

# Museums Northumberland bait - Sustaining Engagement, Creating a Legacy

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*“It’s about confidence and how this has been nurtured - we didn’t know the skills that bait helped to unearth and develop were there”*



Action for Children, Voice of the Child, credit: North News and Pictures

## Introduction

In 2013 the consortium led by Museums Northumberland set a ten year mission for change through to 2023 *“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 case study explores the nature of, catalysts behind and key issues linked to organisations supported by Museums Northumberland bait during Phase One of the programme (2013-16) sustaining their involvement in creating and commissioning arts activities into Phase Two with much reduced or no ongoing support from the Museums Northumberland bait team.

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## Project information

### Project aims

The Theory of Change covering the programme includes an ambition to ‘leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in South East Northumberland’. Progress towards achieving this ambition is evidenced in the number and range of organisations supported to increase demand and aspirations for the arts amongst local communities during Phase One sustaining arts activities into Phase 2. Achieving a sustainable legacy will be reflected in partner organisations using the increased skills, knowledge and capacity of staff and volunteers to develop, resource and commission their own activities to meet growing demand for the arts.

### Target participants

Approaches to generating and sustaining increases in arts engagement through and beyond Phase One have been underpinned by partnership working with a range of organisations, artists and creative practitioners. Crucially the programme has allocated time and resources to support groups and organisations from across South East Northumberland at different stages of their arts journeys, including some with little or no experience of engaging with the arts, to meet the needs of their client group or work towards meeting their own aims and objectives.

### Project partners

The key partners featured in this case study include:

- **Museums Northumberland bait** Creative People and Places programme as commissioner and provider of support to organisations through its team, including Creative Producers, Arts for Wellbeing Manager and Project Director
- **Bedlington Creatives**<sup>1</sup> - a group formed in response to demand from the local community to be able to access quality art experiences
- **Heart of Hirst**<sup>2</sup> - a community group working to improve the quality of life for local people living in the Hirst area of Ashington
- **Action for Children**<sup>3</sup> - a UK children’s charity committed to helping vulnerable and neglected children and young people, and their families which manages a network of Children’s Centres across Northumberland
- **Northumberland Recovery Partnership**<sup>4</sup> - a drug and alcohol treatment service for anyone in Northumberland, 18 years old or over, who is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol

### Project activities

During Phase One of the programme Museums Northumberland bait worked with 215 partners and artists to deliver 162 creative projects. It is this partnership working, often complemented by intensive support and encouragement for less experienced groups provided by artists or the Museums Northumberland bait team directly, which underpins legacy activity and related

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/bedlingtoncreatives>

<sup>2</sup> <https://heartofthehirst.wixsite.com/ashington>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ntw.nhs.uk/services/northumberland-recovery-partnership>

outcomes. The quality of this support at a 'grassroots' levels is reported by projects and partners to have been integral to initiating and maintaining progress towards embracing and promoting quality arts activity.

Specifically, partners highlighted the quality of collaborative working characterised by flexible and proactive support coordinated by Museums Northumberland bait to allow projects, organisations and the artists involved to develop and grow in skills, knowledge and capacity whilst inspiring people through the arts. Crucially, this has seen groups and individuals, (i.e. staff and volunteers) being empowered to not only learn new skills in project planning and delivery but share them with colleagues, partners and participants to support future arts activities.

Indeed, it is the development of this trusted relationship underpinning successful Phase One activity which was highlighted by both projects and Museums Northumberland bait staff as encouraging and informing subsequent activity. By working with groups to develop and deliver projects rather than merely providing a 'finished product' (i.e. placing people at the heart of the commissioning process, supporting groups to design artist briefs and play a role in selecting artists), Museums Northumberland bait has helped to create the skills and experience to help produce a range of legacy outcomes.

In maximising the increased potential and skills of groups supported in Phase One, Museums Northumberland bait has worked with a number of groups to become constituted arts groups and/or support successful funding applications to Arts Council England and a range of trusts and foundations to resource future arts activities. As a result of this support subsequent projects require a diminishing level of resource in terms of time or expertise from Museums Northumberland bait staff, with most groups happy to take the lead in project development in the knowledge that the Museums Northumberland bait team is on hand should they need reassurance, guidance or advice.

***“Phase One created the trust within a partnership while they developed the knowledge - we can take a step back in Phase Two”***

Museums Northumberland bait

Examples of progression and legacy outcomes derived from Phase One groups delivering arts activities independently include<sup>5</sup>:

#### Bedlington Creatives

Bedlington Creatives was formed in response to demand from the local community to be able to access quality art experiences following a Museums Northumberland bait commissioned 'Time to Enjoy' group in Phase One. The group has subsequently benefited from a range of practical support and guidance from Museums Northumberland bait to sustain and build on the interest and inspiration generated through the Phase One project including guidance to become a constituted group to facilitate future funding bids.

Significantly in terms of legacy outcomes, Bedlington Creatives has utilised the skills, knowledge and experience of Sheila Biggs, a Creative Connector<sup>6</sup>. The Creative Connector programme was developed to grow the skills required to build and sustain arts participation supporting the development of emerging artists and arts managers. Sheila has been influential in guiding the development of the group including identifying links to artists, facilitating arts activity and arranging opportunities to explore new cultural activities with 'go and see' visits across the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Unless stated quotes are taken from discussions with members of the respective groups and organisations

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/bait\\_casestudy\\_CreativeConnectors.pdf](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/bait_casestudy_CreativeConnectors.pdf)

The relationship is underpinned by the trust developed between Sheila and the group, her knowledge of the participants and her ability to ensure all parties were involved in the planning and delivery of activities.

Alongside funding advice and support to develop a constitution from Northumberland CVA<sup>7</sup> (consortium partner), the guidance and input from Museums Northumberland bait has provided the group with the additional resources to sustain its programme of activities following a successful bid to Arts Council England in November 2017 for £12,200 from its Grants for the Arts open access funding programme. The funding enabled the group to programme a year of visual arts activities in Bedlington Community Centre culminating in an exhibition at the end of 2018.

### ***“We know what we’re talking about”***

The growth of Bedlington Creatives has been characterised by its increased confidence and competence to plan and commission a wider range of arts activities and to further integrate the arts into the local community. During this period the ongoing advice and guidance provided to the group by Museums Northumberland bait is stated to have enabled its plans to develop and become more ‘adventurous’ more quickly than otherwise would have been the case.

### ***“We want to aim bigger. bait is like a security blanket - there if we need them but it works both ways now”***

Crucially, the group felt able to call upon the Museums Northumberland bait team when required to maintain the quality of activities, for example in cross-checking a brief for artists, proofing a funding bid or identifying artists to approach for interview. The relationship with is now seen however as very much two-way as the group has grown in stature and able to confidently support Museums Northumberland bait with its own work.

### ***“We’re so proud to put our Bedlington Creatives banner up - it really means something”***

The growth of the group in terms of members and scale of legacy activity is highlighted not only through the artist-led workshop sessions based in the local community centre but also its greater integration with, and drive for membership from the local community. This has included building links with a local care home to (re)engage residents in new and familiar arts activities, producing a trail of handmade poppies inspired by the Weeping Window at Woodhorn Museum, producing a display for Britain in Bloom which covered an unsightly building site as well as coordinating a series of family arts workshops during the summer holidays. Project managed by Sheila Biggs, the group was also instrumental in developing Bedlington’s first arts festival in February 2017, inspired by its history and incorporated old photographs, printing work, origami and upcycling.

The group has been recognised for the quality of its work being invited to contribute to Museums Northumberland bait projects including ‘Rainbows End’ and also approached to participate in Beamish Museum’s ‘Joe the Quilter’s Cottage’ exhibition, based on recognition of its growing textiles expertise<sup>8</sup>.

### ***“We were so thrilled to be there and really felt part of it”***

The group has also built on funding successes enjoyed with the support of Museums Northumberland bait, with a number of subsequent ‘independent’ bids including approaches to West Bedlington Town Council to programme family craft activities in the summer holidays. Indeed, funding successes and the success of its arts activities in the community are reflected in

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.beamish.org.uk/news/georgian-quilters-lost-cottage-recreated-beamish>

plans for an expansion of activities, with larger bids to the Big Lottery in the pipeline.

### Heart of Hirst

Formed in 2015, the Heart of Hirst is a community group working to improve the quality of life for local people living in the Hirst area of Ashington. The group has worked with artist Andrea Hawkins and a number of grassroots community and voluntary groups on the 'Hirst Social Energy R&D' project. The Museums Northumberland bait-commissioned project aimed to stimulate community involvement and raise the profile of the area through community-led activities.

An initial 'Party in the Park' event developed with local groups and held in Hirst Park, Ashington in summer 2016 tested the potential for collaborative working through the arts. A second 'Party in the Park' event in 2017 attracted over 500 people. The events generated increased membership for the local groups involved and therefore buy-in and awareness to support future work. The success was recognised in Heart of Hirst securing £3,000 of National Lottery Awards for All funding to deliver a programme of community events in 2018.

### ***“There’s now more than the police and fire attending local events”***

The partnership between Museums Northumberland bait and the local community led by Heart of Hirst has resulted in a book documenting a two-year residency by photographer Mik Critchlow and production of a film, 'A Plea for Common Ownership' by Zoe Walker and Neil Bromwich who worked with 200 people to explore the cultural and socioeconomic history of the area, inspired by its mining heritage.

Museums Northumberland bait's investment in partnership working with the local community and increased engagement in the arts has produced a legacy of increased community action and recognition of the work from the town council. Activities are being sustained through a combination of income generation from selling arts, food and raffles etc. and work by Andrea to help build links to relevant groups (e.g. working with Ashington Community Cinema to provide affordable film screenings), public agencies including Northumberland College and Northumberland County Council as well as potential funders.

### Action for Children

Action for Children is a UK children's charity committed to helping vulnerable children and young people, and their families. It manages a network of Children's Centres across Northumberland with bases in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Bedlington, Ashington and Pegswood. The Children's Centres managed by Action for Children have been involved with the programme since the early stages of Phase One. Following initial collaboration on the 'Bruised not Broken' project, as part of the BBC Great North Passion<sup>9</sup>, Common Ground<sup>10</sup> saw a parents group form a commissioning panel to work with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art to select visual artists with work curated by Rebecca Huggan exhibited at Woodhorn Museum and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

The partnership has evolved however, with Action for Children no longer perceiving Museums Northumberland bait as a 'funder' of arts activities but as a partner in a collaborative relationship which has enabled them to pursue its own arts ambitions.

Despite cuts in core funding and an extended remit from 0-5 to 0-19 years, Action for Children has made 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.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.baittime.to/ProjectDetail?ProjectID=41>

<sup>10</sup> <http://baltic.art/whats-on/quay-gallery/common-ground>

Through representation on the steering group, Museums Northumberland bait has supported Action for Children to develop a successful £23,000 Grants for the Arts bid in conjunction with Rebecca Huggan 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. The work supporting the application and ensuring quality by helping to recruit the right artists with relevant skills and experience has been key and deemed to have been instrumental in engaging service users and staff in both development and delivery which will support future arts activity.

### Northumberland Recovery Partnership

Northumberland Recovery Partnership (NRP) is a drug and alcohol treatment service for anyone in Northumberland, 18 years old or over, who is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol. NRP's relationship with the programme began in 2014 with a Time to Enjoy group which provided opportunities for service users to explore a range of arts activities. This included visits to arts and heritage attractions including Woodhorn Museum, which stimulated discussions about the experience and increased the appetite for further activities.

### ***"It was really straightforward, everyone could just join in"***

The response to Time to Enjoy sessions from clients, staff and volunteers was so strong that NRP decided to fully embrace the arts as part of its client recovery process. Utilising advice and guidance from Museums Northumberland bait to support a successful application for £20,000 of funding from the Rayne Foundation<sup>11</sup>, NRP has invested in broadening and deepening its own, and clients', engagement with the arts with volunteers trained to run regular 'recovery art' sessions. It is stated that this would not have occurred prior to the programme and the validation of the impact of the arts as part of a holistic recovery package.

An example of the continued use of arts activities by NRP and its clients is provided with 'Ark Recovery' - a wooden sculpture created by artist and Changing Lives Peer Mentor, Paul Richardson-Chute alongside graduates from NRP's recovery programme. The sculpture uses drift wood collected locally and is filled with small boxes containing messages and personal recovery journeys written by NRP clients. Crucially in terms of sharing the value of arts activities as part of the recovery journey to other Changing Lives services, the Ark toured a number of recovery centres across the North and Yorkshire and was on display at North Tyneside museum Segedunum<sup>12</sup>.

As a result of the successful roll out of arts activities and the growth in interest in the arts amongst current and new clients, (e.g. clients are proud to have their work exhibited and visitors consistently provide positive comments), a further application has been submitted to Arts Council England to maintain activities, expand work with local museums and arts attractions and further explore the impact of the arts and wellbeing using standardised tools.

### **Key challenges**

Both Museums Northumberland bait and the groups supported have identified a number of challenges:

- Projects working directly with communities over a sustained period of time require sufficient resources to maintain engagement in the arts amongst participants and local people before

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<sup>11</sup> The Rayne Foundation looks for creative ways to support charitable and not-for-profit organisations to tackle entrenched social issues through the arts, health, wellbeing, and education

<sup>12</sup> <https://segedunumromanfort.org.uk>

legacy work can begin;

- Small or fledgling community arts groups will typically need support to improve their governance, structure and organisational capacity in order to maximise funding opportunities;
- Volunteers and staff supported through the programme and subsequent legacy activities to build the skills, knowledge and experience to sustain arts activities are likely to progress to other roles and potentially leave a skills gap;
- Different groups require varying amounts, types and periods of professional support to increase confidence and realise talent and potential which may not be possible given current and future funding constraints;
- Groups need to keep aware of relevant funding opportunities via organisations like Northumberland CVA and arts activity offered through Museums Northumberland bait and wider partners; and
- Whilst Museums Northumberland bait can provide the catalyst for change and greater engagement with the arts at a grassroots level, national and local arts and heritage organisations also need to adapt in order to fully embrace and nurture these legacy outcomes in the longer term.

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## **Outcomes and impact – what changed as a result?**

The support provided to groups and organisations during Phase One of the Museums Northumberland bait Creative People and Places programme has, with varying degrees of ongoing advice and guidance, resulted in a wide variety of outcomes and impacts.

- Museums Northumberland bait has supported partners to access approximately £125,000 of external funding from Arts Council England, local council sources and trusts and foundations to programme further arts activities;
- The capacity of groups to programme arts activities has been increased as a result of changes to organisational structure, (e.g. becoming a constituted group), improvements in governance and/or increased capacity, skills and knowledge;
- There are multiple examples of growth amongst staff and volunteers from Phase One partners which have resulted in reduced need for support from the programme as groups take greater ownership of their own arts journeys;
- By brokering relationships between groups, organisations and quality artists, the programme has been integral to raising awareness of the value of the arts within service delivery to achieve a range of socioeconomic and organisational aims and objectives. Organisations are beginning to invest their own budgets in effecting social action through the arts;
- Groups are expanding their horizons and making increasingly ambitious plans for future arts activities supported by the knowledge that trusted advice and guidance from the Museums Northumberland bait team is available on request and from external recognition of the quality of work they have delivered;
- Organisations highlighted the potential for volunteers and peer workers to play an increasing role in delivering arts activities, complementing the work of paid staff, both in terms of

delivery but also planning and fundraising activities. Members of the groups supported in Phase 1 highlighted their enhanced skills in meeting the needs of funders, knowledge of funding arrangements and recognition of their formal role within a constituted group; and

- Participants in arts activities delivered by the groups recognise the benefits of involvement in local groups in terms of social inclusion, community, pride, friendship, wellbeing and increased confidence to try new art forms and experiences.

## Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities across South East Northumberland include:

- The success of the programme in creating a range of legacy outcomes has been achieved through a flexible and positive partnership approach with trusted organisations, artists and creative practitioners working with Museums Northumberland bait staff to build the capacity, buy-in, leadership and ambition across and within groups and organisations;
- Activities such as the 'Time to Enjoy' groups commissioned during Phase One are not only successful in engaging a range of people in the arts but also highly influential in stimulating and inspiring legacy activity within host groups and organisations;
- The use of the Museums Northumberland bait Quality Framework and discussions of quality of engagement and artistic outputs has transferred to the legacy work of groups and organisations to maintain standards of excellence in future arts activities;
- Groups seeking to maintain and/or develop arts activity with health and well-being objectives appreciate the specific expertise offered by the Museums Northumberland bait Arts for Wellbeing Manager when developing funding applications and designing projects;
- Groups highlighted the value of an artist or amateur able to bridge across communities, artists, partners and funders in supporting collaborative working, increasing capacity and providing focus. Creative Connectors can also help facilitate a sustainable legacy for arts activity for the organisation in receipt of their support whilst boosting their own skills and experience; and
- Legacy outcomes may only emerge after long-term relationship building with communities, increased partnership working, knowledge development and the establishment of trust.

## Replicability

The following are highlighted as top tips for replicating activities supporting legacy outcomes:

- Artists or amateurs with high-level participatory skills able to gain the trust of local communities and build relationships with grassroots groups to support a subsequent process of skills and capacity development;
- Development of a resource such as the pool of Creative Connectors offers groups a level of trust derived from local knowledge and skills in arts engagement which allows support to be transferred from a historical partner whilst facilitating a role for emerging creative practitioners;
- Guidance on good practice in accessing funding for grassroots groups, (e.g. case studies of success stories, funding top-tips, grant availability, targeted networking opportunities etc.) can support groups to work towards achieving sustainable legacies either independently or

with partners;

- Sustainable legacy outcomes can be achieved by arts activities being supported by the reallocation or redirection of existing service budgets;
- Groups and organisations value the knowledge that a trusted source of advice and guidance is available for either technical issues, (e.g. funding applications), subject-specialisms, (e.g. arts for well-being) or for simple reassurance; and
- Maintaining the skills and aspirations of organisations, staff, volunteers and participants by involving them in ongoing arts activities whilst they develop their own arts journeys.



Heart of the Hirst volunteers with curator Andrea Hawkins, credit: Mik Critchlow



Bedlington Creatives with their stained glass window, credit: Jason Thompson

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## Evidence of progress against Theory of Change

### **Ambition: to make a change in levels of participation in quality arts activity**

By enabling a range of organisations to sustain the delivery and programming of quality arts activities initiated through Phase One with much reduced support, the project has created a legacy model capable of sustaining arts and creativity to fulfil the growing demand for the arts in South East Northumberland.

Museums Northumberland bait has impacted, to varying degrees, on the ability and long term capacity of a range of organisations and groups across South East Northumberland to effect long-term change in levels of arts participation.

The additionality of the support offered by Museums Northumberland bait throughout Phase One and into Phase Two is assessed to be very high given the challenges faced by arts partners at a county level and the relative lack of alternative support at the same intensity.

### **Ambition: to involve local people**

The legacy outcomes have directly supported the work of local, grassroots groups and organisations from South East Northumberland.

There are many examples of local people playing an increasingly strategic role in decision making and leadership of arts activities with the benefit of the skills, knowledge and experience gained from the programme.

### **Ambition: to demonstrate the benefits to well-being of quality arts activity**

The legacy outcomes emanating from the Time to Enjoy groups supported in Phase One targeting people at risk of mental ill health have produced a variety of legacy outcomes which will continue to support the well-being of local people.

### **Ambition: to leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in South East Northumberland**

The programme has supported development of a range of skills, knowledge and confidence of both staff and volunteers within a range of cross-sector organisations which will provide a legacy for the arts in South East Northumberland.

In depth work with organisations including Bedlington Creatives, Action for Children and Heart of Hirst has generated capacity and boosted aspirations for the arts.

The legacy of the programme is underpinned by the processes developed to support project activity including the development of quality guidelines and a flexible and innovative approach to programme design and management.

A range of partners have highlighted how the programme has helped to strengthen their organisation and diversify their offer through a combination of support from the Museums Northumberland bait team, commissioned artists and their own experiences.

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## Our Funders



## Our Consortium



Researched and written by Wavehill as part of the evaluation of bait (2019)  
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