Leading The Way: A Youth Arts Consultation

Report 2022

Introduction

Creative Arts East (www.creativeartsast.co.uk) is an arts and community development charity committed to bringing the very best arts and cultural activities to rural or under-engaged audiences across Norfolk, Suffolk and the wider Eastern region. We aim to use the transformative power of the arts to fight rural and social isolation; increase enjoyment, skills, health and wellbeing; broaden horizons and ambitions; and make a positive difference to the lives of people living in rural communities.

We achieve this by helping people access and engage with high-quality arts experiences, including live performances, cinema screenings, creative workshops and training sessions.

In July 2020, Creative Arts East began a one-year youth-arts consultation, to assist our own and others' understanding of why and how younger people engage with music, arts and cultural leadership opportunities in the rural East of England.

Born from our desire to join up the dots by creating opportunities and sustainable pathways between differing youth arts activities, and our frustration of not always being able to make this happen with our own independent delivery, we developed a consultation methodology to better understand the issues direct from young people themselves and also from the wider cultural sector that supports or delivers youth arts provision.

Our Context

As an organisation enabling rural communities and their residents to unlock better and more access to professional arts and culture, for over ten years CAE has designed and delivered event management training programmes in rural high schools to at-risk young people aged 12-15 years.

With support from an artist mentor, students learn about all aspects of live music event planning and management, culminating in a real-life, student run gig for the community. This short-term, project-funded intervention enables Arts Award accreditations and has consistently supported an increase in self-confidence, musical understanding, and career awareness by the young promoters.

However, one significant area of challenge for this programme has been the progression of our trainees onto continued, extended provision outside of their school setting. Specific barriers have centred around: our own lack of direct communication with participants owing to the school being the main channel for contact; transport access/cost to and from opportunities further afield within their county; confidence to attend without friends and an understanding by young people or guardians of what the progression opportunities would entail.

We recognise that the ability for our trainees to continue to hone the skills and aptitudes developed during their initial training is critical to sustaining learning in their longer-term personal and professional lives. Therefore, we remain committed to exploring solutions and alternatives that can help budding youth arts leaders take the next step along their progression pathway. A large part of that commitment is about linking with other partners to share ideas, challenges, and best practice.

In 2019 we held 'From Policy to Practice', a national youth leadership event. Whilst the outcomes of that day were very positive in starting a louder national conversation, there was a definite sense that the conversation should be contributed to and led more by people aged under 25, but it was also recognised that there are often significant barriers to getting these people in a room, including: time and educational commitments, money, transport, adult permission, and interpretation of the opportunity.

In March 2020, with our in-person activities postponed and the need to think differently about future participation pathways, we took the opportunity to reflect on what had gone before, re-evaluate the purpose and take a deep dive into the opportunities and challenges for youth leadership in the cultural sector across the East of England. We have placed the voices of young people and professional practitioners at the heart of this enquiry and our resulting plans for the future, and we stay committed to sharing our findings with the wider sector through communications and the creation of best practice resources.

Consultation Methodology and Reach

Methodology

At the heart of this consultation sat Youth Voice. An authentic voice to be heard and learnt from. Our methodology was designed from a place that enabled young people to speak and be listened to, whilst also including insights from gatekeepers and decision makers, to give us the fullest picture of the challenges and opportunities for young people in the East today.

The method was set against four phases:

A digital survey created for four specific groups (people 16 and under, people under 25, arts organisations and workforce)

Survey findings discussion events, which included representatives from all four groups

1:1 conversations that covered a sampled range of stakeholders

Overarching thematic analysis of our available data

Note: This consultation was designed and delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Almost all of the work took place online or over the phone.

Demographic and reach

The online surveys collected data from 133 people, whilst the 1:1 conversations, focus groups and in person meetings engaged a further 80 younger people, organisations and workforce in consultation.

The demographic profile of respondents reflects a largely white and heterosexual profile (87% white, 70.2% heterosexual), which is reflective of the demographic for the population in the East of England (85.2% white, 95.5% hetrosexual). Furthermore, the majority of respondents were female (71%), and those who do not identify as a disabled person (82.7%).

Challenges in collecting data from a digital survey include: creating enough coverage and promotion of the survey to engage with a wider demographic, especially with underrepresented people, and more specifically with those who do not currently engage with arts and culture provision, including rurally isolated young people. The channels that were most effective were the ones where people were already actively engaging. The survey data is therefore limited in its profiling of what stops people from engaging in arts activities in the first place and what support mechanisms could be put in place to help them attend. Further research linked to longer-term and more in-depth community consultation is required to fully reach and draw out this perspective.

The following outlines what we have found out and provides some suggestions on how we move the agenda forward.

Key Themes and Findings

A full overview of all responses across the four groups can be found at the end of this report in the appendices.

Participatory insights

Some of the key findings for the under 16 age group include:

98%

of young people have taken part in a creative or cultural activity in the past year.

Where did they complete these activities?

- Other
- University
- School/College
- Arts venue
- At home
- Community space

The most popular activities were...

| 17% | Theatre |
14%	Dance
13%	Workshops
12%	Visual art
11%	Music
11%	Events
11%	Film
5%	Written word
4%	Craft
2%	Other
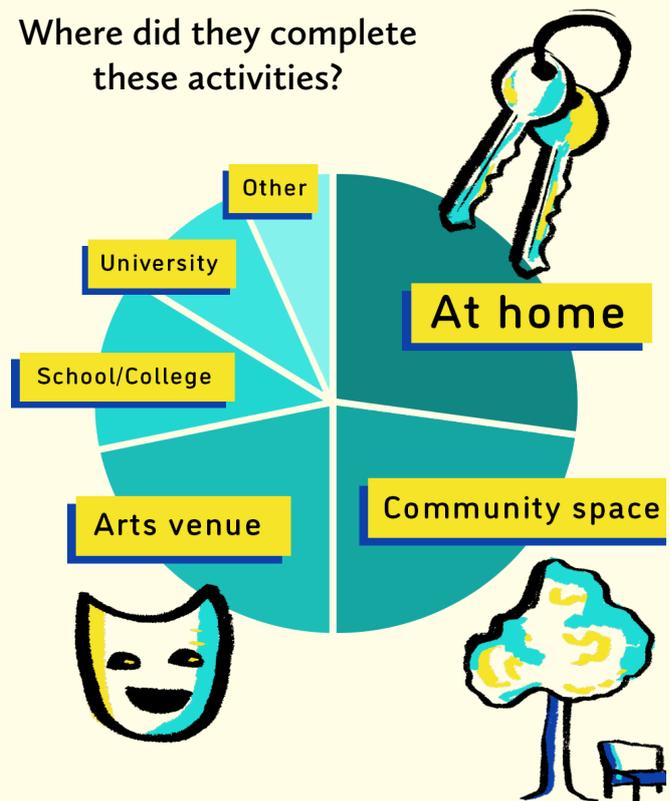
82%

of young people would like to take part in more creative or cultural activities

Only 18%

of young people feel they are given an opportunity to make decisions about what happens where they live

But 95%

of young people **are interested in making decisions** about arts and cultural activities
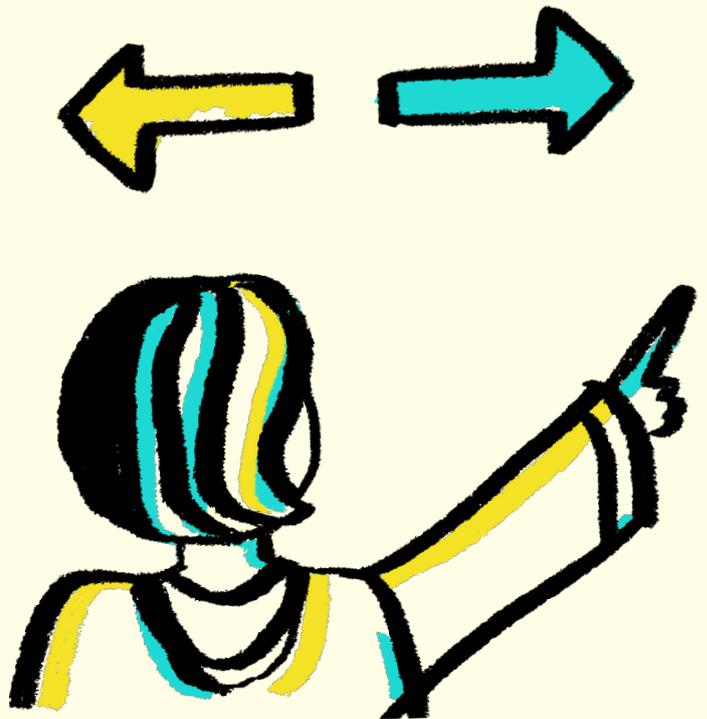
So what's stopping young people from making these decisions?

The **top 5 responses** were:

1. **Knowing where to start**
2. **Money**
3. **Time**
4. **Confidence**
5. **Travel**

Barriers, Motivation and Approach

Confidence

At over 66%, confidence was the main thing under 16s said they needed more of in order to attend local cultural and creative events and activities. For the older age bracket, confidence was second only to time.

Almost 62% of under 16s did not know who to ask (organisations/individuals) for support or guidance in their arts/cultural pathway, and most under 16s felt they didn't have an opportunity to make decisions.

88% of under 16s, and 77% of 16-25s would like to be able to take part in more arts and culture than they already do, with many saying that what's available isn't relevant to them. In fact, most young people felt that they did not have the right sort of thing for them to engage with locally in terms of matching their interests.

The older age bracket tended to have more insight into who to ask about opportunities, and cited more opportunity to make decisions, which is to be expected.

Space

'Having a home' to be creative in.

The importance of space was a reccurring theme through all elements of the consultation. Whether it was digital or physical, it was about finding space for young people where they feel comfortable, safe, able to have agency and autonomy in decision making and a certain degree of authentic ownership.

This finding relates directly to the challenges in engaging and retaining young people onto programmes and reinforces the challenge of working within schools - where there can be a tension between compulsory and extra-curricular attendance and where the prescribed rules of using and being in those spaces can be perceived to be at odds with the aims and outcomes of arts and cultural delivery.

In this consultation, the term 'space' is often used to represent a specific community; with organisations, workforce and young people describing the need to go to those 'spaces', those communities, they want to engage with, offering them a place to explore arts and culture in ways that are meaningful to them.

There has been much research into the importance of space on engagement, especially with creativity, but often working in under-resourced communities

'When places started to do autism hours, it was much more accessible for autistic people to go without having a meltdown or feeling worn out. I started being involved in that during my residency.'

- Alice, Youth Consultation Contributor, talking about how thoughtful access to arts made a difference to her.

'Mixers and resources for BME writers are really helpful.'

- Anika, Youth Consultation Forum Attendee discussing how organisations can support specific groups to feel more confident.

'I've been going to Latitude since I was little. Just being involved in things like that and seeing things outdoors has really pushed my interest in the arts.'

- Elizabeth, Youth Consultation Forum Attendee sharing her experience of early years access to culture and its impact on her.

can mean there are limited options available, and limited scope in what you can do with those spaces to create the environment needed to enable creativity and leadership with young people. However, that does not mean that we should neglect this element of programme design, and as creative practitioners we should be seeking out creative solutions in direct conversation with the young people and communities we want to engage.

Early Years experiences

'Carrying creative support across from childhood to adulthood'

The theme of experience, or lack of, with arts and culture in early years was explored in our conversations. As was the influence of family and carers on decisions about engagement with arts and culture later in life. This, along with many of the other themes, aligns with the main barrier to participation for young people: confidence. Those with early exposure to arts and culture feel most empowered to access these opportunities. People who have been exposed to varied arts and culture offers from their early years are the people who best understand what putting on an event might entail, or how they might explore creative writing, or create a new dance piece. It does not necessarily mean they will engage with all of these activities, but it does mean they can make informed choices and are more often willing to try new arts and cultural experiences.

It is not only the young person's knowledge and confidence around arts and cultural activities that influence engagement, but the support of family and carers. Families and carers have significant influence on young people's decision making, especially before they are 16, so if the sector does not sufficiently build relationships with these key influencers, it will remain difficult to engage those who are 'harder' to reach.

Space also has a role to play within early year experiences; if opportunities aren't held in accessible spaces we will again be excluding those who cannot, for various reasons, access those places. There is a significant role to be played by early years and education settings, where the integration of music, and arts and culture more broadly, into the everyday experience will support children and young people to develop confidence in creative expression, and in turn support positive engagement with creative experiences later in life.

An organisation respondent noted:

'The 3 key barriers to a child are: their family's attitude to arts and creative learning, their school's prioritisation of creative education and its relationship with a local cultural hub, and the child's ability to afford the activity. If a child is provided with at least 2 of these 3, they are likely to engage, if they are provided with only 1 or none they are highly unlikely to engage.'

'It's about locating those people who have managed to reach those under-engaged families and children, with a creative offer that both interests them and is doable.'

- Lynne Simpkin, Recruitment and Outreach Manager at Norwich University of the Arts, discussing the ways that under-engaged young people can be engaged.

'Grants or residencies for specific demographics would be cool.'

- Maddie, Youth Consultation Forum Attendee on how specialised offers would support her and her community.

'We encourage connection with the local industry as much as possible.'

- Dan Foden, Access Creative College talking about applying integrated leadership and networking opportunities.

Friendships

The influence of friendships on decision making for young people cannot be underestimated. It is a topic that emerges time and again, and in under 16s it is the second most important factor in determining whether they do or don't take part in new arts and cultural activities.

This theme also closely aligns with the idea and importance of space; *'a place where young people can relax and be with their peers'* ; somewhere they have ownership and are able to make meaningful choices.

Although most respondents cited *'attending with friends'* as one of the primary ways in which more young people could be persuaded to attend activities, a group of young people from West Norfolk suggested that cultural activities as a way to make new friends would also be a motivator:

"Explain that you'll meet people who are like you and friends are not needed as you'll make more there, encourage them to attend and make more friends as they'll be similar to you."

"He said that she's tried to take friends along but they don't find it fun, so she prefers to look out for activities by herself where she will meet people with the same interests."

Taster sessions, get-to-know-you gatherings and ice-breakers were all suggestions on how to overcome this social barrier, reducing the anxiety we all often feel when trying something new, putting systems and support in place to build confidence to engage with experiences outside of comfort zones and often without established friendship groups.

The right people and relationships

Young people talked about the importance and influence that 'the right people' can have on their experiences. This is a multi-faceted idea; workshop leaders need to be inspiring, fun, knowledgeable, deliver quality and meaningful activities and support young people to break the ice in order for relationships between young people to develop. They need to hear from their peers, other young people who have been on similar journeys and can offer an authentic opinion on their experiences. The role of teachers as a source of information and support is important for people under 16 as they often lack access to other networks and sources of information. Becoming a 'trusted' source as an organisation or representative is important, not only for the young people but to the people that support them such as family, carers, teachers, community groups, etc. Even more so, when aiming to build better relationships with schools, families and organisations working with marginalised groups.

When we explored leadership as a specific theme, there was a consensus across all stakeholders that youth voice needs to guide programme design, but that also the voices of those individuals and organisations who are experienced and know what opportunities would be worthwhile for young people's development (such as future careers) is also needed. There needs to be a balance of youth and expert voices, which can only be fostered if there are strong, mutually respectful, relationships in place to facilitate a co-production model.

One contributor suggested *'Partner young people together and let them direct their own project with a grant to help them and with mentorship from professional artists'*. This model is one organisations have trialled to varying degrees of success, as it is very much influenced by the other themes and barriers discussed in the report. Without addressing these, such a model would be in danger of continuing to exclude people that are not already engaged, however, should these factors be considered and barriers mitigated, it may be a way for organisations to give real power to young people to lead their own way.

Opportunities

Most respondents from within the under 16's and over 16's groups expressed that they have taken part in arts activity in the past year, which suggests that there are opportunities to get involved in. However, organisations and workforce respondents agreed there are not enough follow-on opportunities for young people in the local area, but it was also felt that even when opportunities are available, promotion to and engagement of participants is difficult.

88% of under 16's respondents said they would like to take part in **more** cultural and creative activity and most under 16s (**over 91%**) told us that there is something to take part in locally to do with culture and creativity; although half of these people said that the activity available wasn't the right sort of thing for them. Young people told us that they want more influence in the development of projects, to ensure they are meaningful and engaging. They reflect on the importance of **flexibility** and the offer of taster activity to introduce opportunities, so that they can make informed choices about what they want to be involved in.

It was felt by young people that leadership was important, but activity should focus more on developing leadership skills like listening, negotiating, influencing, collaborating, and planning ahead. Contributors also thought that 'leadership' as a term is not necessarily needed in the promotion of a programme or activity. In fact, it can sometimes exclude young people who are not yet engaged. Engaging, and more specifically, retaining the older age group of 18–25-year-olds continues to be a challenge for programmes and organisations, so there is a need to explore how we make an offer that's a meaningful,

'A challenge is to get mentees to make first contact – and to understand what mentoring entails.'

- Kerensa Rands, Volunteering and Mentoring Administrator at CareerCentral, UEA discussing reframing offers for students.

'When I wasn't feeling good, I got support from one of the tutors, who was also a bit of an informal counsellor. I kind of bonded with this person through the support and always felt welcome.'

- A Youth Consultation Forum Attendee sharing how the holistic approach was key to their success in the arts as a young person.

'It's the application of the leadership which is key.'

- Matthew Gunn, Cambridgeshire Music talking about using the right context for leadership opportunities – what will leadership mean within each specific offer?

pathway, and is flexible in response to their other life needs.

Most organisations said they offered follow-on support, mainly of an informal nature, while practitioners/workforce corroborated this, identifying follow-on support as something that organisations were trying hard to provide. A contributor suggested 'building a network with organisations who engage rural young people over an ongoing period of time' as a way of better delivering on progression opportunities and building longer term relationships with young people.

Information sharing, language and visibility of opportunities were all influential elements for participation and progression explored in conversations. Suggested solutions including 'a space for organisations to publish opportunities for young people' and being more visible in online spaces used by young people, such as Instagram.

The importance of partnerships was examined in various ways in relation to the creation and visibility of opportunities for young people, especially in rural communities across the Eastern region, which often have limited or no existing arts provision, such as built arts infrastructure or regular participatory offers.

Schools and education settings

School, followed by word of mouth, and social media are the main ways organisations and workforce contact young people, and the main ways young people look out for opportunities.

Schools have a definite role in arts and cultural engagement for young people, but the various challenges and opportunities of partnerships with schools have been explored in this consultation. They remain a key pathway and partner for engagement for many arts organisations, yet they often fail to enable many of the factors discussed in this report, especially around ownership of space, how relationships can be developed and the lack of flexibility in delivery approaches and scoping of projects. However, as the main source of information about arts and cultural opportunities, they will continue to play an integral role in the success of engaging young people, especially those who do not engage with any arts and culture outside of education settings. A solution explored by several consultation contributors was the creation of a specific role whose focus would be on information sharing, signposting, and building relationships with schools, teachers, young people, families and carers, and the arts and culture sector, to foster mutual trust and understanding. We need to continue to revisit how we can work effectively and efficiently with schools and education settings, exploring how we can deliver differently. The role of LCEPS and Music Hubs in engaging schools and young people in activity remains an important pathway for arts and cultural organisations wanting to work with young people especially in rural areas.

In the responses from the under 16's survey, 60% of respondents had taken part in a cultural or creative activity in the past year, including dance, drama, music, drawing and photography, and almost 64% did this activity at school or college. However notably, almost **78%** of respondents were **not** completing any kind of arts qualification such as Art/Music GCSE.

'I often hear from people that if they want to be an artist or actress, they need to get away from this area.'

- Youth Consultation Forum Contributor discussing how young people often see their rurality as a barrier.

'There aren't remotely enough good opportunities in the arts and culture sectors.'

- Evan Hancock, Head of Careers at UEA on the low provision of high quality, sustainable pathways for young people.

'Artists and facilitators working on the ground need to be holding organisations to account - is what they're doing practical?'

- Lewis Wickwar, Artist and facilitator telling us that decision making needs to be rooted in consideration of the actual impact of the work.

Holistic approach

"Regarding training, I do think there's a bit of a sense young people reaching the point where they need to move on from things. Otherwise, it's about ensuring the programmes grow with participants and develop things like leadership and mentoring."

There was lots of agreement from our contributors that while the younger age bracket is difficult to reach due to school gatekeeping, it was actually the older age groups that were harder to attract and retain due to their life situation, it being a time of transition, and other priorities taking the fore for them.

There were several conversations about mentoring being key to retention and positive progression. Interestingly, organisation leads were less likely than practitioners to believe they have enough capacity for one-to-one support or mentoring of young people. However, workforce identified a need for extra training and more in depth understanding of the organisational aims and motivations for working with young people.

In consultation with a group of young people from West Norfolk, we explored issues around recruitment and retention of young people. They talked about their own experiences and collectively they felt that *'creating a holistic approach to the development of opportunities would be a more successful route to retention when all aspects of young people's life/ situation are taken into account, such as their employment situation, mental health, financial, as well as creative and career intentions.'*

Taking a person- and community-centred approach, which focuses on facilitating collaboration, integrating robust feedback and evaluation frameworks, and allowing practitioners and organisations to remain flexible and responsive, will in turn create a more holistic way of producing high quality music and creative experiences and activities. Understanding the people you want to work with, giving them a voice about what needs to be considered and how best to create accessible programme and projects, will increase engagement and be better at retaining those people.

We must also acknowledge that in order to create a person/community centred approach to delivery, work encouraging organisations to link and partner where possible, overcoming barriers such as capacity, territory, reliance on individuals within teams, funding and managing relationships, is critical.

Where Next?

Reframing the offer

It was very clear that the kinds of opportunities, and the perception of what is important in those opportunities, varied widely from those in the younger age bracket and those at the top. The results also show that the term 'leadership' holds more importance in terms of the opportunities available to people aged 16+. Different age groups have different needs and barriers. As organisations we need to be thinking how to reframe and broaden programmes, so they are flexible and responsive to the needs of the specific young people we are working with.

For many people aged 16+, the motivations for and importance placed on any one activity varied, but the common themes were:
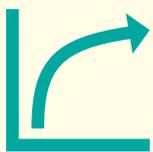
Development of skills; for some this was manifested in qualifications or experience for their CVs, for others it was about becoming better at something for the sake of their artform.
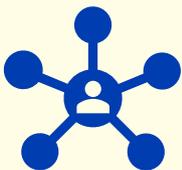
Being part of a network; engaging with others with similar interests were important elements, and linked to this was hearing from others, whether their peers who had been through similar experiences, having a mentor, or gaining industry connections.

Many of these elements can be part of activities and experiences aimed at those under 16 and those over 16, however, the perception and understanding of these elements must be reframed to demonstrate to particular groups why they would want to take part. The language we use to talk about these activities and their benefits must be appropriate, and we must understand motivations and be able to articulate the outcomes in an engaging and meaningful way for the people we want to reach.

Having fun is important to all age groups, so keeping it simple and responsive to interest will support the retention of all ages.

18

Rurality

Although all the findings in this report are relevant to rural children and young people, they are also, for the most part, relevant to the wider population. However, there are specific challenges that face the rurally underserved, or that are highly accentuated when working in a rural context. Children and young people living in urban areas may have limited opportunities, but those living in rural areas often have no opportunities at all outside of their education settings. Young people also said that **'nearby opportunities make it seem less intimidating'**, highlighting the importance of making a sustainable local offer to enable long-term engagement with music and wider arts experiences.

Transport was cited as an additional barrier; if you do not have access to personal transport from parents or carers, there are even more limited opportunities to engage with activities outside of school. Suggestions to overcome the challenges of rurality include **'reimbursing travel costs'**, though this doesn't solve the more fundamental issue of lack of public transport infrastructure across most of the rural East, and **'invest in local infrastructure to develop spaces/venues for young people. Builds trust in the longer term and they need something/somewhere tangible to engage with'**. This second suggestion builds on the themes of space, confidence, ownership, and development of longer-term relationships that support young people to become young music and arts leaders.

Rural voices remain hard to hear, but what they have to say is integral to building a fit for purpose strategy for engagement for all children and young people. We must continue to develop routes to finding and capturing these, through robust partnerships, community outreach and digital engagement. 1 in 3 people in the East live within our rural areas, we must make sure they have equality and equity in their arts and cultural opportunities.

Workforce

Workforce respondents told us that they needed increased training provision and more in depth understanding of aims and motivations of the work organisations are undertaking with young people. They thought this would better inform their approach and ultimate delivery of arts and cultural provision for children and young people. Both workforce and organisation respondents agreed that the development of an accessible, concise and comprehensive best practice guide would be useful as a result of this consultation.

Overall, a person/community-centred approach is acknowledged by the majority of our respondents as delivering the most positive impact for young people, and with this, flexibility, and response to need. However, there are aspects of music and arts delivery with young people that could benefit from a more standardised approach, such as robust evaluation frameworks, better and more joined up impact analysis by the sector as a whole, and quality principles. In recent years, Youth Music and other funding bodies have made significant progress in providing such frameworks, and this has undoubtedly supported the evidence base for a person-centred approach.

However, each investor's evaluation framework and investment timeframe is different and it is rare that an organisation is funded by just one investor, or that organisations working together are funded by the same investor, and so these differences contribute to continuing challenges in creating a truly incorporated approach.

Legacy

'It's important to see transition from supported pathways and into the real world.'
– Adrienne Jolly, Careers Advisor at the Universty of East Anglia.

Creative Arts East is committed to embedding youth voice in the design of strategies, the development of related new work, and the ongoing reflection and evaluation of existing work. As well as the development of our own organisational strategy for young person engagement and embedding of youth voice, there were several other intended legacy outcomes and outputs from this consultation. This includes the delivery of this report into the public domain to enable the use of its findings by the wider sector and strategic networks, and the delivery of a CPD (Continuous Professional Development) offer to all contributors.

Participants have reflected that the act of being involved in a conversation about opportunities, challenges, and solutions, was in itself a useful tool for increasing knowledge and developing best practice. To maintain this information exchange, we have compiled a list of existing resources and best practice guidance which is hosted on our website – www.creativeartseast.co.uk.

We have continued to respond to the requests and needs of our consultation steering group, Creative Connect, by creating opportunities for these young leaders to develop skills, increase knowledge and network with the local creative sector. In addition, we have subsidised free online training places with Upstart Projects focusing on Youth Voice and hosted an inaugural in-person network and connection day, which we intend will become a regular event.

The development and delivery of a best practice guide was touched on by many as a useful resource. We hope that the scope of this report will enable stakeholders to begin to better understand the specific needs and barriers for rurally isolated young people and their communities and design and trial appropriate and effective engagement solutions based on the findings cited here. In the future, we recommend the development of fuller best practise resources to be produced alongside key funders. They would build upon and enhance existing resources, and deliver practical examples built on robust evidence of impact.

Other key areas for exploration include the potential for a directory of creative and cultural opportunities for children, young people and their families. This would support more successful signposting and a forum, or dedicated role, which can work across the sector and the region to support longer-term, light touch, hand-holding engagement for young people outside of specific programmes and projects.

Appendix

1. Youth Music Consultation Findings

- [Click here to view the findings](#)

2. Best Practise Resources for Young People & Those Working with Young People

- [Click here to view the resource](#)

3. Youth Consultation Fora Responses

- [Click here to view day 1 responses](#)
- [Click here to view day 2 responses](#)
- [Click here to view day 3 responses](#)