



# LET'S GET MESSY PROJECT

**April-August 2023**

***Do arts interventions add value to the lives of young people negatively affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences?***



***A project delivered and researched in Dorset.***

## Contents:

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. The project	Page 4
3. The partners, arts forms and trip destinations	Page 4
4. Evaluation methods	Pages 9-12
a. Observations from delivering evaluation tools	Pages 10-12
5. Outcomes	Page 13
a. Testing part-one of the hypothesis	Pages 13-20
i. Social Skills	Page 14
ii. Self-esteem	Pages 15-16
iii. Technical skills	Page 16
iv. Health	Pages 17-18
v. Engagement with education	Pages 18-20
b. Testing part-two of the hypothesis	Pages 20-23
i. Increasing knowledge of arts education and careers	Pages 20-21
ii. Diversifying and developing skills amongst colleagues	Pages 21-23
6. Conclusion and recommendations	Pages 23-27






***‘Wow, what a week!!! I was very emotional last night when I processed all my thoughts. Can’t believe what we achieved as a team and how we all worked together. I can’t even come close to capturing how amazing it was.’  
(Key partner)***

## Introduction:

*Hi, my name is Claire. I am founder of Wakey Wakey ARTS, an arts, youth and wellbeing intermediary service based in Bournemouth.*



*Through Wakey Wakey ARTS, I have three core aims:*

-  *Help young people who are negatively affected by adverse childhood experiences, by providing them with creative opportunities.*
-  *Increase young people's awareness and engagement with arts education and careers – it's a wonderful sector to learn and live within!*
-  *Help colleagues across the arts industry to diversify and apply their skills with youth and wellbeing audiences.*

*The Let's Get Messy project has been bubbling away since I worked for Hampshire Cultural Trust from 2016-2018, project managing [Horizon 20:20 More & Better](#). This was a brilliant long-term programme which aimed to deliver positive impact through arts and culture to young people in alternative provision education settings.*

*Throughout this role I saw firsthand that the delivery of mainstream creative activities can give better life chances to young people who need them most. I also experienced a personal transformation of my own during my adolescence, because of my involvement in dance and the performing arts.*

*I wanted to bring this positive impact to my home county of Dorset, to develop the project concept so that it exposes young people to the whole cultural pathway available to them, and to support the connections and skills-diversification of artists to equip them to work in youth/wellbeing fields going forwards. And so, I designed the Let's Get Messy project.*

*It is important to note that despite wanting to promote cross-sector collaboration between the arts, youth and health industries, the Let's Get Messy project is distinct to an arts therapy service. This is because it focuses on providing the therapeutic benefits of the arts, but through mainstream creative activities, as opposed to through therapeutic interventions.*

*Following years of working in Bournemouth with young people, the unwelcome arrival of the pandemic, the sudden passing of my quietly remarkable Dad ([Brian Wakefield](#)) and the very welcome arrival of my first child Heidi, Wakey Wakey ARTS and the Let's Get Messy Project exploded into being.*

*Initial funding came from the Start Something Creative fund (Real Ideas Organisation) in April 2022, and was match-funded using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England in February 2023.*

*I go into this research report with an open mind...it may tell us as much about how we evaluate arts projects as it does how we should run them. Enjoy digging into this with me, and remember, you can get messy too!*

*Claire*

## The project:

The Let's Get Messy (LGM) project provided five separate partner organisations with six days' 'worth' of professional arts activities for a pre-selected group of young people. These six days included four days with an Artist, one day for a scheduled cultural trip, and one day collating evidence and reflecting on the experience in an arts portfolio, eligible for submission as an [Arts Award](#) qualification.



Image description: Arts Award portfolios created by young people at Livingstone Road Junior School.

Where timings did not allow for providing six full days of delivery, for example if taking place within the school day and around other lessons, the allocated Artist time was divided into hourly or half day sessions and spread across a longer period.

Due to its short delivery window, we had the opportunity to consider this a pilot arts intervention, which meant we were more inclined to take risks and treat it as a testbed for future work. It was the only project of its kind happening within the conurbation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

## The partners, art forms, and trip destinations:

The issue that many young people are exposed to one or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) between the ages of 3 and 18yrs sits at the forefront of this work. This includes abuse and neglect, living in care or being homeless, and parent or carer related problems such as separation or bereavement. We also believe the trauma of experiencing ill-health, whether mental or physical, will sit within this area.

Experiencing trauma at such a young age increases the likelihood of developing mental ill-health, as well as struggling with aggression management and the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance use. If left unsupported, these will evolve to disadvantage a young person within their personal and educational life, the effects of which will impact adulthood.

We believe that the application of the arts can reduce or reverse the negative effects of ACEs for young people, and so we used this 'ACEs' characteristic, as well as the impression that the young people might not already be receiving an arts intervention of some kind, to select organisations to contact.

We began making connections with potential partners in December 2022, and over time we approached 25 different organisations. It was important that 'partnership' was emphasised in our initial conversations, and that the teams we were connecting with understood the value of trialling this in their settings as a mutual research opportunity (whatever the outcome).

Partner dropouts, for various reasons, occurred until April, which meant that we secured our fifth and final partner as late as May 2023.

We are absolutely delighted with the strength of the final set of partnerships and the commitment all partners made to provide as rich an experience for their young people as time and conditions allowed.

Partner organisations and the details of their individual projects are available on the following pages.



1.



[Iford Academy](#). This is a Special School for secondary aged pupils, most of whom have an Education Health and Care Plan. This setting also supports pupils who are at risk of exclusion or who have been excluded from mainstream school.

**Key partner details:** Irene Smith (IAG Lead) and Abbé Davey (Teacher of Art).

**Cohort details:** Five students from Years 9-11. 'The group we chose are all students who have art sessions within school, or who like to be in the art room whilst art is being done' (Irene Smith). All had learning or behavioural needs which affected levels of engagement with education.

**Art form and Artist:** Mandala creation through block and lino printing techniques, with Melinda McCheyne.

**Arts trip:** A trip to [Roche Court Educational Trust](#), which is an independent arts education charity based at the [New Art Centre](#), Roche Court Sculpture Park in Wiltshire. This included decorating mugs and making sketchbooks, taking a tour and interpreting sculptures in a large cardboard sculpture workshop.

**Dates and format of delivery:** The project ran for eight two-hour sessions which took place during scheduled art lessons at school. These occurred twice weekly throughout May. The trip and Arts Award collation day occurred at the end of June.



2.

[Pebble Lodge Adolescent In-patient Service](#) (Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust). Pebble Lodge provides 24-hour assessment, treatment and care for children and young people with severe mental health problems and those who pose a risk to themselves, others, or their environment.

**Key partner details:** Sam Arnold (Activities Co-Ordinator).

**Cohort details:** The patients were aged 13-17yrs and were all female. 'The group were young people at Pebble Lodge, an inpatient unit for teenagers with severe mental health problems. The sessions were open to all of our young people to take part, with the view that they would all benefit' (Sam Arnold). Most young people were noticeably actively self-harming at this point in their lives and dealing with self-destructive thoughts/habits throughout the duration of the project.

**Art form and Artist:** Jewellery-making with Melinda McCheyne, and junk sculpture making with Peter Margerum.

**Arts trip:** A beach comb for 'found objects' to use for junk-sculpture making, a drawing activity on the beach relating to the [Loving Earth Project](#) exhibition at [Westbourne Library](#) and a trip to [All Fired Up](#) pottery café, an independent coffee shop and Paint-Your-Own Pottery Studio situated in Bournemouth town centre.

**Dates and format of delivery:** The sessions ran for three hours per week during education time at the hospital base. Melinda delivered for four weeks through June, with the trip happening in week two on a different day. The Arts Award collation day happened in week five, and Peter delivered for the three final weeks of July.



#### [Mental Health Support Team in Schools \(Dorset\)](#)

(Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust) – Livingstone Road Junior School. MHSTs work with schools to tackle the challenges children and young people experience, by helping them to feel more resilient and look after themselves, and by sharing strategies to help them cope better with life's ups and downs.

**Key partner details:** Nova Bovaird (MHSTs Clinical Lead - Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole), Jane McNiven (MHSTs Team Leader - Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) and Natalie Kenevan (Pupil Engagement Officer, Livingstone Road Junior School).

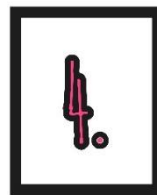
**Cohort details:** 12 young people in years 4-6. 'The children were chosen mostly due to their poor attendance across the year which results from factors out of their control. Things such as sibling anxiety, drug use within the close family, young carers and those who are pupil premium. Only one child has attendance above the attendance policy requirement of 96%, however they are a looked after child with SEN needs' (Natalie Kenevan).

**Art form and Artist:** Fimo (polymer clay) crafting with Káren Krige (Fimo Ark).



**Arts trip:** A visit to [Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum](#) where students had a tour and then responded to what they had seen using crafts (making their own 'imaginary World' through-the-keyhole boxes), a tour of street art along Bournemouth seafront, a visit to the exhibition space at [Pavilion Dance South West](#) and an ice cream on the Terraces.

**Dates and format of delivery:** The sessions ran for six consecutive full school days in July, with the trip happening on day two, an exhibition of student work for families on day five, and the Arts Award collation day on day six. Young people were off timetable and in a separate building to their usual classmates.



BCP Council Children's Rights and Engagement Team. Unite (Children in Care Council) and Insight (Care Experienced Forum) are open to Children and Young People aged 8-15yrs whose Corporate Parent is BCP Council. This service gives children and young people the opportunity, voice, and route to have a say in how services can be improved for themselves and their peers.

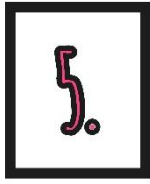
**Key partner details:** Terry Husher (Participation and Engagement Officer) and Jo Fry (Children's Rights and Engagement Manager).

**Cohort details:** Seven young people in care aged 8-15yrs, and one care-experienced young adult (aged 22yrs). There were a variety of needs present in the group, including diagnosed anxiety, behavioural needs, and a young person with affected development due to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

**Art form and Artist:** Theatre-making project about lived experience, with Claire Rimington.

**Arts trip:** A brief street art tour and reflections, a visit to [GIANT Gallery](#), Bournemouth, a picnic lunch in the town gardens and a trip to [Odeon Cinema \(BH2\)](#) to watch *Barbie* (2023).

**Dates and format of delivery:** The sessions ran for six consecutive full days in August, with a mini-sharing for Parents and Carers on day four, the trip on day five, and the Arts Award collation day on day six. The project was hosted by [Arts University Bournemouth](#) in their professional Black Box Studio theatre space.



[BCP Council Young Carers Team](#). This service is available for 5-18 year olds in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. It is for anybody who has a caring responsibility for either a Parent, sibling or other relative who lives in the family home.

**Key partner details:** Melissa Mondon (Young Carer Officer).

**Cohort details:** Six young carers aged 13-16yrs 'who have an interest in art and would benefit from a small group experience. These six originally all prefer smaller groups as larger groups can be overwhelming. Some suffer with anxiety about meeting new people...' (Melissa Mondon).

**Art form and Artist:** Dance and multimedia project with [Louise Kelsey](#).

**Arts trip:** A technical tour of [Bournemouth International Centre](#), a picnic lunch in the town gardens, a trip to [Odeon Cinema \(BH2\)](#) to watch *Haunted Mansion* (2023), and a visit to Starbucks, Bournemouth. There was an additional visit and talk at Winton Library that happened during the artist delivery phase.

**Dates and format of delivery:** The sessions ran for six consecutive full days in August, with the trip on day five, and the Arts Award collation day on day six. The project was hosted in [Winton Library](#), in the room formerly used as the Children's Centre.

#### **Additional delivery elements:**

- Arts University Bournemouth generously donated space for five project days, as well as delivering a Higher Education/Creative Careers talk to the group and full tech-support for the mini-sharing (this provided an invaluable careers opportunity for one young person).
- Roche Court Educational Trust funded travel and tickets for a cultural trip. They have since offered follow-up activities to two LGM groups.
- Bournemouth International Centre (BH Live) provided a bespoke technical tour at no cost to the project. They have since offered the same experience, plus the opportunity to have a technical tour of Pavilion Theatre, to two different LGM groups.
- Due to a saving in delivery costs at Pebble Lodge, up to £50 has been offered from the budget to support resources/an additional trip for patients. Additionally, patients were offered a donation of prom dresses by the LGM arts team to support their in-house prom.



- During the theatre project, a professional artist from the local area volunteered her time as an opportunity for skills-development/networking. The project benefitted hugely from her involvement (three full days), and the team were able to offer her a financial contribution.
- There were two chance OFSTED inspections which involved the project, both went very well.
- During the dance and multimedia project, one young person signed up for a library card, and another made a book reservation, as a result of attending the project at this cultural venue.
- Three young people rearranged family holidays in order to be able to attend their projects.
- Young people and staff at Pebble Lodge had their drawings from the trip exhibited alongside the national *Loving Earth Project* exhibition at Westbourne Library. Unfortunately, young people were not able to get offsite to see this before the exhibition came down.
- As a result of engaging with the project, an arts professional who had been in role for a long time connected with @Wakey\_Wakey\_Arts' Instagram account and made use of the 'Fortnightly Job Splash' feature to secure their next role (a senior, pivotal role within the arts/health sector).
- As a result of reconnecting an Artist and an arts venue for the purposes of a trip, that Artist applied for and was given freelance work within the organisation beyond the project.

## Evaluation methods:

The evaluation methods were designed to produce a measure against the following two-part hypothesis:

- 1) ***Participatory arts delivered in non-arts settings with young people affected by ACEs improve social skills, self-esteem, technical skills, health/wellbeing and engagement with education.***
- 2) ***When cross-sector collaboration between the arts, youth and health sectors occurs, participatory arts increase knowledge of arts education and careers for young people and diversifies/develops skills amongst colleagues.***

**Young people** were asked a range of questions in **baseline and end of project evaluation forms**. Example questions on the forms can be seen below:

- 1) Do you worry what other people think of you?
- 2) Do you know what a career in the arts is?
- 3) On a scale of 1-10 (1 being low and 10 being high), how well does your mind feel right now?

**Key partners** were asked a set of **interview questions** which were answered at the **end of the project**. Example questions included:

- 1) Have you noticed any marked changes in individuals within the group?
- 2) Would your setting ever pay for the project, or one like this?
- 3) Do you feel that your skills have increased or diversified as a result of the project?

All **Artists** were asked a set of **interview questions** at the **end of their delivery**, as well being asked to provide a **session-by-session summary**. Example questions included:

- 1) Have you ever worked in this environment/with these types of young people before?
- 2) Have you learnt anything during this project?
- 3) Have you experienced any challenges during delivery? If so, what?

In addition to this, **anecdotal feedback** from **all parties** was observed and captured **throughout the project**, as well as **photos and videos** recorded by Claire.



As with all evaluation procedures, there needed to be consistency across the tools designed for this project, and the tools needed to adequately provide feedback against all the aims within the hypothesis.

To achieve this, relevant questions were split across the different audience groups, with some aims gaining feedback from more than one group. For example, a comment on the self-esteem of young people was asked for from both the young people and the key partners.

The evaluation forms for young people were also designed to be accessible/inclusive to those who might have language or literary barriers, and because the age range of participants completing the form was so large (ages 8-17 years). This paved the way for yes/no questions, scaled questions, multiple choice questions and some questions with areas for one word, or one sentence answers.

Each audience group was asked the exact same set of questions, or given the same forms, which allowed for close comparison of answers to draw themes from.

### Observations from delivering evaluation tools with 'hard to reach' cohorts:

The interview questions to the Artists and Key Partners gleaned insightful results, with the only variation in how it was conducted being that two of the key partners took some time to answer the questions due to illness and/or annual leave. It could be argued that this will have impacted their ability to recall detail about the project, although it did not appear this way.

There was a bigger variation in the timing, context and environment for which the end measure evaluation form was given to the young people, however. After the first group completed their forms with very little context setting from the team (so as to avoid [demand characteristics](#)), and finding that results were just not that insightful or that questions were misinterpreted as not actually being about the project, it was deemed that a different approach needed to be taken, or tested.

As such, the end measure evaluation forms were deliberately given at different times, in different places and with a varying level of contextualising to see if this affected the level of truthful consideration given to the questions by the young people. See below:

Partner Organisation	Timing of end measurement	Environment	How it was positioned
Iford Academy	At the end of the trip activity, one month after artist delivery and with one day left to go of the project (the Arts Award collation day).	On the school minibus.	No positioning given to avoid demand characteristics.
Pebble Lodge	On the very last day during the final arts session.	In the art room at the hospital.	Some to no recap of what the project had covered, as young people were dropping-in and not necessarily all participating in the activities that day. Due to the time lapse of the project, three key young people who completed the baseline evaluation were unable to complete the end form due to illness or home-leave.

Livingstone Road Junior School (MHST Dorset)	At the end of arts delivery (day five), and just before the mini-exhibition for Parents/Carers.	In the activity room.	The form was set in context, the project was recapped as a group and the questions were read out one by one to help with the understanding of the questions.
Unite/Insight (BCP Council Children's Rights and Engagement team)	At lunchtime on the trip (day five), with one day left to go of the project (the Arts Award collation day).	In Bournemouth gardens.	A brief project recap was given, although not all listened because of the distracting environment (more interesting to chat to new friends). One young person was supported to complete it by a member of staff on a 1:1 basis.
Young Carers (BCP Council Young Carers team)	On the final day (day six – the Arts Award collation day) at lunchtime.	Just outside of the activity room.	Questions were defined by a member of the Young Carers team, who then scribed for all four young people on a 1:1 basis.

With only a surface-level assessment of the difference these subtle changes made, it appears that they didn't seem to make much difference to the relevance or validity of the answers given by young people who are 'hard to reach'.

With the exception of the youngest group (and therefore those who were provided with the most-detailed recap of the project), young people on the whole seemed to be slightly apathetic about the concept of evaluation, regardless of how much they had enjoyed or been affected by the project.

For example, whilst not representative of all participant answers, some young people answered '**no**' to '**Do you know what a career in the arts is?**' and '**Do you know how to carry on doing art within your education if you want to?**' despite having experienced a ten-minute, high-quality Higher Education/Creative Careers talk from a specialist arts university.

One young person indicated that the 'talk was boring', but then when he was given hands-on experience in the Technician's box lighting and sound designing the sharing, he commented that 'he didn't know these jobs existed' and was filled with a vigour to pursue a career within the arts.

Perhaps we must take learning styles and repeat exposure of elements that will help to achieve these aims into account, rather than just relying on one instance of an activity, however strong, to create a 'change'.

Whilst all answers from young people are valid and have been interpreted at face-value, it does throw into focus that for young people the wider picture or relevance of *why* certain things are being delivered or asked, is not always obvious to them. I believe that this was the greatest barrier to the evaluation.

This is perhaps even truer of groups who are experiencing or have experienced adversity in some way, as they may have more urgent pulls on their time and attention in the present moment, which may inhibit their ability to engage with the reflection and abstract thinking required for evaluation.

It is also truer of the groups who took part in the project as part of their existing weekly provision within school or hospital, as opposed to as a standalone activity with a new group of peers. It could be deduced that the project may be more difficult to reflect on as being a separate entity if it is incorporated more seamlessly into their day-to-day life.

Finally, a lack of skills reading and writing, a lack of confidence to ask for help and/or a lack of comfort sitting with one's own thoughts, may all contribute to a lack of *desire* to spend any amount of time considering one's thoughts and opinions about something. Of course, the nature of young people who have multiple ACEs increases the chances of any one of these things being true<sup>1</sup>.

However, we need to be able to evaluate impact with this audience. So, how do we gain true results from young people without really hammering home how much the project has helped you and therefore leading their answers?

It would not have been appropriate for the size of the project to spend *more* time on delivering evaluation tools, for example as sit-down interviews or active games, neither would any other method have been universal across all five groups because of the variation in individual abilities and ages.

Suffice to say, a suggestion would be that more control variables are necessary between groups when running these kinds of projects. This includes working with the same *types* of groups, the same format of delivery, the same timing of the evaluation and perhaps where longer projects take place, more regular evaluation milestones to get an overall truer average of participants' feelings about things that will truthfully reflect the impact of the project.

Running the project in block interventions (like the final three groups), also gleans richer evaluation results, and will prevent the likelihood of a loss of contact with young people who are transient within the setting.

However, should this be a barrier to working with young people who really need it? i.e., not working with certain groups because they can't fulfil the above evaluation criteria? No, because the evaluation could have perfect conditions and the young people still might not fancy giving any more thought to the questions. This might depend on how they're feeling mentally/physically/emotionally, what they're worrying about at home or if there is anything more interesting going on next door.

So, with all of that considered, we now dive into the outcomes which *were* discernible to see what affect the project had on those who were involved.



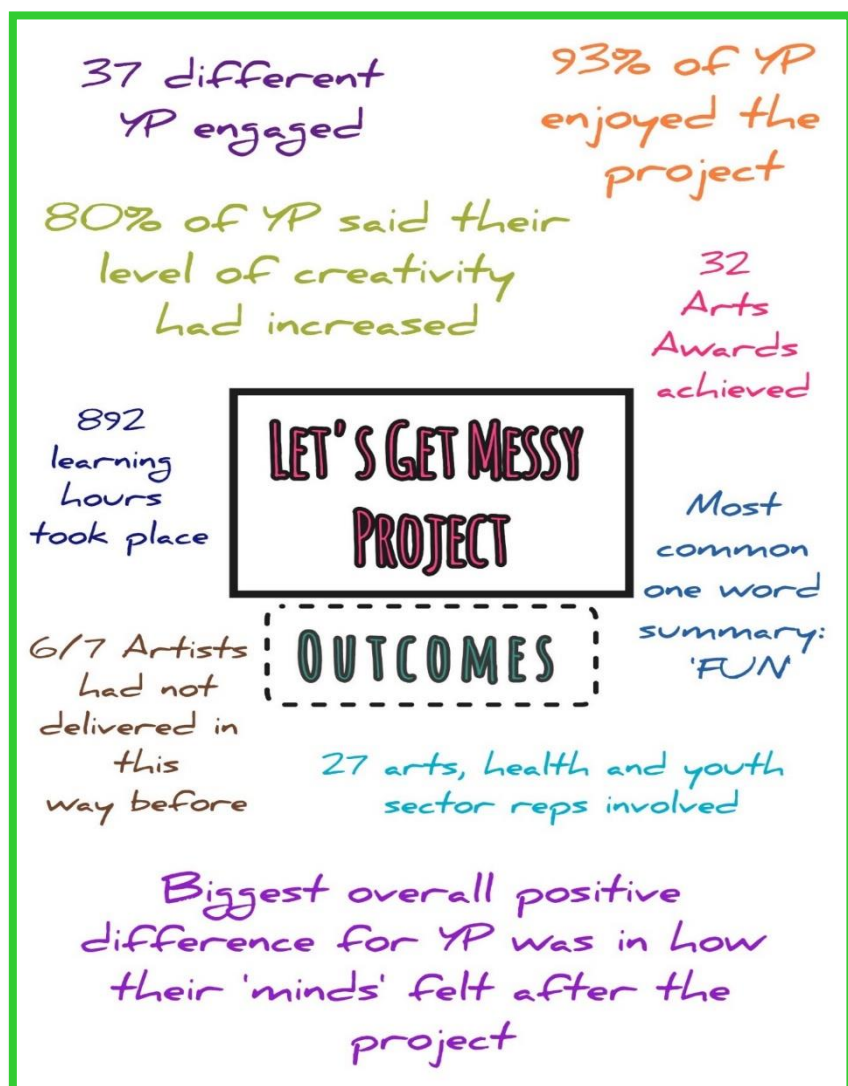
Image description: *Young people and staff in theatre project playing ice-breaker game with Artist.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://mft.nhs.uk/rmch/services/camhs/young-people/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-attachment/>



## Outcomes:



### Testing part-one of the hypothesis:

As mentioned previously, the belief is that the high-quality delivery of mainstream arts activities can have therapeutic benefits to individuals, without having to be delivered in a therapeutic setting, or with therapeutic theory behind them.

The data collected has been thematically analysed to sit underneath the subheadings included in part-one of the hypothesis (below).

- 1) *Participatory arts delivered in non-arts settings with young people affected by ACEs improve **social skills, self-esteem, technical skills, health/wellbeing and engagement with education.***

The findings also comment on how different art forms, cohorts and delivery formats affect the outcomes for young people.

**Social skills** – This refers to the way that young people managed themselves in relation to their peers, and the adults they worked with, throughout the project.



*‘The young people developed wonderful friendships, this was evidenced in the swapping of contact details and the communication between each other outside of sessions...The collection of [autographs] for their own folders in a creative way also evidences the level with which they held these friendships’ (Key partner).*

From the data collected, there was some evidence of an improvement in social skills for young people. Although the statistics are not as strong as the supporting quotes from staff, when comparing the groups the statistics *do* show us that the most noticeable improvement is within the group who took part in the theatre project.

In this group, 50% of young people improved in their personal scoring of **how comfortable they felt meeting new people before and after the project**, 25% stayed the same and 25% got worse.

Anecdotal feedback from staff about this group shows that *‘the young people communicated well with each other, with the delivery staff, with managers, with OFSTED and with other adults they met. They utilised the space available to them to manage their own emotions and behaviours. They showed that they understood they were in shared spaces and needed to consider others not just self.’* (Key partner).

There was also a plethora of feedback from all staff present with this group about how close they had become. One commented: *‘[Artist] did such an amazing job at creating a feeling of safety and support in the space and it really allowed everyone to really flourish and open up. It’s incredible to think that they didn’t know each other at the beginning of the week and what bonds they have made by the end.’* (Supporting Artist)

In the dance and multimedia project, one member of staff commented that *‘two of the young people were brothers and have a negative humiliating banter towards each other. This was noticeably less towards the end of the project, and non-existent when both boys engaged in the task at hand.’* (Key partner).

This therefore shows that there is some correlation between taking part in arts activities and the improvement of social skills. Improvement in social skills seems to be more likely when taking part in group projects rather than individual ones (as all feedback relates to art forms which initiated group activities) and seems to be more of an observed improvement by others than a personal one. However, it is also noted that young people were not asked directly if they thought their social skills had been affected by the project, this is a weakness of the evaluation.

**Self-esteem** – This relates to how a young person felt about themselves, and represented themselves emotionally, throughout the project.



*'I've loved all the art I've seen but I've also loved all the art I did' (Young person).*

When looking at overall changes in confidence, the group with the biggest mean average **increase in confidence** was the theatre group.

When looking at the *whole* group, there were 43 increased confidence points and only eight decreased confidence points across 21 participants. Nine young people stayed the same between the start and end of their projects.

Another indication of self-esteem is monitoring **how somebody feels when they are asked to try something new**, before and after the project.

In response to this question, the greatest difference was in those activities that were block interventions rather than weekly or twice-weekly activities. It is also a contributing factor that these were orchestrated as one-off projects that young people committed to, as opposed to within a school day, so they were perhaps more actively ready to 'try something new'.

The biggest improvement in this area is for the dance and multimedia project, with 75% of participants improving their scores and 25% staying the same (which means that no one felt worse about the prospect of trying something new by the end of the project).

One young person (aged twelve) said of the theatre project: *'This whole journey has made me more confident and a lot more happy. If I could do it again I would believe in myself more. I liked this whole project because I met lovely adults and a new group to perform with. I've really enjoyed this experience with everyone. This was the very best club I've gone to and the one that worked. I'm so glad it did. If I got the chance to continue or start again I would without a doubt'.* (Young person).

The key partner in the polymer clay crafting project said: *'I was surprised how much the quieter members showed more confidence and made new friends and were just more physical than I'd seen before. All the children were just so proud of themselves and their work and I was able to identify some true talent. All have spoken to me this week begging to be chosen if it is repeated'.* (Key partner).

The key partner in the dance and multimedia project explained that *'the very nature of being a young carer means these young people can be...very guarded, sometimes more immature in their emotional*

*needs. Putting themselves in the spotlight was very difficult for them all', however, they commented that 'the drawing/creating tasks were entered into with vigour...All four final participants enjoyed the project, and the workers could see the young people had gained confidence and self-belief through their designs'. (Key partner).*

All feedback for this area again comes from the projects where the interventions took place in a block period, rather than weekly, and were a mixture of performing and visual arts.

**Technical skills** - This relates to the transference or improvement of artistic skills that were taught throughout the project.



*'I learned many things and improved my drawing' (Young person).*

Across the whole group, 80% said that their **level of creativity or technical skills increased throughout the project**, and of the dance and multimedia group, 100% answered 'yes' to this question. Next was the theatre group at 88%, and the polymer clay crafting group at 83%.

When asked '**have you learnt something new during this project?**', 89% of all participants answered 'yes'. Those who answered 'no' were either quite confident in their creative skills already (not open to learning more) or were quite resolute in not wanting to connect with the project throughout. For example: *'...their lack of attendance and interest definitely influenced some of the other [young people's] attitudes towards taking part in the sessions'.* (Key Partner).

In the baseline and end measure questionnaire, young people were asked '**what arts activities have you tried?**' After the project, 87% of young people now referred to the new arts activities they had tried as part of LGM. For example: *'I did various activities including monoprinting, mandalas, zentangles, lino printing'* (Young person).

This quote was given by a young person who was in the group that did not receive any context setting for the evaluation form, so this level of recall some time beyond the arts delivery was really promising and shows an understanding of the activities they did and skills they gained.

Finally, a staff member supporting the theatre project said that *'all young people showed a level of confidence and skill that was far beyond what I ever anticipated would be seen...I thought the group's use of a variety of mediums was outstanding. From acting to improv, painting to prop design, script writing to directing and not to mention sound and lighting. This was a very special project and seeing what the young people achieved will stay with me for a long time.'* (Key partner).



**Health** – This relates to the physical and mental state of a young person throughout the project.



*'[Artist]...has taught us a lot. I've been really happy this week' (Young person).*

When looking at overall changes in how well the *body* feels, the group with the biggest improvement was for those who took part in the theatre project, followed by those who took part in the dance and multimedia project. It could be a coincidence that both groups took part in arts activities which were physical in nature.

However, from the feedback forms it isn't clear whether there is a significant enough difference to make note of this physical health improvement, as there was a greater *decrease* of how well the body felt across all the participants generally. This disproves this element of the hypothesis, therefore.

Promisingly though, when measuring how well the *mind* feels before and after the project, this was the biggest *improved* score out of all the questions. Across 22 participants, there were 44 increased points and 11 decreased points. Eight young people measured the same before and after the project, but four of those were already scoring as high as they could.

However, more significant is when we look at individual group scores. 100% of those on the dance and multimedia project, 87.5% of the theatre project group and 66% of the jewellery/sculpture making group measured a higher wellbeing score after the project with no one worsening their score.

This is a brilliant outcome for the latter group in particular who were in the most vulnerable position as far as their mental health was concerned. As an example, one young person showed high anxiety staying in the room with a hot glue gun when completing the jewellery-making course, but by the end of the sculpture making course they were able to stay in the room with pliers and other hardy materials.

How participants felt before and after the project was also measured in a one-word summary. These words are open to interpretation so there may be room for error, but when banding these as 'positive', 'neutral' or 'negative' and making a comparison as to whether participants had moved between bandings before and after the project, it showed that overall: 49% improved, 34% stayed the same, and 17% were worse.

Examples of improvements are: 'scared to amazing', 'clumsy to expressive', 'overwhelmed to thrilled', 'scared to happy', 'nervous to fine', 'tired to glad' and 'calm to confident'.

The biggest quantity of improved one-word summaries was in the group who took part in the dance and multimedia project, where 75% improved, and then the jewellery/sculpture making group, where 66% improved.

Those who were not present to complete the forms were either because they had transitioned out of hospital back home, or because health had declined so much that they couldn't participate. This shows that the project was not so instrumental that it took precedence over the more urgent deterioration or restoration of health.

However, it may make a subtle difference to a person's experience in a moment of time that could become pivotal to change, or stop them continuing a downwards trajectory that they might have otherwise followed. For example, 'I couldn't sleep, I was too excited about the project and coming back the next day.' (Young person).

**Engagement with education** – This relates to the level of engagement within the project, as well as engagement across areas of learning outside of the project.



*'Another young person who struggles to achieve their best in their day-to-day educational environment was able to show focus and learning using this medium – it was great to see.'* (Key partner).

All feedback relating to the level of engagement with education comes from qualitative feedback provided by the arts teams and key partners. It could be presumed that this element is most relevant in the education settings (Iford Academy and Livingstone Road Junior School), but an improvement in engagement with education, or at least a positive comparison to what is usually achieved within an art session/at school, can be evidenced across nearly all the settings.

Despite this, it is important to outline that within these cohorts of young people, engagement with any type of concentrated or repeating activity is generally a barrier, as observed by one of the LGM Artists: *'It's great to aim high and have aspirations but day to day reality of students' ability to engage or have full attendance makes production of work difficult.'* (Artist).

Therefore, the greater successes will most naturally be seen where the activities were instantly gratifying and varied enough that the young people didn't at any point feel stagnant in their experiences, and/or where the young people really connected with Artists who they were willing to invest their time with. This was most demonstrable in the dance and multimedia project, the polymer

clay crafting project, and the theatre project, where each day brought an entirely different activity or purpose which fed into an overall collective ambition/theme.

However, after an initial settling of the group to find its core members, there was some really strong feedback from the group who took part in the printing project too (which was observed by the arts team as being less varied and slower-paced). To demonstrate: *'I felt that the level of engagement with the project from pupil [M] was extremely positive compared to his normal level of engagement in Art...he was fully immersed in the project and produced some lovely pieces of work - this has never happened in the normal art sessions I have had with [M] - he generally refuses to engage. I believe he enjoyed and gained a lot from the programme.'* (Key partner)

The above feedback is supported by another colleague, who said that across the whole group *'...their engagement was amazing (considering these are students that struggle to complete an hour's lesson)'*. (Key partner)

Similar feedback comes from the key partner for the theatre group, who said that *'it has been identified that some of these young people struggle to complete a full day in formal education and to maintain appropriate behaviour to the setting. These young people showed great resilience in managing their own behaviours and feelings as well as contributing consistently for longer than a school day.'*(Key partner).

It was noted that a reason for this success might be due to *'the young person to adult ratio'* (Key partner) which was two delivery staff and two supporting staff to eight young people, and *'the way the project was run'* (Key partner) which was in a block intervention format, with a mixture of activities and with an Artist who the group bonded very quickly with.

Unsurprisingly therefore, where those perceived contributors to success differed, and where there were other variables at large, the level of engagement was not found to be as successful in all settings.

In a setting where the project occurred for one afternoon per week for eight weeks, the key partner commented: *'I was disappointed with the level of engagement...The engagement in education at [setting] fluctuates, but generally I feel the young people engage better in education than they did with this project. I think part of the reason the engagement in Let's Get Messy was poor is because the young people didn't view it as something they had to do but could choose to do and there were other options available. This was partly down to a lack of support from education and nursing staff.'* (Key partner).

In conversations with this key partner, were we to run this project again, we would absolutely run it in a block intervention for these young people to create an air of excitement and novelty around the project, and to have a greater impact on those who are there at that moment in time.

To explain, due to the transient nature of the setting and more pressing priorities for these young people, for example: home leave, visiting time with family, needing medical attention (even for routine checkups/medication) and more pressing concerns with their mental health such as recent incidences (head banging/self-harming) or difficulty regulating emotions within the session, their ability to lose themselves positively in the project was undoubtedly hindered.

This is a nature of the setting and would not be a barrier to partnering with an organisation like this again (in fact, it feels more necessary to do so), however as intimated by the key partner, a lack of support and a general lack of understanding about the identity of the project by colleagues, led to

competing distractions. Dying hair, creating body art, preparing for a Pride party, chatting with staff in corridors and handling a snake were the most memorable of these.

That said, the key partner did observe a change in one young person on the ward: *'...This young person normally spent most of their time in their room and was not keen on joining in with activities on the ward. It was wonderful to see them engage in the activity with enthusiasm and passion, using their own unique style and creativity.'* (Key partner). Sadly, this young person was unable to complete the end measure evaluation form.

So perhaps this element of the hypothesis is not so much about whether arts activities influence engagement with formal education beyond the project as first believed, but rather, it speaks of whether the project supports the skills and qualities required to be able to focus on one thing for a long time, which can lead to breakthroughs in young people's ability to engage in other areas of their life (including in education).

### Testing part-two of the hypothesis:

The second part of the hypothesis details the outcomes that should occur by the very nature of the project happening. The project is therefore not shaped around these aims, but it is still believed that they will be achieved:

- 2) When cross-sector collaboration between the arts, youth and health sectors occurs, a) participatory arts increase knowledge of arts education and careers for young people and b) they diversify/develop skills amongst colleagues.**

Participatory arts increase knowledge of arts education and careers for young people.



Activities which allowed young people to **explore their knowledge of arts education and careers** included meeting professionals from within the industry and hearing about their work, going on an arts trip and completing an Arts Award qualification. For some, it also meant experiencing a Higher Education/Creative Careers talk from professionals within higher education and taking part in a project within a cultural venue.

Despite this activity, and anecdotal feedback from young people which would suggest otherwise, the quantitative data that came out of the baseline and end measure forms suggests that knowledge of arts education and careers was not increased for many across the project.



When asked: **‘Do you know how to carry on doing art in education?’** (Depending on how old a young person is, this might mean choosing art as a GCSE option, continuing it into further education or pursuing it in higher education) only 23% of participants answered ‘yes’ where before they had answered ‘no’. Of those whose answer remained the same, 60% already knew how to carry on doing art within education.

The most confusing outcome from the data is that 10% of participants answered that they did not know how to carry on doing art in education when at the start of the project they did. It could be argued that the fact that this false negative even exists from multiple respondents, shows that the question and any answers given should be struck off as being invalid.

This is also true of the question: **‘Do you know what a career in the arts is?’**, which elicited similarly confusing responses. The majority of those whose answers were ‘no’ after previously being ‘yes’, were from the primary school group.

However, from this group, there was some great anecdotal feedback that supports that some young people *did* understand that their knowledge of arts education and careers had increased. *‘We learnt about many artists. Picasso, Karen Krige, Annie and Merton Russell-Cotes, Dario Vargus and Joie de Vivre. My favourite was Karen because she taught us. I like that some of her work is 3D’.* (Young person).

From the same group, one young person wrote in their Arts Award journal: *‘Here I was [in the photo] helping to curate the exhibition’* (Young person) and a final young person commented on their understanding of ‘Art’ in general by saying: *‘I also learned that painting isn’t just the only thing for art it can also be made from clay’.* (Young person).

Furthermore, the key partner at this setting observed: *‘The realisation that being an artist IS a job, was phenomenal to watch’.* (Key partner). Therefore, it is difficult to conclude whether this part of the hypothesis has been achieved, because the qualitative and quantitative feedback are in such opposition.

As has already been explored, there is an issue in general with the evaluation as to whether what the young people have experienced has resonated as being relevant to the evaluation (as demonstrated by the previous example of the young person who visited the Technician’s box at Arts University Bournemouth).

Participatory arts diversify and develop skills amongst colleagues.



In respect of **diversifying and developing skills in colleagues across the arts, youth and health sectors**, there is much evidence to support that this *has* been achieved.

A big part of this goal was about providing platforms for artists, and partners within the youth/wellbeing sectors, to have experiences to work together that they wouldn't otherwise have. Six out of seven of the Artists said that they hadn't worked with these groups of young people before, and all said that they'd learnt something during the project.

To demonstrate: *'[I have learnt] lots. Specifically in terms of engaging young people with such low-confidence and the importance of the energy as the facilitator in this environment - finding the balance between being vibrant and engaging yet calm and nurturing'*. (Artist).

Other themes of learning for Artists included how to work best alongside non-arts staff in the room to achieve mutual goals, the type of language that is appropriate to different cohorts of young people, and how learning and creativity is impacted by illness and medications.

Specific to the theatre project, was the realisation that it *is* possible to generate autobiographical work, sensitively, with young people, and the facilitator themselves from this group recognised that *'I should continue to pursue the arts in some fashion, this project sparked my love for facilitating again and reminded me the impact that the arts can have on young people's lives, and how worthwhile the work is'*. (Artist).

Furthermore, when the Artists were asked to **describe the project in three words**, there were fifteen different words used, with the two most common (used three times each) being *'challenging'* and *'inspiring'*.

That said, the hope is that the Artists will go on to apply their experiences to follow-on work within the youth and wellbeing industries so that participatory arts can continue to be served in non-artistic environments for the benefit of young people who really need it. Instrumental in this is the culture-shift from key partners that needed to take place because of the project, so that a case is made by *them* for providing these opportunities within their sectors in the first place.

For one key partner this became clear. They said: *'There is so much impact here. The energy is brilliant. It makes me wonder about running activities that are just fun for young people that have these secondary outcomes'*. (Key partner). Their colleague also commented separately: *'Using [an] arts-based delivery model was previously outside of my comfort zone but being involved with this project has helped me to develop my personal confidence in working with these tools'*. (Key partner).

This key partner was extremely interested in connecting with the arts team involved (Wakey Wakey ARTS as well as individual freelance staff) to pursue further opportunities together which will have valuable outcomes for young people.

There was also great feedback from support staff in the room about the benefits they felt just being able to play: *'I thoroughly enjoyed being creative. I studied Art & Design, but never really use my creative skills, so this was a wonderful opportunity to be diverse and imaginative, using different mediums than you would usually expect'*. (Key partner).

Another said: *'I loved the trip to Russell-Cotes and will definitely go back in the summer. I enjoyed doing some sketching which I forgot how much I loved from [being] a kid myself'*. (Key partner). A measure of wellbeing and job satisfaction, and an increase in knowledge about local cultural opportunities, was not asked of key partners as part of this project, but this might be something explored in future iterations of the project.

A slightly contrasting outcome, but an important one nevertheless, is equipping staff within the youth/wellbeing sectors with the knowledge of what is required to deliver these projects well, even if it means that they decide that it is not the right time or place to do so.

See here from one key partner: *'...As you are aware [I] was 'thrown in the deep end' to deliver Art this year. I perhaps understand the principles/concepts of teaching the subject a little better as I can honestly say I didn't have a clue. Shadowing your project has been insightful if only to reiterate and confirm that it is not a subject I am comfortable delivering'.* (Key partner). It is hoped that in this situation, this member of staff is no longer responsible for delivering the subject, as both their personal wellbeing and the young people's experiences of art will be compromised. This also demonstrates the value of bringing in external professionals where possible to share their expertise, rather than trying to achieve it in-house, or missing out on the opportunity altogether.

A final takeaway moment from a key partner demonstrates how skills have been developed and diversified through this collaborative project, and how they might be applied to future work:

*'It was interesting and exciting watching [Artist] and [WWA] work their magic on these shy, embarrassed, uncomfortable young carers. Getting them to participate, changing their plans to fit the needs of the young people, demonstrated to me the importance of moving at the young person's pace...Giving the time and space for their slow journey, allows for an even bigger celebration at the end of their road'.* (Key partner).

100% of key partners would recommend doing this project (*'Yes Yes Yes!!! This project was amazing. This is such a great format for breaking down barriers and allowing young people to achieve phenomenal outcomes'* - Key partner) and one Artist commented that they are *'looking forward to finding ways to inspire and educate less fortunate children, through creativity.'* (Artist).

The latter part of the hypothesis is therefore indisputable.

## Conclusion and Recommendations:

Overall, the Let's Get Messy project has proven (to varying degrees) that participatory arts delivered in non-arts settings with young people affected by ACEs, improve social skills, self-esteem, technical skills, health/wellbeing and engagement with education.

The claim that participatory arts increase knowledge of arts education and careers for young people however has *not* been evidenced by this project (in fact the outcomes are deemed inconclusive), but we *can* strongly argue that participatory arts, when delivered in collaboration with the arts, youth and health sectors, diversifies and develops skills amongst the colleagues involved.

From the evaluation, we have learnt that there are significant contributing factors to making arts interventions a success, and from this, we can make recommendations for future project designs.

The most contributing factor to success in arts interventions is the **delivery format**. Whilst weekly activities that are embedded into the day-to-day life of young people, for example within their education or as part of their hospital provision, may be more accessible for certain groups, there is undoubtedly a benefit to running interventions as 'other', 'one-off' experiences that create a feeling of novelty and urgency for young people to commit.

The belief is that this leads to higher retention of young people (whether by choice or due to their usual transience from week to week), a greater willingness to invest themselves overall and a stronger understanding of the experience (leading to a richer, more relevant output within the evaluation).

Another positive of running block interventions, is that it was much more straightforward booking artists to deliver as they seemed to be more available generally for six consecutive days, than one-off sessions each week for several weeks. This may have led to more strategic decision-making when matching artists and art forms with the groups of young people, and therefore stronger projects for the final three partners overall.

Regarding the *order* and *type* of activities, the **art trips** were a huge success across all projects and received a plethora of feedback to support this. Apart from the theatre project delivery which appeared to eclipse the trip in value, and the polymer clay crafting project delivery which appeared to be of equal value, the trips, from the position of an onlooker, seemed to be the strongest, most transformative element of the interventions.

The opportunity to go 'offsite' and share an experience as an exclusive group of young people enhanced the project a great deal. These activities occurred in the equivalent of session two or session five across all projects, and so it appears that the timing of the activity did not appear to alter the positive experience of it.

Participants seemed most socially connected and child-like when on these trips, which were shaped carefully around their interests and to compliment the projects they were receiving in-house. See below:

*'The field trip was amazing and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Behind the scenes at the BIC was very exciting and interesting. For the young people to be 40m above the floor of the Windsor Hall was something none of them will forget... The cinema trip and snacks was an experience they do not have very often due to their home situations. Finally the Starbucks outing was fulfilling a dream for one of the young carers, who had always wanted to experience a Starbucks, but had never been before.'* (Key partner).



On the trip to the pottery café, only two young people were well enough to attend. The young people and adults present decided to create additional artwork for those patients who were not there, and these were received very gratefully within the setting when the pieces of art were returned, enabling those who were missing to share in the experience too.



Those who *did* attend this trip noticeably enjoyed it, more so than their weekly in-house art sessions. This was the same for the one other group whose art delivery took place on a weekly basis.

Immediately after their trip to Roche Court, I observed: *'The trip was an absolute success with this group. Their demeanour was much improved since the last time we saw them in session and they were completely engaged from start to finish... They were inspired and over-awed by what they were seeing, treated respectfully by the education lead there, and as equals by the prestigious and pioneering owner. The entire group (staff included) had an absolutely fantastic day'.* (WWA)



These reflections highlight the importance of off-site experiences and raise the question as to whether trip activities should take place at multiple points to form part of a stronger arts intervention, especially for those where the required delivery format may limit the overall quality of the experience.

The art trips also offer young people the chance to be exposed to new ways of thinking and working, and the opportunity to connect with local cultural venues which they may wish to continue having a relationship with. The key partner of the group who took part in the polymer clay crafting project noted: *'It's lovely to see art where children can be free. All they've been given is a box and some materials, they are not being restricted by the curriculum'.* (Key partner).

Two young people connected with Roche Court Sculpture Park via their Instagram accounts to take part in a competition, and a third young person, already a talented and active illustrator, shared their ambition to *'exhibit my work here one day'* (Young person) when touring the GIANT Gallery in Bournemouth.

An additional observation that has been realised relates to the importance of having a **sharing or celebration moment** within the artist delivery phase. This is because both projects which were so strong that the trip did not serve a better experience than the delivery itself, were the only two interventions which had a formal 'sharing' for an invited audience.

These 'sharing' milestones added an additional, memorable high which undoubtedly strengthened the artist delivery phase extensively for the young people and staff involved (making it harder for the trip to compete). Perhaps this tells us that we need to incorporate mini-sharings and exhibitions as an essential aspect of future arts interventions, as opposed to an optional one.

One young person wrote in their Arts Award journal: *'I enjoyed the end because all the audience is proud, they smile and clap...we got certificates'.* (Young person).

Finally, it was so important to maintain **strong communication and organisational skills** to bond teams from across two or three sectors together. This includes, as previously explained, emphasising the importance of ‘partnership’ between the key partners and arts team, as opposed to offering activities as a service provider.

There were some initial partners who were not able to accommodate the project due to capacity, or invest so openly with the ethos and aims, which led to their withdrawal. Where there was an imbalance in the relationship with a partner who *did* continue with the project, a coincidental change of staff improved the experience dramatically going forward before any intervention was necessary.

The eventual mutual-respect and admiration for what the other ‘side’ does, and a genuine interest in sharing skills and knowledge across all five partners and with artists, undoubtedly led to some magical outputs for all involved. A key partner on the theatre project commented:

*‘Can I take the opportunity to say how good it has been to work with your organisation...You have been reliable, creative, committed and a powerhouse through the whole process. We’ve been able to share goals, work together to achieve them and make really positive working relationships along the way. From everything I’ve seen and heard the young people have enjoyed an amazing experience while learning new skills and sharing their stories. Thank you for the opportunity.’* (Key partner).

Likewise, good communication and organisational skills included adequately preparing artists so that their paths were clear to do what they do best: being passionate, creative educators. Sometimes though, there are things that become clearer as a project goes on, or which are related to the young people that are in the room at the time and therefore cannot be pre-empted.

This includes ‘restrictions due to tools that cannot be used/brought in to sessions according to participants’ risk factors’ (Artist) and ‘I hadn’t anticipated being sat on the floor to be an obstacle - so there were more “barriers” to participation in the space than I expected.’ (Artist). However, as the latter artist explains, being prepared to ‘go with the flow’ helped immensely: ‘I re-designed day two. Day one was integral to building up a picture, managing my expectations, and testing my creativity and versatility to enhance the rest of the project.’ (Artist).

It is therefore as important in the good communication and organisation of a project, to **prepare artists and partners to allow room for the unknown**, and to be ready to embrace learning/improvising as the project unfolds. This is more possible with some groups than others, so it is an essential part of that recruitment conversation with key partners and artists alike. See below for feedback from an Artist which supports this theory:

*‘Across each day I felt very well supported, there has been times in other arts projects I have done where things have felt overwhelming, but the setting was wonderfully relaxed and set up perfectly for both myself and the young people to have a meaningful experience and co-create some lovely work.’* (Artist).

Overall, the project created an incredible opportunity to work with some amazing key partners and their client groups within Dorset, and to trial the impact of mainstream arts activities on young people who have experienced genuine adversity in their lives.

Whilst the evaluation and circumstances did not allow for useful reflections on all areas of the hypothesis, there has been such a success story here in creating a foundation for ongoing work within this area, and in creating a rich network of Artists who are all willing and eager to deliver arts interventions again.

**So, do arts interventions add value to the lives of young people negatively affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences?** Regardless of whether a young person has any interest in pursuing art going forward (as this was not a pre-requisite of the project), 93% of young people claimed that they enjoyed themselves.

We can therefore conclude that participatory arts do indeed add value, and that as a result we cannot wait to develop this project to bring positive impact to an even higher percentage of the young people we work with in the future.

Future projects will aim to work with more key partners and therefore more young people. We aim to run projects for longer, and with more art trips and further/higher education experiences peppering the delivery.

We also will investigate the impact these projects have on key partners in the room and will have follow-on networking opportunities for artists who have an interest in sharing their experiences with others in the industry. Finally, we will adopt more in-depth evaluation methods to glean effective reflections on all areas of the hypothesis. Watch this space!

A huge thank you to all the fabulous key partners, artists and funders, for whom this would not have been possible. Thank you to the arts and cultural organisations who welcomed us with open arms and showed respect, appreciation and care to the young people who came on site (showing the best of this brilliant industry and what it has to offer). Finally, thank you to the young people themselves for being willing to 'get messy' in more ways than one.

I'll wrap up with one of the most poignant quotes from the project, and one which I chime with completely:

***'I've had such a good day, I don't want to go home' (Young person).***



Image description: Claire is stood next to a young person with the outcome of her 1:1 mono-printing lesson taught by the young person. The words on the paper read:

*'Thank you for teaching me'.*