

EAST DURHAM
CREATES
.CO.UK

Go & See

Schwellenangst//
Fear of the Door



Prepared By:
East Durham Creates

East Durham Creates is managed by



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Schwellenangst//Fear of the Door

East Durham Creates (EDC) is part of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme (CPP). Creative People and Places is about more people taking the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in arts and culture experiences in the places where they live. East Durham Creates launched in 2014 and has engaged over 100,000 people across its programme of delivery.



In our initial Phase of delivery East Durham Creates adopted the 'Go & See' model as one of our key delivery strands - essentially the provision of visits that can broaden local horizons. This was in recognition of the wealth of arts and cultural opportunities available within the North East that were not necessarily accessible to local people in East Durham. The programme was expressly designed to remove all barriers to accessing existing cultural offers regionally. This resulted in almost 800 local people visiting venues and events for the first time ranging from the Baltic: Centre of Contemporary Art to the Festival of Thrift. As a result many individuals and groups returned to venues or events again without support from the project and in many cases took other family and friends who had not attended the original Go & Sees.

In our second Phase we initially wanted to utilise our Go & See programme to raise local aspirations and look further afield. These visits to places like Hull City of Culture, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Glasgow Film Festival showed individuals and community activists the what art was capable of achieving given the right platform and support. These inspirational visits resulted in a number of project outcomes including bringing shows or artists to the area, a bespoke Arts Café extension to our base in Community House in Peterlee and East Durham's first ever Film Festival.

One of the core aims of our project is the utilisation of the existing networks and projects run by our lead organisation East Durham Trust – The Trust is an established VCS organisation and charity charged with the express aim of tackling poverty in the former mining communities of East Durham. The Trust's project range from a food bank to debt and welfare advice and as such frequently engage with those less likely to be engaged with Arts and Culture. As a result almost everyone on the trip to Hull City of Culture had been in receipt of a service provided by the Trust, generally a poverty intervention and the majority had never visited an Art Gallery or Cultural Venue previously.

Towards the end of our second Phase we began to consider the question of legacy and how to future proof the Go & See programme. This encouraged us to reflect on what had and hadn't worked within Go & Sees as part of our Action Learning process.



Whilst it is clear there are a lot of physical barriers to accessing Arts and Culture in an area where little infrastructure exists project feedback has consistently suggested often taking that the initial step into an unknown place can be huge. In a survey overseen by our evaluators Wavehill during Phase 2 local people ranked lack of knowledge or unfamiliarity as the top barriers for attending new places (after the cost) and suggested that going with people they knew alongside more information would make them much more likely to attend external events and activities in unfamiliar places.*

THERE IS A GERMAN PHRASE 'SCHWELLENANGST' WHICH LITERALLY TRANSLATES AS FEAR OF THE DOOR AND REFERS TO THE FEAR ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING THAT LEAP INTO AN UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY.

This can refer to entering a physical new space or making an impactful life decision such as starting a new job or moving home. Local creative leaders and Go & Seers suggested this was a large part of what often stops engagement by local people who consider arts and cultural space 'not for them' and was definitely something we wanted to address before the end of Phase 2.

This involved introducing two new initiatives:

The Advanced Party

Creative Champions with an interest in exploring regional venues, empowered through their engagement with the project and invested in building long term relationships.

The aim was to build a programme of bespoke visits working together with specific regional venues and utilise our Advanced Party to support others in their community to attend.

These Creative Champions have an initial smaller visit often including meeting key staff, venue tours and backstage or cast talks. This ensures they are well placed to support a larger scale Go & See and it's attendees in the future. This included providing feedback about content in relation to local audiences and considering potential barriers ahead visits such as accessibility and additional costs such as for refreshments.



ALPHABETTI THEATRE ADVANCED PARTY VISIT TO SEE 'PRESENT'

I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE BUT HOPEFULLY THIS ISN'T THE LAST TIME – I FELT LIKE I WAS PART OF THE PERFORMANCE AND IT WAS LOVELY TO MEET WITH THE PEOPLE FROM THE VENUE AND THE CAST. I COULD DEFINITELY SEE PEOPLE FROM EAST DURHAM ENGAGING WITH A PIECE LIKE THIS AND LOVING THE CHANCE TO VISIT THIS HIDDEN GEM OF A VENUE. DENISE, CREATIVE CHAMPION AND CULTURAL HUB MANAGER

Stepping Stone Hubs

These venues are specifically tasked with recruitment of audience and being active meeting and pickup/drop off points for Go & Sees. East Durham Creates is fortunate to have a network of Cultural Hubs, local community venues upskilled to deliver arts and culture as part of their everyday offer. It was vitally important to utilise this asset moving forward and potentially provide future scope for their development as local spaces that make art and culture happen. 3 Cultural Hubs signed up initially to act as Stepping Stone venues with the aim to increase this in Phase 3 and include the new Peterlee based Arts Cafe. Additionally these Hubs would consider whether content would work in East Durham and whether potentially it could be part in another context of our programme (including within the Cultural Hubs themselves).



ADVANCED PARTY AT REDHILLS FOR DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL 'COMMON PEOPLE' EVENT

These venues would open ahead of the visit and provide a space to talk about what and where they were going over a cuppa. As recognised individuals in their local communities the Advanced Party would then act as familiar faces with a working knowledge of where they were going to visit. Essentially this would essentially remove the EDC staffing element. We have already recognised that once relationships are established between our Hubs and outside organisations that often our Hub Leaders begin to go directly to venues or arts organisations, whether that's because they want to make a link to an artist or a show or they want to organise a trip themselves.



LARGE GO & SEE TO BOWES MUSEUM NORMAN CORNISH EXHIBITION

Working together with the Advanced Party and Hubs we identified a number of key venues regionally to work with which included Live Theatre, Baltic, Sage Gateshead, Arc Stockton, Alphabetti Theatre, Redhills, Bowes Museum, Mima and Durham Gala Theatre. We also identified key events such as the Durham Book Festival to include in future programming.



ADVANCED PARTY VISIT LIVE THEATRE FOR 'CLEAR WHITE LIGHT'

This shift is best exemplified by our visits to Live Theatre in Newcastle. Initially a group of 8 Creative Champions attended Clear White Light. Live Theatre provided a tour and chat with the Artistic Director and after the visit the attendees were invited to meet the cast and crew. The Advanced Party were then tasked with recruiting an audience for 'Ask Me Anything' by Paper Birds at the Live Theatre – this show was chosen by the Champions because of Paper Birds previously links with the project. The result was almost 40 East Durham residents attending a show, many of whom had never visited a theatre before.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN TO THE THEATRE BEFORE IN MY LIFE DUE TO LOTS OF ISSUES INCLUDING NOT BEING ABLE TO AFFORD IT. BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND FOR FREE AND NOT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT GETTING THERE MADE ATTENDING THEATRE ACCESSIBLE FOR ME AND ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WOULD, I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE EXPERIENCE AND WOULD GO TO THE THEATRE AGAIN. LES, AGED 58, ATTENDEE TO 'ASK ME ANYTHING'. AND HE DID GO BACK WITH US AND RECRUITED FRIENDS OF HIS OWN.

There are clear lessons to be learnt about understanding that often barriers are not just simply physical or based around issues like transport. Sometimes taking that initial step over the threshold into a new space or experience, particularly when perception is that it's 'not for me' can be the biggest barrier. This is true not just of the model for Go & Sees but for arts engagement in general within areas like East Durham.

Although the global pandemic has halted progress (see Covid-19 section below) East Durham Creates is committed to this new model and ensuring more people who have never visited a gallery or theatre before have the support and means to take that step into the unknown.



LARGE GO & SEE TO LIVE THEATRE 'ASK ME ANYTHING'



LES ON GO & SEE WITH FRIENDS HE RECRUITED

Covid-19

More than any other strand of delivery our Go & See programme was impacted by the pandemic.

In order to ensure a continued offer during the last 6 months of our delivery we trialled a programme of Virtual Visits, a digital version of Go & Sees. These visits ranged from theatre performances to gallery tours which local people engaged with in their own time. They then had the opportunity to digitally get together afterwards in a facilitated group to discuss their experiences. This also included opportunities to speak to the organisations behind Virtual Visit content including Unfolding Theatre, Skimstone Arts and Phoenix Dance who became part of the feedback sessions.

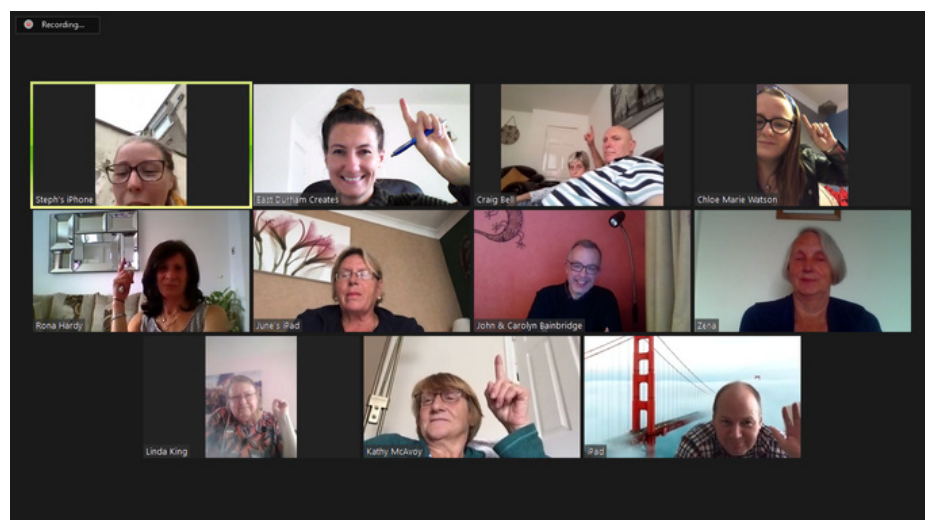
There were several key lessons from this that will be part of our future programming for the Go & See strand:

VIRTUAL HAS VALUE

One of the biggest points of feedback was the value the social gatherings had, particularly to Creative Champions who had been significantly impacted by lockdown/shielding and found themselves socially isolated. Regardless of their opinions of the virtual visits the opportunity to connect was vital.

ACCESS FOR EVERYONE & FLEXIBILITY

It was generally agreed that the Virtual offer meant that those with additional access barriers who could not attend a physical Go & Sees were now able to become engaged. These barriers included caring responsibilities (whether that meant young children or older adults), mobility or other disabilities or mental health barriers that prevented them from wanting to attend somewhere physically. Also because the content could be engaged within each individuals schedule this allowed those with other responsibilities or limited time to be involved with the programme when they previously had not had the capacity to be.



GO & SEERS FEEDBACK SESSION UNFOLDING THEATRE'S 'BEST IN THE WORLD'

CROSS POLLINATION OF PROGRAMMING

Because resource was stretched and limited the team consciously intertwined our programming. So people could receive a Grayson Perry clay Arty Pack and then go on a virtual Go & See to explore his work or audiences could engage with an artist as part of our Artist Takeovers on social media then watch work they had created and talk to them about it in the feedback session. This ability for people to engage at multiple levels in a cohesive way was a really positive learning aspect of our pandemic programming and definitely something to implement within our final Phase when capacity and funding are reduced.



GRAYSON PERRY ARTY PACKS THAT ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO JOIN THE GO & SEE

BRING ARTS AND CULTURE TO THEM

Our Cultural Hub leaders also reflected that livestreaming or showing content as a shared experience in their own safe space venues had huge potential, particularly in light of the volume of content released digitally during the pandemic. This could be utilised in conjunction with physical visits to increase access with arts and culture that is impractical to programme in existing East Durham venues.

REAL LIFE PREVAILS IN THE END

During lockdown local people's ability to commit time to this digital offer was considerable but as real life returned and previous commitments and responsibilities became more relevant interest in the programme meant that attendance dipped considerably, especially for those engaging who ran physical venues whose time became increasingly stretched. Also 'zoom fatigue' and the desire to physically connect - rather than via a screen - meant that interest from the core group waned. This highlighted the need to utilise this offer in a targeted way and focus on audiences who had not just the time but also the desire to engage longer term with the digital offer.

CONCLUSION

These lessons suggest that Virtual Visits should definitely be a part of future programming of East Durham Creates, specifically in a targeted manner to audiences where social isolation and it's mental health impact are likely to continue to be an issue. It is clear that restrictions will be ongoing and external organisations and venues will need to continue to think about how their content is engaged with.