



BBC Great North Passion 2014
Image Sophie Sutherland

Introduction

Museums Northumberland bait has aims to create a legacy of skills, networks and increased capacity through its three Phases of delivery. This is reflected in the programme's 10-year Vision:

'To create a long term increase in levels of arts engagement, driven by the creativity and ambition of people living in South East Northumberland, having a demonstrable effect on the well-being of local people and levels of social energy and activism within communities and the means to sustain those changes in the future.'

This process is mirrored in the Theory of Change covering the programme which includes an ambition **'to leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in South East Northumberland'** and poses the related research question: **'to what extent, and in what ways, has the programme helped to develop skills, ways of working, investment and use of resources (including existing resources) that support quality arts activity in South East Northumberland?'**

This case study explores the extent to which Museums Northumberland bait has supported groups, organisations and individuals to become more sustainable in their current and future creative activities. It highlights catalysts to increased capacity, successes, learning and good practice that can be used to inform similar and future support for groups and organisations across South East Northumberland and beyond.

Context

Skills and broader capacity development amongst those working in partnership with Museums Northumberland bait has typically been incremental and long-term in nature. The ability of Museums Northumberland bait to support groups, organisations and individuals to become more sustainable has also varied across the different phases of the programme, its projects and commissions.

Notwithstanding this variation, the programme has acknowledged and responded to the need for ongoing space and time for people to reflect, learn and adapt in their future practice or creative experiences. Accordingly, the scope to generate sustainable outcomes for people and groups increased in line with project durations generally growing longer in Phase 2 and moving to multi-stage commissions in Phase 3.

The development of increased skills, confidence and capacity has also been subject to a range of barriers and challenges. These include a reduction in Museums Northumberland bait staff capacity, and therefore ability, to provide appropriate support, (i.e. diminishing as capacity and confidence increase) as an intermediary function in later phases of the programme. In addition, the ability of partners to adopt and embrace change and differences in individuals' confidence are related factors influencing the strength of sustainability outcomes.

Increased pressures facing voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations due to the ongoing impact of austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic also represent a cross cutting challenge to achieving sustainability outcomes. The demands facing voluntary and community sector organisations have increased significantly during the course of the programme.¹ Research published by the Northumberland VCS Assembly² highlighting both the targeted mental health and social care provision required, and the rising costs placed on organisations gaining success in utilising arts and culture in order to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes during the pandemic.

These factors have limited the wider VCS advice, guidance and financial support offer capable of reinforcing and complementing the Museums Northumberland bait offer. As a result, the focus, scale and scope of support provided by the Museums Northumberland bait team, (e.g. offering networking opportunities, signposting to partners, artists, funders etc.) has needed to adapt and, in some instances, fill the void created by these socioeconomic challenges.

¹ Research undertaken by Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) on the impact of COVID-19 on sector organisations and their beneficiaries highlighted the large number of people either receiving a significantly reduced service or no service at all from VCSE organisations across South East Northumberland and the wider region. <https://www.vonne.org.uk/resources/late-2020-vcse-sector-north-east-covid-19-impact-report>

² [Economic Impact of COVID -19 summary.pdf \(vcsassemblynorthumberland.co.uk\)](https://www.vcsassemblynorthumberland.co.uk/2-Economic-Impact-of-COVID-19-summary.pdf)

What does sustainability look like?

Increased sustainability amongst the individuals, groups and organisations supported by Museums Northumberland bait takes a variety of forms. These include increased skills, knowledge and confidence, links to new networks or creative contacts and enhanced financial standing for a group or organisation.

Significantly, the programme has worked with a host of organisations to achieve mutual targets, aims and aspirations through creative activities. This has helped to generate learning from a variety of perspectives including new creative groups such as Bedlington Creatives³, community groups such as Heart of the Hirst⁴ looking to improve the prospects for local communities, through to charities and services supporting some of the most vulnerable in the community including Bacmans Community Limited⁵ and ESCAPE Family Support⁶.

However, there are concerns over a lack of ongoing sources of accessible support for groups and organisations once the Museums Northumberland bait programme in its current form ends in April 2023. Individuals and groups alike voiced uncertainty over the ongoing availability of advice and practical support in areas such as idea generation and development, artist selection, understanding finances, fundraising and curating exhibitions and installations.

Skills and knowledge

Organisations

15 groups and organisations have developed skills as arts commissioners and programmers.

Partners and those supported through the programme provided examples of a range of skills and knowledge developed as a result of participation in projects or via interactions through or with Museums Northumberland bait.

The skills and knowledge areas developed included increasing engagement in overall project management and a range of technical competencies including fundraising, marketing and communications. These skills and knowledge gained at both an individual and organisational/group level, and crucially the growing confidence to employ them, have been used to enhance existing activities and/or underpin a range of new ventures.

Individuals

The programme has also made a contribution to the professional development of a range of individuals. Examples include a group of Creative Connectors supported in

³ [Bedlington Creatives](#)

⁴ [Heart of the Hirst](#)

⁵ [Bacmans Community Limited](#)

⁶ [ESCAPE Family Support](#)

Phase 1 of the programme and a greater number of project participants who have used elements of their experience to inspire and, in around 50 cases, inform and boost future journeys in a range of creative careers.

The Creative Connectors programme was established in 2014 to identify freelance opportunities for passionate local people to develop skills and work experience in the cultural sector. The intention was to develop the essential skills required to build and sustain arts participation by supporting the development of emerging artists and arts managers. Amongst the ‘graduates’ of the Creative Connector programme which ended in October 2016, Sheila Biggs has continued her creative journey to become a successful freelance textile artist and workshop facilitator and worked on several projects for Museums Northumberland bait, (e.g. Open Door, Corners of Europe) as well as with wider clients.

Participants in specific Museums Northumberland bait projects have also benefited from their experience of working with and learning from a variety of artists skilled in socially engaged practice.

The Ashington District Star⁷ is a free newspaper/photographic journal produced by an editorial team of local people inspired by the Ashington Group painters. Beginning at the end of 2013, the Ashington District Star aimed to document everyday life in Ashington today through photographs of local people and places taken by the editorial team. Significantly, the project had an overall aim to inspire a new group of photographers and artists, of all ages and abilities, to look at Ashington today and creatively document the area and its community.

Ashington-born photographer Jamie Sinclair was a member of the editorial team who has since gone on to win the Rebecca Vassie Memorial Award set up to honour the late photojournalist. His award-winning project, ‘Hjem’ aimed to shine a positive light on the experiences of refugees who are resettling in Ashington. Jamie highlights the importance of his time working on the Ashington District Star, learning from experienced Photographic artist Julian Germain and being inspired to develop skills as a community-engaged artist. He also highlights the ongoing impact of support from the Museums Northumberland bait team in providing advice and supporting funding bids which have helped to sustain his creative journey.

“I’m finally starting to break through as an emerging artist’ ”
(artist)

“I know where I’m from and I’m proud of it”
(artist)

⁷ [The Ashington District Star](#)

Networks and contacts

178 artists, facilitators, producers have been contracted, building links and connections in the area.

The identification of, and introduction to, artists, arts companies and creative practitioners was highlighted by groups and organisations as a particularly valuable element of the Museums Northumberland bait offer. Partners appreciated the quality of the contacts and networking opportunities provided, benefiting from the reassurance that the recommendation would be based not only on relevant participatory and creative skills, but also being the 'right fit' for the respective group, project and prospective participants.

Importantly in terms of generating and sustaining social outcomes, participation in projects and learning new skills together has also supported the development of new friendships and boosted confidence and aspirations.

Financial

£181,972 has been secured by partners to run their projects with support provided by the Museums Northumberland bait team and Northumberland CVA into the planning and bid writing process for applications ranging in scale from £500 to £23,000.

The scale and sources of earned income achieved and/or influenced by the programme has become clearer over time. Initial expectations of income generated through ticket sales, donations and partner contributions have not been realised given the financial constraints and extent of creative journey amongst the lesser engaged groups targeted by the programme.

However, the programme has been more successful in supporting groups and organisations to attract their own resources through a range of grants and wider fundraising, (e.g. Heart of the Hirst, Bedlington Creatives, Action for Children, Northumberland Recovery Partnership) alongside a reallocation of organisational resources to deliver creative activities. This has taken the form of intensive support in the bid writing process to providing an overview or simply identifying the availability of suitable grant programmes.

Organisational diversification

Non-arts organisations

The longer-term benefits of partnership working with organisations from beyond the cultural sector has become apparent in terms of changes in perceptions of the value of creative activities in achieving a range of creative, but also non-creative organisational aims and objectives. Using its status as trusted intermediary to build projects in

conjunction with partners working with diverse client groups, Museums Northumberland bait has been able to inform changes in working practice and funding and embed creativity as a viable service intervention.

Action for Children⁸ is a UK children's charity committed to working with children and young people, and their families to make lasting improvements in their lives and the organisation manages a network of Children's Centres across Northumberland.

The Children's Centres managed by Action for Children have been involved with the programme since the early stages of Phase One. The Common Ground project saw a parents group form a commissioning panel to work with Museums Northumberland bait and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art to select visual artists, and finished work was exhibited at Woodhorn Museum and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. The partnership with the programme evolved with Action for Children subsequently making a commitment to continue to invest in the arts in its Children's Centres across Northumberland, as well as encouraging service users to explore wider artistic activities.

Through representation on the steering group, Museums Northumberland bait supported Action for Children to develop a successful £23,000 Grants for the Arts bid which was matched by £8,000 from Action for Children and £2,000 from Northumberland Arts Development to deliver 'Voice of the Child' in six children's centres. The legacy of the support provided to Action for Children is characterised by the buy-in gained from a national organisation to widen engagement across its network.

Volunteer led arts groups

Bedlington Creatives emerged from work commissioned by the programme in 2014, to run 12 taster sessions in Bedlington Community Centre involving people at risk of, or experiencing low mood and isolation. Bedlington Creatives was established as a new voluntary group dedicated to working with the local community to provide high quality arts experiences, following a successful application to Arts Council England to support a year-long arts programme.

Bedlington Creatives has progressed to access funding independently to support a range of projects and creative challenges for community members of all ages and abilities. The group has provided quality experiences and opportunities for local people to develop new skills across a variety of art forms and has been the catalyst for other local groups and organisations to work together on the Festival of Arts in Bedlington, with support from Museums Northumberland bait.

Crucially in terms of legacy outcomes, the benefits that organisations experienced from initial interactions with the programme, for example increased staff capacity and quality of engagement with participants, have been seen to flourish and/or resurface in later phases of the programme. Importantly, subsequent use of creative activities have typically required a less intensive but more strategic intervention in later phases of the programme, for example in identifying funding opportunities or helping to maximise the potential of an idea.

⁸ [Action for Children](#)

Outcomes and impact - what changed as a result?

Although often taking years and multiple small scale interventions from the Museums Northumberland bait team to come to fruition, the nature of the relationship between the programme and local partners has evolved. The role of the Museum Northumberland bait team has shifted from largely 'hand-holding' as part of projects commissioned through the programme to providing reassurance, highlighting opportunities in funding or artists availability and imparting the confidence required to help progress an idea into reality as a group's own independent project.

***“You can see a change in confidence, real confidence. It became more like self-agency - we were just not needed as much.”
(Museums Northumberland bait)***

“If we need anything I know to contact Lisa, she's very practical and realistic” (partner)

“I'm very good at thinking these ideas up but struggle to take it to the next step” (partner)

Evidence of sustainability in creative activity can be found across the programme in the form of continuation activities and the development of new projects stimulated by positive experiences.

Museums Northumberland bait worked successfully with Bacmans Community Limited to deliver *As the Days Get Lighter*⁹ involving people living in the villages of Cresswell, Ellington, Lynemouth and Linton. The project employed artists to work with local communities to create, share and discuss photographs and craft pieces reflecting life in South East Northumberland during the pandemic lockdown.

The project generated 1,060 photograph submissions from 146 people to showcase feelings of belonging, social connection and wellbeing. The impact of the work stimulated a wealth of craft activities for local people and children during school holidays, but specifically the development of an online photography group with around 100 members. The ongoing impact is seen through a physical exhibition in a newly refurbished community hub which changes each quarter to display local people's photos.

***“Lisa has been absolutely amazing. It's something we would have never thought about in a million years”
(partner)***

⁹ [As the Days Get Lighter](#)

***“They get on well with the community. That’s hard to find as they tend not to trust outsiders”
(partner)***

***“There wouldn’t be a creative space in the pavilion without the photography - it helps to generate pride and a presence for the organisation in the local community”
(partner)***

The impact of the programme can also be seen through the eyes and experiences of many of the participants in commissioned work. By providing a safe space in which to explore individual and group creativity the programme has encouraged many people to sustain, broaden and deepen their creative journeys.

***“The increased confidence I gained from the audience liking what we did encouraged me to take on other things”
(participant)***

Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities include:

- The generation of sustainable impacts and outcomes within a Creative People and Places programme requires a long-term approach, recognising that confidence building and skills development takes time and is often incremental.
 - Creative People and Places investment can provide the staffing and expertise to help bridge gaps in public and VCS support for arts, culture and communities.
 - Long term investment means Museums Northumberland bait has provided added value through the detailed knowledge of local communities built up over a decade, which ensures projects have a greater chance of succeeding.
 - The value of Museums Northumberland bait in connecting groups, organisations and creative practitioners to ensure projects occur at all, are of a suitable quality and maximise outcomes for all partners and participants cannot be underestimated.
 - The existence of the Museums Northumberland bait programme, and the skills of the team, have played a significant role in attracting the public sector and charitable trust investment required to commission creative projects. The potential to generate earned income from ticket sales, donations and partner contributions has proved to be much more limited, highlighting the difficulties of generating income in areas of
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high relative deprivation hit hard by socioeconomic conditions.

- Confidence to build and subsequently employ the learning facilitated through the programme represents a key factor in establishing legacy outcomes. The incremental approach to capacity building with individuals, groups and organisations used by the programme over multiple years reinforces and adds value to the process.
- The scale of legacy outcomes for local people and organisations has been protected by the ability of Museums Northumberland bait to adapt and encourage creativity through the pandemic, (i.e. through online activities, complemented with physical art packs) given the challenges faced by the public and voluntary sectors during this period.
- The activities supported by Museums Northumberland bait have helped to establish a legacy of voluntary sector organisations using creative approaches to achieve their targets based on a practical demonstration of the benefits to them and their clients.
- The value of the partnership work undertaken by the Museums Northumberland bait team and trusted links to the wider creative sector is seen to be crucial to successfully involving lesser engaged communities across South East Northumberland.

Summary

Museums Northumberland bait has consistently worked to create a long-term legacy of skills, networks and increased capacity through its three Phases of delivery. In each phase, this has been guided by the ten-year mission. The programme has worked successfully to create a stronger and sustainable legacy amongst the majority of individuals, groups and organisations engaged. This includes the development of both creative and non-creative skills, confidence, knowledge and experience based on a cumulative, incremental and long term approach, underpinned by the programme's position as a trusted intermediary between communities, partners and artists.

Crucially, as Northumberland is no longer eligible for Creative People and Places investment, the programme in its current form will come to an end in April 2023. There is, however, potential for the learning and successful ways of working to be taken forward by many organisations. These include the Museums Northumberland bait consortium partners and delivery partners, with both challenges and opportunities ahead to sustain the legacy of what has been achieved.

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