement
how to talk to groups of people
That I enjoy talking to people and working one to one with them”*



Vanessa

Supported by a friend, Vanessa first attended the workshops in her local area of Hunslet. *“Before this I was doing nothing and wasn't leaving my house. I wanted to be part of something.”*

After attending the workshops, Vanessa was invited to become a volunteer with the first Community Artist in Residence, Rozi Fuller, in Hunslet.

Vanessa supported Rozi to deliver activities and facilitate conversations at different community groups in Hunslet, to collect stories from residents about what was important to them in their local area. Vanessa's had a strong interest in art and was encouraged to get involved in planning some of these sessions with Rozi as well. Vanessa contributed enormously to the work on this Residency, also attending Rozi's weekly art group to co-create the collage and animation artwork representing the stories of Hunslet.

“Working with different people has given me a lot of confidence. I didn't think I was able to talk to groups of people. It's been amazing working with Rozi. She's a wonderful person.”



Vanessa went on to volunteer at more workshops. Her biggest challenge was her mental health, in particular her anxiety. We checked in with Vanessa throughout the sessions to provide some emotional support.

“They regularly checked in and helped to solve any issues that occurred in the workshops. Everything was clearly explained to me and I was always clear on what was expected of me. I found the feedback at the end of the sessions to be invaluable. This is where I started to realise I wasn't rubbish, I was actually quite bright and good with people.”

Vanessa came to Swarthmore to support planning and preparing for the final exhibition. To come to Leeds was a huge step for Vanessa. Because of her access needs, we supported her financially with travel.

Vanessa created this collage on Canva of participants' drawings, which we printed on foam board and displayed in the final exhibition. This was the first time Vanessa had used Canva



Being part of the project supported Vanessa towards her longer term goals. She contributed a huge amount of time, care and passion to the project and her words also express how much being part of the project has meant to her:

“I loved the art workshops and wanted to be more involved. When I started volunteering, I was full of anxiety and apprehension. I was convinced that I’d let people down. But over time I started to realise that I was good at talking to and helping people. It’s the best thing I’ve ever done. These last two years have proven to me that I have grown as a person and will hopefully go on to do more wonderful things. I have also learnt a lot about my community, its people and what a wonderful place it is. Being involved in art has lit me up.”

“My future involves more volunteering hopefully with a creative aspect and then all being well I can use my newly learnt skills, social skills and experience to look for work.”

Alan

Alan was referred from Social Prescribing Services but was extremely nervous and uncertain about coming to a new place and being with people he didn't know. We arranged to meet him at BITMO's Gate, the venue where we'd be delivering the workshops, with the aim of introducing him to the setting, to us and to staff at the centre, to get to know some friendly faces before attending. The staff at BITMO and the Asset Based Community Development Worker talked to him about other groups and activities, which Alan subsequently became involved in.

Alan's confidence grew immensely over the course of the project and went from being very nervous before attending the workshops to progressing to supporting others as he began volunteering with us.

After participating in the workshops, Alan also enrolled in an art access course at Leeds City College, starting in September 2024.

Alan volunteered in two sets of workshops and at the second Community Artist Residency in Belle Isle. During this role where he was based at BITMO, supporting participants to get involved in stitching their stories onto the collective artwork.

One of Alan's goals was to increase his confidence in communicating with different people. In the middle of his volunteering in 2024 Alan said:

"I still feel a barrier stopping me communicating properly. I'm trying to come out of my shell more. My goal is to talk to more people."

Later he began to feel a difference in himself in his supportive role:

: "it feels like participants are feeling comfortable in talking to me, opening up more and divulging about themselves."

Alan felt he benefited from the training to help him work towards his goals. The training looked at managing difficult conversations and he used some of these strategies as he explored his volunteering role:

"For me, I don't want to offend so I stop myself saying things. The training helped clarify what to say and what not to."



At the end of the project, Alan shared some of his ideas for art workshops he wants to facilitate himself. He talked about the value of shadowing facilitators and skills sharing for developing his own facilitation practice. He has been put in touch with other Creative Communities volunteers who have been thinking about following this path, in the hope that this gives them an opportunity to create a support network for these South Leeds artists to enable them to continue to develop.

At the final exhibition, we were delighted to play a film created by Alan for his final course project, reflecting his journey. Alan is going on to study Art & Design at University in September of this year.

Please follow this link to watch Alan's film:

[South Leeds - Alan Reynolds](#)



Additional Volunteer Feedback

The volunteering has opened doors and built new strong relationships. It's given me the confidence to share my skills, as I'm really not good at selling myself.

The atmosphere created by penny and Honor enabled me to have self belief. It's given me a dare to dream attitude. I never saw creativity as a feasible career before this

Penny and Honor were supportive if I was having an off day. They were amazing.

When I first came I thought I didn't have that much to contribute but that changed. I could recognise that in the people I volunteered with.

A participant turned volunteer wrote a letter to her former self (during the volunteer thank you day, reflecting on her time with Creative Communities.



I'm writing with a message to hold on. In January 2025 you will start a craft class that will lead to volunteer work. You will only volunteer for a 4 week programme, but it will be instrumental in you finding yourself and your place in the world. Your difficult experiences will help you relate to people and help others

Community Impact

Creative Communities demonstrated a strong impact on the local community. The project enhanced well-being within the community and empowered local residents, strengthening community cohesion. Lasting connections were made with local community organisations and there is ongoing dialogue and work with Swarthmore.

It was notable that the greatest impact was made in areas such as Hunslet and Belle Isle, where there was existing interaction and networking across the community organisations.

In Belle Isle and Hunslet we became a known presence in the local communities. Trust was gained and organisations and residents alike became aware of the project and welcomed us. The support and growing relationships with partner organisations proved vital to the success of the project. There was also been involvement and interest from City Councillors in both these areas. There are already discussions about possible future collaboration, subject to funding.

In Belle Isle we were greatly supported by the welcome and influence of Bitmo and their introduction to the Belle Isle Community Network, where local organisations work with each other, through communication and mutual signposting. We worked in 5 different venues in Belle Isle.

In Hunslet we established an ongoing relationship with Involve Leeds and Hunslet Library and Community Hub. Opera North also began work in Hunslet in Year 2, working on a Song for Hunslet. We were able to work together to share stories and refer participants to ongoing activity and engagement in their community.

In Beeston, Middleton and Holbeck we established good relationships with community venues and organisations, including Hamara, Health for All, and Holbeck Together.

We gave financial support to venues throughout the project by paying for room hire. In addition, if the venues were able to supply us with refreshments and lunch we paid them to supply this. If this was not possible, we made every effort to source refreshments within the community.

The Creative Communities project in South Leeds is a shining example of how art and collaboration can truly transform lives. This initiative crossed over different amazing organisations to create impact!

Karl Witty, from Leeds Forum Central

It has been amazing to see so many members of the community come together to enjoy the 'Creative Communities'! Everyone was friendly and more importantly, patient with everyone involved. Seeing the most vulnerable in the community have something that was inclusive for them was great.

Kirsty Price from Trinity Network

Artist Residencies

The two artist residencies were a huge success. They brought the community together in a way beyond what we had imagined, proving an exceptional tool for exploring and establishing Pride in Place.

Working with a regular artist based in the community, using an accessible approach, increased trust and allowed the theme of Pride in Place to be explored deeply. People were encouraged to engage as much or as little as they wanted or had capacity for.

The choice of artist for the residency was key to their success. They were required to have expertise in their field, to have experience and knowledge of co-creation, to be adaptable, resilient, approachable and self-reliant.

The installation of permanent and public pieces of co-created artwork, that participants walk past with friends and family every day, had huge impact on self-esteem and personal achievement.

The celebratory events were very well attended and the community and venues felt ownership and visibly and verbally expressed pride in their achievements.

**It's because I would have just been at home. I like going out, and mixing with people. It's nice to do group work as well as your own stuff. Rozi is a good tutor at doing stuff like this.
I feel proud of what I've done.**

These sorts of groups are good for me, to use my imagination. It's improved my confidence with people here. I've got to trust them. I've seen a different side to people's characters. Art brings out the best in people. It brings out hidden talents.

Celebrating Hunslet

In Hunslet, Rozi Fuller was based at Hunslet Involve. She gathered a core group of participants, all residents of the local area, and explored ideas and stories about Belle Isle. She also visited groups such as Hunslet Remembered, Soup and Roll Group, Slate (adults with learning disabilities), Hunslet RLFC breakfast club and parents/carers from St Mary's School, delivering workshops designed to promote conversations about the local area. The information gathered was taken back to the Core group, who used it to design and co-create the final piece. In Hunslet the theme centred around history and place.

Mark making and collage were used to create the base piece of work, with animation and Augmented Reality used to bring the work alive. The free Artivive App was used to access the animations and instructions are displayed with the artwork which is on permanent display at Involve.

Key elements of the artwork were printed on large scale boards for outdoor or indoor use and are now on the walls outside Hunslet Involve, and on display at Middleton Railway (which starts in Hunslet), at Hunslet RLFC and at the Parnaby Tavern, creating a mini Arts Trail.

During this residency, Opera North began working in Hunslet and a collaboration grew. Jo Bedford from Opera North attended some sessions and talked about their songwriting project. Some people participated in both projects and stories were shared. The song was performed at Leeds City Museum at the final event and added to the video showcasing the Hunslet Residency and animated artwork, which can be found by navigating to the Creative Communities page under Projects on Swarthmore's website, or via this link below.

Celebrating Hunslet

From the history side of things - I never knew there was so much weight and significant behind Hunslet.



Belle Isle Tapestry

Elnaz Yazdani worked out of Bitmo's Gate - Belle Isle Tenants Management Organisations community centre. She could be found there every Monday morning, at the Welcome Space Sessions and gradually interested people in what she was doing, creating a supportive space for people to get involved and share their experiences. She spent additional time at Bitmo on many Friday mornings and during the repair cafe sessions on monthly Saturdays. The rest of her time was spent visiting groups and members of the community elsewhere in Belle Isle, including Trinity Network, Cranmore and Raylands Community Centre and the 59 Centre.

Elnaz used embroidery to engage people and residents who had never picked up a needle before surprised themselves by getting involved. Conversations emerged during the embroidering and a real sense of achievement and mutual support was fostered. So much so that a few of the regulars still meet on a Monday morning to embroider and chat.

During the sessions the project took shape and were very much led by the community. The work built up and gradually became referred to as the 'Belle Isle Tapestry'. The Belle Isle Tapestry has been loaned to Leeds City Museum for public display for two and half months, after which it will be returned to the people of Belle Isle and go on permanent display at Bitmo's Gate.

Outdoor boards depicting the tapestry are on display at the Cranmore and Raylands Centre, Trinity Network and the 59 Centre (Belle Isle Senior Action).



Belle Isle is a quiet place and the kids say hello to me. It's been calm here. It's been good to mix with people as I usually just stay in the house. It's been so nice to mix with people and make friends.

Coming to the sessions I've met new people. Through this group we are now going to continue with our own sewing group Sew2gether.



Impact of Exhibitions and Installations

Throughout the project we made every effort to ensure that the work created by participants was exhibited and displayed, temporarily or permanently. Seeing personal or collaborative work on display made people feel recognised and validated. Seeing their work being appreciated by others instilled a great sense of pride in their accomplishments, increasing self-esteem and confidence.

Exhibition and celebration events were held at the end of year one in each area. These were local and temporary events, held in venues in which we had delivered. However, at every venue we worked in, we offered them the opportunity to display and keep some of the work created during the sessions by the participants, usually this was group work. At many venues this offer was taken up, including at St Luke's Church, Manorfield Hall, Middleton Park Baptist Church, as well as at Bitmo's Gate, Cranmore and Raylands and Hunslet Involve.

Celebration/installation events were also held at each the end of the artist's residencies. These were extremely well attended and the sense of achievement and community pride was palpable.

The final exhibition and celebration event was held in Leeds City Museum on 20th June, with part of the exhibition remaining up until September 1st. Over 100 people from across South Leeds attended, including participants, volunteers, artists, community professionals and local city councillors. The impact of bringing everyone together and the knowledge that their work would be on show to the general public was evident through the atmosphere and excitement in the room, conversations and verbal and written feedback.



The event today - I love it. It's amazing. The artwork is brilliant. I've spotted some of mine. (Big grin)

Amazing event. Alan's story was inspirational. The song was very emotional. The artwork displayed was amazing. In 2 years of work you have been able to stretch it to so many things. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the Beeston sessions. Thank you



Community Case Study

Collaborating with Involve Leeds.

Involve Leeds is a small community centre, with one part-time paid member of staff. It struggles financially and runs largely on goodwill. However, it is a place where the most in need come to access food banks, warm spaces, support and activities. To some of the local community, it is almost a second home. It is a community centre where there is no need of membership and they welcome people of all backgrounds and beliefs.

In total, we delivered 3 blocks of workshops at Hunslet Involve at which they provided food. They also provided the food when we delivered sessions at the neighbouring Hunslet library and Community Hub. They also provided us with space for the Artist residency - both for workshop delivery and a small studio space. This provided a much needed income stream for the centre. Many of our participants were centre users, some of whom faced many barriers to inclusion elsewhere and whose personal life challenges occasionally threatened to impact the sessions. Claire Whiteley, the centre manager, was invaluable in her support in navigating some of these issues and ensuring we could offer sessions accessible to all.

The artwork from the artist residency remains up inside Hunslet Involve, alongside many of the group pieces created during the workshop sessions, including rag rugging, photography montage and a mosaic. There is also a mosaic installed on the outside walls alongside some interactive boards from the artist residency. This has not only enhanced the visual impact and welcoming atmosphere of Involve Leeds, but increased the community engagement with the artwork and prolonged it indefinitely. Additionally, the participants involved in the making of the artwork will feel a sense of pride and have a permanent reminder of their talents and abilities, contributing to personal self-esteem.

After the unveiling event of the first Artist residency. Councillor Paul Wray, trustee at Hunslet Involve, posted the following publicly on Social Media:

“It was brilliant to be at Involve Leeds today for the Creative Communities Celebrating Hunslet Unveiling.

The project has allowed so many people in Hunslet to express themselves artistically and to feel seen.

Sarata and myself were amazed by the artwork and the use of augmented reality to make the images move via an app.

Thank you to Swarthmore Education Centre for this amazing project, and on behalf of the Involve Trustees, I hope we get to work together with you soon.

To everyone else, please do visit the centre and see this amazing work.”

Achieving Outcomes, Challenges and Learning

We have achieved all of our major planned outcomes and in many cases, the impact far exceeded expectations.

Engagement

We aimed to recruit approximately 200 participants. In the event, we engaged more than 300.

Recruiting people through attending in person events was by far the most successful method of engagement, although very time consuming. With more time and capacity we could have developed this strategy and made time to build trust with the most isolated and hardest to reach. The development of the community artist residency programme went some way to overcoming this challenge as it allowed people to spend time and feel comfortable with an individual artist.

Building relationships with partners was essential and recruitment became easier as we became a known presence. Establishing contact with and meeting with Social Prescribing networks was effective, as we were able to give them detailed information about how the project worked and its benefits, which they could pass relay to their clients.

Some areas have been harder to reach than others. In Holbeck, we struggled with attendance. The reasons for this may include Holbeck having a relatively low residential area, a more transient community, and local organisations collaborating less with each other. We addressed this by extending our area into Beeston in year two, but still advertising and attending events in Holbeck.

In Middleton, it was less clear why we might be struggling with numbers, although this did improve towards the end of year one. In Middleton, there was little interaction between different organisations, which made it harder to disseminate information. In the future, facilitating more pop-up workshops before full delivery could be a way of tackling this.

To make sure we could offer workshops to the people of Middleton, whilst also ensuring they had enough numbers to make them viable, we merged the Middleton and Belle Isle areas and publicised them widely in both areas. Consequently, we had good numbers in year two.

Based on conversation and feedback, we found that people are willing to travel within South Leeds so that they can attend on a day convenient to them, come with a friend, or to a venue they know. We had an underspend on volunteer travel in year one and offered support with travel costs on public transport to participants where necessary and for those needed taxis for accessibility reasons.

Workshop delivery

We delivered 143 of the original planned workshops over the course of the two years, but by including the artist residency, this stretched to more than 200.

The artists were crucial to the success of the project, They needed to be sensitive and flexible to meet the needs of the target participants. Over the two years, a group of talented practitioners was amassed, with expertise in a variety of media and techniques that were new to participants. It was essential to have a large group, as freelance availability varies wildly.

With less experienced artists, or those struggling to meet the needs of the group, support from the project lead and volunteer coordinator was given discreetly during the session and to the artist afterwards. On three occasions it was decided not to re-engage an artist.

We improved advice and guidance to artists over the two years, providing resources and information about the areas of South Leeds, and communicating the needs of the participants as much as possible with the artists beforehand.

Focusing on the theme of Pride in Place was problematic, as getting used to a new practitioner and new technique each week was challenging for participants. We tried offering artists two consecutive weeks to try and combat this. With techniques such as clay and mosaic, this was very successful, as it gave participants a chance to practice and understand the media, make an individual piece to keep, and make a group piece of work for exhibition, focusing on the theme. We limited this to one technique per block.

We became more flexible with the theme and encouraged the participants to follow their own ideas and inspirations.

The artist residency provided opportunity and time to explore the theme more deeply. The two museum trips to the Discovery Centre also focused specifically on artefacts from South Leeds.

Timings and length of workshops

Initially, many participants thought that 4-hour workshops would be too long, but found they could manage the time and enjoy it. Starting at 10 am and finishing at 2 pm worked best. We were flexible with breaks, and as much as possible, provided space to take some time out, understanding if people needed to leave early.

Repeated feedback was that 6 week blocks were too short, with many people asking to return. We aimed to recruit new participants to each block, but in cases of specific need we allowed people to return. We assessed need fairly and in response to specific questions.

In year two, we increased the length of the blocks to 10 weeks. This proved successful.

- It gave people more time to get to know us.
- Participants did not feel it 'wasn't worth coming' if they were unable to make all the sessions.
- It gave more time to allow friendships to build.
- It allowed for more techniques, achievement, and space for confidence and pride to grow.

Accessibility and inclusivity

We aimed to make the workshops as accessible as possible and viewed venues with this in mind. On at least one occasion an organisation was very supportive and keen to work with us, but we were unable to use it as there was no lift. In Beeston and Holbeck we were very aware of different languages and cultures and considered this when planning workshops and food. However, it wasn't possible to use interpreters due to so many languages being spoken and difficulties in advance planning as participants would commit to attend a very short time before the courses started. We familiarised ourselves with apps that helped with translation and emphasised the importance of plain English to the artists, alongside clear demonstrations of practical activities.

Managing Mental Health, Differing Needs and Safeguarding.

At times, it was challenging to manage the differing needs of the participants. We became clearer in setting out ground rules around our own capacity and of the importance of tolerance of others. It was valuable to have volunteers supporting the participants on a one-to-one basis.

In instances where behaviour and relationships with community members was difficult, we worked closely with professionals in the community with knowledge of individuals to ensure we gave them the best possible chance of positive engagement. On most, but not all, occasions this was successful.

Managing personal mental health was a dominant ongoing issue for many participants, which could challenge the boundaries of staff roles and the volunteer role. We discussed this during volunteer training and gave clear guidelines around the boundaries of their role and procedures for Safeguarding issues.

When necessary, the Project Lead and Volunteer coordinator worked closely with Swarthmore's Safeguarding Lead. Support was also given around staying within the boundaries of the roles and expertise, and in signposting to other services.

Creche Provision

There were initial difficulties in setting up Creche provision due to uncertainty in numbers, challenges in finding venues able to accommodate a creche and lack of experience and contacts with childcare providers. We worked hard to find a solution and went on to establish a good rapport and agreed system with a childcare provider. However, the provision was not well used due to varying commitment with parents and children finding it difficult to settle into a new setting over a short period of time. Working in 10-week blocks did not resolve these issues, and we only offered childcare at one block of sessions in year two.

Travel

In year two, we offered support with travel if people had accessibility needs or were unable to walk to the sessions they were able to attend. This offer was only taken up on occasion, but was very much appreciated by those who did take it up.

Community Connections

We aimed to promote community connections. In some areas, such as Belle Isle and Hunslet, this was extremely successful. This was aided by the interest of City councillors, existing networking within the areas and a spirit of openness and collaboration within the organisations.

In areas where it was more challenging, barriers included organisations already working at capacity and lack of engagement and communication between local organisations. This was possibly because some of them felt they were competing for funds, or that they did not have enough commonality with other local community venues. In some areas, despite every effort being made, we were unable to engage with local councillors, or if we did, the councillors were not active in their support.

Collecting Feedback and Evidence

Although we collected as much evidence as we could as we went along. We were aware that some of the best feedback comes via conversations and comments. We collected this type of evidence as efficiently as we could, but it was not always possible to capture spontaneous remarks and people became more inhibited when asked to repeat what they said, or have it written down.

When collecting evidence for Equality and Diversity we asked questions and let people answer as they felt most comfortable. This elicited good responses, but it was not always possible to quantify and a better balance could have been found between offering tick boxes or multiple choices and giving people the opportunity to provide their own answers.

In addition, when starting out we did not feel the need to collect evidence about sexual orientation or gender. We are aware that a large majority, although not all, of the participants were women. If this is an issue we wanted to tackle in the future, adding these questions to the Equality and Diversity forms would be a way forward.



Volunteers

We recruited 22 volunteers, coming from different backgrounds and experience, often with no prior experience of supporting others. We developed the volunteer training to include more guidance on the backgrounds and life experiences of our target groups. We increasingly incorporated real life scenarios into the training to demonstrate strategies for supporting participants with different needs and abilities, such as breaking down instructions.

In year two, we had debriefs after each workshop, which enabled us to further support volunteers needing more guidance on support strategies and to gather feedback and insights from volunteers.

Bespoke training was designed and delivered to help them with issues specific to supporting this type of project.

Signposting and retaining engagement

We incorporated signposting alongside evaluation in the last sessions of each block of workshops to signpost participants to further opportunities. We aimed to include this in newsletters and on social media. However, it was difficult as people did not want to be distracted from the activities being led by the artist.

This is something that could have been improved devoting a session specifically for signposting and by contacting other agencies for information about non-Swarthmore activities on an ongoing basis. This would also allow time to be spent with individuals to talk to them on a one to one basis about next steps and offer support in following up any opportunities. The main barrier to this was lack of time, capacity and dedicated funds.

Despite these barriers, feedback from a large proportion of participants has been that they now feel ready to take the initiative themselves to look for and join other opportunities, volunteer or look for work.

Recruiting Trustees

One of our outcomes was to recruit more trustees from the community. Unfortunately, We did not manage to recruit any trustees directly via the project. We found that professionals or active volunteers in the area were already committed to local causes in South Leeds. For participants and volunteers, this was not a step that they were yet ready to take. However, the project has raised the profile of Swarthmore over the city as a whole and we now have a healthy number of trustees.

Financial Overview

The total budget for this project was £200,000 and the total has been spent.

We became aware that there would be a significant underspend on the venue's budget two-thirds of the way through the first year. We put forward a proposal to use the underspend to deliver the artist residency project. The money was used to fund the artist fees and some additional time for the project coordinator to set up, and oversee the project, which accounts for what can be seen as an overspend on sessional fees and staff salaries.

Materials, publicity, and installation events for the artist residencies came out of existing allocated budgets.

The remainder of the overspend on staff salaries was due to the project lead working additional hours for a period to cover a prolonged period of sickness experienced by the volunteer coordinator, together with an increase in oncosts.

This was covered with underspends in Creche costs, volunteer travel and money remaining from materials, staff travel, training and DBS checks, all of which occurred due to lack of need.

The underspend in materials was due to care and attention in reducing waste and reusing equipment where possible, focusing on sustainability.

I think the engagement Swarthmore delivered during the sessions was fantastic. The guest artist facilitators were all fantastic and participants all appeared engaged, interested, and reflective of themes relating to where they live. Support staff and volunteers were also very good. I think the program was a big net positive for Belle Isle

Legacy

The legacy of the project can be seen in different ways:

The artwork

We have lasting pieces of work installed in and around 11 different venues, including 3 mosaics, 4 rag rugging pieces, 2 photo montages, a series of masks, the Belle Isle Tapestry and the Celebrating Hunslet Artwork. This work is permanently enhancing the neighbourhoods in which the project was delivered

The exhibition at Leeds City Museum will remain up for 12 weeks and participants will have the opportunity and to take their relatives and friends. This will further increase their sense of pride and self-esteem, and also motivate them to visit a valuable, cultural and educational resource in the centre of Leeds.

Well-being.

We have anecdotal and observational feedback that the project has had a positive impact on the lives of both volunteers and participants. For many people this is having a sustained effect, even though the project has ended.

Groups and further activities

In Belle Isle, people were inspired to continue meeting, embroidering, and to form their own group - Sew2gether. Participants from across the target areas are looking at wider educational opportunities, including courses at Swarthmore and elsewhere. They now have the confidence to try new things.

Progression

We had good progression from participant to volunteer. Volunteers have progressed to alternative volunteering, college, or work. Participants who didn't volunteer with us, have also gone on to other volunteering opportunities or opportunities and/or are applying for work.

Community partnerships and collaboration.

The project has forged relationships for Swarthmore with other organisations, in South Leeds and across the City. Meetings are already planned for possible future collaboration. Swarthmore is a more recognised name for its excellent community education practice and ethics.



Final conclusion and thanks

After two years work in South Leeds, Swarthmore Education Centre thanks the National Lottery Community Fund for making all this possible. The grant has allowed us to spend two years in parts of Leeds that are frequently overlooked in terms of access to the arts and culture.

We have met many amazing people, been welcomed into communities, established connections, and collaborated with some outstanding organisations. We have been overwhelmed by the positive feedback and the project has far exceeded our expectations.

We have left a significant legacy behind in a variety of places and are proud to say we have had a significant impact on so many of the people who have needed it most.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all the organisations and people working in South Leeds who have welcomed us:

Bitmo and Bitmo's Gate, Involve Leeds, Hunslet Community Hub and Library, Health For All, Cranmore and Raylands Community Centre, Beeston Village Community Centre, Middleton Family Centre, Trinity Network, South Leeds United Reform Church, Holbeck Together, JamYang Bhuddist Centre, Manorfield Hall (DAZL) St John and St Barnabas Welcome Centre, Hamara, St Luke's Church Holbeck, The Ark Family Centre, Middleton Park Baptist Church, Slate, Hunslet RLFC, Hunslet St Mary's Primary School, Hunslet Remembered, Belle Isle Senior Action - The 59 Centre, Claire Whiteley, Benjamin Mills, Jo Brook, Peter Sutton, Joanne Wood, Leeds City Museum and Discovery Centre, South Leeds Life, Linking Leeds, Forum Central Inner South Leeds Communication Network, South Leeds Libraries and Hubs, Voluntary Action Leeds.

There were many more individuals, too numerous to name, who gave much appreciated support and connections.

We were delighted to work with so many talented professional artists:

Abigail Mooney, Alison Monroe, Boris Cruse, Cassy Oliphant, Charlotte Whitmore, Chris Teal, Clair Thompson, Elnaz Yazdani, Hannah Platt, Hannah Limbachia, Jack Riley, Jita Kaur, Joanna Jowett, Kayleigh Davis, Leigh Bowser, Luke Thompson, Maria Santos, Nicole Colbert, Paul Digby, Poppy Davis, Ria Lake, Rozi Fuller, Ruth Parker, Svafa Einasdottir, Tracy Lau, Verity Dolan.