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Interim Evaluation Report Cultural Spring's Creative People and Places (CPP) Project

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Acknowledgements

Particular thanks go to workshop participants for freely giving their time and valuable insights during focus group discussions and to Space to Create participant organisations for providing feedback and recommendations following their engagement in Phase 1 activities. Additional thanks go to staff for providing timely data, clarifications and for taking part in semi structured interviews.

1. Introduction

This interim evaluation aims to provide a largely qualitative assessment of Cultural Spring’s activities during the first year (i.e. April 2023 – March 2024) of their three year Phase 4 Creative People and Places (CPP) Project.

CPP is an Arts Council England (ACE) Programme which focusses on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average. CPP funds cross sectoral partnerships in local areas to empower residents to decide what kind of creative activities they want to experience on their doorstep. Cultural Spring’s Project targets residents in Sunderland in the county of Tyne & Wear the North East region of England.

By way of geographical context, some summary Sunderland Census 2021 data is provided below:



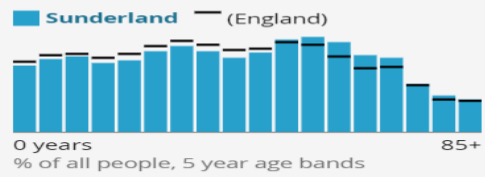
Population

274,200

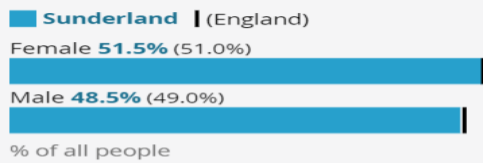
people

56,490,000 people in England
Rounded to the nearest 100 people

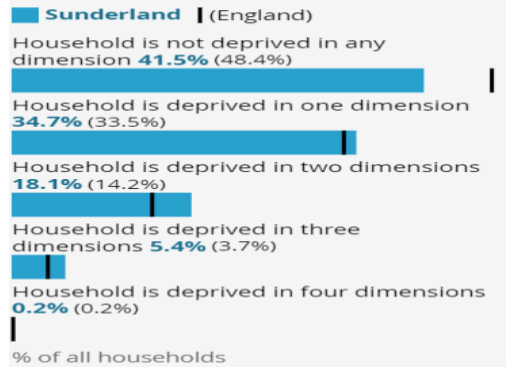
Age profile



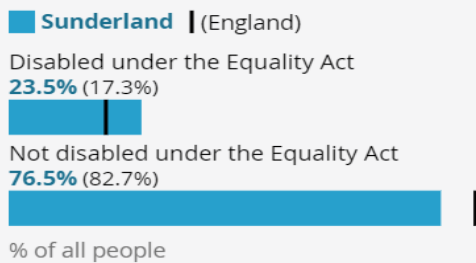
Sex



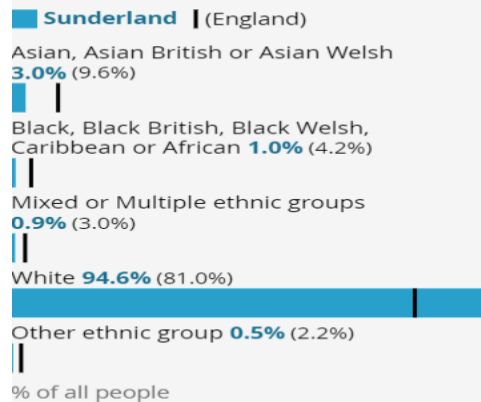
Household deprivation



Disability



Ethnic group



This report provides a snapshot of year one’s activities, outputs, outcomes and learning. Qualitative and quantitative data has been harvested from monitoring information collected by Cultural Spring and supplemented with primary research including discussions with staff, interviews with commissioned organisations/artists/creative practitioners and facilitated focus group discussions with workshop participants and Space to Create organisations.

2. Engagement data and outputs

Numbers by type of engagement

A total of 8531 engaged in Cultural Spring activities during 2023/24. The table below summarises the number and types of engagements.

Segments & activities	Outputs 2023-2024
Participants	1921 workshop participants 54 Craft pack participants 337 Go and See participants Total = 2312
Artists, creative practitioners & commissioned organisations	45 including workshop leaders, Bitesize, Space to Create, Craft packs
Audiences	592 Bitesize Audiences 5624 other audiences Total = 6216
Co-creators	40 Community champions 40 volunteers 12 commissioning forums Total = 92
Total number of those engaged	Total = 8531

Demographics

Analysis of demographic data for those engaging reveals the following picture. This is based on a representative sample size of just over 30% of all engagers, spread across different types of activities.

Demographic	% engagers	% in Sunderland
Male	27%	48.5%
Female	72.5%	51.5%
Intersex	0.5%	Not known
People with disabilities	32%	23.5%
People describing themselves as neurodiverse	21%	Not known
Minoritised ethnic communities	4%	4.9%
Under 29 years	55%	32%
30 – 59 years	26%	37%
60 years +	19%	31%

As can be seen from the table above, women still represent the majority of engagers. Successes have been achieved with engaging more people with disabilities and young people and families. Work remains to be done to increase the numbers of engagers from minoritised ethnic communities.

Engagement levels	Percentage
First time arts engagers	11%
Less than once per annum	10%
Once per annum	23%
2-3 times per annum	34%
Four plus times per annum	22%
	100%

Successful reach into the least engaged groups is evident, with forty four percent (44%) of engagers being from the least engaged groups of people. Cultural Spring’s Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to working in, with and through communities is clearly paying dividends and helping to access those who are hardest to reach and engage.

Previous engagement with Cultural Spring activities	Percentage
Never before	60%
Over 3 years ago	3%
In the last 1-3 years	2%
In the last 7-12 months	7%
In the last 6 months	28%
	100%

Sixty percent (60%) of those engaging had never engaged with Cultural Spring before. This supports their efforts to continue to develop new audiences for arts and culture. Furthermore, of those engaging with Cultural Spring activities half (50%) reported doing so alone and the remaining fifty percent (50%) reported attending with friends and family.

The next few sections look explore: Bitesize; Space to Create; Creative Workshops (in person and online) and Go and See Visits in more detail. Since this is an interim and formative evaluation report these sections look to report on outputs, report on emerging outcomes, draw out the lessons learned, examine what works and why and what does not and why, so that these findings can be fed into future programme development and delivery.

3. Bitesize

Bitesize shows, be they dance, theatre or musical performances, as the name suggests, are intended to be locally accessible, cultural appetisers which engage new and diverse people as partner commissioners, co-creators and audience members. Bitesize artists/creative practitioners and companies are selected by local community members (via Community Panels) in response to invitations to tender. They then work in partnership with community members to co-create performances to be delivered in non-traditional arts venues such as local community hubs. In so doing, they bring people together over the shared experiences of being partner commissioners, co-creators, audience members, and post-performance provide opportunities to share food themed to the shows and to discuss performances. Collectively these involvement opportunities serve to deepen engagement, empower people, build capacity and build pride in place.

In 2023, twenty nine (29) proposals were received in response to a call out to develop and deliver Bitesize performances. Eight (8) were shortlisted and the following four were selected:



A performance about Caroline, a little girl from Sunderland and her journey to becoming a footballer.

We Make Culture



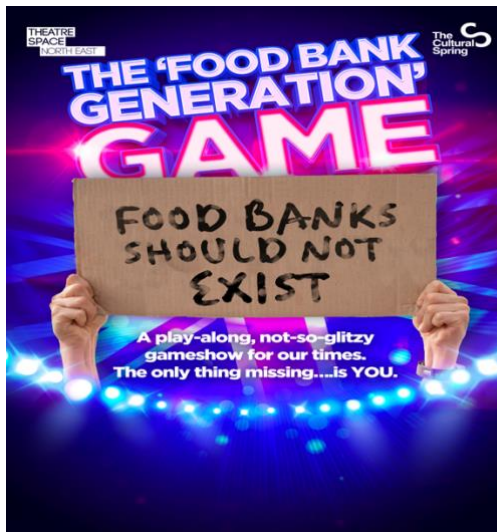
A new immersive, multi-sensory show for older people. An interactive style stage show, for adults with dementia and/or disabilities.

Woven Nest



A coming of age celebration about finding your place in the world, self-expression and making positive change.

The Six Twenty



A show which highlights ongoing and increasing dependency upon food banks, exploring the multitude of reasons people use them, challenging the ways people view them and exploring how people feel about them.

Theatre Space North East

Fifteen (15) Bitesize performances were delivered across the following twelve community venues in, attracting a total audience of 592 people.

- Redhouse Community and District Centre, Redhouse
- The Volt (Former Pallion Working Mens Club)
- Kayll Road Library, Pallion
- Columbia Centre, Washington
- Millennium Centre, Washington
- Easington Lane Community Access Point, Easington
- Hetton Primary School, Hetton
- 17 Nineteen (two shows), Hendon
- Back on the Map, Hendon
- Monkwearmouth School

- Grindon Church Community Project
- The Old Rectory, Houghton Le Spring

Findings

Forty one (41) evaluations were gathered from Bitesize audiences, a sample size of 7.5% - above ACE's 5% target but lower than Cultural Spring's usual sample size. On average just over thirty six (36) people attended each Bitesize performance - this compares favourably with just over twelve (12.5) average audiences for Bitesize performances in 2018 – an almost threefold increase.

In terms of outcome feedback:

- 100% of respondents said they felt either '*very happy*' or '*happy*' after a Bitesize performance.
- 83% said they would '*definitely*' come to similar events and the remaining 17% said '*probably*'.
- 100% said they would recommend the performance to others.

This data demonstrates that audiences clearly enjoyed the Bitesize performances, have an appetite for similar experiences and would recommend them to others.

Learning

- **Development monies delivering more relevant performances**

The introduction of a £300.00 fee for artists/organisations following their Expressions of Interest for use to further develop their Bitesize proposals enabled closer working with communities. This additional time and fee were introduced following feedback from previous Bitesize programming and has led to greater alignment between the artists' propositions and the communities' needs/wants. Thus delivering performances with greater resonance with local community members. This can be seen from the range of difference shows selected and delivered by and within communities and through increased audience numbers.

- **Partnership working with venues paid dividends**

Cultural Spring's enhanced Asset Based Community Development approach to working with Bitesize venues helped connect performances to both organisations and communities and resulted in increased buy in, wider promotion, larger and more diverse audiences – particularly girls, LGBTQIA+, families and those living with dementia.

- **Incorporating lessons learned from 2018 Bitesize delivery**

More time was built in for the promotion of Bitesize shows with enhanced marketing and promotions with all venues, including social media. Similarly the introduction of the additional £300.00 development fee enabled artists to finesse their proposals and work with communities.

- **Successes and legacy**

Woven Nest performances were linked to Dementia Care Homes and this has led to further funding being identified to expand the shows. Sweet Caroline and Redcoat performances were particularly successful at engaging young people and these have led to improved partnership working with Together 4 Children.

- **Well researched/chosen local community venues**

Quotes from audience members point towards the use of community venues as being instrumental in encouraging and supporting new and more diverse audience members:

'Very enjoyable due to the smaller venue. Less intimidating than going to the theatre'

'To have a show in the building where I used to sign on the dole in the 70s was novel, haha!'

'Loved its grassroots approach delivering in the community'

'Accessible theatre in areas where people may not readily have access at a very reasonable cost is a no brainer'

'Very funny, very camp and some important messages. The food was above and beyond what I expected and the layout of the room was great. So many great little extras'

- **Quality cultural product**

The following quotes suggest quality in the both the cultural product and appreciation of this quality amongst audiences.

'The show was absolutely fantastic'

'A fab experience overall'

'The performers were excellent, the script and songs were well written'

'Great show, full of energy and very funny!'

'The performer displayed huge talent as he took us from hearty laughter to pathos in the blink of an eye'

- **Intergenerational appeal**

Thoughtful programming through co creation ensured Bitesize performances appealed to people of all ages and encouraged intergenerational audiences and joint family activities. The following quotes from audience members serve to illustrate this:

'My daughter and I really enjoyed the show, it kept both the children and adults entertained. We both enjoyed the music especially'

'Excellent for all ages'

'It was great for kids'

'My grandson really loved it'

- **Going the extra mile**

Free food and post show discussions were part of the Bitesize experience and helped to add value and deepened audience experience and were often cited in audience feedback:

'The food after the show was excellent'

'It was also really interesting to discuss with the actors what they thought about their role/performance and the themes of show'

'It was lovely to chat afterwards about the show and the deeper meaning'

'It was nice to chat to the lady who runs the soup kitchen and find out more about that'.

Feedback from Bitesize Commissioned Organisations

The inclusion of the Expression of Interest phase and the £300 funding to undertake community research was much valued by commissioned organisations. Organisations/Artists reported that this *'meant we could tailor our idea to the needs of the group and respond to the feedback from the community panel'*, and *'Being funded to develop and grow an idea feels like a really important step forward in valuing artists time so we were really thankful for that.'*

The timeline for research, community engagement and show development allowed for Bitesize was reported as being tight for commissioned organisations, not least because of the December/January holiday periods. Some said that longer lead in times would be appreciated – perhaps 1- 2 months more.

Valuable social capital and connections were realised by commissioned organisations through Bitesize programming. Most notably with Together for Children and Sunderland University which have led to new work with young people and to a joint research project.

Woven Nest made improved their artistic practice, as a result of being involved with Bitesize. Their Milk, Two Sugars performance resulted in new dementia friendly/bespoke cultural product being created with sensory theatre for older people with dementia and disabilities.

Without exception, all the words used by Bitesize commissioned organisations to describe their experience of working with Cultural Spring were positive, including:

Reinvigorating Collaborative **Fantastic**
Supportive **Encouraging** Inspiring
Exciting uplifting **Challenging** Creative

One commissioned organisation described their experience of delivering their Bitesize commission as:

'It was a really great experience. It felt like we'd bitten off more than we could chew at some points, particularly with this being the first time we've done this kind of piece, but the confidence and support from Cultural Spring really helped us through this. The process is a brilliant one for testing and developing ideas. I was so proud of what we achieved and it felt like we really did achieve our goal of reflecting the stories we were told. The participation sessions were really fun and we uncovered some really important stories. I was also so happy that we saw so many of the girls and women who participated coming back to see the final piece. We made great connections to new venues and organisations too. Thanks so much for trusting us with this and being such a support'

and another volunteered the following:

'A huge thank you specifically to Emma Scarr who was with us every step of the way and was hugely supportive and encouraging. Thank you!'

These two statements evidence excellence in the process of engagement from the commissioned organisations point of view and appreciation of the invaluable support and flexibility offered by Cultural Spring.

Lessons learned

Further clarity and improved co-ordination around marketing and promotional activities and responsibilities is needed. Sometimes commissioned organisations relied too heavily on Cultural Spring and venues to do this and did not promote the Bitesize shows on their own websites and therefore valuable opportunities were missed for co-hosting on social media platforms and joint marketing initiatives. It is recommended that this aspect be revisited and perhaps built into contracts for future Bitesize commissions. The £300.00 fees for development post Expressions of Interest (Eoi) for Bitesize performances clearly paid dividends and should be continued. Consideration should be given to extending the development time if possible.

4. From Cultural Pop Ups, via Warm Space + to Space to Create

Space to Create activities in their current form are some way from what was originally envisaged. Below is a visual reminder of this journey which shows how Cultural Spring implements an action learning approach, combined with its Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) ethos.



Cultural Pop Ups in Empty Shops

This activity was conceived as a way of making use of vacant properties in the North, West, East, Washington and Coalfield areas of Sunderland on a short term, flexible basis. The aim was to bring together local creative practitioners, community partners, arts and heritage organisations and to support them to develop a programme of cultural activities that reflected local communities' interests whilst encouraging more people to visit their local high streets. For example, Cultural Pop Ups might include:

- Art workshops led by local artists and community groups
- Performances and rehearsals from local art organisations & community groups
- Exhibitions
- Art markets
- Artists & heritage talks
- Film screenings
- Art Library

The sales pitch to empty property owners outlined the following benefits:

- Highly flexible easy in and easy out arrangements
- Reduction in management, security and insurance costs
- Good PR and CSR for landlords
- Reimagining/reinvigorating through removing the blight of empty property
- Business support for new social enterprise establishment – generating a pipeline of future paying tenants
- Increased footfall for local businesses
- Regeneration and improvement to local high street through creative activities
- Offsetting empty property business rates - properties used for temporary activities are not liable for these rates
- Specimen legal documents available for landlords to speed up and cut costs on the process of lending or letting spaces temporarily
- Provision of a guarantee from the council to return the property quickly should a permanent tenant be found
- Utility and security bills covered
- Property returned in the same condition

Learning

Despite the above incentives and considerable research and development undertaken by Emma Biggins, it proved almost impossible to identify and secure temporary empty premises for Cultural Pop Ups. This was not because of the dearth of empty property, but rather, because of the lack of interest or appetite amongst landlords.

Landlords buy-in proved to be a very slow process and one which required considerable relationship building. Local resident landlords were generally more supportive than absent external landlords, since they better understood and valued the community benefits. However, risk aversion and upgrade cost considerations, along with short term leases (maximum of six months) versus their usual

minimum 2-5 year-long contracts proved to be insurmountable within timeframes and budgets. Furthermore Rates Reliefs available for landlords with empty properties, such as small business rate relief, empty property relief, hardship relief, COVID-19 additional relief fund and retail, hospitality and leisure relief all served as disincentives. These could not be matched by the limited budgets available for each Cultural Pop Up (maximum £8000 each for everything). For example businesses could get fifty percent (50%) off their business rates bills for the 2022 to 2023 tax year – this was often greater than the maximum Cultural Spring could offer.

Often when potentially premises were found, subsequent research revealed that these were being used for other purposes such as storage, or were still under lease agreements with previous tenants or under new lease arrangements with tenants waiting to move in. Additionally, several properties had issues such as: major structural damage, screed flooring, pest infestations, Health and Safety issues such as blocked fire escape routes, water damage and mould etc. Some empty properties were left with the previous tenant's infrastructure in place e.g. pet shops and tanning shops. So, despite best efforts, the Empty Shops Cultural Pop Ups could not be realised.

Pivoting to delivering in Warm Spaces +

The ongoing recession, spiralling energy and food costs and increasing numbers of people struggling to stay warm in their own homes presented another opportunity in the form of Warm Spaces. Warm Spaces came in all shapes and sizes: from community centres, libraries, churches, community cafes, arts centres, local businesses, and schools. No matter where they were based, people were to be assured a warm and friendly welcome.

Some Warm Spaces found they were not being used because people did not want to just come to sit in an empty warm space with nothing to do. Discussions with Warm Space providers quickly identified a win-win scenario, with the development of sets of cultural activities that could be used to attract people into Warm Spaces – thus increasing footfall and engaging more diverse groups of people in arts and cultural activities.

Initially Cultural Spring worked with four Warm Spaces, two in Washington (Washington Mind & The Forage) and two in the coalfields (The Old Rectory & Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP)). These locations were chosen because they were cold spots for Cultural Spring arts engagement activities. Additional Council funding of £10,000 enabled delivery in two further Warm Spaces - Community Opportunities & Broadway Family Services.

In Washington, a series of creative enterprise development workshops were delivered which enabled individuals to develop their crafting and creative skills and to create new products for sale on Etsy and at Craft fairs. The aim was to explore turning people's creative hobbies or potential creative hobbies into businesses. This resulted in a successful Spring Craft Fair at Washington Arts Centre.

Findings

Warm Spaces engaged one hundred and ten (110) participants across seven community based Warm Space venues and eleven (11) professional artists were commissioned. Forty three (43) creative workshops were delivered as tasters and blocks of creative enterprise workshops. Referrals were

received from Social Prescribers, Active Families and Community Opportunities. One Craft Fair was delivered where participants had stalls to showcase and sell their work.

Taster workshops delivered to engage new participants included:

- Cyanotypes
- Pewter Art
- Hooky & Proggy
- Upcycling
- Textile art
- Jewellery making

These led to the development of workshop blocks in different venues.

The Creative Enterprise Workshop Programme provided visual art workshops, led by professional participatory artists. These workshops covered a range of visual arts and upskilled participants in creative enterprise, including learning how to create products using visual art techniques, how to market, price and sell products.

Workshops included:

- 6 sessions in bookbinding and paste paper making
- 6 glass art sessions
- 6 pewter art sessions*
- 5 silk painting and print sessions
- 5 print sessions
- 2 ceramics sessions
- 5 upcycling lampshade sessions
- 3 collage and print sessions

Morphing into Space to Create (S2C)

Learning from trialling the Cultural Pop Ups and Warm Spaces alongside internal team discussions around sustaining workshop delivery contributed to the development of the current Space to Create (S2C) project. S2C worked with ten (10) community venues/organisations to help them grow their capacity to work with communities, to identify and then programme creative activities.

The project allowed the community venues/organisations the opportunity and time to test out new ideas and experiment with what types of creative activities would work best within their own communities – anything from hosting theatre performances to hosting blocks of workshops. As with all Cultural Spring activities the ultimate focus was on engaging those least engaged in arts and culture and working in with and through locally rooted organisations to build their capacity and to aid sustainability.

S2C is being delivered across two phases and at the time of writing this report, Phase 1 had just come to an end and Phase 2 is due to start in late April/early May 2024. Phase 1 focussed on the development of tasters or ‘Have-a-go’ sessions and each participating organisation was awarded £1500.00, alongside marketing training and individually tailored support. Phase 2 will see organisations in receipt of a further £3000.00 to develop and trial new creative activities.

Community venues involved in Phase 1 of the Space to Create Project included:

- Sunderland Training and Education Farm LTD
- Washington Millennium Centre
- The Box Youth and Community Project
- Grindon Church Community Project
- Washington Mind
- The Old Rectory
- Community Opportunities
- YAV
- Grace House North East
- Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP)

Findings

Each Space to Create participant organisation identified their own short and long term aims. Their stated short term aims, and progress is reported below anonymously. The long term aims will be evaluated in the final Phase 4 Evaluation report.

Short Term Aims (by March 2025)	Progress reported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama/creative group • Build up contacts for drama • Build up contacts for art/creative activities 	<i>Information still to be collected</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with our centre users through craft and design • Develop relationships with other projects to share ideas • Improve our bid writing for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved engagement with centre users through activities – still improvements to be made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a relationship with a dance instructor who becomes a regular at youth activities • Explore dance as a regular activity within the youth work programme • Showcase a performance created by our service users 	<i>Information still to be collected</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to deliver a weekly craft/creative group • Work with the original group to induct more – peer element 	<i>Information still to be collected</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help service users to own their work and add value to their work 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain more confidence in marketing • Get more people interested and coming to events • Make more contacts with contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved marketing – now better able to advertise and promote our workshops e.g. 400 participants for our Love A’Fair event. • Audience and participant development – reaching people not previously engaged with our organisation. • Strengthened relationships with artists and making arrangements to contract the artist to work with our youth group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase engagement of churches, young people, adults into creative activities • Develop workshops and skills • Undertake consultation with churches, young people and adults to ensure workshops are fit for purpose • Commission artists for the first time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement with local people. • Increased residents’ sense of pride in the area • Increased the numbers of young people engaging in art and cultural activities • Created more prospects within the area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular cultural sessions • Training volunteers • Events/activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More volunteers have been involved. • Increased interest from the community to engage in arts and we have more displays than we had in the past. • Staff, volunteers and community have become more confident to engage in as well as speak about arts as well as their own heritage and culture. • There is an evident pride amongst members involved and community in their South Asian heritage and culture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased parents/carers engaging in group creative activities • Increased confidence in parents/carers to develop social and creative skills • Through participating in therapeutic creative workshops – enhanced wellbeing to sustain a continuation of creative therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space to Create has enhanced our You Are Not Alone service for family parents and carers enabling us to deliver extra and different therapeutic creative activities. • Developing a more varied offer to try to attract higher engagement. • Out monitoring concludes that activities have been interesting and absorbing as well as beneficial to the general health and wellbeing of participants. • New parents and carers participating in creative activities. • New parents and carers feel more confident in taking part in creative activities after experiencing the benefits.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant feedback has been a testament to the success of the activities we have provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spreading the word about arts and encouraging current non participations to take part Ironing out marketing – social media etc The opportunity for other volunteers and staff to feel confident of their part in and knowledge of the arts To give opportunities for a wide range of arts participation regardless of income or personal circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some funding secured towards the creation of a community sculptural garden Wanting to pursue arts hub status Greater numbers of people participating and generating ideas. Improved marketing and social media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To get art projects up and running for all ages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have started small workshops with art and creativity, hopefully to improve in number to go on to our bigger project – The Graffiti Wall

Findings from semi structured interviews and a focus group reveal the following outcomes following their completion of Phase 1 activities:

- Awareness and marketing**

Cultural Spring’s inclusive marketing and partnership based approach meant that participants heard about the project from many different sources, including wider VCSE meetings, from direct approaches from Cultural Spring, Cultural Spring’s Steering Group and as a result of previously been involved with Cultural Spring’s activities.

- Motivations to engage**

Reported motivations were many and varied and included: The fact that organisational participation in Space to Create was free; Providing opportunities to give back to the community; Flexibility to work with any age group; The opportunities to develop additional/new skillsets; The option to have ‘closed’ workshops for particular client/user groups; Emma Biggin’s infectious enthusiasm for the project; The wrap around support available e.g. how to work with artists and creative practitioners; Enhancing our offer to include arts based activities; Wanting to engage more young people with our organisation and seeing S2C as a way of achieving this and being a springboard for other things; Audience development and New skills development and support.

These diverse motivations demonstrate the considerable added value perceived to be had through engagement with Space to Create.

- Best bits**

Participants cited the following as working well: Flexibility and timescales which supported people’s confidence to engage; Range of different opportunities to engage in S2C activities, e.g. dance, production, set design, fundraising skills – which allows public participants several different entry points and promotes access and inclusion; Local ownership, partnership

working and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach through being able to develop new creative activities to take place within venues in direct response to community needs and wants; Cultural Spring's responsiveness and support; Marketing training; The templates developed which have saved each S2C venue considerable time. Cultural Spring's approach is best summed up in the following quote from a participant organisation: *'As the manager of a mental health charity there are many demands on my time and finding fresh ideas and activities can be time consuming. Cultural Spring make this so easy and effective.'*

- **Delivery challenges**

Respondents unanimously felt that the level of reporting Cultural Spring was proportionate, many cited the perennial challenge of getting participants to complete feedback forms, especially for short term or one off activities. Several organisations reported that their participants felt that some of the questions were intrusive e.g. questions about gender/neuro diversity/non binary.

Finding artists/creative practitioners from Asian and African communities was said to be difficult, but important for work in terms of visibility and role modelling – *If you cannot see it, you cannot be it.*

Consideration should be given to exploring with S2C organisations how best to gather participant evaluation forms to aid collection of this data.

- **Shared Learning**

The marketing training workshop delivered Si Beckwith from Cultural Spring to demystify marketing and enhance organisations' use of different media was highly valued. S2C organisations reported a greater awareness and understanding of the language used within arts and culture and a resulting confidence to engage with this sector.

S2C organisations reported how their activities had resulted in them seeing and experiencing different sides of current service users when they engage in creative and cultural activities.

For instance one organisation reported how: *'We had tried for about 12 years to get one of our service users to consider participating in a craft activity with no success. He went to the Ceramic Course we hosted and loved every minute of it!'*

They also reported increased understanding of the role and value of community based arts and cultural experiences versus just buying a creative activity pack from Amazon – in terms of building community, reducing social isolation, creating connections, learning new skills etc.

Appreciation of artists skillsets and experience which can be used in community settings was also recognised.

- **Doing things differently**

S2C organisations reported that after being engaged in Phase 1 of the project, they are now doing the following things, which they did not previously do:

- More focussed on quality than quantity and getting people to do/try different things.
- Deploying different engagement routes to reach more diverse users
- Enhanced planning, for example developing marketing timelines, detailed budgeting and artist identification

- Engaging more young people in projects at all levels which enhances community ownership, builds pride in place and acts as an incentive to develop more projects with and for young people in the future
- The introduction of a feedback tree

- **Outcomes**

Focus group participants reported the following positive outcomes for their organisations and communities, resulting from Phase 1 delivery activities:

- More young people engaged in Youth Clubs and Campaigns around knife crime
- Community focussed activities
- Increased confidence amongst staff to deliver/programme arts and cultural activities
- Increased numbers of volunteers engaged
- Volunteers' confidence increased
- Increased pride in community culture, arts and place
- Greater numbers of staff engaging in creative activities
- Increased numbers of men engaging e.g. Modelling and Lego.
- Empowered service users, through trying new things such as Creative Writing workshops

- **Miscellaneous**

Description of how working with Cultural Spring on the S2C project during Phase 1 included:

'Good and very positive. I like the fact that open communication is always there, so you know what is going on which makes it easy to maintain the relationship. Having regular monthly conversations with Emma B has built a good relationship. Cultural Spring are always open to our suggestions and have been a good critical friend to us. The tutors delivering workshops have been fab.'

'Cultural Spring seem to have a sixth sense in terms of knowing/anticipating your needs, barriers, issues etc and then offering solutions to these. Our relationship is going to be a long term one – wish we had engaged with them years before. They are a phenomenal organisation. We are gob smacked at the success of the workshops – including the use of workshop tutors who understand and are good at working with people with mental health challenges.'

'They are down to earth, approachable and solution focussed – a real grass roots organisation. An absolute pleasure to work with.'

- **Needs and future wants**

Participant organisations identified the following future needs:

- Clarity around when Phase 2 will start and more detail of what will be involved

- Experience exchange – the opportunity for S2C organisations to visit one another and share experiences and expertise so they can grow and develop faster together through mutual learning
- For there to be future meetings of S2C organisations to better understand what each is doing in terms of developing their arts/cultural offer and to improve ways of working together
- Sharing information about what organisations will be doing in Phase 2, to avoid date clashes and to help raise awareness, joint promotion and marketing
- Signposting support for those involved to progress their ideas. For example, if volunteers are looking to set up an art based business – where do they go for support?
- The development of press packs and other forms of marketing materials
- Potential development of joint brochures promoting all S2C activities in one place
- For there to be an end of Phase 2 celebratory showcase for all organisations involved
- Support from Cultural Spring for young people completing the Arts Award
- Support with sustainability for S2C organisations – including where to go for funding, support with funding applications and exploring the best legal forms for continuance.

5. Workshops and Creative Activity Packs

Thirty two (32) different creative workshops were delivered, attended by 1921 participants. Workshops topics covered a wide range of creative activities, designed to both respond to and appeal to diverse participants. The majority were delivered face to face, but some were online. Workshops included: African drumming; Block fabric printing; Ceramics; Ceramic Wall Hanging; Christmas Applique; Creative Poetry; Creative Writing; Early Years Music; Expressive Mark Making; Fun with fabrics; Furniture Recycling; Furniture Upcycling; Introduction to Cyanotypes; Introduction to Decoupage; Introduction to Pewter; Introduction to Proggy; Introduction to Textile Hearts; Macrame; Mosaic; Performance Arts; Pewter Clocks; Pewter Jewellery; Photography; Photography & Cyanotype; Plants and Patterns; Polymer Clay; Pre School Painters; Proggy Brooch; Shibori Dyeing; Silk painting; Spray Paint; Spring Easter Wreath; Textile Upcycling; Tote Bags Ukulele; Upcycled Coasters; Watercolour Wildflowers; Weaving; Wire and Bead Jewellery.

Creative Activity packs were delivered to fifty four (54) individuals, so that they could engage in creative activities within their own homes. Thus increasing access and inclusion for those people, whom for whatever reasons, were unable to join in person or online group workshops. Notably seventy nine percent (79%) of recipients of activity packs identified themselves as having a disability. This figure is much higher than for in person (39%) or online workshops (30%) and therefore suggests there is value to be had from continuing these packs as a way of engaging people with disabilities. The difference made, as reported by one Activity pack recipient can be found here: *'I was desperate to try a craft but never had the money to try or to purchase the additional materials required. The packs were offered with no cost and had everything provided to complete the craft. It brought so much joy into my life.'*

Quotes from face to face and online workshop participants below clearly illustrate how this activity contributes to Cultural Spring's and CPP programme outcomes:

'Good to get out and try something new' – connections and learning

'I was made redundant after 35 years in my job due to ill health last year. I like craft activities and this gets me out of the house into a social situation, doing activities I enjoy' – new learning

'To have some much needed time to myself as my child has ADHD and home life doesn't allow this' – improved wellbeing, mindfulness and respite

'Being creative gives me a good sense of wellbeing and achievement. I also got to know some new people'. – sense of achievement and improved wellbeing

'I've never had confidence to try by myself. It is much better being part of a group for advice and help' – improved confidence

'Helps my little girl socialise and learn new songs' – connecting and learning

'I was made redundant from my job in 2022. I wanted to take part in activities to get out of the house, like craft and practical activities' – social connections

'I love learning new skills and this class was in my own village' – learning and accessibility

'It made me curious when I had seen the advertisement for the course. I am also quite isolated due to being a carer for my partner and wanted to do something for myself' – connections, respite and wellbeing

'It's something I look forward to every week - and every week I learn something new' – wellbeing and learning

Focus group findings

Two focus groups, attended by twenty (20) workshop participants from a Ukulele and Upcycling Textile group attended. Most participants had been attending their weekly workshop for over six months.

Motivations to join the group originally?

The following reasons were cited:

- Local, accessible and reasonably priced
- To learn something new
- Newly retired – to help fill my time and develop a new hobby
- Opportunity to learn new musical skills
- Meet new people and form new friendship group
- Subsidised instruments
- Wanting to learn how to play music with other family members
- Ambition to be able to play new tunes
- Love to learn – a crafter at heart
- New opportunity
- Love Cultural Springs workshops – attend a choir in the afternoon too
- Local provision is an important factor
- Found about the class through the community & Facebook posts
- Been to other Cultural Spring workshops before – pottery, jewellery and choir
- Interested in sewing classes
- Learning new skills and things to re-do with fabric
- Have been a dressmaker for 40 years but still learning new skills at this class
- Wanted to know how to re-use scraps of materials for bags and quilts
- Sharing skills between one another an important element
- Post Covid wanted to see what there was out there to get involved in

What keeps participants coming to the workshops?

Participants reported the following reasons for their continued engagement:

- Learning new songs to play on the ukulele
- The social side of the group
- Progression of skills/playing ability
- Friendship group formed
- Enjoy it
- Sam's a really good teacher and mentor
- We have fun
- Learn something new every week
- Good venue, pleasant environment, kind people with invested management from the community centre
- Lost confidence post retirement and the class rebuilds this
- The class makes you feel 'worth it'
- Provides a rest and different focus from everyday life
- Chomping at the bit to come each week
- Protected time/space and activity for me each week
- Lonely and it makes me feel supported
- Provides 'switching off' opportunities
- Can talk to others in the group
- It brought me back to the area after moving house
- Able to work at your own pace. I'm always last but this does not matter or embarrass me
- To help each other

Best bits

The most valued elements of workshop participation included:

- Playing new tunes
- Social interaction and chat with fellow players
- Good challenge to have
- Stimulates the mind
- Escapism
- Mindfulness – living in the moment when playing. Takes your mind off other things
- Dress adaptations
- Trying new/other things
- Being inspired
- Creativity in and of itself
- Paula and Michell are excellent tutors, friendly and supportive
- Transferable skills
- Clears the mind
- Making new friends
- Takes our mind off other things
- Going home having made something new and putting it on Facebook

- Sense of achievement
- This dress was a duvet cover last week
- Recycling a teenagers T-shirt by ironing on floral patches to make a unique stylist top
- Helped build my confidence
- Easy interactions

How feel after each class?

Post workshop attendance, participants reported feeling:

- Varies, from happy to frustrated - depending on how well the last session and performance has gone
- I go away singing the tune of the last one played
- In a good mood
- Don't want to go home and cannot wait to come back
- Great and I immediately make another one at home
- Sense of achievement – 'I've made this'
- Confident – got more of myself back
- Confidence to join other classes
- Very comfortable

Miscellaneous comments from participants included:

- Streets ahead of WEA classes
- Really gutted this is the last class – hope there will be more
- People don't sit in the same seats each week like in other classes – everyone talks and shares things

Outcomes

The following outcomes have been harvested from evaluation feedback from a 15% sample size of workshop participants:

Outcome	Percentage
Feeling happy after workshops	98%
Sense of achievement	100%
Learning something new	97%
Appetite to take part in similar activities in the future	99%
Feeling more relaxed whilst taking part/improved wellbeing	96%
Would recommend to others	100%
Valued the social aspect of workshops	94%

These levels of positive outcomes supports continued access to locally based, affordable creative workshops. Cultural Spring's ABCD approach to sustaining these through their Space to Create programme is both a sensible future focussed approach and a valuable additional initiative.

6. Go and See Trips

Eight (8) Go and See visits took place attended by three hundred and thirty seven (337) participants. These included trips to: I Daniel Blake, Penguin, Beauty and the Beast, Nightfall, Sunderland Light, Breaking Tradition, Aladdin and the National Gallery.

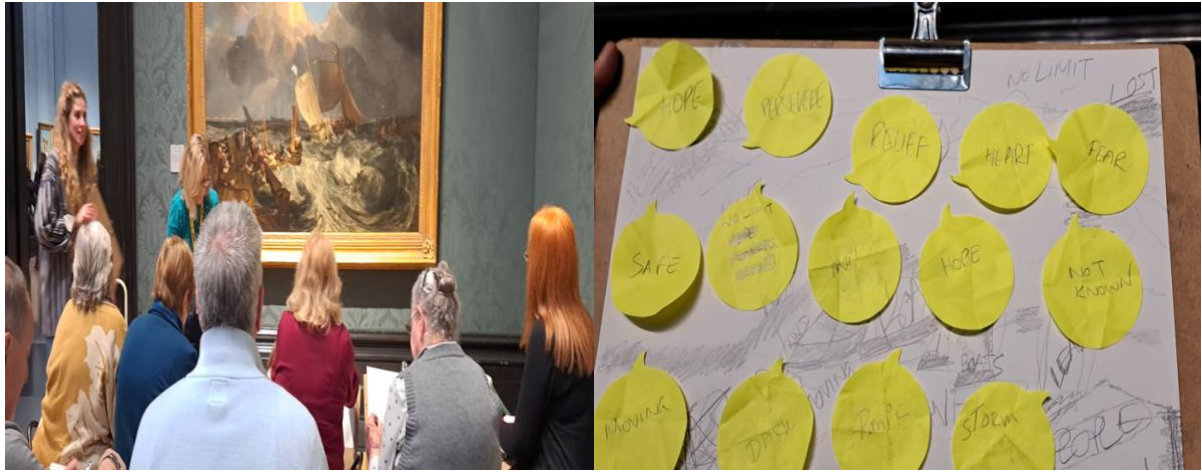
Demographic data for those engaging with Go and See trips can be found below:

Demographic	Percentage
Male	29%
Female	71%
Minoritised ethnic community	3%
People with disabilities	19%
Under 25 years	47%
25-64 years	39%
Over 65 years	14%
Neurodiverse	26%
First time arts engagers	7%
One or less engagements in the arts in the last year	41%
New to Cultural Spring activities	59%

The above table reveals a slightly higher male engagement profile than for other activity areas, lower engagement levels amongst people with disabilities and from minoritised ethnic communities and just over a quarter of participants identifying as being neurodiverse. Just under two thirds of participants were new to Cultural Spring activities and forty one percent (41%) were from the least engaged cohorts - which demonstrates continued reach to new and least engaged groups of people.

The National Gallery trip organised in February 2024 was mainly for community representatives from venues and organisations and was attended by fifteen (15) people. The group took part in a facilitated exercise to look at Turner's painting – the aim of which was to use art to strengthen connections, explore the use of art objects as ways to open communication and discussions.





Following this trip a working group has been established to progress activities around the National Gallery Art Bus which will be visiting the Coalfields and Washington, Simonside, Bede and Reckondyke communities between the 15-24th November 2024. The aim of which is to help raise the profile of the National Gallery through bringing works out to the community.

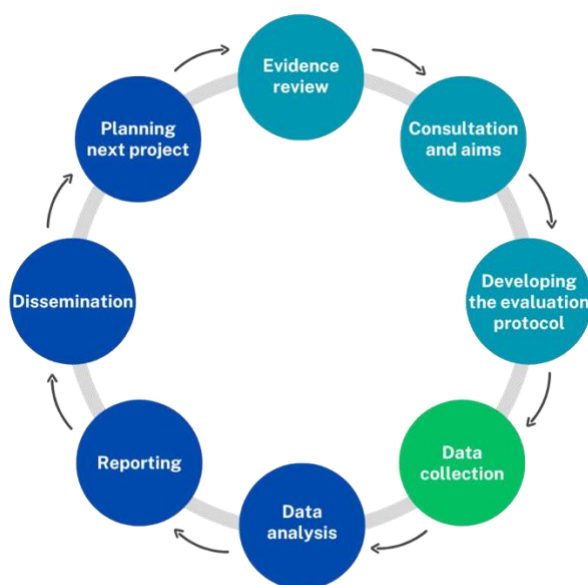
7. Conclusions and recommendations

Vision and process driven

Cultural Spring's CPP Project is driven by its organisational vision *'For arts and culture to be an expected and accepted part of everyone's lives in Sunderland and South Tyneside'*. All activities are designed to increase equity, diversity and inclusion whilst building capacity and empowering individuals and communities to help shape and realise the types of creative activities delivered, with an eye on how these can be sustained going forwards.

Action research

As evidenced throughout this report Cultural Spring continues to demonstrate its action research project credentials through the ways in which it responds to individual, organisational, partner, stakeholder and community feedback alike and using this to help shape activities – the journey from Cultural Pop Ups via Warm Spaces to Space to Create and changes made to Bitesize delivery (notably the longer lead in development time, introduction of the £300.00 community development fee and closer partnership working with Bitesize venues) both being cases in point



Asset based community development approach

An Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) ethos continues to a preferred modus operandi. When beginning to work in new areas or on new activities, Cultural Spring starts with community assets rather than deficits and builds on these, working with physical, human, cultural and intangible assets to co-create future arts and cultural provision. Their increased programming of activities in non-traditional spaces for non-traditional audiences/participants has helped to extend reach and engagement amongst the least engaged. Space to Create work with community venue/organisations

evidences this ABCD approach and has led to considerable added value and empowerment for those involved – not least in helping organisations engage new and more diverse people with their S2C and their own activities, development of social capital and networks and increased understanding and confidence to engage with art and cultural sector organisations.

Transformational Engagement

Cultural Spring's CPP project provides numerous routes and entry point for people to engage in arts and culture. For instance people can engage in *transactional* ways as consumers, participants, audience members and commissioned organisations. However the hope is that people and organisations will engage in more *transformational* ways, as: co-creators, invested artists/creative practitioners & commissioned organisations, volunteers, decision makers, community forum/panel members, Steering Group members and co deliverers. Transformational engagement is as a way of achieving step change and significantly contributes to sustaining activities going forwards. Transformative Engagement is a process based not on the transfer of expertise, but rather an interactive and iterative process in which all partners work together to tackle issues and deliver activities through experience exchange and shared learning.

Generous leadership and partnership working

Generous leadership is also a feature of Cultural Spring's modus operandi demonstrated through Cultural Spring's Steering Group, Community Champions, Commissioning Forums and panels. Time is spent establishing and building relationships with individuals and organisations, empowering others to make decisions, delegating responsibilities and valuing and acknowledging other's contributions.

Legacy

Whilst this report focusses solely on activities delivered across Sunderland, it should be noted that the Cultural Spring Charity has continued to deliver arts and cultural activities across South Tyneside, thus preventing a cliff edge of provision being faced by these communities. Meaningful partnership arrangements, not least with the South Tyneside Cultural Partnership have resulted in significant resources being leveraged to enable continued delivery. This is a clear indication of the value placed on Cultural Spring's activities and contributions to regeneration, inclusion, place making and wellbeing.

Incidental benefit

Organisations engaged in S2C collectively reported an increased knowledge and awareness of the arts and cultural sector and recognition of the value and role the sector has in enhancing their activities. They also reported greater appreciation of the skillset and experience of artists and creative practitioners. Hopefully this will lead to further market development for artists and creative practitioners and future joint activities and projects.

Recommendations

Below we present a number of recommendations for consideration:

- **Bitesize**

Further work with commissioned organisations and venues to improve clarity around marketing and promotional activities and to achieve synergy through joint marketing approaches.

Continuation of the £300.00 post EoI development fee for community engagement activities to ensure Bitesize relevance and buy in.

Consideration to be given to extending the Bitesize development time allowed for commissioned organisations.

- **Space to Create**

Further work to be undertaken with community venues/organisations to explore ways to improve participant and audience feedback.

Further explanations to be given to explain why some perceived intrusive monitoring questions are required e.g. questions around gender status etc.

Facilitating further networking opportunities amongst S2C partner organisations so they better understand what each are doing, can share experience and expertise to develop faster together.

Consideration be given to organising a showcase for all S2C organisations

- **Workshops**

Look to deliver future support around legal forms and potential funding sources and financial models to aid workshop sustainability going forwards.

- **Increasing diversity**

Work to increase the visibility of artists, creative practitioners and commissioned organisations coming from minoritised ethnic communities.

Continue to offer these, especially for people unable to leave the home for whatever reason – people with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities particularly value this offer.

