



OUR IMPACT.
OUR EXPERIENCE.
OUR LEARNING.

25
26

“I WAS GENUINELY AMAZED AND UPLIFTED. IN TIMES THAT OFTEN FEEL HEAVY AND UNCERTAIN, EVENTS LIKE THIS BRING BACK A SPARK OF KINDNESS, CONNECTION, AND HAPPINESS THAT WE ALL NEED. YOU REMINDED OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, AND MANY OF US ADULTS, TOO, OF THE SIMPLE JOYS WE SOMETIMES FORGET TO APPRECIATE IN THIS MODERN, FAST-PACED WORLD.”

(AUDIENCE)

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HELLO.

We're Ideas Test. We're a Creative People and Places (CPP) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), funded by Arts Council England.

We're an action research project, which means we experiment with different ways of working. We develop projects and create events with people and partners in Medway and Swale to enable and support communities to live more creative, fulfilling lives. Taking a community asset-based approach (<https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>), these activities usually, but not always, include:

- drop-in workshops, local festivals and events 'on the doorstep'
- targeted neighbourhoods work which gives our communities agency to develop and deliver projects and programmes that matter to them
- collaborations with creative, health and place-based partners.

About this report

Having successfully bolstered our evaluation processes over the last three years, our team follows a structured method of creating in-house individual evaluation plans and producer Round Up reports for each project. These align with our overall evaluation framework created with our external evaluator. This means that we learn along the way, and are responsive to feedback. Rather than replicate those reports here, we've summarised our overall findings for 2025 - 2026, including independent research conducted by our evaluator. Although we take a proportionate approach to our evaluation, a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data sits behind the insight on the following pages. We've shared our learning, celebrated our achievements, and assessed where things haven't worked quite as well so we can make changes.

The report aims to tell our story over the last 12 months. It's structured by the intended outcomes we hope to achieve for each target audience. We define outcomes as the benefit, difference or change we want to have on people's lives. Our outcomes align with the standard generic social outcomes (GSOs) and generic learning outcomes (GLOs), including enjoyment, creativity, belonging, pride, inspiration, wellbeing, positivity about the future and skills development. As always, we've also shared any unintended outcomes.

Our evaluation has been designed and delivered in alignment with a series of four evaluation principles: robust, beneficial, people-centred, and connected.* We approach evaluation in a realistic, curious and care-focused way. You'll find more about the evidence we've used to inform this report, along with any limitations on pages 83 and 84.

As an action research project, we believe it's important to talk about failure so that we can adapt what we do. In the process of reflecting on this year, we've considered the three core questions which are central to our progression and ongoing work as a CPP NPO:

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by creativity and culture and what are the most effective ways to achieve this?
2. What approaches enable us to deliver on our aspiration for excellence, both in the process of community engagement and the creative and cultural experiences on offer?
3. What else are we learning that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?

*We use the Centre for Cultural Value's principles (<https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles/>) to guide our evaluation approach.

'AT A GLANCE' ACTIVITY

Throughout this report we've referenced a variety of projects we've produced this year. Here's a snapshot of some of them. You can find more information about each project on our [website](https://ideastest.org.uk) (<https://ideastest.org.uk>).

ACTIVITY	IN BRIEF
Walking Each Other Home - Stacy Makishi	A participatory workshop for LGBTQIA+ communities with award-winning Hawaiian artist Stacy Makishi. The workshop involved sharing stories and creative exercises to explore how ritual, connection and curiosity can help build community.
Gather & Groove	A celebration of music and movement in Lordswood through two events taking place in May and September 2025. A continuation of work in 2024/25, this year we worked closely with Lordswood Dancentre, Lordswood Library and Moving Memory Dance Theatre with a view to raising community spirit through creativity.
Luton Lights 2026	Building on the success of 2025, our family-friendly light festival took place once again at Invicta Social Club in Luton. This year's theme was 'circus' and included a series of library and school workshops. The finale event involved performances by the New York Brass Band, Matt Barnard from Circus Active, Ellen James, plus a range of indoor activities and acts.
HEARD	Following various listening events and workshops in 2024/25 and at the start of 2025/26, our HEARD group decided to tackle the local litter problem through 'litter pick sessions with a twist'. Rupert Oldridge, a world-champion beatboxer was brought in to support this activity. Several 'talking bins' were installed on Luton Road, which share messages and litter-based lyrics every time they're used - all recorded by children that Rupert worked with through a series of school workshops. Read more about this project on page 31.

ACTIVITY	IN BRIEF
Medway Arts and Homelessness Forum	<p>Working with Arts and Homelessness International (AHI) and funded by Medway Council, these forums continue to connect people interested in arts and homelessness and are now run independently. The meetings include people with lived experience of homelessness; homelessness service providers and arts organisations/individuals with an interest in connecting with members of the homeless community.</p>
DisQuiet	<p>Funded by Youth Music and the Hays Travel Foundation, DisQuiet was led by a team of professional musicians. The second year of this project continued to provide weekly sessions for young musicians aged 11-18 across Medway and Swale, along with school holiday audio camps, and other performance opportunities including Chatham Carnival and Love Gillingham.</p>
Intertidal Allotment (Cement Fields)	<p>A long-term Cement Fields project with artist Andrew Merritt, creating a functional artwork and community allotment on the north coast of Sheppey. Our role is to provide a range of public engagement activities, including facilitating the Friends of Intertidal Allotment group who meet monthly.</p>
Brompton Halloween 2025	<p>A 6-month initiative designed to boost community engagement and local wellbeing through a shared creative activity. Monthly meet-ups were held at Tracie's cafe in Brompton, with group members deciding to create a new Halloween event (reviving a similar community tradition from 15 years ago). As well as costume making workshops, an interactive family-friendly Halloween trail was designed and delivered by the group on 31 October 2025. Read more about this project on page 29.</p>
Sittingbourne Steam Railway Writer-in Residence	<p>Artist and writer Dan Thompson is our writer-in-residence at Sittingbourne Steam Railway during the 200th anniversary of the railway's broader history, and the 120th anniversary of steam trains at Kemsley paper mill. The project aims to celebrate heritage, engage new audiences, animate the visitor experience at the railway and attract visitors. You can read Dan's work from his residency here (https://ideastest.org.uk/news/writer-in-residence-announcement/).</p>

DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

EXCELLENCE FOR US MEANS BRINGING JOY AND DELIVERING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Being ‘excellent’ for our team at Ideas Test means producing authentic work which resonates, celebrates, and connects communities to stories, place, and each other. But it's also about achieving the outputs and outcomes we've outlined in our evaluation framework (available on request, with our top line findings summarised on the following pages).

As always, we use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess excellence. One way is by evaluating the experience of the people we're engaging. We do this by collecting data on satisfaction (or enjoyment) ratings, overall reactions, and behaviour (e.g. if audiences return/if they have a propensity to come to something else). We also use the Arts Council England Insight & Impact (I&I) toolkit on our individual in-house project evaluations, which is designed to support the measurement of quality and value.

SATISFACTION RATINGS CONTINUE TO BE HIGH

In 2025/26, 99% of audiences surveyed across a representative range of our activities rated their experience as excellent or good, with 72% rating it as excellent.* This aligns with our findings from previous years as shown below, and means that we've consistently received an ‘excellent or good’ rating of 99% since 2023. Given that satisfaction can be an indicator of quality, this result is a positive reflection on the high level of artistic programming we're bringing to the area.

Year	Sample	% rating excellent or good	N
2023/4	161	99%	160
2024/5	409	99%	405
2025/6	88	99%	87
Total	658	99%	652

*This is based on 88 respondents answering a satisfaction question on our survey. Of these 88, 63 respondents rated us as excellent, 24 as good, and 1 as average. We've a lower sample size this year for our surveys, which is explained on page 83. Note that ratings for ‘excellent’ were slightly lower this year (72%) compared with 2024/25 (82%) but given the low sample size our data is less reliable and robust in 2025/26. We can draw on qualitative evidence to more confidently evidence satisfaction, and this points to a positive experience.

PARTNERS ALSO RATE US HIGHLY

We've highlighted the main outcomes for partners from page 56. However, our anonymous survey and independent qualitative interviews indicate that they've had a positive experience with us this year.

100% of partners would describe their relationship with Ideas Test' as a successful one and 100% are either 'very likely' or 'likely' to work with us again*. When asked how we could improve (either in our work directly with partners or more generally), there were no suggestions in the survey, and very few suggestions in the qualitative feedback. The latter included:

- Articulating what we do better**
- Considering whether the brand name 'Ideas Test' is too ambiguous
- Having a focused objective or target more greatly articulated with a partner for a project (i.e. what the overall aim is/what needs to be achieved)
- Not 'parachuting' into a neighbourhood but continuing the slow, care-focused depth rather than breadth approach (which they suggested was working).

“They come up with the best, most creative ideas.”
(Partner)

WE'VE EMBEDDED THE IMPACT & INSIGHT TOOLKIT INTO OUR WORK MORE READILY THIS YEAR

We've also seen some positive results through the Impact & Insight toolkit this year which helps us measure quality and value. Although the dimensions we include in our surveys are mandatory, they mostly align with our organisational evaluation outcomes. With our one-off events we're required to track relevance, rigour, distinctiveness, enthusiasm, local impact and cultural contribution. With our co-created projects it's about intention, voice, experimentation, intensity and motivation. A useful explanation of dimensions we use is listed on page 84. (See also <https://tinyurl.com/yyfztb4p>).

In 2025/26 we also continued to collect data on optional dimensions as this supports our wider evidence gathering. This includes dimensions on wellbeing, pride in place and belonging. The toolkit works best when comparing our own viewpoints (pre and post activity) with those of our audiences and participants to acknowledge whether our audiences have reacted in a way we expect (i.e. dimensions should not be viewed in isolation - some may not be relevant for a particular artistic vision, event or project). We've increased our use of the toolkit this year, which is now embedded as a core part of our producers' individual reflection processes and their Round Up reports.

Insight from the toolkit is highlighted throughout this report where it aligns with particular outcome areas e.g. distinctiveness (dimension) and learn something new (outcome).

*Based on a total of 6 surveys from partners, with 100% (n=6) stating 'yes' in answer to the question 'Would you describe your partnership with Ideas Test as a successful one?' and 83% (n=5) and 17% (n=1) stating they were 'very likely' and 'likely' respectively to work with us again in the future.**We're just about to start working with a PR agency who will help us do this.

IN THEIR WORDS

"I have really enjoyed the lovely food and setting." (Participant)

"They're extremely positive and flexible to work with and brought a lot of joy to our library and community." (Partner)

"It was a brilliant experience, my partner who is hard to impress was very appreciative and loved the experience. I was very skeptical as it was free so was like it may be a flop but it was amazing, very well organised and everybody did sooo well, it was cold but all the team worked so effortlessly, really loved it. Hats off to all." (Audience)

"I've performed at GENfest, which was my first major performance. And I really, really enjoyed that. I also played at the Corn Exchange in Rochester, which was also really incredible." (Participant)

"Can you in future avoid asking if someone's gender is the same as assigned at birth and please change the what is your gender answers to male, female, trans, non binary, prefer not to disclose. It is more inclusive for that question and means you don't have to ask a second question about gender in such an intrusive way." (Audience)

"Great evening, despite the weather. Perhaps the event has outgrown the venue." (Audience)

"I enjoyed seeing friends perform. I love the mini tour of Brompton. Maybe warn for neurodiverse for disco room for ear defenders & tight crowded room there & King George V pub." (Audience)

"My 7 year old was a bit scared, especially of the nurse! She was probably a bit too scary for children." (Audience)

"We came last year and I preferred last year's to be honest. It was more colourful, there was more entertainment. Don't get me wrong, I like this. But the band look a bit miserable, and they're not like the drummers yeah, they were all lit up weren't they?" (Audience)

IN THEIR WORDS

“I feel the outcome of the project is disappointing. I'm not convinced anything that was done will result in a change of attitude. I'm also not convinced that gimmicky bins are a good use of money - I have dropped litter in 2 of them, and not heard any speaking - so they might as well have been left as ordinary bins, with the money spent on providing additional bins in strategic locations. I am unconvinced about whether this served to build community, as on the occasions I attended, the only participants were already at least partially active within the community and/or already connected with Ideas Test.” (Participant)

“Just a big thank you to whoever put this on because it's been just great, yeah we've really enjoyed it, oh and free popcorn the kids are all loving that.” (Audience)

“That was really cool.” (Audience)

“It was brilliant. It was my sister who told me about it, she saw it on Facebook. Really great.” (Audience)

“It was lovely to connect with other local people via a shared activity, and gain satisfaction from seeing the results of the litter picks.” (Participant)

“I liked the whole lot because it was a real spectacle. It was well choreographed, it was well planned. When's the next one?” (Audience)

“Thank you Sheppey Arts Syndicate and Ideas Test for making this happen for us. I would not have missed it for the world.” (Audience)

“I just enjoy being with the group and enjoying it together and like writing our own songs. I've been working on some of our songs, so like I made some of their little guitar melodies which has been fun.” (Participant)

“Very good I enjoyed it lots” (Audience)

“Fabulously creative and great fun. Great event for Halloween. Thank you to all involved.” (Audience)

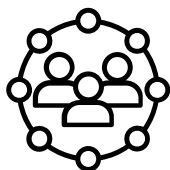


INSPIRING AND ENGAGING PEOPLE FROM AREAS OF LEAST ENGAGEMENT

STATS AT A GLANCE



14,233 engagements with audiences and participants



268 events/activities



50% were engaging with our work for the very first time*



77 artists were commissioned



22 partnerships including **9** new ones were made



3 schools and colleges were engaged

*This is based on data aggregated from the Impact & Insight toolkit, where 72 respondents answered this question. Of these, 36 reported they were engaging with us for the first time. This compares with 71% in 2024/5, which indicates that we're successfully attracting repeat engagers for our work.

WE ENGAGED 14,233 AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS THROUGH THE DELIVERY OF 268 ACTIVITIES

We commissioned 77 creative practitioners to support the delivery of our work this year. Notably this has enabled us to bring a broader range of artforms to our communities than we have before. From professional visual artists Hannah Whittaker and Xtina Lamb (Luton Lights); through to world-championship beat-boxer Rupert Oldridge (HEARD), British BMX champions Fusion Extreme (Gather & Groove) and experienced writer Dan Thompson (Sittingbourne Railway Writer-in-Residence), we've brought high-quality talent to the programme.

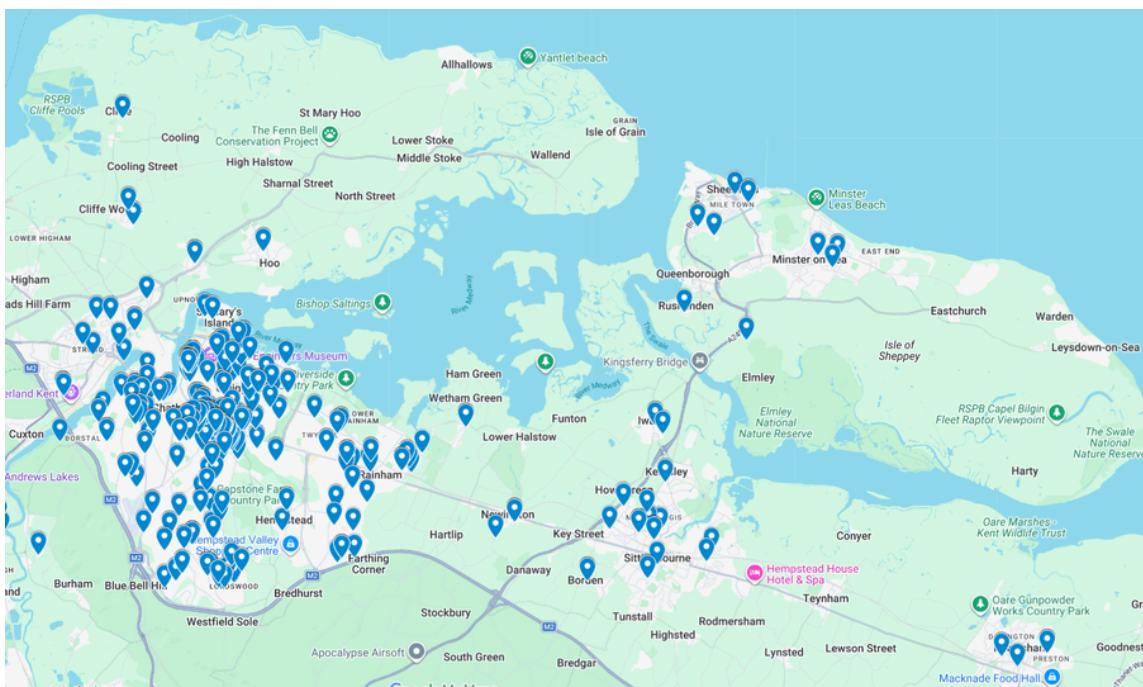
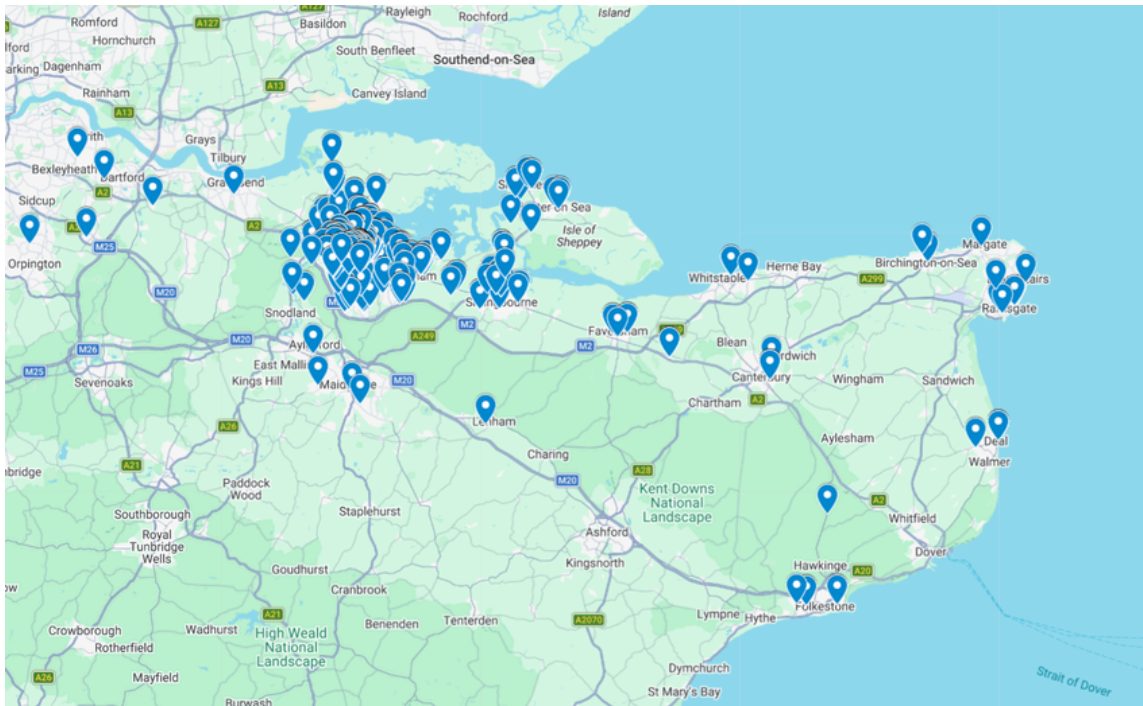
We also worked with a total of 22 professional partner organisations (9 of which were completely new to us) including 3 schools and colleges. Read more about our partnerships on pages 55 - 61.



Image credit: Tracy Brunt

REACH

59% of audience and participant postcodes collected this year were from our target postal sector areas* (compared with 66% in 24/25 and 61% in 23/24). This indicates that we continue to be successful in attracting those who are statistically less likely to engage with arts and culture. Although this year's figure is lower, it suggests that as well as our focused neighbourhoods work, our programme is successfully drawing audiences from across the wider landscape of Medway and Swale (as shown in the below maps) as well as beyond it.



*827 postcodes were collected from audiences and participants. Of these, 488 were from our target postal sectors as identified in our business and audience development plans as target areas of deprivation where people are statistically less likely to engage in culture. See limitations regarding postcode analysis at the end of this report. Note that we didn't attract audiences from Swale postcode ME12 4 which is on the far side of Sheppey - however it may be worth additional promotion and targeting for Sheppey-based events and activities next year. 803 postcodes were successfully mapped to produce the above maps using My Maps (Google).

REACH AND DEPRIVATION

Postal sector target area of deprivation	Number of these in overall sample collected
Medway (ME2 2, ME2 3, ME4 4, ME4 5, ME4 6, ME5 7, ME7 1, ME7 2, ME7 4, ME7 5, ME8 6)	448
Swale (ME10 2, ME10 3, ME11 5, ME12 1, ME12 2, ME12 3, ME12 4, ME13 7)	40
Total	488

59% of audience and participant postcodes were from our audience development target postal sectors

Decile	N	%
1	176	22
2	184	23
3	114	14
4	60	8
5	81	10
6	49	6
7	53	7
8	45	6
9	27	3
10	12	2

To check the very latest accuracy of our target postal sectors, we've mapped audience and participant postcodes against the new Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2025*. The IMD ranks every Lower-layer Super Output Area from most deprived (rank 1) to least deprived (rank 33,755). Deciles divide this list into ten groups, each containing ten percent of areas. Deciles allow us to summarise deprivation levels quickly, without looking at full ranks.

Findings reiterate that we've engaged those from the most deprived areas in England, and are therefore statistically less likely to engage with arts and culture. Aligned with our target postcode findings, 59% were within decile 1 - 3 (with just over a fifth - 22% - in decile 1). Decile 1 are the most deprived 10% areas in England (those with the highest levels of deprivation), decile 2 reflects the 10 - 20% most deprived and decile 3 are the 20 - 30% most deprived (note that the IMD describes this as a relative, rather than absolute measure). This is a really positive result and demonstrates we're reaching the right kind of people for our work.

*A total of 801 postcodes were able to be successfully mapped against the 2025 [IMD](https://imd2025.co.uk) (https://imd2025.co.uk) using the postcode look up tool. Deciles are based on relative ranking. An area in decile 1 is not twice as deprived as an area in decile 2. It is simply placed in a different ten percent band.

ONS PERSONAL WELLBEING PROFILE

The below table shows the ONS4* results for audiences and participants after engagement with our activity. Although we don't have baseline data,** the findings can be compared with both national and local averages. Whilst caution needs to be drawn due the sample size, plus the fact that we can't directly attribute any results to our activities, the below table shows that some wellbeing aspects are above UK average (highlighted below in light orange).

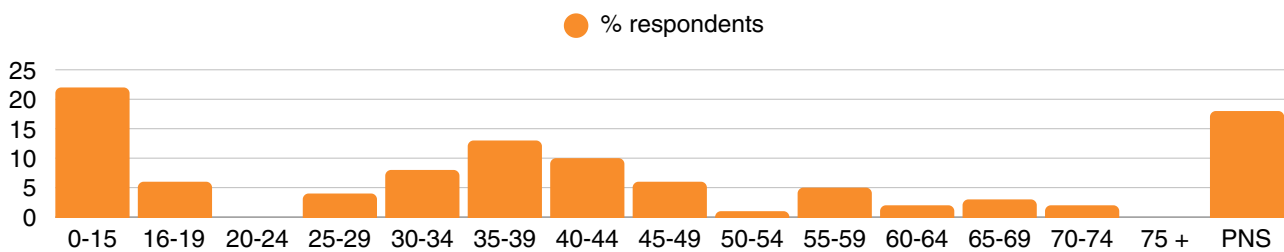
Source	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety
UK average	7.6	7.8	7.5	3.2
Medway average	7.3	7.8	7.3	3.3
Swale average	7.4	7.7	7.8	2.8
Light up Luton Finale average	5.55	6.82	7.33	6.20
HEARD co-creators	8.75	7.75	8.25	2.25
Brompton Halloween Trail co-creators	8.40	8.20	8.00	Data not available
Brompton Halloween Trail audiences	8.31	9.00	8.00	2.91
Sticks and Stones	5.69	6.46	7.56	4.00
Gather and Groove (September)	7.80	8.80	8.60	1.25
Stacy Makishi	4.67	3.67	5.67	6.33
Writer in Residence (14 Sept)	7.00	8.33	8.00	3.67

*Latest APS Q3 data release to Sept 2025 published February 2026 (<https://tinyurl.com/mevzvzcm>). Data also in [this latest LA ONS dataset](https://tinyurl.com/49ufc76x) (<https://tinyurl.com/49ufc76x>). **We use the 5 Ways to measure wellbeing - see page 51. ONS4 data was collected as a specific requirement for an external funder, but it's not realistic or appropriate for us to capture baselines on this for all activities. The ONS are changing wellbeing measures, explained [here](https://tinyurl.com/3y6asv62) (<https://tinyurl.com/3y6asv62>).

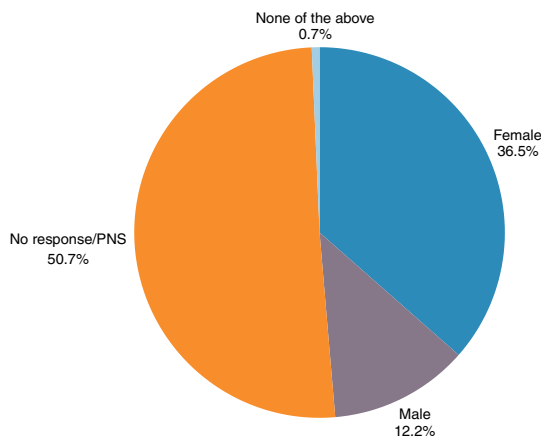
WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE ARE THEY?

The below data presents demographic data results, captured through our core survey across one-off and longer term projects during 2025/26.* Although our data includes a high volume of prefer not to say (PNS) responses, it indicatively shows that our audiences and participants skew towards a White/White British, younger (under 40s), female and straight demographic. 18% identified as neurodiverse and 11% as D/deaf or disabled.

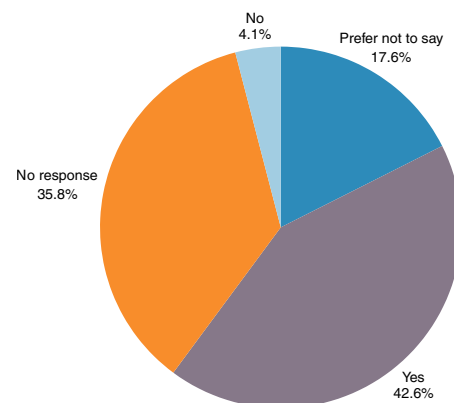
AGE



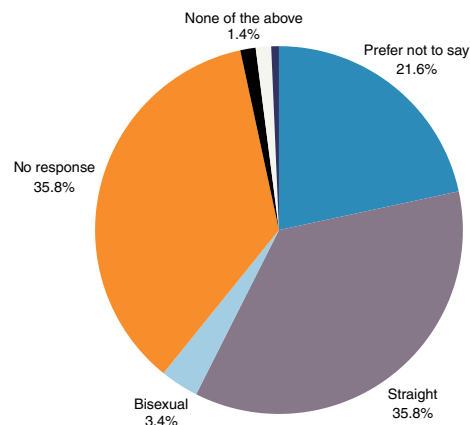
SEX



GENDER (IS IT THE SAME AS WAS ASSIGNED AT BIRTH?)

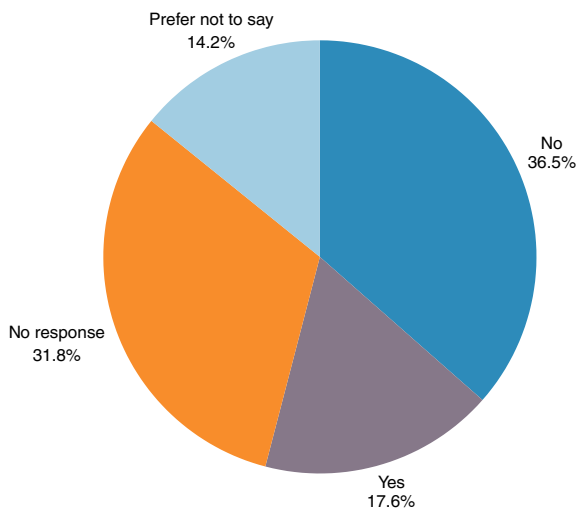


SEXUAL ORIENTATION

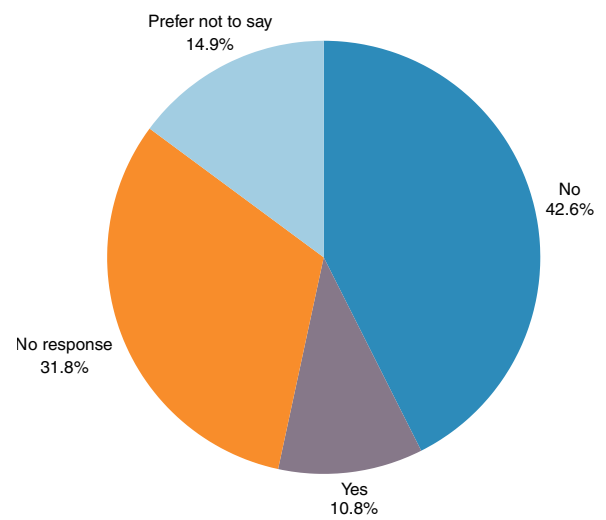


*This data is taken from Illuminate and represents a total of 148 survey respondents. Note the limitations on page 84, with those opting to skip or 'prefer not to say' in response to personal demographic questions. The above reflect the following results: Sex: Female (n=54), Male (n=18), No response (n=53), Prefer not to say (n=22), None of the above (n=1). Gender (same as birth): Prefer not to say (n=26), Yes (n=63), No (n=6), No response (n=53). Sexual orientation: No response (n=53), Straight (n=53), Prefer not to say (n=32), Bisexual (n=5), Prefer to self-describe (n=2), Gay (n=1), None of the above (n=2). Age: 0-15 (n=33), 16-19 (n=9), 20-24 (n=0), 25-29 (n=6), 30-34 (n=12), 35-39 (n=19), 40-44 (n=15), 45-49 (n=9), 50-54 (n=1), 55-59 (n=7), 60-64 (n=3), 65-69 (n=4), 70-74 (n=3), 75+ (n=0), Prefer not to say (n=27).

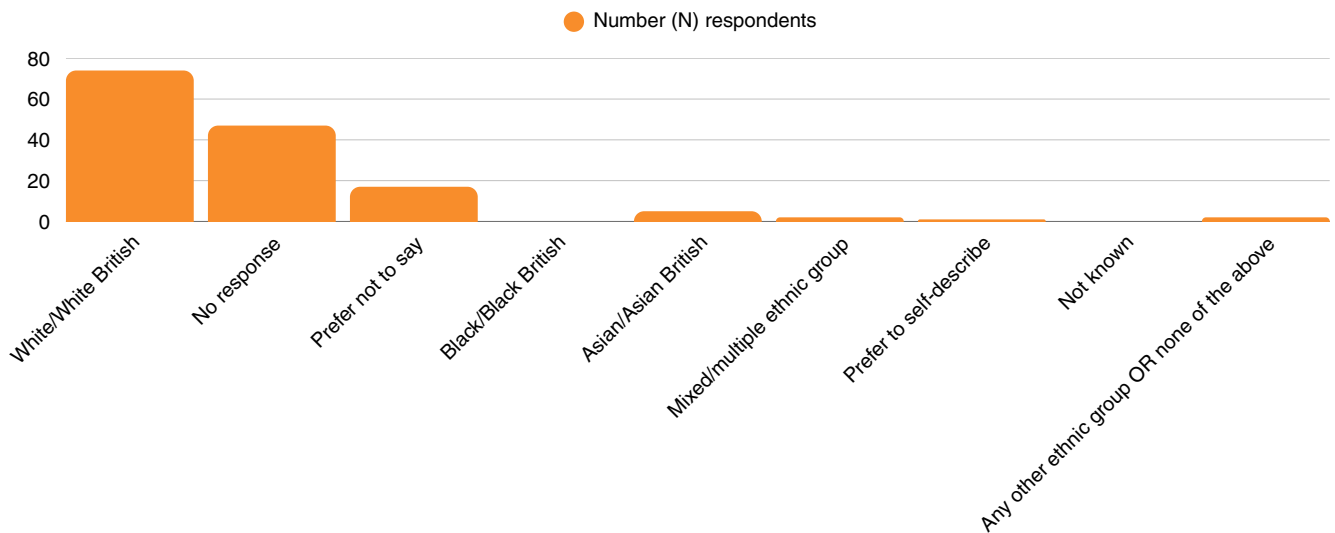
NEURODIVERSITY



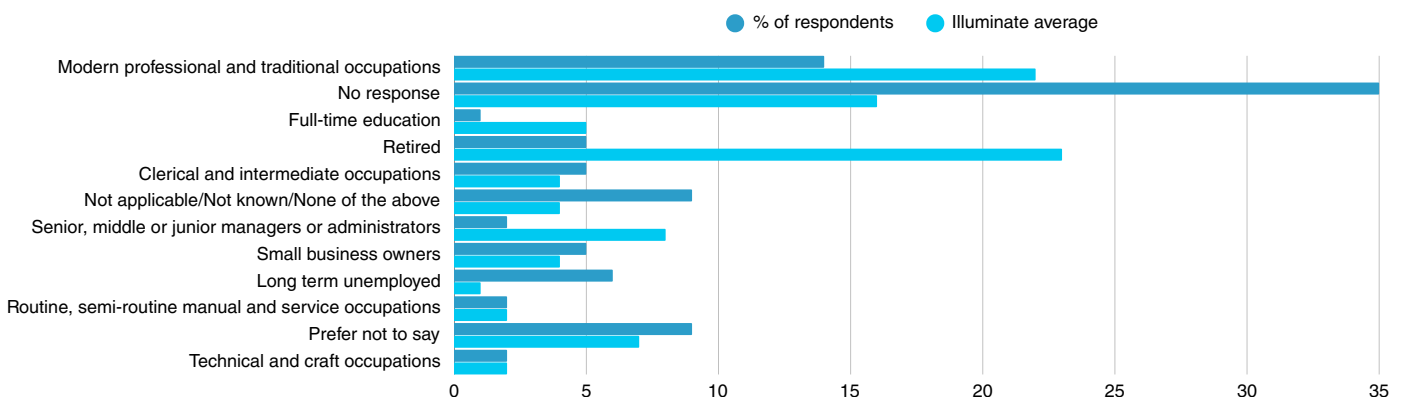
D/DEAF AND DISABILITY



ETHNICITY



OCCUPATION



*This data is taken from Illuminate Insight and represents a total of 148 survey respondents. Note the limitations in the section at the end of this report, regarding those opting to skip or 'prefer not to say' in response to personal demographic questions. The above reflect the following results: Neurodiversity: No (n=54), Yes (n=26), No response (n=47), Prefer not to say (n=21). D/deaf or disability: No (n=63), Yes (n=16), No response (n=47), Prefer not to say (n=22). Ethnicity: White/White British (n=74), No response (n=47), Any other ethnic group OR none of the above (n=2), Black/Black British (n=0), Asian/Asian British (n=5), Mixed/multiple ethnic group (n=2), Prefer to self-describe (n=1). Occupation: Modern professional and traditional occupations (14%, average 22%), No response (35%, average 16%), Full-time education (1%, average 5%), Retired (5%, average 23%), Clerical and intermediate occupations (5%, average 4%), Not known/None of the above/Not applicable (9%, average 4%), Senior, middle, or junior managers or administrators (2%, average 8%), Small business owners (5%, average 4%), Long term unemployed (6%, average 1%), Routine, semi-routine, manual and service occupations (2%, average 2%), Prefer not to say (9%, average 7%), Technical and craft occupations (2%, average 2%). Note that Illuminate only provides percentages and not N for Occupation via its dashboard.

AUDIENCE SPECTRUM

Audience Spectrum (<https://theaudienceagency.org/en/what-we-do/audience-spectrum>) is a population profiling tool which describes attendance, participation and engagement with the arts, museums and heritage, as well as behaviours, attitudes and preferences towards such organisations. The tables overleaf show the size of each segment within our data, compared to the size of that segment with the population of our base area. The index figures shows the extent to which each segment is over or under-represented in our data, compared to the base area population. An index of 100 occurs when the proportion of a segment in our data matches the size of that segment in the base population. An index over 100 indicates that this segment is over-represented in our data compared to the base population. Indexes of over 110 are shown in blue. An index under 100 indicates that this segment is under-represented in our data compared to the base population. Indexes of under 90 are shown in orange. The bars next to each index give a quick representation of how over or under-represented each segment is. Where this over or under-representation is likely to be significant - i.e. the index is greater than 110 or less than 90, and the difference between our data and the base population is greater than 5% - the background of this cell is highlighted blue or red.

Our current marketing and audience development primary target segments are Frontline Families and Up our Street. We'd particularly identified these in our market segmentation as having the greatest potential for engaging those with low arts engagement in our Medway and Swale catchment area based on their location/behaviour/interest/preferences. We've now gathered three years' of profiling thanks to the improvements we've made to our postcode data collection systems. The results overleaf highlight the consistency we're achieving with attracting 'low engagement' Audience Spectrum profile targets. More specifically, the graphs on the next page show that in 2025/26:*

- We over-indexed on Up Our Street subsegment U2, but under-indexed on Up Our Street U1. This could reflect the free programming and hyper-local neighbourhoods focus this year. U2 are older residents, often in long-standing communities, with lower incomes than U1. Up Our Street U1 sub segment audiences are middle-aged and have modest means. They're occasional cultural attenders with mainstream tastes, and they tend to spend more (and spend more often than U2).
- We slightly underindexed on both Frontline Families F1 and Frontline Families F2, but on the whole achieved what we'd expect when compared to the resident population. Given the over-indexing of this segment in previous years, this may be a profile to keep a careful watch on. F1 Frontline Families are low-income families with older children, whereas F2 Frontline Families are hard-pressed young families who are just starting out. Engagement with arts and cultural events is limited, and they're more likely to attend free events and festivals so they're a strong potential target for our work. We'll review our product and promotion for these subsegments as we head into Phase 5.
- Interestingly we over-indexed on Experience Seekers (E1). These are typically middle-aged graduates living in urban areas. They're motivated by identity, socialising and entertainment (including music). Although they're typically found in high concentrations in the South East, this finding could also suggest the impact of our more experimental elements of programming this year e.g. Stacy Makishi and Luton Lights finale (e.g. New York Brass Band), and/or those who perhaps travelled from outside the area.
- Although not a primary target, as in previous years we continue to substantially over-index on both Kaleidoscope Creativity subsegments - these are the most ethnically diverse audiences who tend to be mixed age group, council housed, with low education, employment and income-restricting leisure opportunities. This is a positive result for us in terms of evidencing the diversity of our audiences when we've not been able to do this robustly through our core survey, due to high incidences of 'prefer not to say' with demographic questions including ethnicity.

*785 postcodes were matched to an Audience Spectrum segment during profiling. See more on segment profiles and maps at <https://theaudienceagency.org/en/what-we-do/audience-spectrum>.

Subsegment profile

Audience Spectrum subsegment		Ideas Test 2025-26 Participants		Swale and Medway Population (adults 15+)	Index
		Count	%	%	
High engagement	Metroculturals M1	1	0%	0%	206
	Metroculturals M2	0	0%	0%	0
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C1	8	1%	1%	90
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C2	27	3%	6%	56
	Experience Seekers E1	25	3%	2%	192
Medium engagement	Experience Seekers E2	13	2%	2%	75
	Dormitory Dependables D1	53	7%	10%	70
	Dormitory Dependables D2	73	9%	13%	70
	Trips & Treats T1	164	21%	22%	95
	Trips & Treats T2	84	11%	11%	100
Low engagement	Home & Heritage H1	20	3%	7%	39
	Home & Heritage H2	10	1%	1%	131
	Up Our Street U1	3	0%	3%	15
	Up Our Street U2	137	17%	7%	250
	Frontline Families F1	66	8%	9%	97
	Frontline Families F2	16	2%	2%	96
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K1	29	4%	1%	275
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K2	40	5%	1%	395
Supported Communities S1	0	0%	0%	0	
Supported Communities S2	16	2%	3%	79	
Unclassified		17	-	0	
Base		785		355,224	

2025/26 results (above)

Subsegment profile

Audience Spectrum subsegment		Ideas Test 2024-25 Participants		Swale and Medway Population (adults 15+)	Index
		Count	%	%	
High engagement	Metroculturals M1	1	0%	0%	147
	Metroculturals M2	4	0%	0%	32,264
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C1	11	1%	1%	88
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C2	36	3%	6%	54
	Experience Seekers E1	18	2%	2%	98
Medium engagement	Experience Seekers E2	20	2%	2%	82
	Dormitory Dependables D1	62	6%	10%	59
	Dormitory Dependables D2	107	10%	13%	73
	Trips & Treats T1	182	17%	22%	75
	Trips & Treats T2	87	8%	11%	74
Low engagement	Home & Heritage H1	49	4%	7%	68
	Home & Heritage H2	16	1%	1%	150
	Up Our Street U1	21	2%	3%	73
	Up Our Street U2	192	17%	7%	249
	Frontline Families F1	149	14%	9%	155
	Frontline Families F2	57	5%	2%	243
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K1	29	3%	1%	196
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K2	30	3%	1%	211
Supported Communities S1	0	0%	0%	0	
Supported Communities S2	30	3%	3%	106	
Unclassified		16	-	0	
Base		1,101		355,224	

Please note: base totals and percentages do not include unclassified records

2024/25 results (above)

Subsegment profile

Audience Spectrum subsegment		Ideas Test 2023-24 Participants		Swale and Medway Population (adults 15+)	Index
		Count	%	%	
High engagement	Metroculturals M1	2	0%	0%	438
	Metroculturals M2	0	0%	0%	100
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C1	7	1%	1%	93
	Commuterland Culturebuffs C2	12	2%	6%	33
	Experience Seekers E1	9	1%	2%	92
Medium engagement	Experience Seekers E2	30	5%	3%	196
	Dormitory Dependables D1	37	6%	9%	68
	Dormitory Dependables D2	52	9%	14%	63
	Trips & Treats T1	106	17%	22%	78
	Trips & Treats T2	99	16%	11%	142
Low engagement	Home & Heritage H1	18	3%	7%	43
	Home & Heritage H2	7	1%	1%	124
	Up Our Street U1	5	1%	2%	47
	Up Our Street U2	71	12%	8%	149
	Frontline Families F1	65	11%	7%	142
	Frontline Families F2	13	2%	2%	96
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K1	21	3%	1%	265
	Kaleidoscope Creativity K2	27	4%	1%	318
Supported Communities S1	0	0%	0%	0	
Supported Communities S2	29	5%	2%	198	
Unclassified		-	-	0	
Base		610		347,865	

2023/24 results (above)

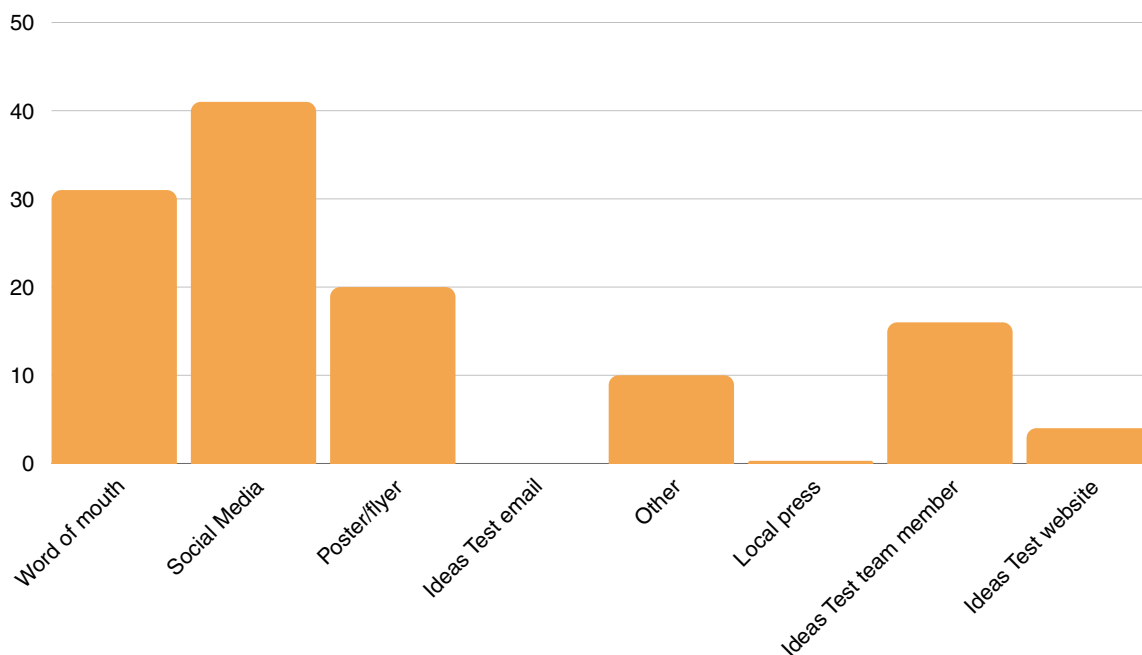
HOW DO THEY FIND OUT ABOUT US?

The data in the below graph is taken from our Ticket Tailor sample of 342 bookers.* It shows that social media and word of mouth is driving engagement, with an opportunity to increase our targeted communication via e-mail. We'd expect this to grow over the next three years with our new segmented e-mailing database now in place and a greater emphasis on email data capture through sign-ups (both online and at events or activities). Key marcomms highlights this year include:

- Instagram interaction increased by 100% to 13.4K year-on-year. This growth reflects a more strategic approach to platform-specific content, including increased use of video and higher-quality professional photography from events.
- Overall, Facebook engagement showed modest growth, with interactions increasing by 3.6% year-on-year to 2.2K. Link clicks rose significantly by 161% to 2.5K, driven primarily by users accessing our website's events and projects pages.

There has also been a notable increase in community-driven engagement on our social media channels. Audiences are increasingly sharing posts within local groups and initiating discussions about our events. For example, during Luton Lights users actively asked about installations (such as the window art) with other community members directing them to our website.**

Media coverage and PR activity increased significantly over the latter six months of 2025/26, particularly in relation to HEARD and Luton Lights.



*Although we also ask a marketing channel question on our core survey, we've used Ticket Tailor data as it is a larger sample size and therefore more reliable. This represents a total of 342 responses (who could select all that applied): Word of mouth (n=105); Social Media (n=139), Poster/flyer (n=67), Ideas Test email (n=0), Other (n=35), Local press (n=1), Ideas Test team (n=55), Ideas Test website (n=14). **While this trend is supported qualitatively (e.g. screenshots), we can't back this up with quantitative data evidence. This is an area to develop as we go into Phase 5.

**“ALL WE DO IS JUST GO
TO THE SHOP, GO TO
WORK AND GO HOME. SO
THIS HAS BEEN GOOD
FOR US GETTING OUT
AND DOING THIS. IT
MADE ME FEEL HAPPIER.
IT WAS GREAT.”**

(PARTICIPANT)

OUTCOMES FOR AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS

In this section we've briefly summarised findings from our analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from audiences and participants during 2025/26. We've shared common themes in the data, but any views held by just one individual have been made clear.

JOY BRINGS PEOPLE BACK

Bringing fun and joy through our programming is really important to us (as well as our audiences). We've already outlined how satisfaction levels have continued to be high (see page 9), but enjoyment is also evident in the range of qualitative data we've collected this year. As in previous years, positive feedback was typically attributed to several common factors: that events were free, high quality, fun, welcoming and brought the community together. We're seeing how this is translating into repeat engagements, with people trusting us to deliver 'a good time' - for example audiences returning to Luton Lights 2026, after enjoying themselves in 2025.

Enjoyment has been particularly striking this year in our co-created projects, including HEARD and Brompton's Halloween Trail where participants described how much fun they'd had being part of a team and doing something positive together (see 'enjoyment' dimension results on pages 29, 31, and 85).

These encouraging findings show that we're living by our values - of being authentic and bringing top quality programming to people 'on their doorstep'.



Image: intended outcomes for audiences and participants from our evaluation framework

“I really actually enjoyed the whole thing. We all sort of gelled I felt, we all laughed...and I really enjoyed picking up the litter which I didn't think I would to be fair. I looked forward to it.”
(Participant)

IN THEIR WORDS

“It’s wonderful to have something so local to where you are, and yeah really good. I think it’s been really good that it’s been every year, this is definitely very busy today so people are starting to know what to expect.” (Audience)

“It’s been lots of giggles. When we missed a session, I think we all really missed it didn’t we? [group of co-creators agrees].” (Artist)

“I loved it. I enjoyed all of it. It was very nice.” (Participant)

“It’s been wonderful.” (Audience)

“It’s positive to have this space in Chatham, so close to home.” (Participant)

“It was also shocking and amazing. I was like, oh my gosh, is that actually happening in front of my eyes?” (Audience)

“It’s really so amazing that the community does something like this. And I love lights too. Make it bigger next year!” (Audience)

“Fabulously creative and great fun. Great event for Halloween. Thank you to all involved.” (Audience)

“My daughter is still looking at her little Boo book, she really enjoyed it.” (Audience)

“I took some videos and in the background you can just hear my mum having an absolute blast, and my son is still going round the house saying ‘this is my phenomenonmenon’.” (Audience)

“I loved the lady with the hula hoops!” (Audience)

“We live just down the road. Yeah it’s amazing, we enjoy everything, the music, it’s a happy thing! We seen the leaflet and we thought we’re just going to see, yeah she sent it to me on Facebook. Just curiosity [made me go]. It’s the first time. It was a nice surprise seeing all this.” (Audience)

IN BRIEF: BROMPTON HALLOWEEN TRAIL

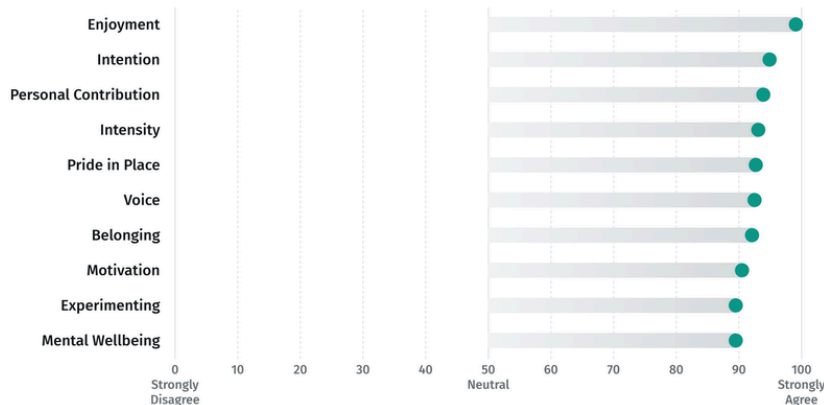
Taking place from May to November 2025, this project was designed to boost community engagement and local wellbeing through shared creative activity. Led by our Senior Producer, Amy Scott, a total of eight community meet-ups took place at Tracie's Cafe in the heart of Brompton. These gatherings facilitated relationship building, creative sharing, and robust collaborative planning; with the central goal to empower local residents in taking the lead in designing and delivering a community event. Shared group interests and initial research indicated that there was a strong local desire to revive a previous Halloween event, so the group decided make that its focus. A new Halloween Trail was co-created and presented to the public in hour-long slots (with a total of four trails) on 31 October 2025. This project was part of the [Medway Creative Health Place Partnership](https://tinyurl.com/t5xwj8dz) (<https://tinyurl.com/t5xwj8dz>).



Nine local co-creators were involved. We commissioned local writer, Kat Pegler* to create a Brompton ghost story for the trail. The story's content was shaped by interviews with local people to gather stories and folklore, which rooted the event deeply within the area's history and heritage. **101 people attended the Halloween event** and **100% (n=15) of survey respondents rated the trail as 'excellent'**. In total we worked with **10 artists** (2 based in Brompton, including trail director Nic Lamont and designer Tukru Hassien who were both members of the co-creators group). Medway Council promoted the event via their website, social media, and in Medway Matters.

Impact & Insight results: based on five co-creator survey completions after the trail and taking an average calculation (where 100 is strongly agree and 0 strongly disagree), shows our co-creator community residents scored their experience particularly highly on **enjoyment** 'I had a good time' (99), **intention** 'I felt able to shape the intention of the project' (95), and **motivation** 'I feel motivated to do creative things in the future' (91). See our other dimension results on page 85.

Dimension Outcomes



There were several unintended outputs and legacies:

- A booklet was produced, designed by Tukru Hassien. This was distributed locally to the library, Tracie's Cafe and other local organisations.
- The project successfully established new partnerships which we can explore for future projects: Tracie's Cafe, The Cannon Pub, The King George V Pub, and Second Chance Community Centre.
- The group are planning an event for next Halloween and continue to meet up independently. We're supporting them to find sources of funding.



IN BRIEF: HEARD (LUTON LITTER PICKS)

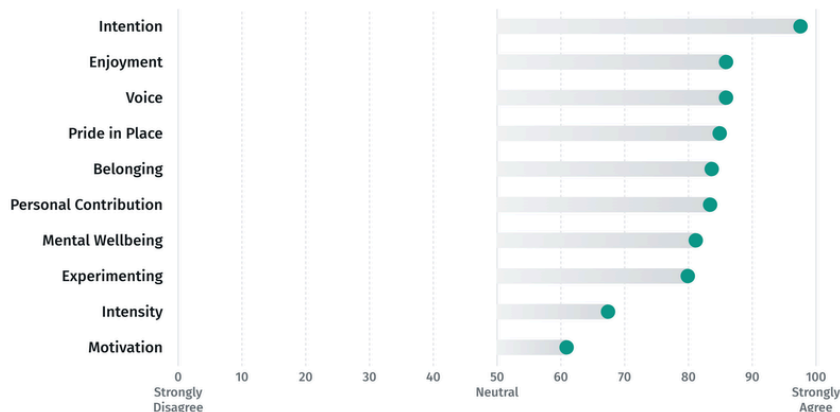
HEARD was our other co-created project which took place in Luton led by Senior Producer Wayne Parsons. We originally met 34 people in the community through creative events to listen to what they wanted and thought the area needed. We brought various artists in to support these events and inspire people with new and bold ideas. A core group of residents decided to focus on the local litter problem. As outlined earlier, we commissioned world championship beatboxer Rupert Oldridge to support the group's 'litter picks with a twist'. We also invited artist and sound designer Thor McIntyre-Burnie to create three 'talking bins' which were stationed on Luton Road; these delivered messages of thanks every time they were used. Each bin included recordings made by local primary school children in Rupert's workshops*. This project was part of the [Medway Creative Health Place Partnership](https://tinyurl.com/t5xwj8dz) (<https://tinyurl.com/t5xwj8dz>).



219.53kg of rubbish was removed over **nine sessions**. Participants walked a combined estimated **27.13 kilometres (30,000 steps in total)**. **428 calories** were burned per session on average: that's the same as a moderate spin class or a brisk swim. **390 conversations** were recorded with people living or working on Luton Road. **345 views** of the beatboxing recordings were registered on Linktree via bin QR codes (with **285 track clicks**, 113 of which were unique). We've shown that creative health doesn't have to happen in a clinical or cultural setting to work. It's been one of our most experimental, controversial and high profile activities we've ever delivered. Read our key learning from page 70 (and see limitations on page 84).

Impact & Insight results: based on four survey completions at the project end and taking an average calculation (where 100 is strongly agree and 0 strongly disagree), our co-creator community residents scored their experience particularly highly on **intention** 'I felt able to shape the intention of the project' (98), **enjoyment** 'I had a good time' (86), and **voice** 'I felt my ideas were taken seriously' (86). See our other dimension results on page 85.

Dimension Outcomes



There's been several unintended outcomes and legacies:

- We generated a huge amount of media coverage and developed stronger relationships with councillors and council colleagues (e.g. in communication/waste).**
- We measured waste removal, bin usage, active hours and movement data for our project evaluation. These were all new metrics for our evaluation approach.
- The group want to continue their litter picks and tackle larger fly-tipping issues in the locality. We're helping to facilitate meetings with our council partners on this.
- Medway Council have given permission for the bins to remain on Luton Road following the completion of the project.

Image credits: Tyler Austin. *See individual HEARD Round Up report on request for further detail. Watch a film about the project [here](https://tinyurl.com/mr3crh5c) (<https://tinyurl.com/mr3crh5c>). You can also listen to the beatboxing tracks [here](https://linktr.ee/IdeasTest) (<https://linktr.ee/IdeasTest>).

**BBC News, BBC Radio Kent, KMTV. See the media coverage [here](https://tinyurl.com/7e232ach) (<https://tinyurl.com/7e232ach>).



WE'RE BRINGING A REGULAR DOSE OF CREATIVITY TO AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS

As highlighted earlier, we're targeting particular postal sectors where people are statistically less likely to engage in culture*. And as in previous years, we've successfully reached those who've never experienced or participated in engagement activities like ours**. Of the 148 respondents to our core survey, 10% (n=15) said they were engaging in arts/cultural experiences for the very first time. Additionally, 6% (n=9) said that they typically engage in arts/culture once a year or less. This is a lower percentage than last year, which could reflect the positive impact of local creative engagement and audience development efforts (including our own); or it could highlight the number of repeat audiences that we're reaching. It indicates that there's an opportunity to use catchment area analysis to strategically target more non-users as we head into Phase 5.

	2024/25	2025/26
% experiencing arts and culture for the very first time	17% (n=68)	10% (n=15)
% engaging once a year or less	24% (n=98)	6% (n=9)

In addition, as the dimensions table on page 85 shows, our Insight & Impact toolkit average results for Cultural Contribution were consistently high, for example Brompton Halloween Trail audiences (99), Gather & Groove: May (90), Stacy Makishi (100). Other examples include:

- **DisQuiet**, where young people have been able to increase the creativity in their lives by working with professional musicians and peers who are similarly interested in music. Across the two years of this programme, including in 2025/6, participants have consistently told us that they wouldn't ordinarily have been able to learn music (for free), access performing opportunities or be in a band (especially given the availability of music/music curricula in school) or progressed musically as quickly as they have.

- **HEARD** (see page 31), where half of the litter pickers told us that they had little or no creative engagement in the arts or culture prior to the project. Involving the group members in decision-making and idea generation provided an active rather than passive engagement in creativity.
- **Brompton Halloween Trail** (see page 29) where the local community designed and delivered a Halloween event 'on their doorstep' for the first time in over ten years. Group members who already had an existing creative interest reported that the project helped to nurture their talent (see more on pages 64 - 69).

*DCMS [Taking Part Survey](https://tinyurl.com/rmdadu4a). (https://tinyurl.com/rmdadu4a). **This is based on the list of arts and cultural activities specified in the mandated Arts Council England Illuminate question. They include: 'online or in-person activities produced by arts organisations, museums and/or libraries, such as exhibitions, performances, literature events, gigs, festivals, creative participation'. 2024/25 data is based on 410 respondents to the core survey. 2025/26 data is based on 148 respondents. Limitations regarding survey sample sizes is highlighted on page 84.

PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING SOMETHING NEW BECAUSE OF OUR ECLECTIC PROGRAMMING AND RISK-TAKING APPROACH

We always try to introduce something different into the local creative and cultural mix. This helps ensure that we're not repeating or replicating existing provision, and means we can push people to rethink what arts and culture 'looks like'. Whether it's award-winning artists like Stacy Makishi working with the LGBTQIA+ community on Sheppey, New York Brass Band playing at Luton Lights 2026, or world champion beatboxer Rupert Oldridge bringing new sounds to the streets, our 2025/26 programme has been eclectic and this means that people are more likely to experience something that they've not ordinarily had access to before (due to financial, cultural, or intellectual barriers). Being an action learning project and having permission to fail is key to this approach: we're (quite literally) testing ideas, and it seems to be working (for the most part!*) with our audiences and participants.

We're pleased that this intention has come through strongly in our independent and in-house qualitative data, with communities commonly sharing that they've experienced something new or 'different'.

In addition, as the dimensions table on page 85 shows, Insight & Impact toolkit average results for Distinctiveness were consistently high, for example Brompton Halloween Trail audiences (93), Writer in Residence (90), Gather & Groove May (93), and Stacy Makishi (99).

**“ I haven't
been to
anything like
this
before...it's
definitely
different.”
(Audience)**

*We've highlighted some examples where people have told us we've missed the mark on page 10. We also share process challenges on pages 77 - 82.



Image credit: James the Scribe <https://www.jamesthescribe.com/>. This image was scribed during one of our HEARD listening events, where we brought Zoie Logic Dance and Murmuration Arts together to present two of their projects, with the aim of inspiring our co-creators.

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INSPIRED, INCLUDING TO COME BACK TO ONE OF OUR EVENTS IN THE FUTURE

Although we can only evidence propensity, our audiences and participants tell us that they've been inspired by our events and activities. This is consistent with previous years. Commonly occurring examples include:

- wanting to attend something else that we programme in the future (i.e. crossing over to another type of activity)
- returning to something creative they'd done earlier in their life (e.g. painting)
- taking up something creative that's new (e.g. a drawing class)
- volunteering time (e.g. with a community partner they've been introduced to)
- developing a new idea for something creative or community focused (e.g. our Brompton Halloween group continuing to meet; or DisQuiet participants setting up their own bands and attending open mic nights).

Inspiring people in different ways will potentially have an impact on our communities more broadly. For example, as mentioned above, our HEARD litter pickers want to continue litter picking locally and start tackling other urgent local waste issues like fly-tipping.

As the dimensions table on page 85 shows, Insight & Impact toolkit average results for Enthusiasm (which is an indicator of propensity to engage again) were consistently high, for example Brompton Halloween Trail audiences (98), Gather & Groove May (88), Luton Lights Finale (94) and Stacy Makishi (100).



Image credit: Tyler Austin

**“I’m starting to work on building a band outside of here. I don’t think I would even have had the confidence to reach out to any of my friends to do that but now that I’ve got this confidence, I’ve managed to do it.”
(Participant)**

“I MET A LADY WHEN WE WENT TO ELMLEY, SHE HAS NOW APPROACHED ME TO ASK ME IF I WANT TO VOLUNTEER, AND IT WOULD BE A REGULAR THING TO GO AND HELP PRIMARY SCHOOLS. SO THAT’S AMAZING.”

(PARTICIPANT)

“I have always loved the idea of foraging, but I didn’t have the knowledge. It's great to come out and learn about foraging in such a lovely place.”
(Participant)

PEOPLE ARE DEVELOPING NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE WHICH THEY DIDN'T EXPECT

Findings show that the positive change we’re having on people’s skills and knowledge is having a potential long-term impact. We struggle to do longitudinal research (due to impracticalities, time, and budget) but this year we invited our Make Waves alumni to share how they’d been getting on since their time with us*. As the visual on page 40 (captured during The Ripple Effect event) shows, we learnt how the skills and knowledge gained through our programme has helped young people to gain new volunteering or employment opportunities (as well as connecting with other creatives and organisations in Medway and Swale).

With our other audiences and participants, both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that communities are learning new skills or knowledge through our work. Some specific examples include learning how to beatbox (HEARD school workshops); safe foraging (Intertidal Allotment); problem solving (Brompton Halloween Trail); circus skills (Luton Lights); writing and recording original songs (<https://soundcloud.com/disquiet-programme/brain-leak>) (DisQuiet); and developing local heritage knowledge (Brompton Halloween Trail). In depth interviews with our external evaluator, audiences and participants often shared surprise at learning something new.

IN THEIR WORDS

“It’s nice having this once a month get together, having a creative thing, having creative input and hearing other people’s ideas. Not all of them are great, some of them are better than others...but it’s that creative stuff meshing together and when you get that outcome...it was above expectations it was wonderful!” (Participant)

“I’ve bought a few new instruments, so like a bass guitar or a keyboard. And an acoustic and electric guitar, and I’m planning to buy a banjo. I’ve also been learning the DJ on the side. I wouldn’t have done all that without this group. This group has inspired me quite a lot actually.” (Participant)

“I’ve already tried to start another band. There was a period in time where I was starting to feel like maybe I would stop music or take a break from make music and playing music songs. But I found that when I really got into this group, it helped change my mind.” (Participant)

“I think coming up with the ideas was the creative part.” (Participant)

“Apart from helping children at school with their art projects, it's not something I do at home. Now I'm retired. I've got my easel out now, downstairs in the dining room, and all of my sketchbooks out, my watercolor...everything's out now. They were just all just boxed away in a wardrobe. I always thought when I retire, I'll do it because I'll have time, but I think I'm doing it sooner than I would have done without [names project] if you know what I mean.” (Participant)

“I definitely learnt something, because every single ghost is something to do with Brompton’s past. I was speaking to my neighbour who’s part of the Brompton History Society and she gave me some of the stories behind the pubs that are here, like the horseman. There was genuinely a chap in like the 1800s whose horse bolted and he fell down like a 40ft drop with this horse.” (Participant)

“It brings more people in because it’s different, all different activities. It’s never this busy normally. Usually it’s the same old people.” (Audience)

“I have never been inside a professional studio before.” (Participant)

“Never done this before, wish I could do more stuff like this.” (Audience)

IN CONVERSATION WITH...BENJAMIN

“ Ideas Test Project: DisQuiet

Can you tell me why you decided to get involved in DisQuiet?

Well, I firstly wanted to start a band, and I wanted to make my own music. At the start, I was just doing covers, but I always realised that what I really wanted to do was to make my own music. So eventually, I came to this group, and I started doing that.

What have you most enjoyed about DisQuiet?

Well, I think I've enjoyed being able to improve so much of my musical skills. I've got so much better at playing keyboard and piano, which is the main instrument I play.

And what's been the biggest benefit of coming along?

This place is really important in my heart. I definitely think that if you're having a bad time or a bad week, you can come here and you will have that like short period of joy to cheer you up, even if things aren't going the way that they're supposed to. I don't think you'd get that much attention anywhere else from professional musicians about how to make songs. And the best part about this is that it's a free group that anyone can come to. There's no pay barrier, and people can just learn these skills, which even at school, they may be able to, but time's more restricted. You have a lot more time here to develop and learn these skills and talk to people about their experiences in the music industry as well. It's helped me get more confident by being able to play live. Yeah, it's brilliant.



Photo credit: Marge Ainsley



Have you learned any new skills by coming along?

Well, Dave and Joe have helped immensely, and they've been very supportive and friendly, and they've definitely encouraged us to do things that we thought weren't necessarily possible. There's lots of people around me here who have been helped by them, who came here starting completely from scratch, and they've become really good musicians. Teamwork has been amazing, and I've been able to, like, learn how to get on with other musicians and to communicate more, which definitely helped me improve. Also, it's definitely helped with knowing how to create songs and structure songs and use music software, so you can actually adapt those songs into actual studio recordings. I've been able to learn the basics with Logic Pro.

Do you think you've been able to be more creative with your music by coming to DisQuiet?

I definitely think that being surrounded by other people with creative ideas makes you lean into the creativity. I think you become more creative together, because the positive energy interacts and bounces off each other.

If someone was thinking about coming to DisQuiet, but they were a bit unsure or felt a bit uncertain beforehand, what would you say to them, what advice would you give?

I'd say I usually find it awkward to come into a club or a new area for the first time, but people here are unjudgemental, and you pretty much get integrated into the group relatively fast.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about DisQuiet?

I mean, I'm not exaggerating here, but in terms of learning and improving musical ability and being able to have a lovely space where people can come and play music, which is basically really open, like you can go down any path you want - there's a lot of flexibility. And I feel like this place is the only place that there is. Dave and Joe are an essential part to that. It has a spark, which makes it so unique and so good compared to some other places.



PEOPLE TELL US THAT WE'RE BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND GENERATING PRIDE IN THE LOCAL AREA

When we ask people if our work has helped them feel different about the local area, we're often told that they're already proud of where they live - and that it's others who have a negative perception of it. That said, our qualitative evidence commonly suggests that people are proud of themselves for being involved or taking part - and they believe that our work is positively changing other people's perception about their local community. For example, HEARD's litter pickers reported that people have thanked them for collecting rubbish and said how much nicer the area is as a result;* and the Brompton Halloween group collectively suggested that the trail had generated a sense of pride in the neighbourhood that hadn't been felt for some time.

As the dimensions table on page 85 shows, our Insight & Impact toolkit average results for Pride in Place were consistently high for audiences (e.g. Brompton Halloween Trail (97), Gather & Groove: May (88), Stacy Makishi (100)) as well as for co-creators (e.g. Brompton Halloween Trail (93) and HEARD (85)). This was also the case for the Belonging dimension, for example with audiences: Brompton Halloween Trail (98), Luton Lights Finale (93) and Stacy Makishi (100); plus co-creator scores (e.g. Brompton Halloween Trail (92) and HEARD (84)).

An unintended outcome reported in anecdotal staff reflections has been the unanticipated involvement of teenage boys, who've seen activities happening on the streets and wanted to get involved.

Having positive male-identifying role models, such as our Senior Producer for Gather & Groove and HEARD, working alongside artists like Fusion Extreme (BMX) and Rupert Oldridge (HEARD beatboxer) has indicatively helped to model positive behaviour and resulted in these young men being recruited as volunteers. We'll continue to monitor this finding as we go into Phase 5.

Our neighbourhoods work is also frequently described as bringing people together in spaces and places they didn't know about before, ordinarily visit, or feel safe spending time in. For example, the finale of Luton Lights at the Invicta Social Club brought customers in who'd never been before, despite it being on their doorstep. Our qualitative data commonly shows that we're developing a sense of community through our events, and encouraging people to meet and get to know their neighbours. Connection with others is a key determinant of wellbeing, which we highlight as a core outcome from our work on page 51.

You can read more about our asset-based approach to placemaking and our learning on pages 56 - 61.

*At one local workshop run by one of our senior producers, 90% of people (out of a sample of 42) said that they'd noticed a difference in cleanliness over the last few weeks. However, there have been some critical comments about the project - mostly on social media platforms, which we note on page 80.

IN THEIR WORDS

“I’m proud of how many people who turned up, who did the trails...we didn’t think as many people would turn up but I felt proud seeing everyone enjoying themselves.” (Audience)

“There’s quite a bit of economic background difference here, and I’ve never been to Brompton until this trail, I’ve lived in Rochester for 10 years and I didn’t know this incredible place existed. And so it’s brought me here and I’ve just loved seeing a mix of people from lots of different backgrounds.” (Participant)

“We love beatboxing and it’s good for the environment. We can pick up litter and help the world.” (Participant)

“I’ve come from Gravesend so I doubt I would have come here on a Friday normally, and loads of people wouldn’t have come here or known about it. I’ve just seen the fire juggler who was extraordinarily good!” (Audience)

“It’s so cool that this happened on Sheppey Island ahead of our Pride celebrations.” (Audience)

“You did see a little difference, obviously people still dump rubbish. But I feel there’s been a bit of a difference. I do think people are viewing it a bit differently. And the more they’ve seen us...even the people in the shops, they came out...it’s planting a seed of maybe actually we don’t have to live like this...let’s all have a bit more pride in where we live. It’s not going to change overnight.” (Participant)

“It’s good yeah, it brings the community together doesn’t it?”

“I think it’s good for the local area to do something like this. They don’t do nothing much like this. It’s just nice to see people getting motivated in doing something.” (Audience)

“The teacher said that was the most engaged they had they’ve ever been.” (Artist)

“There’s been a big change along here, it’s not as vibrant or as busy as it used to be, but that particular night it was kind of like you were looking around and the place was elevated. It was actually something very special.” (Audience)

“THIS LITTER PICKING WITH RUPERT SHOWS THAT PEOPLE DO CARE. PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE CONSTANTLY IMPLY THAT PEOPLE WHO LIVE HERE ARE WORTHLESS AND OBVIOUSLY THAT’S VERY DIFFICULT FOR THOSE OF US THAT KNOW WE’RE NOT WORTHLESS. TO HAVE SOMETHING TANGIBLE THAT’S SHOWING THERE ARE PEOPLE HERE THAT DO CARE ABOUT THE AREA, IS QUITE IMPORTANT TO HAVE.”

(PARTICIPANT)

IN THEIR WORDS

“Well, my children have moved away now, and there’s no grandchildren. So you do start to think: ‘oh, should we move near to where they are? What’s here for us anymore? It’s not the same as it used to be....nobody knows anybody anymore. It’s too busy...’ You get all those negative thoughts. But this project has made me think, no, do you know what - when I went to that meeting and I felt so proud that they wanted to use a beach on Sheppey. And then you start thinking, how many places have got a beach that you can just walk to? How many places have got those cliffs ...I can go for cliff walks and see horses, and then be up the beach, and then there’s seals in the sea, you know? I’ve gone along to these meetings, and a lot of those people, there’s connections with my family. And I think, no, I have got history here.” (Participant)

“You just appreciate the area more, the park and walking along the street, you see it’s different.” (Participant)

“It feels more like a community after being involved. We don’t really see our neighbours that much, we don’t all go outside at the same time.” (Participant)

“It just made me proud of being part of this and proud of Brompton.” (Participant)

“It’s really quiet here. It’s almost really easy to forget that you even have neighbours, so I definitely feel more connected.” (Participant)

“I think it heightened people’s awareness of the possibilities that the area actually holds.” (Participant)

“People took a pride in the area, and I think that’s still there. I know it was three months ago, and it was a one off, but you know, even now, you can still feel that appreciation of the area has gone up.” (Participant)

“I think it helps the community, we’ve all met each other because of doing this. It gives people a sense of achievement, pride and getting that sense of community back because there isn’t any anymore.” (Participant)

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN GIVEN A PLATFORM FOR THEIR VOICE AND HAVE FELT EMPOWERED TO MAKE DECISIONS

We've made a big step change in authentically generating agency this year, helped by the recruitment of our two Senior Producers at the end of 2024/25. Findings indicate that taking a depth rather than breadth approach in our two target communities of Brompton and Luton has generated a sense of empowerment, with potentially long lasting impacts. For example:

- HEARD participants described how it was definitely 'their project' and felt comfortable enough to share different ideas at initial consultation sessions.*
- Brompton Halloween participants reported feeling listened to by others and the producer, and confident to share their ideas.
- Three community members in the Brompton Halloween group had creative interests or career backgrounds. All three reported how being involved had reignited their passion for creativity or increased their confidence in doing more/returning to it in some way (see more on page 65). We've noted that increased feelings of capability has been a frequently cited unintended outcome for participants this year, which we'll monitor more closely through the Impact & Insight toolkit as we go into Phase 5.

Qualitative feedback from other projects and one-off activities has also highlighted that people feel that we've listened, or provided an opportunity for participants to be listened to. This is encouraging given that this one of our core values as an organisation.

For example:

- One Stacy Makishi workshop participant described how they felt comfortable enough to share their lived experience in front of others.
- Multiple DisQuiet participants described how they felt encouraged to share their ideas and were listened to by their peers e.g. when writing and recording music.
- Whilst things can often get political, one participant from the Friends of Intertidal Allotment suggested they could confidently share their opinions with the rest of the group.

As the below example table shows, quantitative data from our survey related to agency and empowerment (using Impact & Insight co-created dimensions**) also aligns with the findings from qualitative data. Definitions of each dimension can be found in the guide on page 85.

Dimension	Brompton Halloween co-created group	HEARD co-created group
Voice	93	86
Intensity	93	68***
Experimenting	90	80
Personal contribution	94	84
Intention	95	98

*We've outlined the successes and challenges of this socially engaged approach on pages 71-82. **Based on five post-trail co-creator survey completions for Brompton Halloween Trail and four for HEARD, taking an average calculation (where 100 is strongly agree and 0 strongly disagree). ***It's surprising given the qualitative feedback that this is lower than the other scores, but this could reflect the logistical realities of delivery i.e. time that the producer had to input rather than co-creators e.g. council liaison, and where the producer also had to make some executive artistic decisions e.g. bringing in beatboxer Rupert Oldridge.

IN THEIR WORDS

“It’s been very satisfying doing it and being part of doing something to improve the area for everybody not just yourself.” (Participant)

“I would be so disappointed if we don’t do it again.” (Participant)

“I think it was very much our project. Obviously we couldn’t have done it without you organising it...” (Participant)

“When you first go to meetings you’re always a bit apprehensive and a bit nervous and no one wants to say anything do they? But it felt comfortable [at Heard] and you felt comfortable to say what you wanted.” (Participant)

“I think it’s also shown people again that actually you do have more power than you think. You never used to have to say to people, go out and sweep your front, people did it. But if you’ve got to say to people you can tidy it, you can put plants in. Eventually people will take notice.” (Participant)

“When we went to the first consultations we had a say and we were listened to, it wasn’t just pushed under the carpet.” (Participant)

“It’s been amazing to realise I can still be creative, I can still do this...my confidence has improved.” (Participant)

“It just felt like I’d been able to create something that works. I reckon that everyone is listened to, as it’s pretty small group. So when we write little songs, we’ll each contribute a little bit and they’ll be one person who comes up with the idea. Everyone will be like, ‘oh, why don’t you try this and this and this’, then we’ll try it, and then we’ll see if it like works in the song. That’s kind of just how we end up. And it just fits together.” (Participant)

“It’s nice when I have said something, and you get a couple people say, yeah, good well done. Yeah, good idea. Yeah, I get that. So that’s nice. That makes you feel good. You’ve had some kind of positive input.” (Participant)

“My experience of the workshop with Ideas Test was very thought provoking and made me feel that I could speak my truth amongst others.” (Participant)

IN CONVERSATION WITH...MAX

“ Ideas Test Project: DisQuiet

Can you tell me why you decided to get involved in DisQuiet?

I've been here probably about a year and three months something like that. My Mum told me about it, and I think she saw a post online about it. And I played guitar for a little bit before joining here, and I just wanted a way to sort of express myself, whilst expanding my knowledge in a band.

What have you most enjoyed about DisQuiet?

It's just a good way to meet up with mates. Of course, I love playing a guitar and everything like that. And I think the social aspect is pretty good. It's good vibe, a good laugh: the staff are really funny, and I love playing instruments. I just like expressing myself through music. Thursday is one of my favourite days of the week. I just come here and have a great time. I really look forward to it.

And what's been the biggest benefit of coming along?

I feel probably working together as a team to make original stuff, and we also perform different songs. And making the songs is also really fun. Just being part of like our band is quite cool. There's songs I've made, and I've sort of like come up with a few chords, and then we start to get a feel about it, and then maybe a title. As much as there's musical talent here, you can also talk to the leaders about anything that you want. It's like got a good social aspect, so if you have any problems, they always ask 'how are you?' and that kind of thing.



Photo credit: Marge Ainsley



Have you learned any new skills by coming along?

Definitely being part of a team and making sure that people are being listened to – that’s been quite an integral part of it.

Do you think you’ve been able to be more creative with your music by coming to DisQuiet?

Yeah definitely. I used to have guitar lessons, and then I stopped that, so this sort of became a replacement. I feel like I’ve definitely progressed, learning different chord shapes, stuff like that. And I go to a lot of workshops as well that are run for DisQuiet, so we did DJ-ing and podcasting and stuff like that. I’m writing, mixing everything and stuff like that. So I’ve been creative a lot.

Has the group inspired you to do anything specific?

I think probably singing and playing at the same time. When I started, I tried it, and I was like, I can't do this, so I need to go away and practise. And I did, and I practised here as well. There's loads of different songs that I can play and sing at the same time now that we've done like here.

If someone was thinking about coming to DisQuiet, but they were a bit unsure or felt a bit uncertain beforehand, what would you say to them, what advice would you give?

No one is going to judge you; we’re all the same boat and come from different backgrounds and abilities. Even if you don’t play anything, just pick up a tambourine.

Is there anything else you’d like to say about DisQuiet?

It feels quite important - like I said it gives me something to look forward to in a week. And I know for fact that if I if it wasn't this, I'd literally just go home and be bored. It helps me with getting skills, like teamwork, listening to people, sort of self-motivation in a way too. And public speaking, public playing as well.



AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS TELL US OUR WORK IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO THEIR WELLBEING



We ask about the potential impact of our activities on people’s mental wellbeing through our surveys, using the Impact & Insight toolkit. Although caution must be drawn due to the low sample size, results for the Mental Wellbeing dimension were consistently high on average across our work, as shown on page 85.

In addition, as in previous years, we continue use the NEF Five Ways to Wellbeing* framework as a way to assess indicators of wellbeing in the qualitative data we gather from audiences. It’s positive that our audiences and participants continue to tell us that their wellbeing has benefitted across the five ways. For example:

Connect: this year people have reported that they’ve made new friends, or been encouraged to get to know their neighbours.

Give: as part of our asset-based approach, organisations have supported our work e.g. Tracie’s Cafe; people have also given time to co-create projects in some way.

Take notice: people have noticed new things in their community (for example through litter picking or visiting new spaces in the community like Invicta); they’ve also reflected on how they feel or listened to others as described earlier.

Learn: people have engaged in activities where they’ve experienced something new for the first time; learnt a new skill, or gained knowledge (as described earlier).

Be active: people have been involved in activities which have involved movement or simply getting out doing creative activities in the fresh air. For example Gather & Groove, and HEARD litter picks (see physical health metrics highlighted earlier on page 31).

We’re starting to see consistent qualitative data in specific wellbeing benefits reported by audiences as a result of engaging with our work. These include improvements in mood, reduction in anxiety, and increased relaxation. Perhaps most strikingly, we’ve heard life-affirming and life-changing impact examples this year: one participant decided not to move house to be near their family as a direct result of being involved and recognising the benefits of staying in the area; another with extremely poor mental health described their involvement as ‘life saving.’ We don’t get those shared experiences through quantitative data capture, which is why we invest so heavily in our qualitative data collection across all our projects. It’s where the authentic stories lie, and where we can really learn from our communities about the direct impact we have on their lives.

Results for audience and co-creator wellbeing based on the ONS4 (the four personal wellbeing questions used by the Office for National Statistics to measure the UK’s ‘national happiness’ are included with caveats on page 20.

*<https://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing>. Brompton Halloween Trail and HEARD projects were part of the Medway Creative Health Place Partnership (<https://tinyurl.com/t5xwj8dz>). This was a combined research project, focusing predominantly on using creativity to improve public health in Brompton and Luton. Further quantitative evidence is being gathered by partners on that project as part of their own evaluation framework and remit.

**“IT’S SAVED MY LIFE,
BECAUSE IT’S HELPED
MY MENTAL HEALTH.”**

(PARTICIPANT)

IN THEIR WORDS

"Some of the young people who attended, in fact pretty much all of the young people who attended came on their own and were experiencing a degree of isolation in friendships, And they were all very different from each other, different schools, different ages. And the thing they had in common was they wanted to play music, and then to see them be accepted into this group and belong...being an individual person, you know, was, this is what the group's been about. So it wasn't like a whole load of, you know, a friendship group joined and they just carried on being a friendship group and produced great music together - it was individuals coming together who were looking for somewhere they could belong." (Partner)

"I remember one of the meetings on the Wednesday. The same morning, my dad died, and it was nice to just come here [names partner venue] and have everyone here to support me, to ask me do you want to stay, are you OK? It was just nice to have everyone here to support me through that." (Participant)

"These things lighten your life. It's not solving our political problems, but it does put a smile on your face. You do what you can to improve your situation." (Participant)

"We're up and down hills and constantly moving." (Participant)

"With the guy next door, I've approached him more. As you get to know people, you all become a bit more approachable and you help each other more, which is what used to happen in communities." (Participant)

"I found it very, very tranquil, relaxing, and I feel good. I feel fabulous." (Audience)

"I just want to say thank you for encouraging [names person]. He lost his father last year. I see the effect of what you are doing, So thank you. You made the day for my son now." (Audience)

"I'll be honest with you I wasn't feeling great before I came here and yeah, it's kind of making me feel better than I did I can tell you." (Audience)

"Really good with my son, my son has neurodivergence and the BMX guys adapted really quickly to help." (Audience)



TAKING A COMMUNITY ASSET-BASED APPROACH AND BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

OUR ASSET-BASED APPROACH IS HELPING US REACH THE RIGHT AUDIENCES, AT THE RIGHT TIME, IN THE RIGHT PLACES

We've worked with 22 partners this year, including 9 organisations who were new to us (this compares with 27 and 7 respectively in 2024/25). The strong partnerships that we've developed - including key community assets continue to be essential in reaching our target audiences. This is evidenced in our work across Medway and Swale, but particularly in our target postal sector neighbourhoods work. For example:

- **Tracie's Cafe** in the heart of Brompton was the focal point for the Brompton Halloween Trail and the regular meeting place for community member co-creators. The owners have recently submitted a grant to make improvements to their business premises (supported by our team), and intend to display community creative work in the cafe, inspired by their involvement in the project.
- **Invicta Social Club** hosted our HEARD co-created events and meetings as well as the Luton Lights finale, which helped to raise awareness of the club with those who had never been before; and opened up access to cultural activities for members of the club who don't usually engage in the arts.
- **The Pilot's Rest** micro pub in Sheerness has hosted our Friends of the Intertidal Allotment meetings, and developed a new exhibitions space inspired by the creative community.
- **Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway** hosted our [Writer-in-Residence programme](https://tinyurl.com/4awasm33) (<https://tinyurl.com/4awasm33>) which is continuing into 2026/27.

The above findings has shown that - when the right places are selected - taking an asset-based approach makes our audience engagement stronger, empowers community voice and has a direct impact on placemaking.

The two-year Medway Creative Health Place Partnership has now finished. This involved working across Brompton and Luton alongside partners to collaboratively tackle meaningful and relevant health and wellbeing issues to communities. We've developed stronger relationships (especially with Medway Council through HEARD) as a result (see page 31). Funded by Arts Council England's [Place Partnership Fund](https://tinyurl.com/4tmd5k4d) (<https://tinyurl.com/4tmd5k4d>), the programme involved working in collaboration with Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership, University of Kent, The National Centre for Creative Health, Medway Council's Culture and Libraries, Public Housing and Public Health teams, Icon Theatre, Nucleus Arts and Live Music Now.

As with last year, our partners included a range of cultural, local authority, education and place/health-based community partners. This has meant we're meeting communities 'where they're at' in their neighbourhoods. Other partners this year have included: IslandWorks, Sheppey Arts Syndicate, Sun Pier House, Luton Library, Cement Fields, plus many more.

WHAT OUR PARTNERS SAID

WE'RE CONSISTENTLY SEEN AS AN ORGANISATION THAT LISTENS, AND PARTNERS WANT TO WORK WITH US AGAIN

100% of partner survey respondents (n=6) either strongly agreed or agreed that we listened to what they had to say (with 83% or n=5 strongly agreeing). This is also reflected in the qualitative data from independent depth interviews, with partners describing a positive two-way dialogue where discussions are genuine, transparent and honest. We're pleased that 100% (n=6) said they'd describe their partnership with us as a successful one. As in previous years, we're described by partners as being reliable and having integrity. This has clearly impacted their propensity to work with us in the future, with 100% (n=6) stating they were either very likely or likely to work with us again (with n=5 very likely).

WE'RE HELPING TO DEVELOP BEST PRACTICE IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Findings suggest that we've been able to model best practice when it comes to partnership working. Whether that's through demonstrating what a listening organisation 'looks like' or the professional paperwork needed e.g. partnership agreements. Two thirds (n=4) either strongly agreed or agreed that they'd gained best practice/new partnership working skills that they didn't have before.

PARTNERS BELIEVE WE'RE ADDING VALUE BUT SUGGEST WE NEED TO SHOUT MORE ABOUT OUR IMPACT

Qualitative evidence from independent interviews suggests that partners feel that our reputation is a growing, and positive one within Medway and Swale, with 100% (n=6) of partner survey respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing that we add value to the area in some way. However, they commonly suggested that we should shout more about our successful achievements by undertaking strategic PR outside of the communications intended for our core target audiences. This was a common finding in 2024/25 too, so we've started making plans to address this in 2026/27 through a brand communication targeted campaign, using the support of an external agency. As in previous years, we recognise that there's still some work to do in terms of improving awareness of what we stand for and what we're trying to achieve. For instance, only half of 2025/26 partner survey respondents (n=3) either strongly agreed or agreed that they could confidently describe what we stand for as an organisation (this compares with 71% or n=5 in 2023/24). Two-thirds (n=4) of partners in 2025/26 reported that it's clear what we're trying to achieve. This compares with 71% (n=5) in 2023/24. Due to low take-up rate in 2024/25 we don't have data to compare with the last financial year, although qualitative data suggested a similar picture: read our previous evaluation reports [here](#) (<https://ideastest.org.uk/about/>).

IN THEIR WORDS

"Just to experience, over time, the difference that it made in those young people, both in practical skills, but personally, was a massive highlight for me." (Partner)

"We love working with Ideas Test and hope to continue to do so for as long as possible." (Partner)

"...they interrogate things and that's what I find really invigorating about them." (Partner)

"...they've come to stuff, and they've been part of the conversation, which I think is really important." (Partner)

"Everybody who kind of works in this area knows about them, because they are one of the main organisations. I guess, maybe what they could do is more clearly articulate what they do somehow." (Partner)

"I can't think of anything [they do less well]." (Partner)

"I think the biggest strength is the fact that they're really out there doing the work and taking the work to their communities." (Partner)

"I think they've been really great at building quite personal connections with those communities. And I'd say building trust, because you get a lot of people coming in from the arts and sort of swanning in and then out again. But I think they've done it with real integrity and sort of care." (Partner)

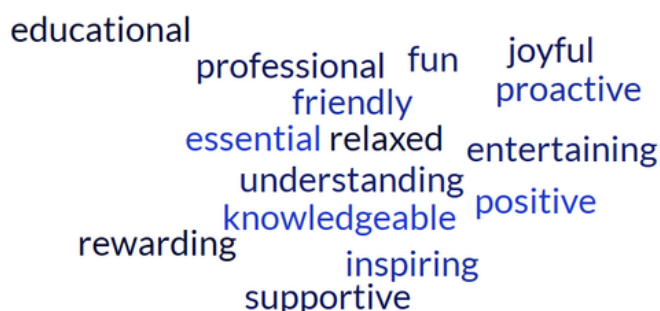
"...they're giving us an ongoing partnership where hopefully we're delivering for them, but they're also being a massive support for us." (Partner)

"The best thing about having this [event] here, is that local people find out that we exist! Because they don't know we're here. I think to the members it just shows them what can be done, and to see some of their neighbours that they don't know. Bar takings will be up because we've got a lot of members coming in tonight who wouldn't normally be here. It brings in people who wouldn't normally use the club. And it brings in a lot more members who wouldn't normally be here on the Friday night and they'll probably stay, which is good for the club." (Partner)

WHAT OUR PARTNERS SAID

WE'RE INSPIRING PARTNERS AND HELPING THEM FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITY

Introducing partners to each other and bringing creative collaborations together in Medway and Swale was commonly referenced as one of our positive impacts on partnerships. It's encouraging that we continue to be seen as an organisation that adds value to the wider cultural eco-system. We're seen as a community connector. Partners also reported developing new connections as a direct result of working with us. For example, 67% (n=4) of partner survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they'd developed new partnerships with organisations who they wouldn't ordinarily work with. Whilst there's limited evidence in terms of helping to drive audiences/customers to partners, 100% (n=6) either strongly agreed or agreed that working with us had helped to build their reputation or profile. We're also inspiring partners, with 83% or n=5 strongly agreeing or agreeing that they've been inspired by our work in some way.



A word cloud of partner feedback. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The most prominent words are 'professional', 'fun', 'joyful', 'friendly', 'proactive', 'essential', 'relaxed', 'entertaining', 'understanding', 'positive', 'rewarding', 'knowledgeable', 'inspiring', and 'supportive'. The words are in various shades of blue and black.

Words used by survey respondents to answer the question 'which three words would you use to describe your experience of working with Ideas Test?'

PARTNERS HAD LIMITED SUGGESTIONS WITH REGARDS TO IMPROVEMENTS

We've reflected on what's worked well and less well with partners, along with key learning for the future on page 77. However, our independent evaluator found very few suggestions for improvement from partners. Aside from aspects to address related to communicating our brand values, programme and impact more readily with partners, there were only three other comments to note:

- One partner suggested that we needed to know more about what they could offer us in return, which potentially indicates we needed to get to know them better.
- Another suggested that they'd have preferred greater involvement in planning, plus a more structured articulation of targets and purpose.
- One partner reflected on how previously we'd 'parachuted' into communities, and that wasn't the right approach. They suggested we'd rectified that this year by truly taking a neighbourhood-led approach.

Overall, findings suggest that the majority of partners were happy working with us. This is also reflected in the adjacent graphic which highlights words that partner survey respondents used to describe their experience with us.

**“THEY DON'T SEEM TO
BE VERY GOOD AT
BLOWING THEIR OWN
TRUMPET.”**

(PARTNER)

IN THEIR WORDS

“I think there’s something about the name... it's maybe just a bit ambiguous.” (Partner)

“Ultimately, what Ideas Test did for us were two things. First and foremost, the connection into the community and people who would be interested. And secondly, and brilliantly, they went over and above what we expected.” (Partner)

“It’s definitely inspired me to put on exhibits. I’m thinking about having certain artworks showing. We’re thinking of doing an annual exhibition.” (Partner)

“I know they worked a lot with the performers who were from that community, which I think was great. And everything, balancing quality with that kind of local involvement can be a challenge. But I think they did a really nice job on that.” (Partner)

“I think having a regular thing as a target, to work towards, perhaps would have been sort of a good, you know, thing to have...two years is a long time, and it's like, where what we actually aiming for at the end of this?” (Partner)

“...initially they were kind of going into those communities and going here we are kind of thing, rather than meeting people on their own terms, really, but I think they kind of remedied it later on.” (Partner)

“I'm not sure if Ideas Test see us as a useful partner, or know what we can offer.” (Partner)

“Connecting - from the start, Tracy and Amy et al have proactively introduced us to further potential partners / collaborators in Medway.” (Partner)

“I don't actually know what other stuff they're working on, particularly. Which means I'm not quite sure what I can say about what they do, because I can only really talk about the projects that I've been involved with.” (Partner)



WORKING WITH CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

WHAT OUR ARTISTS SAID

WE'VE WORKED WITH 77 ARTISTS FROM ACROSS MEDWAY AND SWALE (AND BEYOND!) IN 2025/26

And as we highlighted earlier, the range of creatives we've commissioned this year has been incredibly varied, and this can be attributed to our two new Senior Producers who've drawn on their extensive contacts book, experience, and creativity to bring something new and imaginative to our programme. But it's not all been plain sailing, and we've gained a lot of new knowledge - especially in terms of ensuring greater clarity with artist briefs, contracting and commissioning (we've talked more about this in our process evaluation section on pages 71 - 82).

Demographic data collected about our artists shows that they predominantly identify as White British, Straight, and Male (see page 67). In addition:

- Two-thirds are aged 35 - 49 years old
- 8% identify as D/deaf or disabled
- A quarter identify as neurodivergent.

Capturing robust demographic data from artists continues to be a challenge. For example, a total of 24 artists from the 77 we worked with this year met Arts Council England's criteria for collecting demographic data (i.e. those who worked for 5+ sessions). Of these 24 artists, only 12 completed the whole demographic survey. We believe that our artists are more diverse in age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality than the findings reported here. We've highlighted this limitation on page 84.

GIVING PERMISSION TO EXPERIMENT HAS IMPACTED ARTISTS IN SEVERAL POSITIVE WAYS

Across both survey and interview data, artists shared a range of new skills or knowledge they'd gained as a direct result of working with us. These included: motivating audiences, time management, crowd management, improvisation, knowledge about the local area, production techniques, icebreakers, and idea generation.

It's difficult to robustly evidence if we've embedded socially engaged practice into our artists' approaches. However, from commonly occurring feedback in the qualitative independent data we know that:

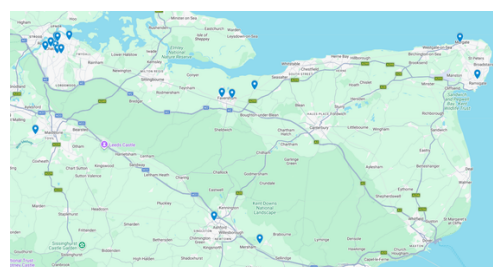
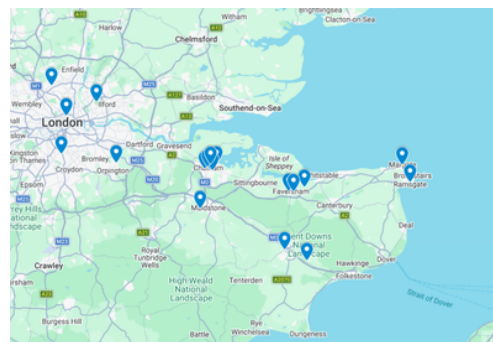
- artists felt predominantly supported by the whole of the Ideas Test team (i.e. not just the producers)
- we've helped them to develop new networks and connections in the community (i.e. with other artists and organisations)
- they've been inspired to continue working with communities in the future, including on co-created projects
- the Ideas Test Christmas party helped to introduce new partners and other cultural practitioners they didn't know before
- giving artists permission to experiment and learn has helped to develop and strengthen their creative practice (especially those who are less experienced in working on larger/longer-term projects)
- artists had fun and enjoyed their experience.

WORKING WITH ARTISTS

One artist also shared how it had helped re-ignite their creative career and ‘got the ball rolling’ with being confident enough to apply for freelance contracts again. Another also suggested how increased confidence was an important outcome for them. This indicates that we’re having a positive impact on the wellbeing of artists too.

As described earlier, three of the participants involved in co-creating the Brompton Halloween Trail were formally paid for their time as creative practitioners due to their career expertise, and this has subsequently led to additional paid opportunities with ourselves and with organisations elsewhere. For these particular artists it’s also helped them feel more rooted to their local community. These examples demonstrate how we’re identifying and investing in local talent through our co-created neighbourhood programmes.

In our independent depth interviews with artists, there were very few suggested areas of improvement. One artist however suggested we needed to improve communication and advance planning prior to contracting in order to make the best use of available time.



Maps showing reach of artists (based on a sample of 22 postcodes provided with 21 able to be successfully mapped)

“I think it has put me on the map with local residents, which is lovely because I moved here almost three years ago, and I knew a few people already, but I think it's really helped me to become more involved.” (Artist)

IN THEIR WORDS

“It’s been a real pleasure working on this project; contributing to something that has enabled such meaningful progress for the participants has been incredibly rewarding.” (Artist)

“It has given me some time to dedicate to my creative practice, without being held in by tight expectations. I’ve got to experiment, take some creative risks.” (Artist)

“It’s been really enjoyable meeting the community where I’ve been working, and getting to know the place in a different way.” (Artist)

“I think Amy is an incredible producer.” (Artist)

“Wayne’s been brilliant to work with, I’ve been really impressed with him.” (Artist)

“Other members of Ideas Test that might normally sit at a computer all day were very hands on, and actually gave a lot of input creatively, and gave ideas. And you know, that just elevated it more, and it’s very supportive. There was a lot of trust.” (Artist)

“I now have a network of local artists and opportunities.” (Artist)

“I learned lots of new things - how to be adaptable in an untraditional performance space, how to work with hanging timings, working with a group of people I’ve never met before and also solo devising and then slotting what I’d made into the overall performance in a few hours. Overall it was a great experience and one I’d recommend to anyone!” (Artist)

“Project managing on this scale was new for me.” (Artist)

“I’ve had fun, met lots of interesting people - both public and in the partner organisation - and made some good work that has helped the partner, too.” (Artist)

“Having nice feedback about something I did is really, really nice.” (Artist)

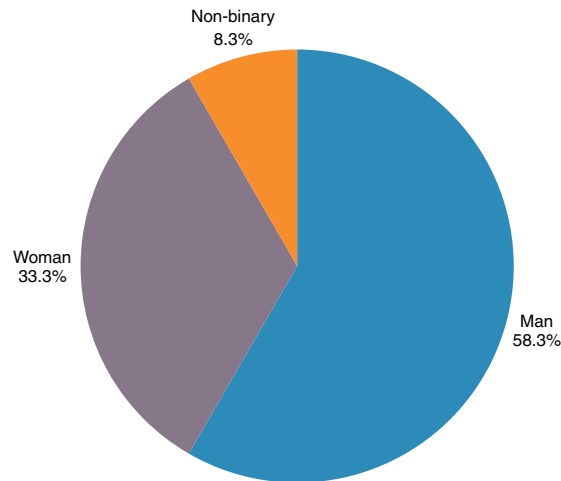
“I got to learn personally more about the place I live so I feel like I had more of a sense of belonging.” (Artist)

“There’s like little seeds of things that could grow into something [with another artist they met on the project].” (Artist)

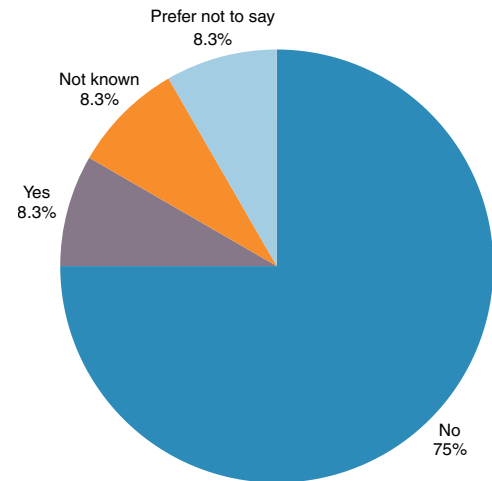
ARTISTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

This data is taken from the in-house workforce survey completed by 12 creative practitioners.*

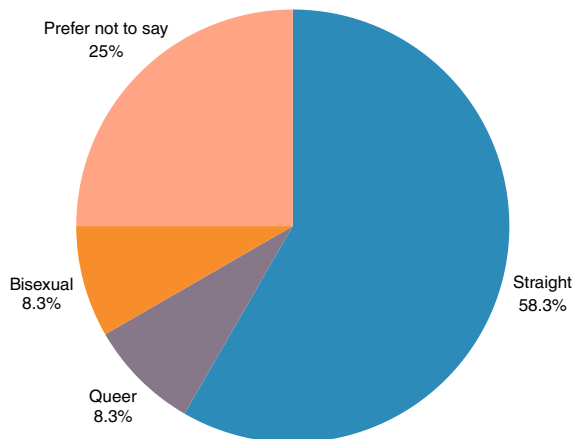
GENDER



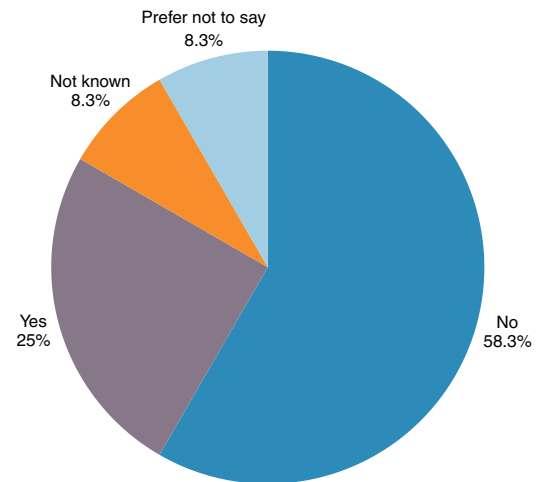
D/DEAF AND DISABILITY



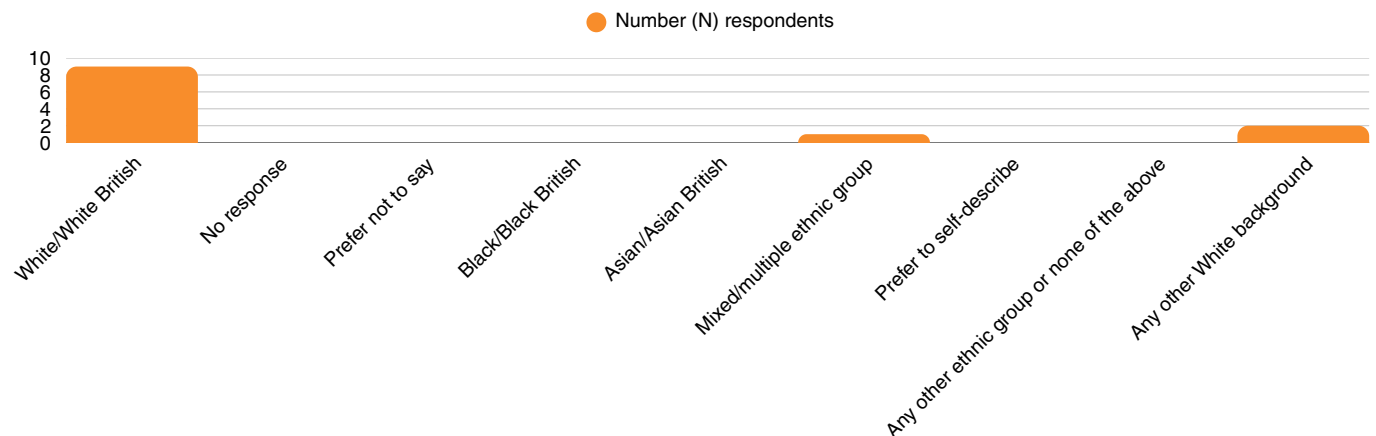
SEXUALITY



NEURODIVERSITY



ETHNICITY



*Data is taken from the in-house workforce survey. It includes 10 artists and 2 specialist staff e.g. facilitators, curators, producers, choreographers etc. Gender: Woman (n=4), Man (n=7), Non-binary (n=1), No response (n=0). D/deaf and disability: No (n=9), Yes (n=1), Prefer not to say (n=1), Not Known (n=1). Sexuality: Straight (n=7), Queer (n=1), Bisexual (n=1), Gay woman/lesbian (n=0), Prefer not to say (n=3). Neurodiversity: No (n=7), Yes (n=3), Not Known (n=1), Prefer not to say (n=1). Ethnicity: White: British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish: (n=9), White: Any other White background (n=2), Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds (n=1). Age (not represented in a chart): 20-34 (n=3), 35-49 (n=8), 50-64 (n=1).

IN THEIR WORDS

“Thank you for entrusting me with the character of [names character]. I took a 20-year detour from acting and there is a history of gypsies and wise women in my family and this was the perfect character to get me back on track. Congratulations for beautiful writing, attracting an exceptional group of creatives and leading with lots of love.” (Artist)

“They hadn't done any planning or put foundations in place for things they wanted to do, which wasted a lot of the limited time we had.” (Artist)

“It was an utter privilege to work with Ideas Test on the ghosts of Brompton and immersive community led spooky theatre piece that turned a small corner of Kent into a haunted adventure trail for all the family...the team that put it together were amazing it's no small feat to pull that kind of thing off, phenomenal work from Ideas Test, the volunteers, the local businesses and fantastic team of actors and bunch of sold out audiences who threw themselves into the spooky fun.” (Artist)

“I think it's more like not necessarily learning brand new skills, but like a levelling up.” (Artist)

“It's helped prove I'm still capable, even now I'm 45 so for my mental health and my well being has been fantastic, and it's opened doors now I went to the Ideas Test Christmas party, and I've met other professionals that work in theatre locally. So that's opened up new doors for me, you know, I'm now in touch with them, and we're planning to meet for coffees and things, you know. So it's started a ball rolling.” (Artist)

“[Skills gained]. A thinking-out-of-the-box mentality to imagine and create new ideas.” (Artist)

“I don't think I've written or directed something that's been so site specific, where the story is to do with the area. It's quite a large scale production for me I think.” (Artist)

“I feel I learned how to handle situations better when students did not show interest or enthusiasm to partake in the activities made available to them, I feel I have gained more experience and learned how to engage students better in these situations.” (Artist)

“AS A LOCAL ARTIST, IT’S SO IMPORTANT AND BRILLIANT THAT I GOT TO DO THIS. I WAS SORT OF A MELDING OF MY CAREER AND WHERE I LIVE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. IT’S ABOUT POSITIVITY, ACKNOWLEDGING ARTISTS, BRINGING A COMMUNITY TOGETHER, AND THIS SENSE OF JOY AND FUN - AMAZING!”

(ARTIST)

LESSONS LEARNT

WHAT'S WORKED WELL?

Through the lens of our CPP three core questions (see page 5) we regularly reflect on our progress as a team. As an experimental action research project, we consider what's worked well and where we've been most effective in facilitating public engagement on a quarterly, mid and end-of-year formal basis. Here's a summary of those conversations.



We've embedded evaluation into the programme more successfully this year, with everyone taking ownership. Each project evaluation is informed by our overarching evaluation framework and has an individual in-house report written up. This learning is then fed back into our planning cycle. We're developing a culture of evidence and learning which informs what we do next. There's still work to do but we're starting to build a much more proactive, reliable and robust approach.



Our two new Senior Producers are bringing enthusiasm, creativity and experimentation to the programme, including finding and commissioning a variety of high-quality artists from the local area and beyond. This has also given emerging artists on our patch something to aspire to. We've felt like the programme has been coherent, inventive, fun and challenging this year.



Although we need to do more thinking about the legacy of events and activities, we've seen success in projects which are continuing to run independently with some hand-holding e.g. supporting funding applications with our Brompton Halloween co-creators group and opening channels of communication with the council for HEARD litter pickers.



We've doubled down on our audience development approach of depth rather than breadth. By listening to what people want and need, we've worked intensively in Brompton and Luton communities and increased the amount of genuine co-creation this year. Although there's been challenges (see below), we've changed our view on what success looks like for our neighbourhoods work and feel more confident in articulating this.



Being part of the Creative Health Medway two-year programme has been a brilliant way of working towards a common goal to reduce local health inequities and inequalities. It's introduced us to new partners and colleagues across Medway who we'll be able to work with in the future.



We're seeing a tangible difference to pride in place which helps boost our morale and those of our co-creators and audiences. For example the public reports of positive changes that have been noticed about local spaces (such as the streets looking visibly cleaner following HEARD litter picks).



Working on a project involving waste collection was always going to be a hot topic. Whilst there were challenging elements (which we highlight below), delivering a creative experiment like HEARD generated incredible national media and local PR, raising awareness of our work in the local area. As outlined earlier, it also helped to develop new and strengthened relationships with local councillors, council colleagues, primary school teachers and other organisations such as Norse Group (the council's waste and infrastructure partner). We feel that this project was a really great example of collaboration, civic engagement and teamwork.



We've introduced accessible artforms to audiences. For example, beatboxer Rupert Oldridge reported that teachers found that beatboxing was a really accessible way to involve their children in a musical activity; with no need to buy expensive instruments. Similarly, using Halloween in Brompton as a 'hook' along with an interactive, performance-based trail successfully attracted a variety of demographics*.



As our partners reported above, we're starting to get a reputation for the work we're doing in our target postal sectors. Working door-to-door and getting to know individuals and shop owners on the streets where we've been delivering activity has been key to raising awareness of who we are (as individuals) and what we do (as an organisation).



Our new Operations Manager has revolutionised the way we work and the systems we're using (for example using Adobe for streamlining contracts). Financial planning has been strengthened and our Senior Producers now hold regular meetings with the Operations Manager to ensure their budgeting is on track. Our work around UK GDPR and our privacy policy has also been refined.



We've continued to strengthen our relationships with partners and assets in Sheppey, such as IslandWorks, the Pilot's Rest and the Criterion Blue Town. This puts us in a good position for delivering our business plan for Phase 5. Delivering Stacy Makishi and our Friends of Intertidal Allotments activities has also helped to maintain our profile working on the island, including with LGBTQ+ communities.



Partnership working more generally has moved from passive to strategic delivery. As a result, we've started being invited to local and national events to share our experience, models of engagement, evaluation, and knowledge with co-creation. For example, we were invited to be a case study for the UKSPF and took part in an online webinar with cultural sector colleagues to share our use of the Wheel of Failure**.



Our Board and Consortium Away Day held at IslandWorks and the Criterion Blue Town was a positive way to bring everyone together, and we're hoping to repeat this in 2026/27.

*See Brompton Halloween Trail in-house Round Up report on request.

**FailSPACE [Wheel of Failure tool](https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/wheel-of-failure/) (<https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/wheel-of-failure/>).



Our work is opening up conversations that wouldn't ordinarily happen elsewhere. For example our Senior Producers report that local residents have developed a sense of trust in us, and often share concerns about their health and wellbeing or local area e.g. anti-social behaviour, that they wouldn't want to tell the council. At times it's felt like we're acting as a conduit or intermediary between the council and community. This is something that we're thinking of more strategically exploring in the future.



We've witnessed artists building connections with community members before. But the strong bond and relationship that Rupert Oldridge formed with the HEARD litter pickers felt quite different and took us by surprise. We believe that this shows what can be achieved when you commission the right artist for socially engaged community work.



As we noted earlier, people are returning to our events and activities which are now a 'diary fixture' like the Luton Lights finale. We're starting to see the benefit of continuing to return to the same place - for example the Luton Lights window artworks last year inspired others to find out how to get involved this year. It feels like our audience development work is finally having a snowball effect.



Bringing joy shouldn't be underestimated. We've learnt that injecting something fun into an otherwise mundane activity is an underrated tool in community work. Consistency has also worked well - showing up in the same place at the same time builds trust that can't be gained through delivering a one-off single event.



As shown earlier, Instagram growth has increased (engagement and followers) and our community is sharing social media posts. We've also developed our website and e-news systems with new segmentation on Mailchimp which enables us to better target our communications.



Bringing in freelance videography expertise and budgeting for content generation at key events has also helped us tell our story better and enhanced our promotional communication through use of video assets.



We've enhanced our internal processes with marcomms this year e.g. the senior producers have been more involved in promotion and the product cycle. We've changed the language we use to make sure people feel more included and understand what it is we're trying to involve them in. Whilst there's more to do in terms of sharing our achievements, we've started putting a greater focus on celebrating and communicating impact externally.



We've balanced the programme to target and attract different types of Audience Spectrum segments including those least likely to engage with culture. We've offered different levels of engagement - for example a two minute experience with a beatboxer versus a three hour workshop.



We've recruited our co-created evaluation group (our 'community researchers') for Phase 5. It's early days, but this group will help us explore and test new ways to collect stories of impact from our audiences and participants. It's a new, socially engaged strand of our evaluation programme*, and we're excited to see how it develops.



Bringing our freelancers, artists, partners, Board and Consortium together at a Christmas social again this year was a great way to not only thank people for their time and involvement, but - as we've highlighted earlier - helped people to forge new connections and contacts.



Our Make Waves legacy event 'The Ripple Effect' brought young people and partners back together to celebrate their achievements since the programme and to highlight its impact. This worked really well as a final wrap-up event. We were also invited to give a presentation about Make Waves at a business skills event in Maidstone. This positively helped share the legacy of the programme which ran from 2021/22 to 2024/25.



Ultimately the unique hybrid of taking a community asset-based approach in combination with community building has proved really successful: it feels like we've found the right balance and direction. Our hyper local approach has really honoured and valued the people we've worked with and their neighbourhoods.



We own our mistakes and learn from what doesn't work as much as what does. This has resulted in a positive broader outcome locally: we're going to host a new 'failure cafe' every quarter with partners. As a CPP action learning programme, we feel that we're in a unique position where we have permission to experiment and learn from what works well/less well.



Our team has been significantly enhanced this year in terms of skillset. Our Director recognised what was needed in order to grow the company i.e investing in senior producers rather than one-off freelancers. This has ultimately led to some brilliant results in 2025/26.



Proactive members of our Board and Consortium have helped to connect us with local partners and opportunities.



We've built in more time to generate insight from the Impact & Insight toolkit. Although this is a mandated tool by Arts Council England, we use this as our main surveying platform and have more readily integrated the findings into our in-house project evaluation reports (and this summary) in 2025/26. The toolkit has given us another way to measure and report on quality, as well as other outcomes including placemaking, wellbeing and enjoyment.



WILLS'S
GOLD PINE
CIGARETTES
SOLD HERE

CENTENARY FIELDS
Fit
Fields in Town

MARINE
DISAST

Image credit: Marge Ainsley (taken at Board and Consortium Away Day pictured here on a tour of the Criterion Blue Town).

CHALLENGES

Specific practical reflections per project can be found in our in-house Round Up reports, however we've collated our overall learning below. We've summarised our findings from 2025/26 across four areas: communication, partnerships, programming and operational elements, and monitoring and evaluation.



Communication

Summarised from our reflections on:

- Internal and external communication
- Reputation and PR
- Audience development

Challenge	Learning highlight	Failing forward (how we'll tackle this)
Keeping up-to-date with the latest tools and audience development techniques takes time	Ongoing training for the team is an ongoing need. Audience development is part of everyone's role	Continue budgeting for audience development training and attendance at relevant sector or CPP events to stay up-to-date
Being appropriately credited for our work on partner communication materials (e.g. logo/copy)	Despite providing boilerplate copy it's difficult to control this	Hold early discussions about marcomms and continue to provide boilerplate copy to partners. Schedule email reminder immediately after events to add credits e.g. prior to any partner social media celebratory posts or reports
Capacity to achieve deadlines	Scheduling marcomms activity is a challenge when delivery turnaround times are tight	Review who does what for marketing and audience development tasks, as the current approach is not sustainable
There's still work to do in terms of improving our brand recognition	Rolling out the brand needs further time and attention	We're going to work with a specialist brand agency to help us improve brand awareness in 2026/27



Partnerships

This relates to our reflections on:

- How we manage our partnerships
- Who we partner with

Challenge	Learning highlight	Failing forward (how we'll tackle this)
<p>It's sometimes difficult to manage the expectations of our partners and it's easy for us to be overlooked</p>	<p>Trust is crucial. We need to challenge more and make sure we're pairing the right partners with the right projects</p>	<p>Build a strategic dialogue with partners from the outset and be clear on both sets of expectations. Be more vocal when things are not OK. Better articulate our value</p>
<p>Although we've had some success with being invited to share our learning (as described above in 'what's worked well'), we weren't invited to key local events where we feel we could have brought something useful to the table</p>	<p>There's still work to do in terms of raising awareness of our role and potential usefulness/impact locally</p>	<p>Undertake stakeholder mapping exercise and develop and implement PR plan locally. Share reports more readily with Creative Health project partners/commissioners and local practitioners. Share LinkedIn posts more readily and communicate our learning to cultural peers. Offer to speak at conferences and shout more loudly about what we do both locally and nationally</p>
<p>It's sometimes been difficult to activate partners - for example in connecting us with others/opportunities in Medway and Swale</p>	<p>Infrastructure matters. Working <i>with</i> partners rather than <i>around</i> them means the things you create last longer and reach further</p>	<p>Continue working towards a strategic rather than passive relationship with partners</p>



Programming and operational elements

Summarised from our reflections on:

- Financial reporting and planning
- Strategic planning and programming
- Working with artists
- How we practically deliver activities
- How we manage our workload

Challenge	Learning highlight	Failing forward (how we'll tackle this)
<p>We've felt that our expected deliverables for artist commissions have been clear, but some artists have not been quite on the same page. Some artists have had different expectations</p>	<p>We need to improve how we articulate what we want and ensure this is in artist contracts prior to recruitment. It can be difficult to be clear when working in socially engaged ways. Being clear in our own minds about a project or its expectations prior to artist contracting is crucial to the success of a project</p>	<p>Ensure aims and expectations are clear before artist contracting (e.g. be as prescriptive as possible within the boundaries of socially engaged practice). Review other elements of contractual agreement with artists e.g. access riders, expected professional standards, ownership of work after projects (subsequent usage, IP etc)</p>
<p>Commissioning the right artists for the job - we've not always got this right</p>	<p>As highlighted earlier, we've learnt how getting the right artist can make a huge difference to the community they're working in. Artists need to have high level social skills and be personable when working on socially engaged projects</p>	<p>Draw up core list of interpersonable skills and ensure these are highlighted and tested at interview stage. Ask more questions - have a two way dialogue with artists about where they feel their strengths and weaknesses are before recruitment, to ensure we find a good match</p>
<p>Limited budgets for delivery</p>	<p>There's always more we want to do. We're showing what can be done on restricted budgets and taking a targeted approach (rather than spreading ourselves too thinly). We should be proud of that approach</p>	<p>Continue working with Operations Manager in 2026/27 to ensure budget allocations match the ambition for delivery</p>

<p>The impact of climate change (particularly pertinent this year at Luton Lights Finale, where the weather led to bottle necks in the space and it was difficult to install the outside tent)</p>	<p>Extreme weather (either torrential rain or heat) continues to have a potential impact on our events (and public engagement numbers). There's a risk to outdoor work. Supplier costs are also higher. We learnt what health and safety requirements are for future wet weather events at Invicta Social Club e.g. lawn area mud</p>	<p>Continue to track the impact of climate change on outdoor arts. Work with others in the CPP network to raise issues and find creative mitigations. Continue to have back up plans wherever possible - recognise that these may carry higher costs. Increase contingency budgets. Increase budgets overall to reflect increased supplier costs. Ensure any future events taking place at Invicta Social Club draw on the wet weather learning from this year</p>
<p>Managing the potential negative impact of bringing artists in from outside the area</p>	<p>We need to inspire local artists and avoid dampening their spirits / generating imposter syndrome or negative feelings</p>	<p>Think and discuss as a team. Be mindful of striking the right balance between bringing artists in from outside the area. Ask local artists who've been involved this year about what they think - hold an open dialogue to understand how they feel</p>
<p>Engaging audiences has worked well via 1-1 engagement methods e.g. door to door but this is not the best use of producer time</p>	<p>Successful engagement in communities relies on visibility. There's a pressure on producers to incorporate this into their work load</p>	<p>Review role of producers and engagement element of job description. Consider ringfencing a portion of budget to recruit local people (that we've already engaged) to be footsoldiers or find alternative solutions</p>
<p>Co-creators suggesting budget spend</p>	<p>Co-creators can be fearful of spending budgets at the level we allocate for their projects</p>	<p>Continue to support co-creators with understanding how to budget and how much things cost to reassure them</p>
<p>Delivering activities which start and finish in the winter</p>	<p>Winter isn't the best time to run outdoor activities but sometimes this can't be helped e.g. due to funding requirements for delivery</p>	<p>It's impractical to avoid winter events, however where there are gaps in neighbourhood delivery, consider running something in the summer to maintain connection with community</p>

<p>Keeping momentum going with co-created projects</p>	<p>Gaps between meetings can reduce enthusiasm. Consistency is key</p>	<p>Always add something into projects so there's a visible presence inbetween meetings (e.g. HEARD talking bins provided a connection with the project inbetween litter picks)</p>
<p>Board and Consortium member attendance at events or activities has been little to none</p>	<p>There are some potentially unidentified barriers in Board and Consortium members attending our activities and events</p>	<p>Raise at forthcoming Board meeting to find out what the barriers are so that we can address these. Forthcoming events to be added as standing item on each meeting agenda. Consider having a champion on the Board for different work package areas</p>
<p>Tackling controversial topics which have a link to strong community opinions and perceptions about the council</p>	<p>It's difficult to change people's mindsets on topics closely linked to things they pay for e.g. council tax on waste collection; communities do not always value the role of the arts in helping to drive change</p>	<p>Don't shy away from tackling difficult topics if that's what communities need and want (we've had some good results this year). Ensure crisis PR plans are in place to deal with any negative social media or community reactions</p>
<p>Reaching transient members of the community and those with English as a Second Language is challenging</p>	<p>People in temporary housing move around. They're often not connected to local networks or community groups. Being visible leads to incidental engagement of these groups. Children's voices can be powerful. Blanket communication will not reach these groups.</p>	<p>Longer term thinking is required to increase accessibility and inclusion for these audiences. We made creative and physical presence on the street our primary communication strategy this year — rather than leaflets or social media — and that helped. But it's an ongoing challenge for any project working in a multilingual, multicultural area.</p>

Agreeing project legacies in advance

Trust that this will happen. We want residents to take ownership and they will more often than not step up. We need to have these conversations with them early to find out what they want to happen afterwards

Hold open conversations with co-created community members earlier so that there can be a 'good exit' for everyone - rather than simply finishing. Allocate legacy funding within project delivery budgets where relevant

Attendance management of ticketed events - ticket no shows

Our experience reflects a wider trend currently being felt across the sector. Discussions with other CPP programmes has highlighted that a no-show rate of at least 30% is now a standard industry pattern

By recognising this broader pattern, we're better equipped to refine our own delivery models. We're currently implementing strategies to account for this, such as adjusting capacity to 'overbook' where safe, utilising waiting lists, and testing more intensive communication methods closer to event dates to ensure all available spaces are successfully utilised.



Monitoring and Evaluation

This relates to our reflections on:

- The way we collect data and any mandatory requirements from funders
- How we plan and deliver evaluation

Challenge	Learning	Failing forward (how we'll tackle this)
<p>It continues to be a challenge to collect demographic data from communities (some of whom elect to prefer not to say)</p>	<p>We've continued to take a care-centred approach when collecting quantitative data from audiences and participants - a survey is not always the most appropriate method to use</p>	<p>Continue to ensure that respondents understand the context statements prior to asking for demographic information. Give the Senior Producers permission to use alternative tools if surveys are not appropriate for the abilities or needs of audiences. Low survey sample sizes should be justified by taking a care-focused approach to monitoring and evaluation. Continue to collect postcodes through similar channels as this provides a wealth of data</p>
<p>Working with funding partners who have different data collection requirements than our own/ACE's. Requests for evaluation questions coming too late for baselines as projects had already started e.g. Creative Health</p>	<p>It's not easy to collect demographic data for multiple funders/partners as they do not always have the same question and response choices</p>	<p>Continue to align data requirements wherever possible, but convey to partners that we are mandated to collect data for ACE in a particular way (and ensure this is clear in partnership agreements at the beginning)</p>
<p>Reliance on reporting via written impact reports and collecting data in more traditional ways e.g. depth interviews</p>	<p>Consider how to collect data and share it in more creative ways</p>	<p>Work with co-created community researchers group (as outlined above) to enable new approaches to data collection and sharing which can run alongside the traditional methodology. Budget has already been allocated for this</p>

THE SMALL PRINT

ABOUT OUR EVIDENCE SOURCES

Over this year we've used a mixed methodology in collaboration with our external evaluator to robustly measure the impact of our work through in-house and independent primary research. Specific sources have been drawn upon to collectively generate the insight presented in this report. This includes:

- In-house project evaluation reports and learning/FailSpace de-brief notes (Gather & Groove, Brompton Halloween Trail, HEARD and Luton Light Nights)
- Completed project proformas (on project commencement) by the senior producers
- Weekly team meeting minutes
- Quarterly in-house activity monitoring spreadsheet (also inputted as activity data into Illuminate)
- Monitoring data recorded by Senior Producers
- 148 audience and participant surveys (collected via the Impact & Insight survey platform where we host our core surveys for both audiences and co-creators and manually uploaded to Illuminate.) Sample sizes vary per question (due to the type of question included e.g. mandatory or core, skips, or prefer not to say responses).
- General quote bank within the monitoring spreadsheet which includes a range of qualitative data captured both formally and anecdotally in-house and through vox pops conducted by our external evaluator
- Ticket Tailor Booker data including 342 marketing source question responses
- Postcode data (collected from a sample of 827 audiences and participants via ticketing platform and survey/point of entry monitoring, with 801 successfully mapped against the IMD and used for The Audience Agency's profiling)
- Social media and website analytics 'headlines' and quarterly reports provided by the Marketing Manager
- Artist workforce monitoring data x 24 (this includes x12 complete responses used for demographic profiling with the remainder partial responses)
- Impact & Insight Toolkit Insight Reports x 4 (Luton Lights, Gather & Groove, Stacy Makishi, Brompton Halloween Trail)
- Vox pops with audiences at Luton Lights finale by our external evaluator x 20
- Vox pops with audiences at Gather & Groove (September) by our external evaluator x 8
- Group interview with x 4 HEARD co-creators by our external evaluator
- Group interview with x 8 Brompton Halloween Trail co-creators by our external evaluator
- Depth telephone interviews with x 2 Brompton Halloween Trail co-creators by our external evaluator
- Depth interview with DisQuiet participants x 11 by our external evaluator
- Depth telephone interview with x 1 Intertidal Allotment participant
- Partner and artist interviews x 8 by our external evaluator
- Emailed feedback x 3 from artists
- Emailed feedback (various) collated by senior producers from interactions with artists, audiences and participants
- Social media comments on our posts as well as partners e.g. Medway Council
- Media coverage/other creative materials e.g. HEARD booklet, graphic scribe (Make Waves 'The Ripple Effect'/HEARD)
- Quarterly reflection meetings and subsequent notes with the team, facilitated by the external evaluator
- Quarterly Director's Report to the Board
- Year end process evaluation review facilitated by our external evaluator.

DIMENSIONS EXPLANATION

Experimenting: I felt comfortable trying new things

Intensity: I felt deeply involved in the process

Motivation: I felt motivated to do more creative things in the future

Pride in Place: It made me feel proud of my local area

Belonging: It helped me feel part of the community

Personal Contribution: My contribution made a difference

Mental Wellbeing: It had a positive impact on my mental wellbeing

Enjoyment: I had a good time

Voice: I felt my ideas were taken seriously

Intention: I felt able to shape the intention of the project

Relevance: It had something to say about modern society

Rigour: It was well thought through and put together

Distinctiveness: It was different from things I've experienced before

Enthusiasm: I would come to something like this again

Local Impact: It's important that it's happening here

Cultural Contribution: It provides an important addition to the cultural life of the area

LIMITATIONS

- There are duplicate postcodes in the postcode sample. This could indicate that the same person has come back more than once, that they are from the same family group, or, given that there's 15 properties on average within the same postcode (according to Royal Mail), they could be different audience members. The latter is possible given the neighbourhood hyper-local work. These have therefore been left in the sample rather than de-duped and excluded.
- It continues to be a challenge to collect demographic data through the mandatory questions required by Arts Council England and this is reflected in our sample size. We continued to receive refusals as seen in previous years, where respondents skipped questions or elected to 'prefer not to say'. We also have to balance collecting data for our own evaluation purposes versus mandatory monitoring. We take a care-focused approach to our evaluation and the survey is not always an appropriate methodology to use. Therefore the demographic data shown in this report is likely to be an incomplete picture.
- This is similarly a challenge for capturing data from artists. For example, a total of 24 artists from the 77 we worked with in 2025/6 met Arts Council England's criteria for collecting demographic data (i.e. those who worked for 5+ sessions). Of these 24 artists, only 12 completed the whole demographic survey. We believe that our artists are more diverse in age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality than the findings reported earlier.
- Data collected in relation to HEARD and participant steps/calorie count was estimated via the Senior Producer's own smartwatch.
- As always, there is a potential bias to the data collected by in-house staff rather than by the external evaluator.
- Caution must be drawn when using percentages as often the number (n) behind these percentages is small and therefore should only be used as an indication rather than robust finding. The numbers behind percentages have been included for transparency when used in the above findings. Note that total number of completions per question in one survey vary, depending on if questions were skipped. Totals that do not add up to 100 is likely due to rounding than error.

Dimension*	Brompton Halloween co-created group (post trail)	HEARD co-created group
Sample (N)	5	4
Voice	93	86
Enjoyment	99	86
Intention	95	98
Personal contribution	94	84
Intensity	93	68
Pride in Place	93	85
Belonging	92	84
Motivation	91	61
Experimenting	90	80
Mental wellbeing	90	81

Dimension	Brompton Halloween audiences	Gather & Groove (May)	Gather & Groove (Sept)	Luton Lights Finale	Stacy Makishi workshop	Writer in Residence (14 Sept workshop)	Sticks and Stones
Sample (N)	14	6	5	11	3	4	15
Rigour	99	76	88	86	100	88	78
Enjoyment	99	92	96	95	99	95	89
Cultural Contribution	99	90	87	93	100	76	82
Enthusiasm	98	88	93	94	100	97	85
Belonging	98	88	71	93	100	80	84
Pride in Place	97	88	82	92	100	65	87
Mental Wellbeing	95	80	85	89	99	70	76
Local Impact	95	100	75	96	100	90	86
Distinctiveness	93	93	63	77	99	90	67
Relevance	14	73	60	70	98	4	57

*See Dimenstions Explainer for dimensions on page 84. Figures show average calculation supplied by the Insight & Impact toolkit, based on overall sample (where 100 is strongly agree and 0 strongly disagree). Note that sample N is given as the overall survey responses (N varies per dimension in some instances, data available on request). Caution to be drawn due to sample size.



WARNING
Anti-climb
paint
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Image credit: Tyler Austin