




ARTS

ADVENTURERS

**FINDING AND CREATING
COMMUNITY ADVOCATES TO
SUPPORT MARKETING AND
DATA COLLECTION**

STAY IN TOUCH

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1. BACKGROUND

Arts Adventurers are ambassadors and champions of the work of Creative Scene. They are employed on a casual basis to collect information about our events and activities out into the community - the sports and social clubs, community groups and schools, shops and family fun days.

The people we want to invite to take part in, and come along to, activities and events often have less experience of attending and taking part in arts and cultural activities. They don't already go the traditional places where arts events are marketed and where leaflets about what's on are usually distributed, such as theatres, arts galleries or libraries.

We needed to find a way to make sure that information about our events were available in the places where people live, work, shop and socialise - and that when people picked up a flyer in their local café, pub or chip shop, the owner would be able to tell them a bit more about it and encourage them to go along.

So we needed the inside knowledge about the best places to go and best times to catch people. Where's the busiest park to find the parents who might like to bring their kids along to a half term show? Which shops are closest to the pub where we are putting on a performance? This deep knowledge comes from being part of the local community and the demographics we are trying to engage with.

As well as getting the word out, we wanted to ensure a warm welcome people to events - we don't run a venue and so have no regular 'front of house' or box office staff to gather data and feedback from audiences. In addition, some of the people who come to our shows might not book online and are wary of sharing their personal data- so we needed new ways to collect data and feedback. We found paper feedback questionnaires weren't being completed by a good sample of the audience, or they weren't given us the information that we needed.

We set up Arts Adventurers, a pool of local people who can use their contacts, local knowledge and enthusiasm to make sure word gets out and people feel encouraged to come along to our events. They are casual, but paid, roles, as we believe in the value of their work and what they bring to our marketing insights and audience experience.

2. WHAT DID WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

- To increase our audiences from particular segments of lower engagement.
- To build audience capacity at particular neighbourhood venues.
- To increase data collection at events.
- To get wider and more meaningful audience feedback.
- To increase our visibility in the community.

3. WHAT DID WE DO?

- We took on a part-time co-ordinator who oversaw the first recruitment drive of Arts Adventurers. As an active member of local community groups, who works in a community engagement role with sports clubs and charities, our co-ordinator was well placed to get out into the community, find and speak to potential applicants.
- The Arts Adventurers co-ordinator spoke to sports and community groups, local artists, Facebook groups and young people about becoming an Arts Adventurer and recruited an initial team of 12. Their experience included working with children with special education needs, working with older people as a community artist, running a writers group and singing in the local choir.
- Once we'd found our team, we gave them training (with pizza). Training included:
 - How to talk about the work that Creative Scene do: we encouraged our Arts Adventurers to speak in their own words rather than providing set marketing copy.
 - How to encourage audience feedback: we trained our team in how to approach reluctant audience members, to ask questions and to always have a pen handy to note and scribble down overheard their comments.
 - How to use your network: we created an Arts Adventurer map, asking our team to write down all the groups, football teams, after school clubs that they knew about and how they might fit into our target audience for different events and activities. .
- We also carried out a skills and knowledge audit of the Arts Adventurers, noting who had experience in using social media, who felt confident sending emails, who was more confident speaking to large groups, who could drive, who had the best knowledge about the local schools, so we knew where the team had specialisms - and where they might want training.
- We needed some visibility and for the team to feel part of Creative Scene and like a team of Arts Adventurers, so we commissioned a locally based artist and designer to design branded t-shirts, hoodies and lanyards for the team, so they can wear them while they're out and about. As well as creating a casual uniform for our team, and generating some team spirit, this helps promote Creative Scene's brand further in the community - people are intrigued by the 'Arts Adventurer' title and logo.
- We sent the Arts Adventurers them out into the world, armed with a brief, flyers and feedback forms. Some of the team were briefed to find local history groups online and go and chat with them about our show about the Luddites, some were asked to gather feedback from a group of emerging folk musicians at their masterclass. Others were tasked with pounding the pavement in a certain postcode to discover shops, cafes and pubs.

- We asked our Arts Adventurers to feedback after each of their shifts, so we could monitor what we could improve upon or do things differently.

4. WHAT WORKED?

- Our Arts Adventurers have been invaluable to us in getting the word out about our shows and festivals and collecting data at our events. Although it's a bit too early in the process to see if they're consistently bringing new audiences, we have audiences recognize their faces at shows and mention an Arts Adventurer by name in how they found out about the show.
- Boots on the ground have especially helped collect audience data and feedback at our free outdoor events: at HeckmondLIGHT, Arts Adventurers increased audience data and feedback by 35%, and at Cleckheaton Folk Festival, Arts Adventurers increased collected audience data and feedback by a huge 480%.
- Although feedback rates have improved, but we have found that we still need to encourage people to reflect more on their experience. We have added additional training for the Arts Adventurers with more guidelines on what we need feedback on and how to prompt more reflective feedback from audience members.
- Having boots on the ground has increased the core team's knowledge of groups and their activities in the area, and gives insights into local issues and concerns. We find out things we would not otherwise know that help with our marketing tactic: we know of thriving ukulele groups who don't have an online presence, and that some schools need leaflets on a Thursday morning in order to get them home to families by the weekend.
- Collecting data at family shows is a particular challenge, but found that when we add an engagement activity before or after a show Arts Adventurers are able to chat to parents to collect their feedback, while the kids were making a pipe cleaner unicorn or a Christmas crown.



Our Arts Adventurers in action. Photography credit: Nathan Towers

5. WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We ask for our Arts Adventurer's feedback and for them to evaluate their experience, to help us adapt the Arts Adventurer role and training programme.

We found that:

- As a casual pool, we need the ability to add capacity when we have a lot of events on, but we don't have the funds or level of activity to make these regular hours and permanent contracts. The working and/or education commitments or family and caring responsibilities of some Arts Adventurers sometimes conflicted with our needs, especially during busy times, and we needed to expand the pool we draw on so we can be sure we always have cover.
- We needed to give time to induct the team thoroughly into our financial and administrative processes. Some had not had casual work of this kind before, and we needed to be clearer about how to claim payments and submit expenses claims. We will devise an Arts Adventurer handbook to answer these.
- There was sometimes a conflict between Arts Adventurer's paid work with us and their work as a volunteer with other local organizations. Many of our team had not previously been paid for similar roles in the community - such as handing out flyers or feedback forms at local festivals. We want to support local volunteering but still pay people for their skills, time and expertise as creating the right audience experience and collecting data are central to our approach. We are working with local volunteer-led festivals and partnering with other local arts organizations to pilot an Events Crew volunteer training programme. This role will be different to the Arts Adventurers, and focus on event delivery support, aiming to offer opportunities to those who are looking to get back into work or get more experience in running events.
- Some of our Arts Adventurers lacked a broader awareness of different art forms and what is going on in the cultural scene in the wider West Yorkshire area. So we identified venues and theatre companies who would be good for us to visit as a group and watch a performance. As well as giving our Arts Adventurers an opportunity to expand their knowledge of local theatre and venues, it allowed everyone to get to know each other a bit better as well.

6. WHAT'S NEXT?

- We're now in the second round of recruiting – and we're especially looking for people we haven't worked with before and have links to different demographics to join our team. This includes recent graduates who have returned to the area, people who are more plugged into the local music and pub scene and creatives and artists from South Asian backgrounds.

- We also want to offer more training for our Arts Adventurers. They're not trained fieldworkers, so when collecting data from audience members or participants, we've found that there's a hesitation to ask for more reflective feedback or a tendency to speak to the already engaged. We will be developing workshops to offer additional training to help support our Arts Adventurers, in, for example, tackling unconscious bias.

6. TOP FIVE TIPS FOR RECRUITING AND TRAINING ARTS ADVOCATES

- Start with the obvious: who have you worked with before? Participants in workshops, volunteers at events, members of the audience you always see, local creatives and students you know are looking for casual work.
- But don't stop there: don't be afraid to reach out to people you don't know. We went to community choirs, housing associations, local Facebook groups we don't usually interact with- to advertise the roles.
- Think beyond the formal, organised groups: valuable contacts in the community can include mates at the football, mums at a coffee shop, or parents at the school gates.
- Train your casual staff on brand guidelines and organisational aims, and make sure they know about the content of what they are promoting or collecting feedback on - but encourage them to speak in their own voice. Leaflets on a shelf can be ignored, but passion and enthusiasm is infectious and authentic is memorable.
- Have fun! We brought a diverse group together and made training fun with team-building activities and loads of pizza, and we buy our gang a drink and some snacks on their 'go and see' trips.



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Kirklees Theatre Trust Company Limited by Guarantee 1504033 England
Registered Charity 510693 – Creative Scene is the Creative People and Places project for North Kirklees, West Yorkshire, supported by a consortium including The Lawrence Batley Theatre, Kirklees Council and Batley Festival.



LOTTERY FUNDED



Supported using public funding by

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