



IMPACTFUL INSIGHTS

**A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH
TO AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT**

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CREATIVE SCENE: MAKING ART A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Creative Scene is part of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places initiative. This initiative has seen significant investment into key areas of England where involvement in the arts is significantly below the national average.

Creative Scene was established in 2014 in the North Kirklees area located within West Yorkshire. The place is a non-metropolitan suburban area located between Leeds and Manchester and includes the towns of Batley, Dewsbury, Birstall, Cleckheaton, Heckmondwike, Liversedge and Mirfield.

Since 2014 we have welcomed over 300,000 to 141 cultural events. This is a huge achievement in an area identified within the bottom 33% of places where involvement in the arts is significantly below the national average.¹

The success of our activity is down to a variety of reasons – but one core contributing factor has been a curiosity to understand in-depth the people and place of the small towns that make up our area.

This cycle of development is consistently informed by thorough data collection, analysis and reflection on what the insights tell us about our audiences and their cultural experiences of our work.

1. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT – OUR JOURNEY

At the start of our project in 2014, our approach was focused on putting audiences at the centre of the programme for North Kirklees (Dewsbury, Mirfield, Batley, Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike).

We had a statistical understanding of the North Kirklees baseline population. Active Lives information highlighted that people in the area were 'lesser-engaged' in the arts than other areas across England. This was further endorsed by data such as the Kirklees Council Resident's Survey 'Your Place Your Say' (December 2011) which showed that 52% of people in North Kirklees did not attend a single arts event in the previous year compared with 36% in South Kirklees.

From this starting point, our work has been about a slow sustainable build, developing meaningful relationships and trust, growing something, rather than delivering discrete pieces of work and then moving on.

¹ Active Lives Survey November 2015 to May 2017

The last five years have been a key test bed for a variety of activities – direct events, delivery of happenings never seen before, finding new spaces and places to present and perform, opening up opportunities for people to get engaged.

As a result, this case study will:

- Share insights about the value of using data to better understand and engage audiences;
- Outline the challenges of capturing a comprehensive data picture in an area with limited cultural infrastructure and a lesser engaged population;
- Highlight the importance of using a broad data set in order to inform and create evidence-based insights and cultural activity that reflects the diverse communities in a non-metropolitan area.

2. NATIONAL TO LOCAL

We are aware of the importance of data and the role it plays in creating evidence and insight to inform programming, commissioning, and new initiatives such as supporting local artists.

From the start of the project, we have recognised the value of both quantitative and qualitative insights. The measure of our impact is drawn from a variety of data sources.

Being one of the Creative People and Places (CPP) projects nationally means we have a responsibility to collect and share anonymised data to feed into and inform a national picture of impact. This is part of Arts Council England's assessment of the effect that significant and sustained investment can have on changing levels of engagement in the arts – in an area where previously there had been no real cultural provision.

Arts Council England have approached the CPP investment as an action research project with the ultimate aim to understand three core questions. As a result of their investment in direct activity in lesser-engaged areas:

- Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
- To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
- Which approaches were successful and what lessons were learned?

We collect the data required to evaluate these questions via surveys at events and generate a sample of responses across events every year. With many of our events being free and/or not ticketed surveying is often the only option to capture on-going insights. The survey data captures some essential

information required by Arts Council England, such as demographic information and postcodes.

The postcode data tells us which areas we draw our audience from and is also mapped against Audience Spectrum² (an arts-specific segmentation model used in England) to better understand penetration of particular audience types. We also supplement surveys with any additional questions we want to gain insight on e.g. how people travel to events, whether they have attended any Creative Scene events in the past.

This data is then collated into quarterly reports and supplemented with a narrative interpretation and overview.

Alongside this, we also have used the data to understand which Audience Spectrum segments we are penetrating year on year. Where there might be fluctuations and changes in the type of people we are attracting and engaging we can clearly see stories and reasons emerging about why those audience groups increase or decrease in their attendance and participation year-on-year.

3. CAPTURING STORIES

Other methods of creating insight have been focused on capturing the broader stories and narratives of the people attending or participating in our activity. This enables us to generate a deeper understanding of impact beyond numbers and anonymous statistics.

The ethnographic approach involves a researcher / storyteller embedding themselves within specific settings of Creative Scene for a prolonged period of time. This has enabled the development of a rich understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the environment Creative Scene operates in. By listening to stories, observing interactions and collecting materials (photographs, texts, literature, statistics) it has created a vibrant data set rich in qualitative insights.

The critical aspect of having all of this data has been the importance of ensuring that the diversity of these data sources are not reviewed in isolation from the wider 'jigsaw' of understanding. In isolation, they only tell the story from one perspective about how Creative Scene is impacting in an area of lesser engagement.

Our ethnographic approach has involved:

1. Team observations
2. An ethnographic evaluation
3. Making A Scene
4. SceneMakers to Arts Adventurers

² Visit www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum/profiles to explore the segmentation profiles

5. Focus Groups

1. Team observations

At the start of the project it was about Creative Scene empathising with the people living in the area - getting to know them through observation, conversation and anecdotal feedback. It involved recruiting a team who were good communicators and were confident; who could get out and about into cafes, pubs, and community centres.

The team connected with local events and festivals and cultivated an open door for people interested in changing and developing the cultural scene to come and share their ideas and ambitions.

2. An ethnographic evaluation

Early on in the set up of Creative Scene, we partnered with the University of Huddersfield to conduct an ethnographic evaluation³. Published in May 2016 it captured insights and learnings from 2014-2016.

This early insight highlighted some key aspects for our future direction. It noted that we needed to:

- think beyond the impact of Creative Scene and Creative People and Places as being just about attendance and participation;
- think more broadly about the complexities of developing a cultural ecology that links towards emerging thinking on cultural value;
- take into account non-monetary impact and value of development of patterns and relationships within different community settings, how career development, ideas transfer, money flows and how a cultural programme can connect and flow between funded, commercial and homemade subsectors.

Initial evaluation findings also noted:

- ✓ Creative Scene events had become a source of pride for residents in their community, increasing their sense of connection to place and people
- ✓ The programme is highly accessible and attractive to large audiences as well as dedicated target audiences, often combining multiple art forms in a single event
- ✓ Volunteers had been involved in over 60 events resulting in 340 hours of volunteering
- ✓ The engagement process was equally important and valued as the creative outcome/ event.
- ✓ It identified Creative Scene as a change-maker and catalyst in the area.

³ Conducted by Dr Steve Swindells, University of Huddersfield

3. Making a Scene: www.makingascene.net

We also commissioned a 'storyteller' to capture and publish a publicly accessible online story and image blog about the background, thoughts and feelings of local people engaging with Creative Scene.

One story captured the observed response of an audience member after attending our commissioned play about the female Batley Bulldogs local rugby league team, *The Ruck*. The play was based on the lives of the real-life experiences of young women players and touched on issues such as isolation, eating disorders, fitting in, family and sexuality. It was written by Kevin Fegan following a year-long residency at the rugby club.

"I've never been to a theatre before," says one of the Batley Girls to one of the mums, as they head through the foyer. "I wasn't expecting it to be half as good as this."

"Me neither." - Staff and volunteer observations and discussions with audiences and participants.

4. SceneMakers to Arts Adventurers

From the start of the project, we recruited SceneMakers – a group of local people interested in being Ambassadors and championing the work of Creative Scene.

This has now evolved into a more formal paid role of Arts Adventurer whereby we employ local people to help promote events, collect evaluation and generally connect indirectly within the communities where they live and work and feedback ideas and thoughts on cultural programming and activity.

5. Focus groups

We commissioned a series of four focus groups, run by an independent researcher, in order to better understand the lesser engaged groups that we have identified need more in-depth relationship building.

The groups included:

- ✓ Families (from Healey – an area where we programme family shows)
- ✓ Hey Days - older population 65+
- ✓ 16-24 year olds (which we refined towards speaking with people in this age group who are creatively engaged or interested)
- ✓ Asian women with children aged 3-8 (attendees were primarily from the Muslim community)

The insights from these focus groups have started to:

- ✓ inform 2019 programming, communications and marketing;
- ✓ inform community engagement activity which might encourage people in these groups to attend/ participate in Creative Scene events;

- ✓ supplement and enhance the connections between our artistic programming and our target audiences.

To share a more detailed example of the type of insights we collected from these focus groups the following details some of the findings from our families focus group which took place in Healey.

Healey is a deprived area of North Kirklees with a population of approximately 3,000 living in predominately social housing across a variety of estates.

Through the interviews we found, other than looking after their family and home, the women appeared to have no hobbies outside of the home. In terms of access to arts and culture, most of the women had no childhood experience of going to shows, galleries or museums. Many of them perceived arts and culture to be boring and not for them. As a result, families feel stuck in their community and prefer treats that are cheap and local, such as fast-food chains.

Those interviewed were also negative about their local area; they saw the area as an unsafe place to raise their children and with nothing to offer: there is no local library, no facilities and the local park is seen as unsafe.

In addition to this, many in the group believed their children wouldn't enjoy the arts or be able to concentrate for long periods of time. Stemming out of this, many of the participants had concerns around bad behaviour and attracting the disapproval of others. The women also had a preconceived impression of other attendees of arts events 'looking down on them', which was an additional deterrent.

There are changes that we have made in our communications as a result of this; refining the copywriting to have an emphasis on how relaxed the performances are and programming performances with some level of interaction or activity.

It was also positive to find out that ways we had been developing our programming to reflect stories from within the South Asian communities had been well-received:

"We don't really go to watch any shows, and we don't really take part in any of that, but we did go see The Rabbit Girl ... and that was fantastic ... the boys were fascinated and it was only 45 minutes or an hour long. Perfect for them. It's probably one of the best afternoons we've had as a family. Their eyes lit up in a way I hadn't really seen before. My 5-year old was really engaged. I didn't realise puppeteering was as difficult as it was. I think it blew my kid's minds. It was such a nice family event and it wasn't expensive ... Often arts and culture don't represent anything from our own subculture or our religion ... it was really nice to hear a south Asian story within that, to have something to relate to."

4. CHALLENGES

We recognised quite early in the project that we had to be careful not to just base the impact of the project on a tick box accountability process based on collecting demographic data in isolation (i.e age of audiences, where they live).

It was important that we also captured the deeper effects Creative Scene has on individuals and communities with respect to legacy and sustainability.

There are several reasons that this data-driven approach throws up challenges:

- The capacity of Creative Scene team resource and demands on time to collect as large a sample of possible.
- The problems associated with collecting audience data at such a diverse range of events – random sampling, people not wanting to fill in data about themselves especially those from more deprived areas for whom filling in forms links to experiences such as benefit claims or a general concern about sharing their data.
- We do not operate a venue – we often partner with other ‘spaces’ and these often do not have box office or ticketing systems or even Wi-Fi.
- Many of the events being free or un-ticketed means we heavily rely on sampling of the audience during or after the event- – and even on ticketed events many of our sales can be walk-ups.

So, it is with this background that we use our data to inform insight – alongside utilising the skills and expertise of the team in place to create a cultural programme of activity that stretches the ambition of the area and in turn raises expectations and aspirations about what can happen locally.

5. WHAT'S NEXT?

We are still on this journey of discovery but our consistent and comprehensive approach to data, evaluation and capturing the story of the impact on the people and places of North Kirklees is clearly identifying increasing engagement of local people in arts and culture. However, the way we capture data and insights shows that the impact of Creative Scene’s activity goes beyond just a number or percentage increase.

It’s about much more. It’s about having established trust with local communities about the quality of the artistic offer It’s about commissioning new things inspired by stories drawn out of the place which resonates with its communities. It’s about re-building pride in place – where people live, work, and socialise.

It’s about opening up creative opportunities for people who never even considered a career in the cultural sector. Projects such as SceneMakers, Arts Adventurers, Brigantia⁴, and the emerging Culture Council⁵ have been established to empower local communities to get involved.

It’s about using our data-driven insights to develop action research partnerships and projects that respond to the Focus Group findings.

⁴ Brigantia is Creative Scene’s making and meeting space in the heart of Dewsbury town centre.

⁵ Creative Scene’s Culture Council will bring together stakeholders from the local area to feed into Creative Scene’s activity.

It's about creating memorable events, shows, and opportunities to participate that make art a part of everyday life for people who have had little opportunity or inclination to engage with the arts before now.

6. TOP TIPS

1. Get out there! Take the time to understand your potential audience, their attitudes, expectations and habits.
2. Don't rely on one method of data capture. The stories and experiences of your audience, what's brought them to your event, what their experience of the arts is, is just as important as their postcode data.
3. Co-ordinate a focus group on the audiences you're finding hard to reach. The most surprising conversations grew out of our focus groups and helped us to reassess our approach.



Visit our website: www.creativescene.org.uk

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