

# VOICE OF THE CHILD 2018

Self Evaluation



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# VOICE OF THE CHILD

Voice of the Child is a project set up by Action for Children to celebrate curiosity, creativity and a child led approach to learning and play.

## Executive Summary

Four artists were in residency across 5 children's centres in central Northumberland from February – October 2018. They co-created and delivered a set of participatory sessions at Ashington children's centre, Choppington first school, Newbiggin children's centre, Newbiggin sports centre, Bedlington children's centre and Pegswood children's centre.

The Voice of the Child project explored ways in which children and young people's communication could be encouraged through arts activity and play.

Artists and centre staff worked together to plan sessions which encouraged curiosity in both children and their parents and developed new skills. The residency impacted positively on wellbeing for those involved and introduced artists and art-forms into children's centre environments over a 10-month period of time.

Artists started the process with a set of self-development goals which for each of them included a deeper understanding of how to work with very young children. They were also particularly interested in making work which had value for both the community of participants and for exhibition outcomes.

Artist were enabled to bring different art-forms together in a process of co-creation which had family creativity and a child led approach at its heart.

## Our participants

Our participants for the project were;

- Action for Children children's centre staff
- Families with children under 2
- Children in nursery aged 3-4
- Young people in after school clubs up to age 19.
- Parents/ carers as adult participants

## Headline statistics

- 929 children and young people participants across 6 different centres
- 678 parent/ carer participants
- 38 delivery staff
- 10 admin/ other staff, 1 freelance project manager



## Aims

- To find creative ways to explore, record and understand the voice of children and their families through creative activity.
- To better understand ways for artists to complement the work of children's centre staff.
- To create a set of interactive exhibitions in children's centre environments and cultural venues of interest.
- To find ways to inspire project participants including exposure to artworks and other venues e.g.; 'Go and See' opportunities

## 2018 Goals

- To work with the community in a way where skills are learnt through inspiring artistic experiences using the theme 'Voice of the Child' and artforms of traditional craft, storytelling, visual art, play, noisemaking, audio recording sculpture.
- To work with up to 400 children and families
- For artists to work with participants to create work which can be taken home and in ways which inspire parents/ children to extend experiences outside of the setting.
- For artists and centre staff to engage in reciprocal training to gain further skills in working creatively with children.
- For the artists to work with participants to co-produce high quality artworks that can be showcased at the exhibition venues and increase speech and language and interest in literacy.
- To take part in 3 cultural trips/ 'go and sees'.

## Voice of the Child values

Over the course of the artist residency, we developed a set of values to help plan and measure our success against.

### Voice of the Child

- celebrates curiosity and creativity and is child centred and where possible child-led interactions.
- encourages partnership working between children's centre staff and artists supported by a creative facilitator and project manager.
- supports skills development and wellbeing for participants, artists and staff.
- adapts to the needs of the environment it works in and strives to connect to the early years development framework.

## Artistic Approach

Working in partnership with artists, we explored new materials with families. Parents were encouraged to help their children explore materials talking about colour, texture and comparing the material to other things in their world. We recorded children's voice through creating a series of self-portrait images drawn into clay tiles and onto naturally dyed cloth which was made into a permanent artwork in the form of a set of Tee-pees. We also recorded a set of drawings into a music box. We worked with 7 artists across the residency, 2 for 10 months, 2 for 4 months and 3 for shorter commission elements of the project;

- Yvette Hawkins (textile residency artist),
- Lindsay Duncanson (audio/ noise making residency artist),

- Stevie Ronnie (storytelling artist for research and development phase),
- Judith Davies (ceramics residency artist),
- Marek Gabrysch (audio sessions)
- Daniel Weatheritt (design/ illustration commission)
- Alan Fentiman (film-making commission).

Art-forms explored in sessions;

- Ceramics with paper porcelain and paper clay with clay tools, found objects and natural materials.
- Textiles including sewing, macramé, weaving and natural dyeing using Red Cabbage, Turmeric, Blueberries, Spinach, Avocado and Onion skins.
- Storytelling and Book Making
- Print-making
- Visual art
- Crafts
- Audio recording/ noise making/ digital devices



### Staff expertise, skills development and reciprocal training

There were 6 training sessions planned and delivered in partnership with Action for Children staff which encouraged reciprocal learning and skills development.

Artists trained in the Early Years Framework led by AfC staff. Staff trained with Stevie in bookmaking and self-expression, Judith with ceramics, Yvette with textiles and sewing, Lindsay with noise making from materials found at home.

Staff and artists worked to find the best ways to deliver the activity for the project and most of the activity took place within existing sessions where AfC staff would set up a range of activities at different stations both play based and creative and the artist/ s would set up a ‘Voice of the Child’ station.

### Management team.

The project was managed by a freelance project manager who worked with us for 45 days between December and October 2018. The project was steered by a group made up of children’s centre staff and arts professionals and met seven times of over the course of the project.

- Lindsey Kirk – Children’s Centre Manager
- Aimee McPhillips – Children’s Centre, Early Years Co-ordinator
- Lisa Blaney – Arts and Health manager, bait (creative people and places), Museums Northumberland
- Sarah Bradbury – Community Programmer, BALTIC centre for contemporary art, Gateshead
- Rebecca Huggan – Director, New Bridge Project, Newcastle
- Claire Newton – (freelance) Creative Consultant and VOC Project Manager

## Partnerships

- Ashington Library/ Leisure Centre
- Woodhorn Museum
- Bait, museums Northumberland
- BALTIC, centre for contemporary art/ BALTIC Library
- Seven Stories - the national centre for children's books

## Go and Sees (days out)

We created four 'Go and See' opportunities for participants in partnership with cultural organisations supported by the bait, creative people and places at Museums Northumberland model.

- 35 Families went to Baltic for the first time and saw Infinity Pitch by artists Peter and Rossi,
- 5 families came in to see our 'pop-up' participatory exhibition at Woodhorn Museum,
- 9 families came to Newbiggin beach to co-create a large-scale artwork
- 7 families came on a summer trip to Seven Stories and Ouseburn Farm taking in part of the Exhibition of the North trail at Ouseburn created by artist Kate Drummond.



## Impact on participants

- Of the 35 families, 34 who visited BALTIC for the first time - would now take a trip to Baltic independently
- Of the 7 families who visited Seven Stories, Ouseburn and Ouseburn Farm— 6 would now go on a trip there independently, the one who said they wouldn't revisit is down to the pay barrier.

*"All the activities made me feel really creative, we enjoyed the trips as my children enjoyed mixing with other children and getting out and about. The kids enjoyed collecting and hunting for objects on the beach to make a mermaid and since the clay sessions we have done play doh activities at home."* Mum of two children, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

*"I enjoyed the textile work, I found this so therapeutic and enjoyed having time for me while my children were in being looked after in creche. We loved the trips and it's made us more creative at home too, I used to upcycle things but then I stopped, and this project made me start again. It just feels really good to do these activities."* Mum of two children, Ashington

*"I really enjoyed working with Yvette, she was lovely. She taught me how to achieve something, the ability to sow. I've been so much more creative at home, I have done more marking making, and been more creative, lots of arts and crafts with the kids. Voice of the Child really encourages self-*

*expression in children? I'd like to see more stuff to do with the children. More stuff together that we can create something."* Mum of 3 children aged 20 months, 9 years, 8 years, Ashington

### Exhibitions and showcases

Products/ new commissions x 9

- Yvette and Judith's co-created home portraits scroll book x 1
- Yvette's tee-pees x 3
- Activity cards x 1
- Judith clay creations x 2
- Lindsay audio interactions x 2



We have two permanent ceramic exhibitions in indoor and outdoor areas in Newbiggin and Ashington children's centres which have at least 425 service users per week.

We have partnered with BALTIC and Ashington library to exhibit two artworks for a period of two months each. Yvette and Judith's co-created self-portrait printed cloth book was positioned in BALTIC library from 9<sup>th</sup> September – 28<sup>th</sup> October

Yvette and Lindsey's 'Tee-pees of Discovery' were created with a view to be toured and there is a plan to use them in staff training sessions, national sharing events, library pop-ups and in other venues with a selection of noise making materials and popular picture books. We expect visitor/ interactive participant numbers to 'Tee-pees of Discovery' to be over 4000 by the end of the year.

### Temporary/ pop-up exhibitions

Pop-up exhibitions allowed us to reach participants outside of the children's centre environments and we were keen to offer participatory opportunities alongside exhibiting co-created art-works.



- Woodhorn Museum for The Miner's Picnic – Sat 9<sup>th</sup> June (1 day)

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- Ashington Summer Fair - Sat 1<sup>st</sup> July (1 day)
- Ashington Library – Autumn 2018 (10 days) tbc
- BALTIC Library – 9<sup>th</sup> September – 28<sup>th</sup> October (49 days)
- Colour to the Grey, Blyth – 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (5days)

Total visitor numbers for pop-up exhibitions; 6513

### Permanent exhibitions

We have created a series of three permanent exhibitions inside and outside children’s centre spaces entitled ‘Home Portraits’ which include two permanent ceramics exhibitions in the garden at Ashington children’s centre and in the foyer area and training room at Newbiggin-by-the-sea children’s centre.

Visitor numbers per month across both centres are; 1840 and the work will be in place permanently from October 2018.

### Communication and Audience Development

#### Marketing - Print

We were able to have flyers made in house and these were given to existing groups and to new members of the community as they accessed the children’s centre for the first time.

Where Voice of the Child sessions took place inside an existing group, the participant numbers were high. Where an additional session was advertised, numbers were lower, and artists struggled to meet expectation of a longer activity session. For this reason, we focussed the early years engagement on regular sessions and advertised parent, family and after school sessions. Although some of the attendance was low, we were able to understand how best to reach participants and ensure maximum value for the artists time after our research and development phase.

#### Online

Artists used the #voiceofthechild across their social media and we hope to keep the project title for future collaborations with artists.

We have had articles printed on the staff intranet which goes to all staff who work in Action for Children circa 3000.

#### Artist Feedback

Judith Davies - “I had specific aims around learning how to engage very young children. The most significant moments were when individual children were captivated by the process of working with clay and lost themselves in the making. One young girl in the nursery session repeatedly returned to make more work, was very independent and wanted to join the tiles of clay together and create a longer piece. Her imagination was inspired, she took the task further and made her own contribution, impressing natural forms into the piece and drawing into the clay with whatever tools she could find.

Another important moment was experiencing how the group of children interacted and worked together on impressed slabs made at Newbiggin and their delight in how objects like shells and stones left pattern and imprint in the surface.

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The after-school club environment was a very positive experience and working with older children gave the opportunity for more sophisticated and focused work to be made. Some of these children were very talented and really enjoyed working with clay, something fewer schools are offering because of technical costs in running kilns and lack of appropriate space. The children were very focused, and both genders took part, although most involvement was from females. The groups of young people were also very focused on task and really enjoyed working with clay. They benefitted from the calm and therapeutic working methods and a chance to make things that they could use at home. The work done for Colour to the Grey by them gave an opportunity to enjoy use of colour and to work quite freely and expressionistically.



The sessions with staff helped to connect to the project and potential developments with other groups. It also gave staff a chance to make work themselves and discover their creativity and use new materials and techniques.

The project which has been a very valuable experience for me as an artist. I hope that participants have felt that the work made by them is valuable and that it forms a lasting legacy for the centres.”

Yvette Hawkins - “I have been able to extend my knowledge of natural dyeing further particularly around health and safety, what produces the most vibrant colours etc and I have used this project to develop this further, which has resulted in working in other projects. I have also had the chance to develop this in combination with printmaking. Other dye techniques like ice dyeing and printing with plants have also been explored in greater depth than I had done previously.

I have really enjoyed particularly the challenge of getting everyone’s prints together and creating a visually vibrant set of artworks which I hope will be enjoyed for years to come. I hope that staff will take away some of the techniques I’ve introduced and keep creating artwork and objects for their centres and families.”



### What we learnt

Reflections on our original aims;

1. To find creative ways to explore, record and understand the voice of children and their families through creative activity.
2. To better understand ways for artists to complement the work of children’s centre staff.

3. To create a set of interactive exhibitions in children's centre environments and cultural venues of interest.
4. To find ways to inspire project participants including exposure to artworks and other venues

Working in partnership with artists, we explored new materials with families. Parents were encouraged to help their children explore materials talking about colour, texture and comparing the material to other things in their world. We recorded children's voice through creating a series of self-portrait images drawn into clay tiles and onto naturally dyed cloth which was made into a permanent artwork in the form of a set of Tee-pees. We also recorded a set of drawings into a music box.

We completely transformed the way we thought about exhibitions for this project in order to enable as many of the participants we worked with to see their work. This meant that for two of the artists the work they made became an interactive exhibition. Yvette's 'Teepees of Discovery' are works of art the children can interact and play with. We also created a set of noise making materials to accompany each tee-pee and a set of activity cards with illustrator Daniel Weatheritt.

We worked with the community in a way where skills were learnt through inspiring artistic experiences using the theme 'Voice of the Child' and artforms of traditional craft, storytelling, visual art, play, noisemaking, audio recording sculpture.

For artists to work with participants to create work which can be taken home and in ways which inspire parents/ children to extend experiences outside of the setting.

For the artists to work with participants to co-produce high quality artworks that can be showcased at the exhibition venues and increase speech and language and interest in literacy.

Children and families were exposed to a plethora of new artists, materials and techniques and we well exceeded the number of participant engagements. Reciprocal training was brilliant self-development for both artists and centre staff. The project has enabled our service to continue to keep children at the heart of everything we do. Using a child focused approach, we have been able to explore different ways of capturing the 'Voice of the Child'

### Development as an organisation

We have engaged a wide range of participants across all ages including under 2's, school aged children, teenagers, parents/carers in a variety of sessions including open groups, nursery sessions, out of school club, parent sessions, family sessions, taster sessions, fun days, summer activities, which has meant we have found different ways to enable the Voice of the Child to be explored in different art forms. We found using a variety of sessions enabled us to reach a wide range of participants.



We have engaged with a wide range of families across the children's centres, providing the families different opportunities and experiences. This has enabled the project to reach out to families who ordinarily would not have otherwise engaged in arts activities.

The taster sessions enabled families to come together and take part in a creative activity as a family as a whole, to bring families together. It gave artists an opportunity to see the families and understand the communities they were working in. Taking part in making and creating gave a sense of achievement and ownership.

Participating in arts activities has encouraged families to attend 'go and see' trips which helped to widen participant's cultural knowledge and confidence in arts and give exposure to other art forms and high-quality experiences.

Many families in our area do not have money or transport to go to cultural venues so this element was brilliant as it also helps to build and strengthen relationships between families.

The project enabled the artists to become more confident in working with the early years through co collaboration with Children's Centre staff, artists have become more creative and child focused in their engagement with the early years.

Judith's work involving clay enabled children to explore an art form more freely in creating self-portraits as well as encouraging younger children the opportunity to mark make which ensured activities became more child led which created opportunities for younger children with limited vocabulary to communicate and express themselves through play.

The parent focused sessions have supported some participants from the early stages of the project and taken them on a journey to explore their interest and creativity to further develop their skills and knowledge. Clay crafts and textile sessions gave more focused art form where parents could learn new skills such as natural dyeing and stitching, which are more traditional crafts.

The sessions provided support to participants and opportunity for socialisation with others which helps break down the barriers of isolation as well as enhancing their mental well-being.

As artists were spread across and covering different areas, this impacted upon the artists been able to become fully embedded within the Children's Centres and be seen as part of that community. Going forward for future projects we would look at this differently so that an artist can become focused solely within a setting and community to build those relationships.

This experience has helped us to understanding delivery of a large-scale project, as part of our service. We had not anticipated how much additional time staff would be required so for a new project we would build extra time for staff.

### **The future for Voice of the Child**

The activity has enabled a shift in creative and strategic thinking at Action for Children central Northumberland. We are now starting to work with participants as decision makers in the creative process.

We are now working in partnership with bait, creative people and places at Museums Northumberland, Northumberland County Council and other partners to develop a range of creative

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projects across our centres with artists. We hope to diversify the framework for artist residencies and build on the impact working with the creative sector can have on our participants confidence, skills development and wellbeing.

We are thinking about longer term goals and impacts of working with artists on our service users, participants and staff.

We are working with our national fundraising teams to develop fundraising strategies and ideas to support arts activity that helps us to impact on our goals around literacy and wellbeing. Planning and delivery of sessions at times was challenging to fit with the children's centres offer in line with artists time, going forward in the future we would build in the key dates into the planning at the very beginning of the project.

There are two key staff who have been involved in supporting the Voice of the Child artist residency project and they are keen to continue to help develop project ideas and bring in other key members of staff from different departments too.

The project has enabled staff to take part in a range of activities and art forms to help further develop their own skills as well as replicate experiences in the future to enhance learning with their role. An example of this was the colour dyeing activity, a member of staff recreated the activity and produced a piece of work that is to be used as a piece in the final product. Going forward, we will include AFC induction processes with the artists in the beginning for artists to understand some of the policies and procedures of AFC to support and guide artists when delivering to ensure safety and risk elements are covered.

The staff sessions have been helpful to impart knowledge and skills such as the clay/stitching session. Staff are able to use these skills in their day to day work working with Children and families.

Children's Centre staff were able to impart and share their knowledge regarding the early years to help support the artists in the delivery of their activities which strengthened the relationships between everyone. I feel this was important to understand and value each other's work and how we can collaborate together to achieve the best outcomes for the participants.

The audio and sound sessions have given staff an insight to noise making and audio in a way that would not ordinarily have been used. Lindsay has brought new ideas to explore sound and audio and enhance communication with children and families.

The tepees and audio equipment will be an enhancement to the Children's Centre, staff will continue to use the resources in many different ways that enriches communication and continues to explore the Voice of the Child in regular sessions.

[www.actionforchildren.co.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.co.uk)