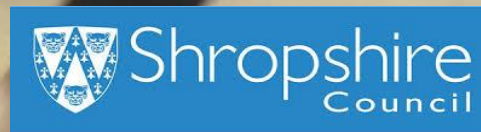


Lively Libraries

Fun Family arts activities in south Shropshire libraries this summer

2014



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Evaluation Report on the Lively Libraries arts project South Shropshire 2014

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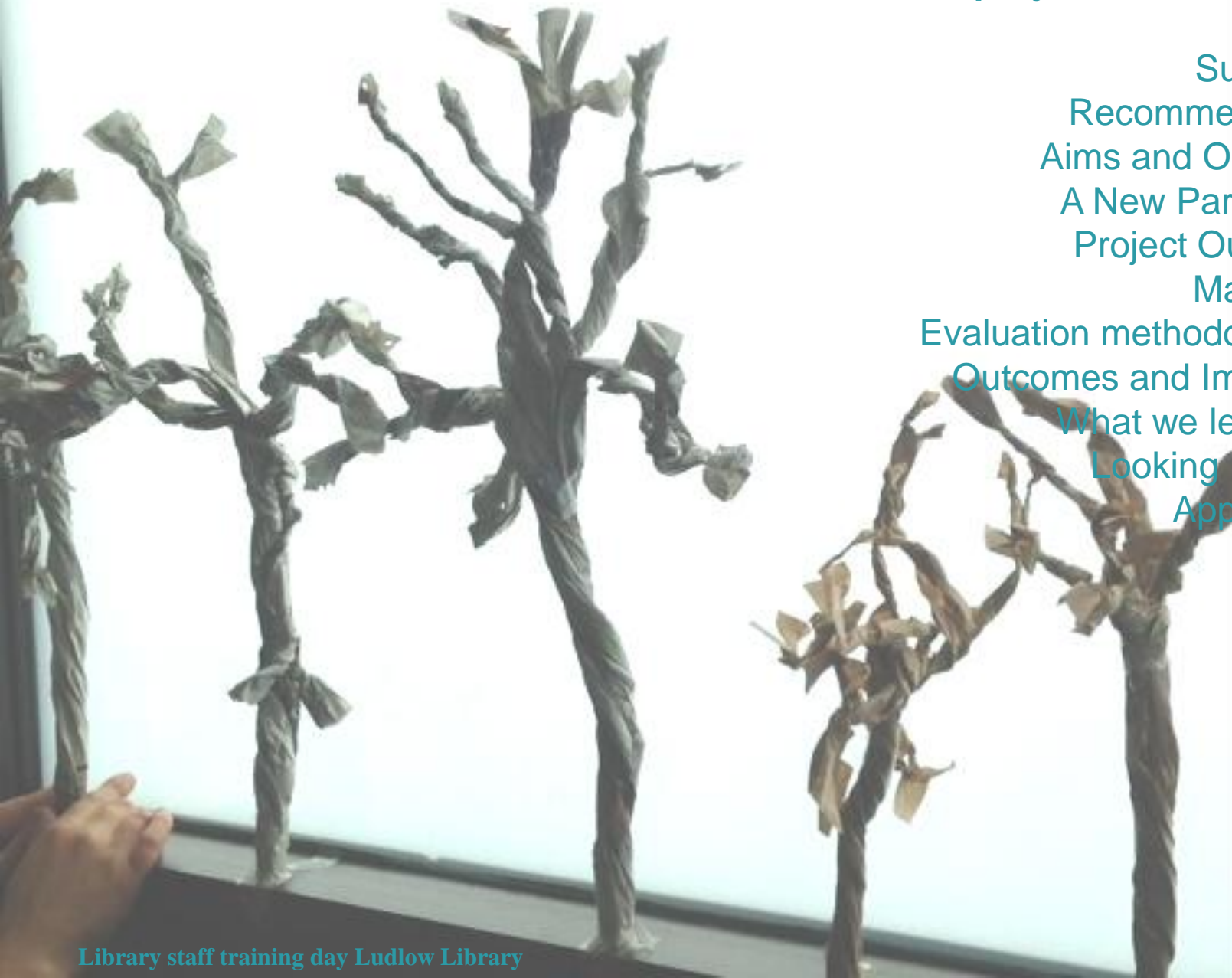
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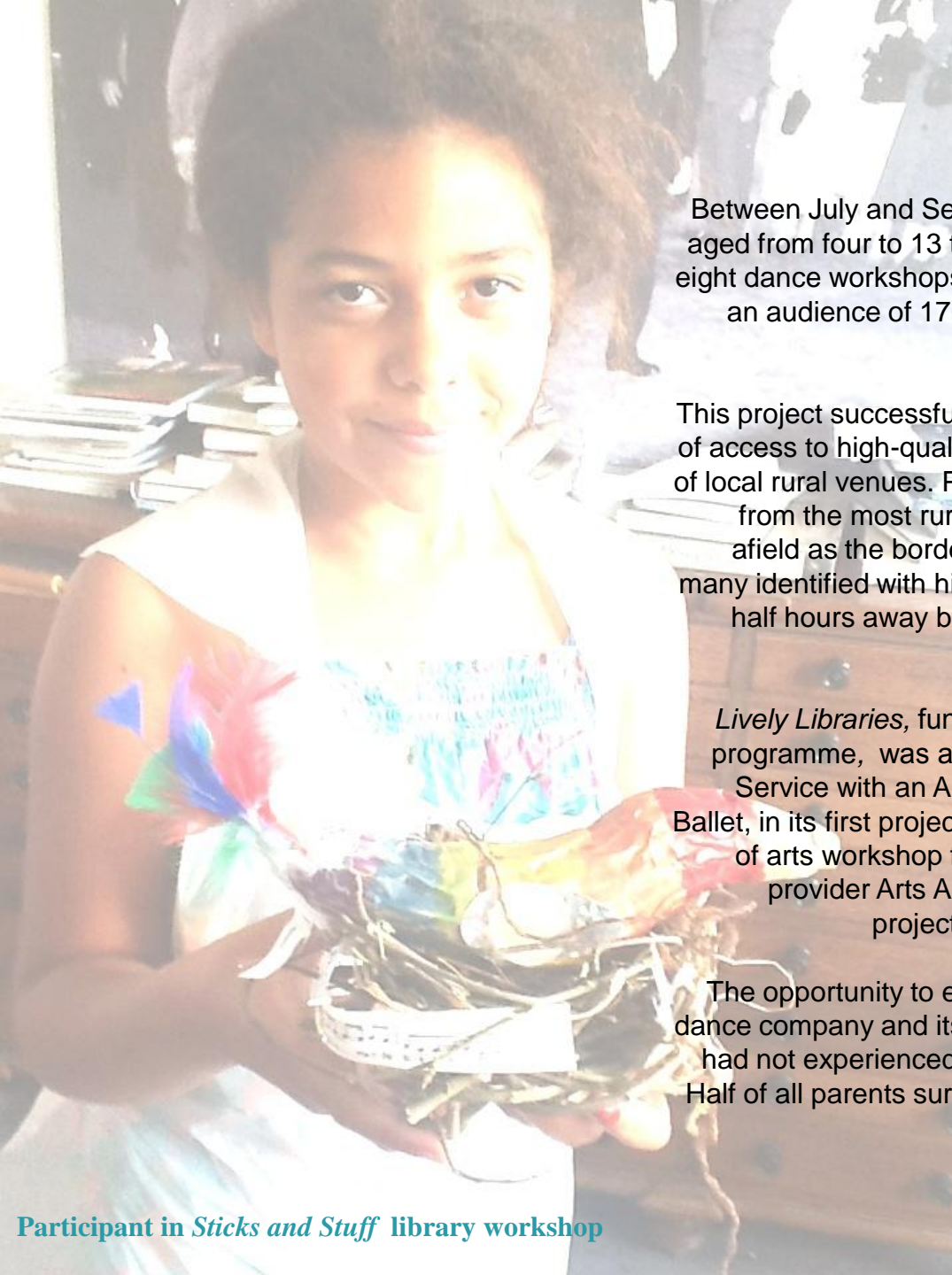
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A ground-breaking project

Between July and September 2014 139 young people from rural Shropshire aged from four to 13 took part in eleven arts workshops in local libraries and eight dance workshops in community spaces, including two performances for an audience of 170 adults. An additional 35 or so parents and carers and young volunteers took part.

This project successfully met specific rural needs – such as sparsity and lack of access to high-quality artistic work - by operating in a geographical spread of local rural venues. Postcode analysis showed that participants were drawn from the most rurally isolated areas of South Shropshire and from as far afield as the borders of Worcestershire, Powys and Clwyd. These areas, many identified with high Rural Disadvantage Indices, are typically two and a half hours away by train from the cultural offer of the nearest large urban centre.

Lively Libraries, funded by the Arts Council England's *Grants For The Arts* programme, was a 'first' in several ways: a first partnership for the Library Service with an ACE National Portfolio Organisation, Birmingham Royal Ballet, in its first project in Shropshire, and the first encounter with this calibre of arts workshop for participants. It built on the specific skills of rural arts provider Arts Alive, experienced in the demands of multi-site rural arts projects but working with the Library Service for the first time.

The opportunity to engage with an internationally respected and significant dance company and its dancers was a first for *all* the dance participants. Half had not experienced dance of any kind before, as audience or participants. Half of all parents surveyed had attended none or only one arts event in the previous 12 months.

Positive outcomes

Lively Libraries was highly successful in its aim to make 'great art' more accessible in Shropshire and to offer 'enriching artistic experiences' in rural libraries.

Using the new ACE Children and Young People's Quality Principles as a framework for devolved evaluation by participants, Library staff, artists, audiences and partners, the project was demonstrated to have provided 'excellent' and 'inspiring' creative arts experiences for participants.

A wealth of enthusiastic and positive feedback from young people, parents and others was gathered through a diverse range of methods. Almost all young participants reported an increased sense of pleasure and social connection during the arts workshops and many a sense of pride in achievement about creating or performing, all impacts associated with both hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

Lively Libraries created employment for ten artists, five from Shropshire. It created a touring exhibition of Birmingham Royal Ballet's Beauty and the Beast costumes in rural libraries and community spaces, seen by thousands of local people.

Almost all parents and family members and many participants reported that the project had stimulated a desire for further engagement with the arts. There were 120 bookings through the project from local people for BRB performances at the Hippodrome Birmingham.

Participant at *Pipkin* Bridgnorth library workshop

Many parents and audience members commented positively on the presence of Birmingham Royal Ballet in the County and there was a level of excitement about the residency reflected in feedback.

High levels of engagement

The Arts Council Quality Principles were used as a basis for 35 written observations of activities made by staff, volunteers and the project evaluator. These showed high levels of 'exciting, inspiring, engaging', 'striving for excellence', 'being authentic', 'actively involving children' and 'sense of ownership and belonging', with concrete examples to support each observation.

Young participants completed 106 feedback postcards. Three questions relating to the Quality Principles were included to support the ACE *Grants For the Arts* (Libraries) aim of 'actively participate in artistic and cultural activities' and were answered positively as follows: 'People listened to my ideas' ('Sense of ownership and belonging') 65%, 'It was exciting' ('Exciting, inspiring engaging') 92%, and 'I felt included' ('Actively involving children') 93.5%. Confidence baselines set and revisited showed the positive impact of the dance workshops.

High levels of engagement were also demonstrated by the number of dance participants (79%) who named specific skills (such as 'step ball change', galloping') in answer to the questions 'I learnt something new...' and 'I liked best'.

The written observations of the arts workshops (supplemented by eight informal interviews with participants and 55 written responses from parents) offered clear indications about quality in terms of professionalism and 'striving for artistic excellence' ('children were really using their imagination to tell their own stories and transpose them...[the artist] showed them several techniques and tools...'), inspiration, and ownership: 'Mine will be a wild whistling bird – the only one left in the forest!' (participant comment).



Recognition of quality

Artists responded with observable professionalism and skill to the wide range of participant ages, numbers, and venues (for example, a dance workshop involving four to 13 year olds, an artist's craft workshop with an unexpected 24 participants). Shropshire artists produced highly reflective accounts based on explicit theories of change which helped drive the project.

At the two final dance performances 70 audience members (41% of those present) completed a written questionnaire: 100% said they were 'impressed' and/or 'inspired' by the performances and 80% said that it was 'essential' that BRB dancers were involved. Importantly for the project aim of raising the profile of arts partnerships in libraries, 84% of questionnaire respondents knew that it was a 'Shropshire Libraries and Arts Alive event'. Several unsought written endorsements and highly positive emails were received, reflecting a high level of emotional engagement, mostly focussing on a sense of privilege and excitement about the BRB involvement, but many referring to the Library/Arts Alive partnership: 'It has reinforced in my mind the great things which are happening in libraries'. Other emails expressed intentions to further engage in the arts: 'we will be taking a trip to Birmingham on the train to see Beauty and the Beast', 'it has inspired us to look for other opportunities to take part'.

Birmingham Royal Ballet staff and dancers found the residency highly engaging and developmental, creating the opportunity for extensive discussion and review of their rural practice. Displays of their costumes in participating libraries 'created a buzz'. The project gave a BRB dancer a valued opportunity to be mentored and work alongside a highly experienced workshop leader and composer. BRB has expressed a keen desire to work further in the County: 'We were welcomed with open arms and every child was prepared to try hard'.



Sticks and Stuff library workshop participant artwork



The most important legacy of *Lively Libraries* is the many positive impacts on participants and parents reported above: the creative use of libraries, parents' intentions to read more to children, raised awareness of -and proven enthusiastic demand for - high quality art in rural Shropshire.

Over two thirds of arts workshops participants said they intended to continue writing/telling stories or making artwork at home. In the weeks following the arts and dance workshops several young people returned to libraries to discuss their experiences or share their stories, and positive feedback continued to flow in from parents via email.

Library staff were actively involved in supporting the costume displays and arts workshops. Staff made a subsidised trip to a Birmingham Royal Ballet performance and a special ticket offer was taken up by 120 participants and local people. This together with the other impacts the project has consolidated awareness of the Birmingham cultural offer and created a pool of 'advocates' in the Library Service and the community for 'great art'.

This was a reflective, developmental project which included widespread and critical discussion throughout . A professional development day involved 21 Library staff as a preparation for the project's legacy aim to improve arts activities in Libraries, towards which two Library staff also undertook Arts Award training and a permanent collection of 'Storyboxes' was created. Library staff reported an increased sense of confidence about using the training day to build on their creative and evaluation skills.

In follow-up interviews all partners recognised the need to build on the project experience through future collaborative partnerships to achieve their separate and joint aims and looked forward to the opportunity to put the lessons of this first partnership project into effect through continuing shared reflection.

Recommendations

1 The impact of the arts and dance workshops was to both reveal and create new demand and enthusiasm for high quality arts experience for children and young people provided locally. This can be built on by partners.

2 The diverse venues offered by libraries can be successfully used for high quality arts activities which can enhance the current local offer. This can be built on by partners.

3 The involvement of Birmingham Royal Ballet had significant impact both symbolically and in terms of quality of delivery, leading to raised awareness and intention to access further high quality arts activities. This can be built on by partners.

4 To develop depth in a complex interdisciplinary project like this requires further strategic development to help identify shared aims and new ways of achieving them.

5 This requires greater opportunity for partners to exchange practice-based insights, to plan collaboratively and develop a more coherent project plan before work with participants begins.

6 For example, for artists, dancers, Library staff and partners to develop their understanding of each others' professional practices and local contexts in order to develop new collaborative methodologies.

7 This first experience of embedded evaluation produced many rich accounts and discussions, but this was uneven and depends on a high level of local engagement. This can be taken further through joint staff development.

Project Aims

The *Summer Reading Challenge* is a national scheme run by the Reading Agency through libraries. Each year children aged 4 to 11 years are challenged to read six books throughout the summer holidays collecting stickers and rewards along the way. In South Shropshire the theme was *Myths and Legends* which tied in with the BRB's current *Beauty and the Beast* production. <http://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/>

Arts Award is a national scheme administered by the Arts Council England to offer trained support to children and young people up to 25 to develop as artists and 'arts leaders' through developing their 'creativity, leadership and communication skills'. Discover and Explore are the 'starter' levels. <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/arts-council-initiatives/artsaward/>

Shropshire Council and the Wenlock Poetry Festival held a competition for the County's first *Young Poet Laureate* in 2013. During *Lively Libraries* the post was held by Mia Cunningham who 'shadowed' writer Polly Peters. <https://shropshire.gov.uk/news/2013/06/shropshire%E2%80%99s-first-young-poet-laureate/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjSg5tY2npc>

Lively Libraries main aim was to develop new audiences for high quality arts in rural areas.

It aimed to extend rural libraries' arts offer and to develop staff skills to facilitate and deliver creative activities, raising public expectations and increasing library membership and use.

It visualised rural libraries as 'creative, family-friendly hubs', aiming to link the project impact into an ongoing enhanced library offer.

Project Objectives

Links established with 'hard to reach' groups

Participating library footfall and loans increased and membership up by 5%

Increased awareness and completion of the Libraries *Summer Reading Challenge* (see left) and a sustainable increase in young volunteers in the scheme

Staff to develop new skills and confidence

Arts Award *Discover* and *Explore* to be offered in two South Shropshire libraries (see left)

Raised awareness of Shropshire Young Poet Laureate scheme and increased skills for the YPL (see left)

'Storyboxes' (props and costumes) to be created to support the new creative activities

A new partnership

This was a new partnership between Shropshire Libraries, the Arts Alive Rural Touring Scheme and Birmingham Royal Ballet. Shropshire Libraries was the fundholder. The bid was developed by the Project Coordinator, Pam Parish, former Shropshire Library Manager for Children and Young People. Partners were represented by Arts Alive Director Sian Kerry, Birmingham Royal Ballet Director for Learning Pearl Chesterman, and Teresa Eccleston (Area Manager North) from Shropshire Libraries.

<http://new.shropshire.gov.uk/libraries>

Shropshire Libraries is a service provided by Shropshire Council. The Service aims to support formal and informal learning, promote the enjoyment of reading and contribute to the 'enjoyment and quality of life, encouraging participation in cultural, democratic and economic activities' and the development of 'healthy, caring and socially inclusive communities'.

It has a network of 22 libraries, 11 in South Shropshire where *Lively Libraries* was set. At a time when national adult borrowing figures are in decline and libraries nationwide face cuts in services, Shropshire Libraries looks to broaden its 'offer' through partnership working.

<http://www.artsalive.co.uk/Default.aspx>

Arts Alive is a charity which has been providing local people in rural areas the opportunity to choose and promote professional arts events in local venues since 1999. It organises about 1000 events a year including music, drama, dance, film, puppetry and storytelling. Its mission is to bring 'high quality and affordable arts events to within easy travelling distance of every person in Shropshire and Herefordshire'. It is a National Portfolio Organisation, that is, regularly funded by the Arts Council England.

<http://www.brb.org.uk/>

Birmingham Royal Ballet is also an Arts Council NPO and one of the UK's most creative and exciting ballet companies and one of the few in the world that not only creates new full length narrative ballets but also regularly commissions new music. Through an extensive programme of learning and community engagement it reaches out to communities and individuals who are new to dance.

Young volunteer supports *Lively Library* participants in Ludlow Library arts workshop

Project Outline

Shropshire is one of England's most rural and sparsely populated counties.

This project successfully met specific rural needs – such as sparsity* and lack of access to high-quality artistic work - by operating in a geographical spread of local rural venues. Postcode analysis showed that participants were drawn from the most rurally isolated areas of South Shropshire and from as far afield as the borders of Worcestershire, Powys and Clwyd.

These areas, many identified as high Rural Disadvantage Indices, are typically two and a half hours away by train from the cultural offer of the nearest large urban centre.

The project focussed on four market towns: the two larger towns of Ludlow and Bridgnorth which both have an active library membership of over 3,000 and two smaller ones, Craven Arms, an area of social and economic deprivation and Bishop's Castle, where active library membership at both these libraries is less than 900.

All four libraries hosted an exhibition of Birmingham Royal Ballet costumes from their current *Beauty and the Beast* production, which played at the Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury just before the start of the project

In July and August 12 two-hour arts workshops were run in these libraries by four local artists, selected for their experience in similar settings and the high aesthetic and participatory quality of their work. Although intended for 5-11 year olds, family needs extended the age range below and above this.

There was a charge of £3 per head, which in practice was not always paid for siblings or parents. The Shropshire Young Poet Laureate 'shadowed' one of the artists for two sessions (in Ludlow and Bridgnorth) and created a new piece of work for the project.

*South Shropshire population density 0.39 persons per hectare, UK 3.77



In the last week of July Birmingham Royal Ballet ran a series of eight dance and performance workshops for a total of 52 children. Intended for 5-11 year olds, these too accepted children from 4-13 in response to parental requests. This culminated in two performances to a paying audience of 170 adults and family members in the SpArC community theatre in Bishop's Castle.

Finally, the project evaluator and two artists, Storytellers Sal Tonge and Kate Johnston, designed and delivered a training day for 18 Library staff (not all from participating libraries) in creative activities and evaluation at Ludlow Library. Two Library staff were supported by the project to complete their Arts Award Adviser training, which enables them to assess for the Award.

To support long term creative activities by Library staff, two 'Storyboxes', hampers containing props and costumes, were created by a commissioned artist, Mandy Wix, to be shared by Libraries.

Staff, participants, artists and volunteers were invited to engage in ongoing evaluations throughout the project, including at the final staff training day. This was seen as part of the project's developmental impact.

Library staff in creative activity with Kate Johnston at *Lively Libraries* Staff Training Day, Ludlow Library

The *Lively Libraries* marketing strategy recognised that word of mouth through local Library staff would be a key means of recruiting to the project. In addition parents were especially targeted through schools.

For the events in libraries, 9000 full colour *Lively Libraries* leaflets and 250 A4 posters outlining the summer's creative arts workshops were distributed to libraries, schools, children's centres, leisure centres, youth centres and community hubs across South Shropshire .

Digital marketing, twitter and social media were widely used and encouraged. Arts Alive produced E-Flyers for the arts and dance activities and every workshop and venue, circulated via the Library Service, Theatre Severn , SpArC and partners email contact lists , website bulletins and social media.

Partners' Twitter followers of over 17,000 were regularly tweeted throughout the project with many re-tweets.

An e-flyer for the Birmingham Royal Ballet Dance Residency was produced and forwarded by Arts Alive Rural Touring Scheme to Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury. The theatre distributed this flyer to audiences who had bought tickets for BRB's performances at Theatre Severn in May 2014.

A press release was sent via the Shropshire Council Newsroom for distribution to the press, and a second press release to local media contacts including the BBC in the West Midlands by the Arts Alive team. Stories were carried in the local Shropshire Star and County Times and half a page in the South Shropshire Journal. A piece about the project was included in the summer newsletter of the ACE 'bridging' organisation *Arts Connect West Midlands* and it featured on the partners' websites



Evaluation Methodology

A series of evaluation approaches were used throughout to create a multi-perspective insight into the project, as systemic and integrated into project activity as was possible. This participatory evaluation strategy was designed to support the developmental aims of the project to increase staff skills and confidence for sustainability.

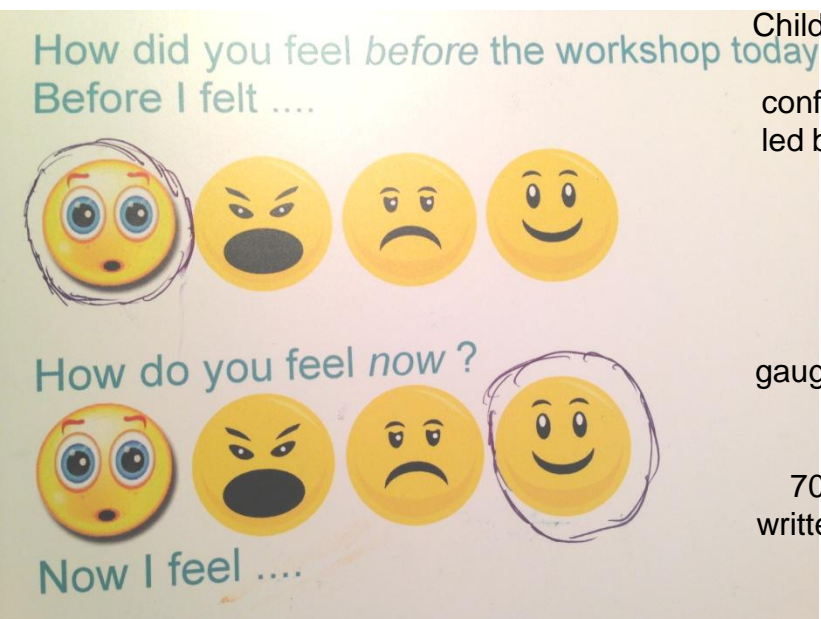
The evaluator met with partners, Library staff and three artists separately before the activity started to introduce this framework and invite participation. Conditions which might maximise the impact of creative activities, such as concentration and creative flow, striving for aesthetic excellence, quality materials and reflection were discussed.

The ACE Children and Young People's Quality Principles were introduced as an external guide designed to improve participant experience .

Artists were asked to develop their own criteria and recording methods for aims chosen by themselves for their workshops. These included 'engagement', 'taking ownership of a story by changing it' and so on.

The ACE principles were used as a framework for 35 written formal 'Prompted Observations' of arts and dance activities made by staff, young volunteers and the project evaluator. Ten children were interviewed.

A replica postbox and high levels of engagement encouraged feedback from participants



Children in the dance workshops completed 106 feedback postcards, posted into a life-sized postbox, gauging the impact on their wellbeing and confidence, engagement and what they had learnt. Both these and activities led by the dance tutor provided a baseline for the dance workshops in terms of confidence, mood and skills.

24 parents completed written feedback about the dance workshops.

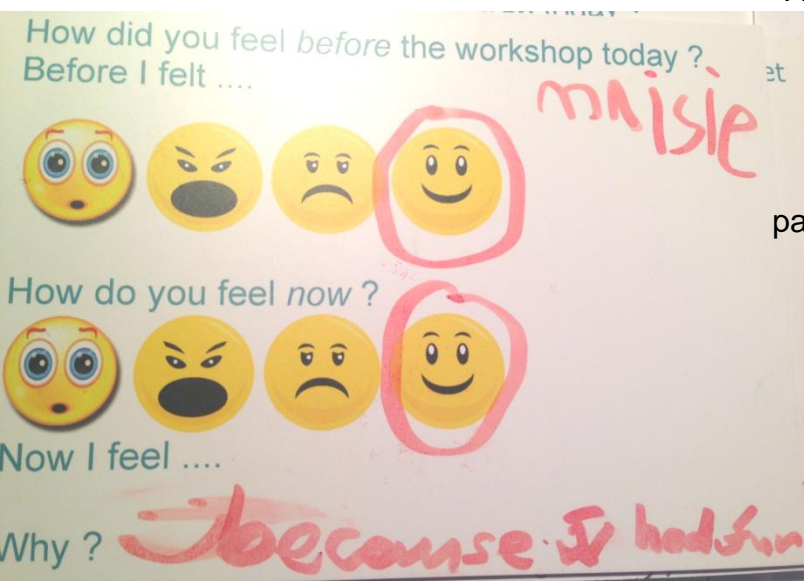
Children and parents completed 30 postcards in the arts workshops gauging impact and also asking whether parents would be more likely to use the library and read to their children following it.

70 of the 170 audience members at the two final performances completed written questionnaires assessing the impact on children and the demand for further similar opportunities.

All these written responses were analysed thematically and quantitatively .

Library staff gave feedback via emails throughout, and in various ways including creatively at the staff training day.

An online survey created a baseline to evaluate the success of the partnership and was revisited at the end. All partners were interviewed by the evaluator.



Postcards gave even the youngest participants a chance to express their levels of confidence. Top left shows a postcard from the first dance workshop and below left one from the third workshop illustrating a pattern of confidence levels increasing.

Outcomes and impact

The Costume Exhibitions

“Magical and the workmanship is beyond belief!”

“We spotted them in the window and came in”

“Saw the pictures on Facebook and just had to call in”

“Just pleased to experience the talented and creative people we still have in the arts”

The impact of the costume displays were connected with two things: pleasure and pride at such high quality art being available locally, and deep aesthetic appreciation of the costumes as artworks. Feedback strongly suggested that the costumes both inspired imagination and a demand for more similar quality art locally.

Library staff reported that the costumes were a good way to introduce the *Lively Libraries* programme and a talking point to encourage parents and children to discuss other library offers, the *Summer Reading Challenge* and relevant books and other material. This was confirmed by subsequent questioning of parents of participants.

The displays toured for a total of 81 days at participating libraries and the SpArC community theatre at Bishop's Castle and were extremely well received by visitors and staff. Feedback, kept by Library staff in library Comments Books, was overwhelmingly positive. In some libraries children were encouraged to 'design a costume' in complementary displays.

Theatre Severn (in the County town of Shrewsbury) hosted a display of six costumes from BRB's production of *Beauty and the Beast* in May publicising *Lively Libraries* events. Anecdotal feedback suggested that the connection may not have been made clear through signage, but the impact of this is hard to evaluate as the question wasn't raised with subsequent participants.



“Ludlow Library lends itself to this kind of exhibition. We have the height and plenty of light. The costumes made quite a statement and have inspired us to use costumes in the future”

Library staff member

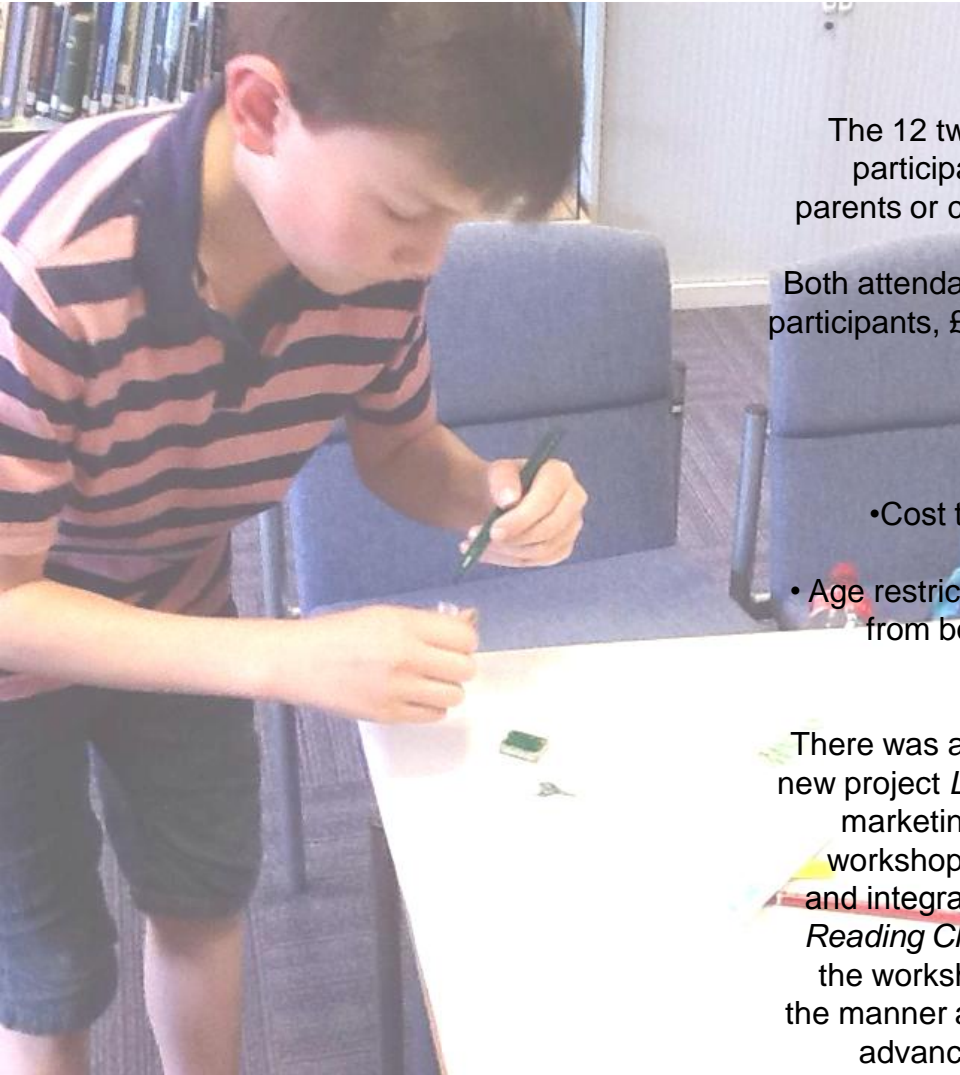
“What a privilege to view these exquisite costumes close to. I’ll be back”

“My daughter saw the costumes while she was in Bridgnorth and she was so struck by them she is going on the coach to the Birmingham Royal Ballet with my mum. Hopefully there will be a seat for me too”
[Reference to Lively Libraries trip]

An estimated over 15,000 members of the public saw the costumes. This figure is based on library visitor numbers records: for example, at Bridgnorth Library alone, during the exhibition from May13 – June 11th, there were 7,044 visitors.

Outcomes and impact

The Library Arts Workshops



The 12 two-hour workshops attracted a hugely positive response from participants and their parents. They were attended by 86 children, 24 parents or carers and about another 11 volunteers. Fees generated £259.

Both attendance and income were significantly lower than anticipated (400 participants, £540 income). A number of possible contributory factors were identified by Library staff, parents and partners:

- Publicity leaflets arriving in schools too near the end of term
- Leaflet design may have been 'confusing'
- Cost to parents higher than for the usual Library summer children's activities
- Age restrictions tighter (discouraging parents of younger or older siblings from booking, although in practice, when these arrived they were not turned away).

There was another contributory factor related to the extent or not that this new project *Lively Libraries* was embedded in libraries 'usual practice'. The marketing strategy had identified Library staff as key advocates for the workshops. The project design intended the workshops to complement and integrate into the 'usual' summer library offer, especially the *Summer Reading Challenge*. However, some staff reported that they experienced the workshops as an *additional* task and were unable to support them in the manner anticipated in the project plan. Some staff were also unclear in advance of the exact nature of each workshop and therefore found it difficult to advocate in detail.

Polly Peters' Workshops

**“I’m going to finish this as soon
as I get home!”**

“I’m taking away new legends!”

**“I feel I’ve got new vocabulary
and I put in more details”**

“It was epic!”

**“Even as a volunteer it was
interesting. You could see the
children were lively and excited.**

**One boy was acting and talking
eagerly”**

**(13-year-old volunteer in Prompted
Observation)**

Polly Peters is an extensively published children’s author and highly experienced in creative writing workshop delivery. Her story-creating workshops for *Lively Libraries* focussed on local legends of Mitchell’s Fold and the Roaring Bull of Bagbury were aimed at 7-11 year olds and attracted about equal numbers of boys as girls. Her sessions were observed by Library staff, volunteers and the evaluator. Polly produced a detailed reflective evaluation report, in which she identified key indicators of impact: for example, children’s learning (‘chose to stand to tell story so creating dramatic space’) and engagement (‘gave me clear and imaginative instructions’). Observations confirmed ‘positive, child centred’ workshops adapted to individual needs. For example, exploring similes with older children (Bishop’s Castle), and suggesting drawing with younger children (Bridgnorth and Ludlow). She set baselines of expectations and confidence at the start of each session (drawings and words) and revisited them at the end. Children demonstrated increased confidence and specific new skills. Observations also confirmed great enthusiasm and excitement about creative writing, with children rushing to tell parents what they had done at the end.

This was confirmed in several libraries where staff reported that children had returned later to discuss the workshop and their new storytelling ‘adventures’. This was taken as an indicator of lasting impact upon which Library staff can build through their own activities.

In written responses, all parents reported that children had been ‘inspired’, ‘excited’ and some that it would make them (parents) more likely to read or tell stories and use the library, although several said that they ‘already did this’.

Kate Johnston's Workshops



Kate Johnston creates intriguing art works from natural and recycled materials, 'inspired by the seasons and local landscapes'. She is an experienced workshop leader, renowned for her professional preparation and the powerfully imaginative frameworks she creates.

For *Lively Libraries* she helped children make 'Story Nests' which told the stories of imaginary birds, sometimes woven through with strips of words. Kate's reflective evaluation of her workshops focused on the ways children demonstrated imaginative engagement: "Some of the children ran with a simple narrative with their birds and talked about their special characteristics and qualities". She worked with a wide age range, high level of parental involvement and sometimes unexpectedly high numbers. For example, her Ludlow Library workshop had 24 children, ten parents/carers, three Library staff and two young volunteers – most of whom participated. Library and project staff and volunteers made nine written observations of Kate's workshops and 27 parents gave written feedback.

All these plus participant's comments paint a picture of inspirational and exciting activities in which participants strove to make concrete their personal vision, often in intent silence and concentration. There were many times observed when 'creative flow' had clearly gripped participants. Each artwork was photographed and participants encouraged to tell its 'story'. Parents all reported that children were 'inspired' and 'excited' and many commented that they were likely to 'use the library more often'.

Kate's own comments were echoed by observers that, although 'on the surface' she was completely able to offer a high quality experience to all groups, the smaller groups were more successful in terms of individual attention, and the one session (Bishop's Castle) which took place within the book stacks had greater potential for linking the creative activity and library offer than those in separate rooms.

"A fantastic workshop with a very knowledgeable artist. The creativity was flowing from both the young and old! Many thanks"
Parent

Kate Johnston at *Sticks and Stuff*

<https://www.facebook.com/SticksAndStuff>



“My bird sits on your shoulder and whispers things”

“Summer, the golden songbird cousin of the Phoenix. Her song makes the sun come out”

“Mine will be a wild whistling bird – the only one left in the forest”

“My bird finds two unhappy friends and makes them best friends in the world”



“He has a secret name because it’s special – yes it’s true”

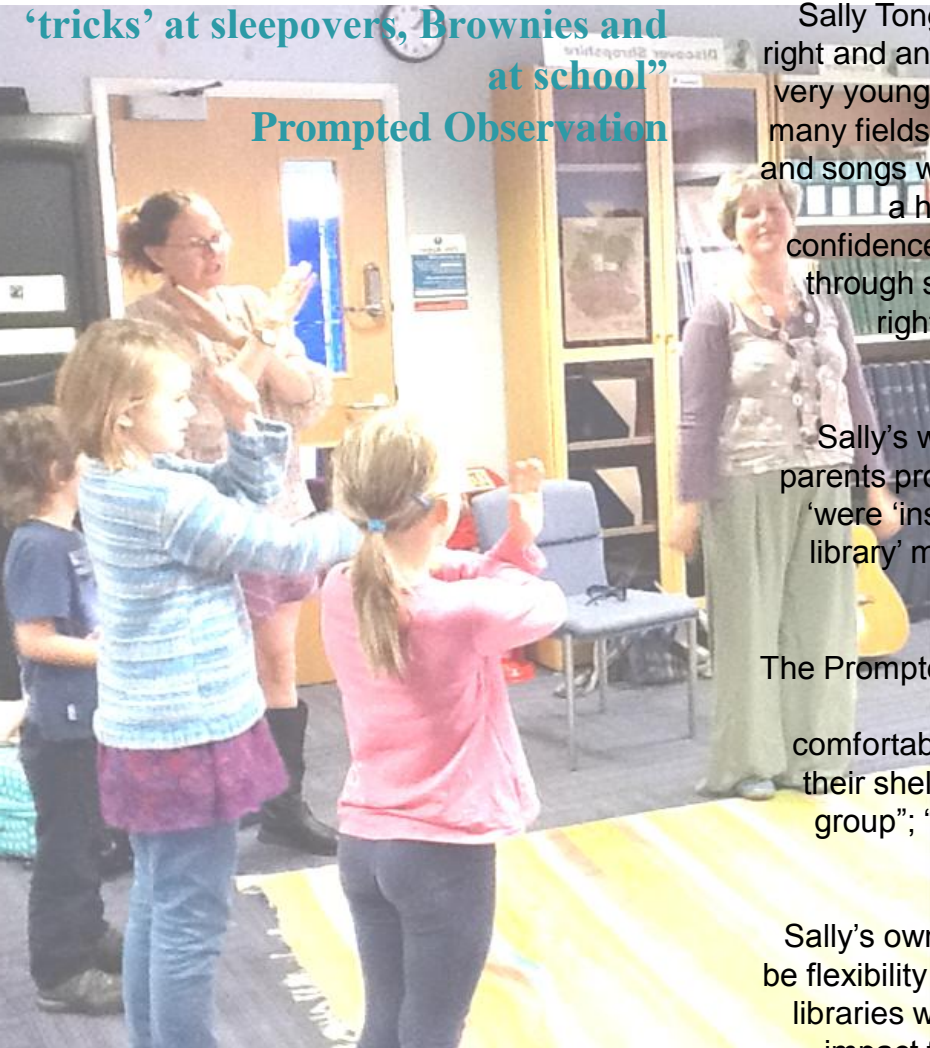
“My bird can daydream for 100 hours”

“Iyoo likes fish”

Participant comments in Kate Johnston’s workshops and birds in the library. The final comment was (his mother said) a four-year-old’s ‘first written sentence’.

Sally Tonge's Workshops

“She suggested that children could tell stories using the techniques and ‘tricks’ at sleepovers, Brownies and at school”
Prompted Observation



Sally Tonge is an inventive Storyteller, performer and musician in her own right and an experienced workshop leader across all ages but especially the very young. She works nationally as a trainer working with professionals in many fields, including libraries. She draws on a repertoire of tunes, rhymes and songs which can be adapted, elaborated and embellished at the drop of a hat. Central to participants' experience is the development of the confidence to take similar kinds of risks with language and voice, perhaps through simultaneously feeling that it's 'easy' and worth trying hard to get right. Her workshops for *Lively Libraries* were noisy affairs filled with laughter.

Sally's workshops were observed by a range of staff and volunteers and parents provided written feedback, all saying that their children 'enjoyed' or 'were inspired' and several that they would both 'tell stories' and 'use the library' more often following the experience. Parents were encouraged to join in with action rhymes and name games.

The Prompted Observation sheets showed how inclusive, 'positive and child centred' Sally's workshops were: "She made all the children feel comfortable, even the ones who were shy at first immediately came out of their shells"; "Everyone sat on a 'story rug' to encourage closeness of the group"; "She mixed groups and pairs up"; "She listened carefully to any contribution".

Sally's own reflective evaluation emphasised how she sees her strength to be flexibility and responsiveness: "I could have delivered drop-in sessions in libraries when they were open and involved more people, made a greater impact for creativity in the library setting rather than in separate rooms".

Zoe Needle's Workshops

“It felt like a real family workshop” (Parent)



“Cool, that is going to look wicked!” (Young participant)

Zoe Needle makes ‘endless story strips’ which evolve into new combinations and re-combinations mimicking the evolution of traditional tale-telling whilst keeping their essential ingredients. Within the imaginative framework of myths and legends children in Zoe’s three workshops discussed and drew their own stories and then used the strips to create new ones, making ‘stop-go’ video animations.

Her workshops were observed by several volunteers and staff, one of whom noted particularly the “high quality, professional art materials” used. Zoe herself in her own evaluation reflected that “I had to put down boundaries in order to stop children just using felt tip pens as this is the ‘norm’ for most – but the pens were only there for use with the stamps. Where the children didn’t do this (Bishop’s Castle) the most interesting and effective results emerged”.

Working with children from under six to 12, Zoe was able to “meet the needs of each individual, going round and talking to them” (Prompted Observation). Parents were drawn into the activity too, contributing to *Lively Libraries* aim of making sustainable impact on attitudes towards arts activities.

From Zoe’s reflection: “What I liked about this session was that the adults really got involved and created wonderful dynamic results with their children and also had a go alone. They all listened and used the materials in the way I had described which hadn’t happened in the previous workshop. One lady who loved it said it made her want to study art”.

Birmingham Royal Ballet Workshops

The Birmingham Royal Ballet workshops ran in Craven Arms (CASCA*) and Bishop's Castle (SpArC**) as six three-hour sessions, a whole day, a two and a half hour rehearsal and two one-hour public performances. This was a tremendous illustration of commitment and engagement from the 52 four – 13 year olds who completed the week – half of whom had never danced at all before: "This is demanding even physically for four year olds, yet he has them really 'striving for excellence', trying to get it right again and again, and they love it!" (Prompted Observation).

The workshops were an illustration of how the aesthetic and practice professionalism of a 'high art' company can be used with young people and how this raises expectations and outcomes. Lead artist and highly experienced workshop leader Colin Sangster set the bar high from the first day: "This is about thinking, you have to think hard the whole time. Are you going to work hard? Are you sure?", using professional terms ('If you are facing upstage') yet clearly adjusting expectations for age and confidence in a calm and reassuring tone. Except briefly when the four groups of 15 merged and children had to watch each other's performances, they showed intense absorption and concentration in the activity at all times. Colin and BRB dancer Brandon Lawrence were observably paying attention to each child's learning, working from 1:1 to whole group, and there was lots of questioning to check understanding. Every child had a clear and active role.

Although the narrative of *Beauty and the Beast* underpinned the content of the workshops, observations and interviews with participants and parents suggested that a more powerful imaginative framework for the children was the idea of 'real' performance on stage. Several commented with pleasure that they had learnt new terms, such as 'Upstage', 'Waiting' (to go on).

"It was amazing the team maintained focus with such a huge age range"
Parent's Observation

"You have just learnt a new step in five minutes which dance teachers say takes six weeks!"
Lead artist to participants

"They sat on the floor with the children and even the shy ones warmed up quickly"
Prompted Observation

*Community Arts Sports Craven Arms community venue which includes the local Library
<http://www.furniturescheme.co.uk/centres/casca-centre/>

**SpArC community theatre with a remit to show high quality arts and film
<http://www.sparctheatre.co.uk/>

“What I liked best was the pretend fighting. I can’t say what I didn’t like because I liked everything”

“Today I learnt to hold hands with my partner in a special way”

“Today I learnt to use the space”
Dylan

“Today I learnt to express my feelings through a dance. I didn’t like it when it was time to go”
Mia

“Today I feel hapee”
Olivia

Colin measured confidence before and after every workshop: this is Group 4 end of session ‘still not totally confident but not scared’

Eight Prompted Observation sheets were completed by Library and project staff, volunteers and the evaluator, using the ACE Children and Young People’s quality principles as a framework. Children completed 92 ‘Postcards to the BRB’ over the week. These clearly demonstrated a number of outcomes, including the high level of engagement such a high rate of return itself suggested.

Three questions relating to the Quality Principles were included to support the ACE *Grants For the Arts* (Libraries) aim of ‘actively participate in artistic and cultural activities’ and were answered positively as follows: ‘People listened to my ideas’ (‘Sense of ownership and belonging’) 65%, ‘It was exciting’ (‘Exciting, inspiring engaging’) 92%, and ‘I felt included’ (‘Actively involving children’) 93.5%. Confidence baselines set and revisited showed the positive impact of the dance workshops.

Skills development was observable over the week, but high level of engagement and skills learnt was also shown by naming of specific new skills learnt (such ‘step ball change’, ‘galloping’) in 79% of postcards

Widespread shift from nervous apprehension to confident/happy in the ‘smiley face’ record over the week, despite some pre-performance nerves (65% ‘nervous’ on day one to 89% ‘happy/confident’ on final day). Many children also mentioned new friendships as a positive outcome. Even the very youngest children were able to respond with detailed comments on the postcards, which were ‘posted’ in a replica red postbox.

24 parents completed written feedback, 37.5% said that neither they nor their child had visited an arts event in the past year while a further 33% had visited only one (mainly dance), suggesting that, although recruitment of specific ‘hard to reach’ groups was hard to record, this did represent a ‘new’ audience for participation. There were only three boys participating, suggesting that much more targeted recruitment was needed. These included two of the oldest participants, who made the choice to come, suggesting that parents’ attitudes may need as much attention as boys’.

The Performances

“Spectacular!”

“Please come again!”

Fifty-two young people performed their dance twice to a total audience of 170 at the SpArC community theatre in Bishops Castle on August 1st. The venue provided raked seating and stage curtains and the real sense of ‘backstage’ and professional performance the children had been practising for as they rehearsed and learned to ‘wait’ like professional dancers. Tutor Colin Sangster narrated and the children were supported onstage by dancer Brandon Lawrence and backstage by three BRB staff. SpArC volunteers ran front of house. A live performance of a new piece by BRB composer Andrew Kristy made during the workshops led the dance.

Audience reaction

The audience was largely but not entirely family members so unsurprisingly applause was generous. However, the rapt attention given and the high level of responses post-show, verbal and written, demonstrated a high level of engagement and excitement. Nearly half the audience completed a written questionnaire and seven unsolicited longer written comments were handed in and several emails followed. All comments were positive: ten referred to the unusual opportunity to have artists of such high quality in the rural area: 76% said BRB’s involvement was ‘essential’ and many commented that it had stimulated demand for ‘more’: 93% said they wanted to see more dance/performance and 86% said their children did too. Using the Arts Council’s Children and Young People’s quality framework, we asked if parents thought performers had been ‘fully involved’ (96% said yes) and ‘inspired’ (91.4% said yes). There were many comments about the skill needed to create such a high quality performance in so short a time: 83% thought it was ‘better than expected’.

Over a quarter of the audience (26%) had attended ‘none’ arts events in the past year and another 57% had attended only 1-2, a reflection of two things: the inaccessibility of arts in the rural area and that, in keeping with the project aims, this was on the whole *not* an audience of frequent arts attenders.

A video of the performances is available at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1tUr9w7ieo>.

**“How lucky we are to have the
Birmingham Royal Ballet right
here !”**

**“We will definitely try to see
the BRB again somehow”**



What we learnt: a developmental project

‘A great opportunity for me as a dancer to work out of Birmingham with future audiences and dancers. Working along side someone as professional and dedicated as Colin Sangster was a pleasure. I learnt so much about communicating in a youth environment as well as structuring class and rehearsals for the appropriate groups. I find projects like these highly important as dance opens so many eyes and opportunities across the board.’

Brandon Lawrence , Birmingham Royal Ballet dancer

‘The best thing for me at the workshops [where she ‘shadowed’ creative writer Polly Peters] was the freedom for the children to write what they wanted and for me to write something that was out of my comfort zone. Performance poetry and storytelling are similar and I enjoyed participating . I also wrote a new poem about a subject matter I had not explored before and I wrote it live alongside the children. This was a new experience for me.’

Mia Cunningham, Shropshire Young Poet Laureate

As a new partnerships *Lively Libraries* was seen as a developmental project. Specific opportunities were planned, and were highly successful, such as the involvement of BRB dancer Brandon Lawrence in the dance workshops and the mentoring of Shropshire’s Young Poet Laureate in the creative writing workshops. The aim to raise awareness of the YPL was achieved through the parents, children and Library staff involved, and although Mia felt that her confidence had not increased through the experience, she admits she felt “very confident” *before* the project and that it had offered her new and rewarding opportunities.

Looking back on the workshop process Birmingham Royal Ballet Director for Learning Pearl Chesterman reflected that rural distances meant the team of five stayed in Shropshire for the whole week, facilitating far more (late night) discussions, reflections and articulated re-planning than might usually happen: “It was a positive developmental experience for the team too, especially with regard to how we might work in rural areas. For example, we noticed differences in the children’s willingness to become fully involved and the warmth of the welcome from staff and parents we felt was significant”.

Feedback from Library staff about the *Lively Library* Training Day held at Ludlow Library in early September in ‘creative activities and creative evaluation’ was very positive. It gave staff the opportunity to learn about evaluation techniques while giving in-depth feedback about the project, and to learn about and take part in two highly creative arts activities. Staff reported two impacts: greatly increased confidence about evaluation of arts activities and delivering creative workshops. However, staff also felt that further training was needed in both areas. They strongly recommended that in future projects such training should *precede* activity, fostering a greater sense of engagement and, by giving a better sense of the workshops, enabling staff to become better advocates for them - crucial for successful local recruitment.

What we learnt: our targets

The number of exhibition days (81) was far higher than predicted (35) because of the unexpected offer to exhibit BRB costumes. Library staff responded enthusiastically, facilitating and advocating for the displays.

Numbers recruited for the BRB workshops were 'capped' for reasons of 'good practice' by the Company to 15 per group (60 recruited, 52 completed). The over-ambitious ACE target of 80 was set during the early stages of planning and later revised.

Numbers recruited to the Library workshops were much lower than hoped for. The complex reasons for this have been suggested in this report and are connected with some of the organisational issues discussed in it.

The lower numbers participating had a knock-on effect on project income, which is shown in the following budget summary.

Lively Libraries was successful in achieving its aspiration to create a new partnership to bring 'great art' to rural Shropshire, to reveal and create demand and reach families not regular arts attenders. It successfully raised skills, confidence and enthusiasm for creativity, storytelling and library use among families and young participants. It was successful in reaching or almost reaching many of the target set in the funding application to the ACE, such as employing local artists and raising the profile of Libraries as centres for creativity (partly through social media). It levered income and resources into rural areas of disadvantage.

However, on reflection some original targets may have been over ambitious. For example, in such a sparsely populated area the target of increased Library membership by 5% is likely to have been too high for any brief project and this needs considering for future plans.

Similarly the target to increase *Summer Reading Challenge* participants was not fully reached and may have been over ambitious. There was an overall slight increase in South Shropshire SRC starters (up by almost 3%) in a year when over the whole County figures were slightly down. Nevertheless, feedback from parents gave little indication that many had joined the Library or SRC because of the workshops, although there was a small number of parents saying they had 'found out' about SRC and 'other' library offers through the project.

However, because the project was clear about its evaluation methodology, it is possible that a future project can build on these statistics to determine any longer term impact.

The project budget

LIVELY LIBRARIES									
INCOME			Description						Amount £
Arts Council Award									25922.00
Earned Income			Ticket Sales						£ 432.00
			Workshop fees						£ 779.00
Other public funding									£ 3,850.00
TOTAL INCOME									£ 30,983.00
EXPENDITURE									
Artistic Spending			Description						Amount £
BRB Residency and costume exhibition									£ 9,583.00
Artists' workshops in Libraries									£ 2,111.00
Story boxes									£ 1,591.00
Young Poet Laureate			2 sessions						£ 80.00
Developing your organisation and people									
Artists training for library staff									£ 1,030.00
Marketing and developing audiences									
									£ 3,955.00
Overheads									
Library staff additional hours									£ 910.00
Venue Hire									£ 837.00
Freelance Project co-ordinator									£ 6,760.00
Creative Evaluation									£ 3,388.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE									£ 30,245.00

- Clearer objectives at the start. More planning and monitoring meetings for all involved
- Involve those staff most closely involved with the project in initial planning meetings. More time to jointly plan and involve staff
- If we had a longer lead in for recruitment of participants, perhaps BRB could have supported this stage by meeting with community groups
- Establish contact with local dance artists to offer training/organise future activities in order to leave a greater legacy

What we learnt – partnership issues

An online survey of *Lively Libraries* partners set a baseline for a successful partnership. Key factors were: good communication, clear roles acknowledgement of and respect for partners, understanding each others aims and objectives, good communication, clear roles and responsibilities; clear action plan and expectations; willingness to understand project from another's point of view, trust and shared vision.

Partners said the project would be a success if: successful specific outcomes for all partners, there was a desire to work together in the future; good attendance at library events, new members and positive advocacy for Library service; new ideas grown from the experience; effective project delivery; seeing the ideas continue to bear fruit in the libraries.

The follow-up survey revealed mixed feelings: almost all respondents expressed a desire to work together again and felt that 'new ideas will grow from the experience' and that the project had 'a clear action plan', and was 'very' or 'mostly' effective (4/6). However, there were strong feelings that communication had been poor in the project, that partners did not understand each other's aims and objectives clearly and that the project lacked a shared vision.

Partners identified a number of ways that these difficulties could be avoided in future. These are on the left. It is important to note that many of these are connected with a need for a much longer lead in time between award and start of activity, which can be built in to future planning; and that they are congruent with points raised by Library staff.

What we learnt – organising effectively

These comments are drawn largely from Library staff feedback and interviews with partners, as well as the high level of discussion throughout the project. They are all about 'getting it right next time':

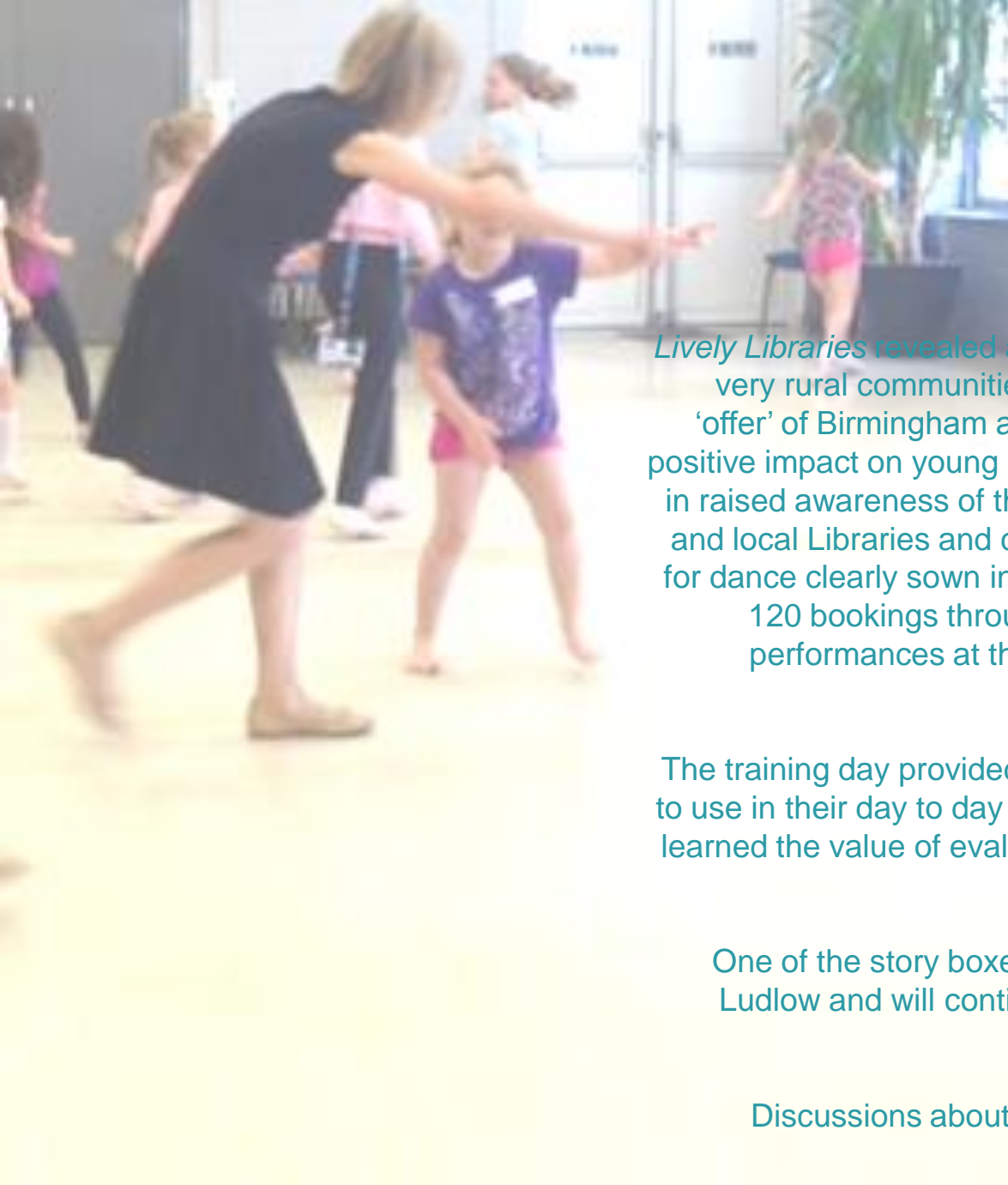
In a multi-disciplinary project there may be several quite different professional cultures, with their own ways of working, protocols, understandings and priorities. It is essential to build consultation and discussion into planning and as a separate review activity during the project. This can be part of a systemic evaluation strategy.

In order to create a long-lasting in-depth experience for young people such a complex project needs extended activity and reflection time.

Each partner's expertise needs to be used to the fullest extent. For example, local Library staff's understandings about marketing ,pricing, timing and recruitment; BRB's embedded good practice in protocols such as child protection, consent issues, risk assessment, media; Arts Alive's knowledge of working with rural arts; the Library Service understanding of local issues. A more formal sharing of these and other diverse areas of expertise can be highly developmental for all partners and increase the legacy of the next project.

Communication needs to come from a single source on a 'need to know' basis.

Project plans and communication strategies need to prioritise 'taking care' of and valuing existing staff (in this case, mainly Library staff). In order for them to become advocates for the project (essential if recruitment is mainly local) they need to feel like stakeholders.



Looking forward

Lively Libraries revealed and created a demand for excellent art in very rural communities. It raised awareness about the cultural 'offer' of Birmingham and the Birmingham Royal Ballet. It had a positive impact on young people and families. Its legacy will unfold in raised awareness of the creative potential of rural communities and local Libraries and community venues, and in a new passion for dance clearly sown in the hearts of the young performers. The 120 bookings through the project from local people for BRB performances at the Hippodrome Birmingham confirm this legacy.

The training day provided staff with inspiration and practical ideas to use in their day to day work with children in libraries. They also learned the value of evaluation and practical methods to carry out their own evaluations.

One of the story boxes has already been used with children in Ludlow and will continue to be used with groups of children in libraries in the South area.

Discussions about the next steps needed to build on these successes are already under way.

Today I learnt something new, how to...

stage fight

This is how I feel about today... I really enjoyed

People listened to my ideas [yes] [no]

It was exciting [yes] [no]

I felt included (yes) (no)

What I liked best was ... the stage fighting

I didn't like it when... I held up everyone's arms because I concentrated on it for much and got my feet wrong

Today I learnt something new, how to... step ball

This is how I feel about today... really happy

People listened to my ideas [yes] [no]

It was exciting [yes] [no]

I felt included (yes) (no)

What I liked best was ... to dance

I didn't like it when... we stopped

From MAISIE

Appendices – a few words from participants, observers and families

"I sincerely hope this will not be the last time you give children the chance to showcase their talents in their community. It has also made me realise how important it is that the children get to show their talent and not just to work towards exams etc, it gives them a sense of pride and a reason to strive forward to succeed"

"The lady running the workshop kept them all joining in and chattering excitedly. One boy he was getting really excited and you could see he was enjoying himself. She listened to everyone's stories and what everyone said really carefully"

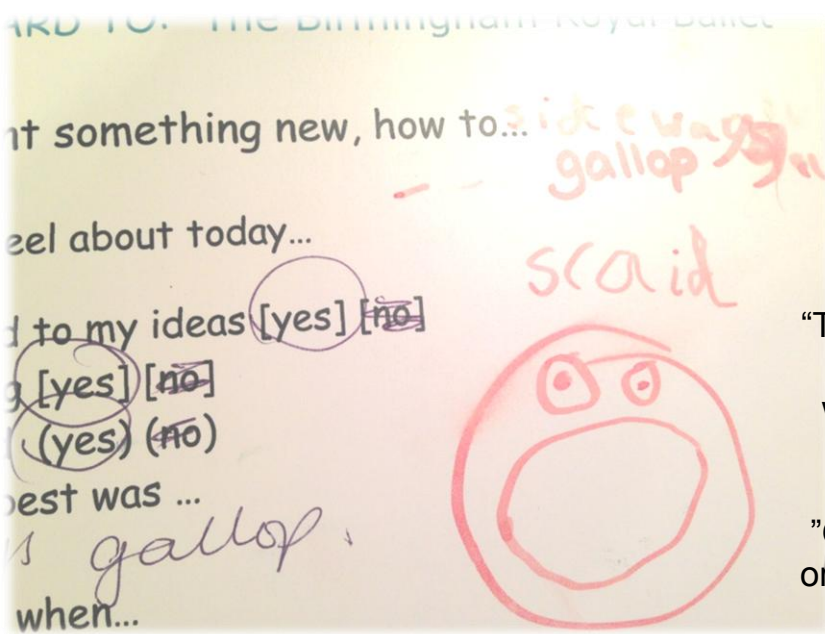
"The workshop was full of laughter"

"He loved making the bird and he hasn't stopped talking about it"

"As soon as I get home I'm going to finish my story"

"It was star. It was cool. She was good company"

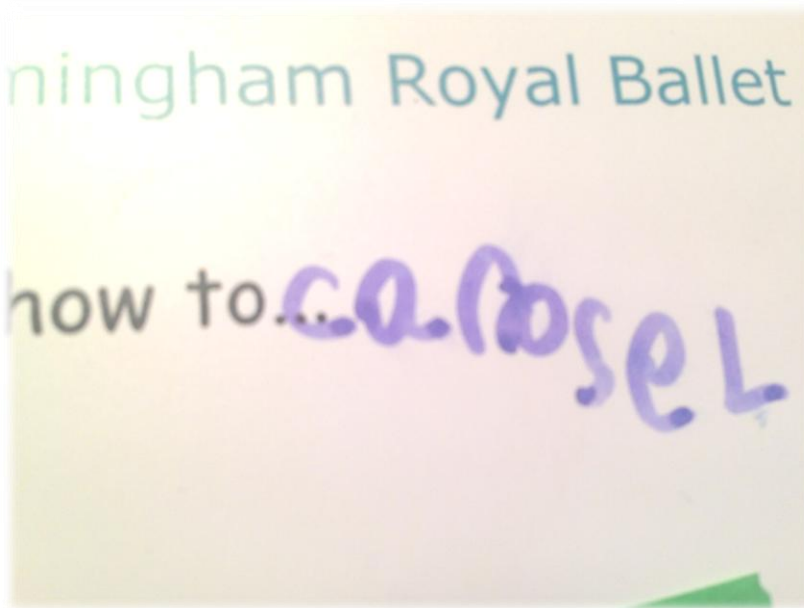
"My daughter has learnt a lot, made new friends, had an experience to remember and treasure and more than anything had a lot of fun. In her words it was just AMAZING."



"Thank you for arranging this past week's activities, my daughter has had a great time and it has been a wonderful experience for the children that we would not ever be able to offer them without projects like this".

"The experience of working with Birmingham Royal Ballet has been most enlightening for them allowing them to see a little of how the world of professional theatre works and the demands and passion of professional dance".

"Our house will for some time to come echo the words "Colin says" or "Brandon does" . I would highly recommend anyone who has the opportunity to take part in this scheme to do so - it was brilliant!"



"Just a note to say how utterly bowled over I was today by the inclusive BRB team's workshop, with 4-9 year olds! It was clearly so well structured and meticulous in detail. Colin created an atmosphere of intense concentration without intimidating any of them - the whole activity was beautifully paced and led from one skill to the next. It also occurred to me how almost any participatory community artist of any genre could learn from the delivery - I felt I learnt a lot."

"We would all like to thank you and let you know what a wonderful time we had taking part in Beastly Ballet with The Birmingham Royal Ballet. I enjoyed watching the production coming together, and was extremely impressed by how seriously the whole team took on the challenge of working with so many children. It has inspired us to look for more opportunities to take part in this type of project."

Pam Parish, Project Coordinator, November 2014.

With thanks to

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This report was written by
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